

Bi132 The Gospels I

Lesson Bi132-42 God Is Sovereign

Are you concerned about the quest for justice and equality in the world today? People in the world are looking for “more and better” for themselves and others. For believers who trust in God and his provision for them, there should be a different response to this world’s needs. What does God consider people’s greatest need? They need a Savior. How does he reward his people when they respond to this greatest of needs? In this parable Jesus addresses these questions by saying:

The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, “You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went.

He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon, he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, “Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?”

“Because no one has hired us,” they answered.

He said to them, “You also go and work in my vineyard.”

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, “Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.”

The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. When those came who were hired first saw this, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. “These who were hired last worked only one hour,” they said, “and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.”

But he answered one of them, “I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

So the last will be first, and the first will be last (Matt 20:1-16).

The silver denarius coin was the usual daily wage for a Roman soldier and also a day laborer. Those who worked all day were promised by the landowner this amount before they started working. For those hired mid-day he promised only to be fair. For those hired last, wages were not an issue, but saving the harvest was. The later workers were not lazy; they simply had not yet been hired. Old Testament law required that workers be paid at the end of each day’s labor. This was to protect the poor who might be exploited and cheated by rich landowners.

The parable focused on the urgency of bringing in the harvest of grapes before it was lost. Even when there was only one hour of daylight remaining, the landowner sought workers for his harvest. In Palestine the harvest had to be completed before the first rains or it would be ruined.

The landowner represents God the Father. The harvest represents lost souls that have not heard about Jesus. God's greatest desire is finding the needed workers so that none of the potential harvest will be lost. Therefore, he continues seeking people who will become a part of the kingdom and work to win others.

When those who labored all day saw the late arrivals getting a full wage; they expected to receive more. When they received the agreed upon amount, they became angry. They wanted more because they judged their worth to be greater. The master's response was that they had received what had been promised them. Then he added that the money was his and he had the right to give it as he desired. The key question, "Are you envious because I am generous?" is still a warning for believers today.

Because Jesus used the phrase, "The last will be first, and the first will be last," at both the beginning and ending of this parable, the story serves to explain these words. God judges differently than humans do. This parable is an answer to Peter's question about rewards for the disciples who had left everything to follow Christ. One of the unique characteristics of the kingdom of God is that all receive eternal rewards not based on ability, good works, or number of years served, but on faithfulness and obedience to whatever God has asked them to do. Christians may be surprised to see some who were little known or perhaps saved on their death beds rewarded in heaven the same as others who were famous or influential Christians. God freely offers grace and eternal life equally to whosoever believes on Jesus and testifies for him. God's values are not based on the way human beings may value people. The landowner shows us a God who believes in both equality and generosity.

This story is **important** because it demonstrates the values God has concerning rewards for faithfulness and generous grace for all people who come to him.

The **main truth** of this story is that God is sovereign. He will reward all workers in his kingdom according to their faithfulness.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. Why did the landowner continue seeking out more workers for his harvest fields?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered "because of the urgency of bringing in the harvest," you are correct.
2. Which of the workers in the harvest were angry when the landowner was generous with his money?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered that the ones who worked all day were angry because of the landowner's generosity to those who had come last for only one hour, you are correct.
3. What was the main truth of the story of the workers in the vineyard?

A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said the main truth of this story was that God is sovereign, rewarding all workers in his kingdom according to their faithfulness, you are correct.

Your assignment for this lesson is to learn the ‘Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard’ and tell it to someone else. After telling the story ask this question, “Why does God not reward people based on how much they accomplish, but rather on their obedience and faithfulness?” Consider that God gives all people their abilities based on his plan for them and asks that they be faithful in following him.