

A Journey with Christ the Messiah

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

Luke 15:4-7

INTRODUCTION:

This morning we are continuing a series that I have entitled *A Journey with Christ the Messiah*. In the last several weeks we have embarked on a journey through both the Old and the New Testaments with the purpose of discovering Christ the Messiah that is written there. We have looked at Old Testament prophecies and saw Jesus fulfilling all of the Messianic prophecies concerning Him. We have looked at His birth, His miracles, and His seven "I AM" proclamations. We have examined His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead and the significance of those events.

In the next few weeks, I would like to look at Jesus' teachings through the parables that He taught during His ministry and try to apply them to our lives. This morning we are going to look at the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard.

ILLUSTRATION:

Well over fifty years ago, during a conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated, what—if any—belief was unique to the Christian faith. The debate went on for quite a while, until C.S. Lewis wandered into the room and asked, "What's the ruckus about?" His colleagues explained that they were discussing Christianity's uniqueness among world religions. Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's **grace!**" A sort of enlightened hush fell over the crowd. Everyone at the conference had to agree.

Grace! It is a word that we use all of the time. The bank gives us a grace period. The corrupt politician falls from grace. We describe the hostess as gracious and the dancer as graceful. We even say grace before our meals. We talk a lot about grace, especially at church. What's interesting to me is that someone has searched the scriptures and discovered the fact that the New Testament never records Jesus using the word "grace".

Believe it or not, the Gospels don't record where Jesus ever uttered the word. Run a finger down the red letters in your Bible, type it into your Bible app, or break out an old-fashioned concordance, but you won't find the word grace falling from Jesus' lips. It was said of Him quite a bit, but never by Him. But don't be fooled, although He may never have said it, He lived it every day. And even though the scriptures do not record Him using the word "grace", Jesus did say a whole lot about grace. Scholars call a whole group of his stories the "grace parables." Some of his most famous stories fall into that category. One of which is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. Sitting on a scenic hillside in Judea, Jesus told this parable:

[All Stand and Read Scripture](#)

Matthew 20:1-16 (NASB)

20 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; ⁴ and to those he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ And so they went. ⁵ Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. ⁶ And about the eleventh *hour* he went out and found others standing *around*; and he *said* to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day long?’ ⁷ They *said* to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He *said* to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’

⁸ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard *said* to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last *group* to the first.’ ⁹ When those *hired* about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. ¹⁰ When those *hired* first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, ¹² saying, ‘These last men have worked *only* one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.’ ¹³ But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. ¹⁵ Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ So the last shall be first, and the first last.”

As we prepare to continue this journey, let's bow in a word of prayer.

Prayer

Let's continue the journey!

This story strikes a chord with many of us because it assaults our sense of fairness and justice. Many think this story is simply a reminder that even very late in life one can accept God's grace and still get into heaven, but it's so much more than that. This story is all about grace. First, this is a story about extravagant grace!

BODY:

I. EXTRAVAGANT GRACE.

The scene that sets up Jesus' story would have been a typical one in the days of the Bible. Even today there are places where day laborers gather to seek work. These workers were unskilled and near the bottom of the social-economic scale. In fact, many lived at a level not far above beggars. So when the landowner pulls up and offers to pay them a denarius to work in his vineyard, they eagerly hop in the back of the truck.

Why? Because a denarius was a normal day's wage, not for a day laborer, but for a Roman soldier. So, even the laborers who put in a full day's work were compensated generously for their time. But the real extravagance of God's grace is seen when even those who had worked for only one hour were paid just as much—so much more than they deserved. The point of the parable is that God's grace isn't something you earn. It's a gift, freely given by an extravagant God.

Many of us identify with the employees who put in a full day's work, rather than the add-ons at the end of the day. The whole concept of grace runs contrary to our instincts. We like the idea of earning our own way. We want to pick ourselves up by our own bootstraps. That's what religion tries to do.

- “The Buddhist evaluates your life based on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.
- Hinduism relies on doing good Dharma to get good Karma.
- Muslims believe that they earn their way to Allah through the Five Pillars of Faith.
- Even many Christians often assume that God saves good people. So be good! Work hard. Be honest. Go to church. Say your prayers. Stay sober. Keep your promises. Pay taxes. Sit through another one of Wayne's sermons without falling asleep and you will be saved. We think as if God grades on a merit system.”

But, let's not miss the point of the story: God dispenses gifts, not wages. Grace has nothing to do with what you've earned. If we want to be rewarded for our merit, if we want to be compensated for our work, then the Bible spells out how we will be paid:

Romans 6:23 (NASB)

²³ For the wages of sin is death, (This is what our merit has earned us. But God has a better plan.) but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You can have your wages or God's gift; but not both.

Put another way:

Ephesians 2:8 (NASB)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God;*

We contribute nothing. Zilch. As opposed to a worker earning his wages, eternal life is unearned. A gift. Our merits merit nothing. God's grace merits everything.

First, this story highlights God's extravagant grace. Furthermore, this is a story about God's endless grace.

II. ENDLESS GRACE.

Did you notice how many times the landowner went out looking to hire workers for his vineyard? Jesus said he went out early in the morning, then again at nine o'clock, and again at noon, and again at three o'clock, and again at five o'clock. He just kept coming. God's grace is like that.

It just keeps coming, searching for people to save. The Bible says,

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)

⁹ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

And so, he keeps coming. No one will be able to stand before God on Judgment Day and claim that God didn't give them a chance to experience his grace.

ILLUSTRATION:

I'm reminded of an old story I'm sure you've all heard before. A terrible storm came into a town and **local officials** sent out an emergency warning that the river banks would soon overflow and flood the nearby homes. They ordered everyone in the town to evacuate immediately. But this stubborn old man heard the warning and decided to stay, saying to himself, "I'm not leaving my home. If I'm in danger, the Lord will save me."

The **neighbors** came by his house and said to him, "We're leaving and there is room for you in our car, please come with us!" But the man declined. "I have faith that God will save me."

As the man stood on his porch watching the water rise up the steps, a **man in a canoe** paddled by and called to him, "Hurry and come into my canoe, the waters are rising quickly!" But the man again said, "No thanks, God will save me."

Soon, the floodwaters rose so high the man had to climb up to his rooftop. A **helicopter spotted him and dropped a rope ladder**, but the man still refused, "No thank you! God will save me!"

Shortly after, the house broke up and the floodwaters swept the man away.

In Heaven, the man stood before God and said, "I waited and waited for you! Why didn't you save me?" And God said, "Son, I sent emergency warnings, a car, a canoe, and a helicopter. What more did you want?"

God's grace is like that. It comes in many forms. It may come from behind the pulpit or cloaked in the kindness of a stranger. You might discover it in the pages of Scripture or in the stillness of your prayers. But it keeps coming; searching for souls to save. God won't give up on you. He'll give you every opportunity possible to accept his grace—to receive his gift.

On the other hand, maybe you've already embraced God's grace and that's the problem. You keep going back for more. You've asked for forgiveness more times than you can remember. You've asked for strength to get through each day. You've prayed for more than your fair share of miracles. Does there come a point when you've reached your grace-limit? Can you make so many withdrawals on God's grace that there are insufficient funds available? Let me answer that question with another question.

ILLUSTRATION:

If you plunge a sponge into Lake Winnebago will you absorb every drop? If you take a very deep breath of air will you suck all the oxygen out of the room? When an ocean wave crashes against the beach, will there ever be another one? Of course, there will. No sooner will one wave crash into the sand than another one appears. Then another and another.

That's what God's endless grace is like.

If God did nothing more than save us from certain doom, that would still be gracious, wouldn't it? If God gave you eternal life and nothing more, who could complain? But God's grace doesn't stop there. The Bible says,

John 1:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.

If you woke up in a warm, dry house this morning. If were healthy enough to get out of bed. If you were able to make it here this morning, you've already received grace upon grace. Like waves crashing against a sandy beach, God's grace just keeps coming—with no end in sight. He gives us endless grace. Finally, this parable is also about God's equalizing grace.

III. EQUALIZING GRACE.

One of the reasons we often stumble over this parable is that it offends our sense of fairness. We think that the workers who were in the vineyard longer deserve to be given more and the late-comers deserve to be given less. But we only think that because we like to compare ourselves to others. Jesus would say to us the very same thing he said to his complaining workers:

Matthew 20:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?'

None of them were disappointed with what they received until they saw what everyone else received. We tend to act the same way.

Can't you just hear the laborers in the vineyard arguing at the end of the day? Hey, I put in six hours in hot sun! Yeah, well I worked nine hours. Only NINE HOURS? I've been breaking my back for eleven and half hours! Twelve if you count lunch! I want you to notice the chain of events that took place in the hearts of these workers. They started by comparing themselves with others. This then led to coveting, which led to complaining, which led ultimately to criticizing. Do you struggle with coveting, complaining and criticizing? If so, stop comparing yourself with others.

Comparing ourselves to other is the quick and easy way to feel good about ourselves—to think that we're somehow entitled to more of God's grace and goodness.

Standing next to the dead-beats and junkies and prostitutes of the world, we boast, "Look, God, compared to them, I'm pretty good! Don't I deserve more?" But that's just the problem. God doesn't compare us to them. They aren't the standard. God is. And compared to him, none of us are any better or more deserving than anybody else.

Suppose God simplified matters and reduced the Bible to one command:

"Thou shalt jump so high in the air that you touch the moon."

No need to love your neighbor or pray or follow Jesus; just touch the moon by virtue of a jump and you'll be saved. Well, we would never make it. There may be a few who could jump three or four feet high. Maybe even a few would reach five or six feet. But compared to the 230,000 miles that would remain, who would be able to boast? Now, God hasn't called us to touch the moon, but he might as well have. Jesus established the standard in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:48 (NASB)

⁴⁸ Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

None of us can meet that standard, because none of us are God. Maybe you can jump six inches higher than a heathen or foot higher than a junkie, but compared to the distance between us and God, we all fall terribly short.”

But that’s where grace comes in. The grace of God is the great equalizer. God, in his grace, lifts us up and puts us all on the same level. Jesus put it this way at the end of the parable:

Matthew 20:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ So the last shall be first, and the first last.”

In God’s economy of grace, the first and last just blur together. It’s not about keeping score. It’s not about whether Jesus gives you 8 oz, 20 oz, or a whole gallon of grace.

It’s just about the fact that he gives it.

CONCLUSION:

When I told you that Jesus never said the word grace in the scriptures that wasn’t the whole story. It’s true that the gospels don’t record a single utterance of the word from Jesus’ mouth. It’s nowhere in the Sermon on the Mount. He never whispered it to Peter, James, or John. He didn’t shout it out from the cross. But here’s ‘the rest of the story’ as Paul Harvey would say. Two decades after Jesus died on the cross, the Apostle Paul prayed. Three times he asked for Jesus’ help with a particular problem that he had. Do you know what Jesus said to Paul? Jesus told Paul,

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NASB)

⁹ ...“My **grace** is sufficient for you...”

When we get to heaven, there won’t be any contest to see who was the most deserving of God’s grace because will realize that none of us deserved it. There will only be one contest in heaven. When we look back and see what we were before, when we see how penniless and poor we really were, when we remember the day Jesus found us in our sin and reached out to us with his extravagant, endless, equalizing grace, the only contest will be to see which of us will sing the loudest, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.”

Have you accepted God's grace?

He is Lord!