



January 31, 2021  
“Grace is Not Fair”  
Matthew 20:1-16  
Pastor Gary Hamrick

Whether a person comes to faith in Jesus early in life or late in life, the reward is the same – forgiveness of sins and the assurance of Heaven upon a person’s death. Jesus taught a parable to caution those who were saved early in life not to be jealous of those who get saved late in life who receive the same rewards. The “benefit package” is the same for all who trust Christ as Savior, no matter when they get saved or what kind of terrible sins they’ve committed. God is generous with his grace and does not give us what we deserve. We should all be thankful for that!

### Historical Background

1. Parable
  - a. A parable is the use of an illustration, often taken from everyday life, to communicate a deeper moral lesson or spiritual truth. It’s a tool used to get the listener to think and understand.
  - b. The word parable means to cast alongside of or to compare.
  - c. This word is used forty-eight times in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
    - i. The Gospel of John doesn’t include any of Jesus’ parables.
  - d. Jesus used this parable to teach about the kingdom of heaven.
  
2. The Kingdom Of Heaven/The Kingdom Of God
  - a. Of the four Gospel writers, Matthew is the only writer who wrote about the kingdom of heaven, doing so more than thirty times.
  - b. In the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John, the writers used the term Kingdom of God, doing so more than fifty times.
  - c. These terms are used interchangeably; one example of Jesus using them interchangeably is found in [Matthew 19:23-24](#).
    - i. [Matthew 19:23-24](#) – *“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Assuredly, I say*

*to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ ”*

- d. Every kingdom has a king, and in this case the king is God.
- e. Every kingdom must have subjects of the king.
- f. Every kingdom must have a territory, and in this example it's both physical and spiritual.
  - i. It's physical because heaven is a real place.
  - ii. It's spiritual because it speaks of the rule and reign of God in the hearts and lives of people.
    - 1. **Luke 17:20-21** - *“Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, “See here!” or “See there!” ‘For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’ ”*
- g. Pastor Gary said, “In a broad sense the Kingdom of Heaven is about rule in the hearts and lives of people, and God’s reward – heaven itself – for those who have submitted to his rule in a relationship with him. And Jesus enthusiastically calls people [and] invites people [and] welcomes people to be a part of [this kingdom, the kingdom of heaven]. [Jesus] wants us to submit our lives to him as king and to enjoy the many benefits that come to us as citizens of that great kingdom. The invitation is open to all. ... Every single one of us is serving a king. Either you are king of your life and you are serving yourself, and you are doing what you want to do, when you want to do it, and how you want to do it, or God is king of your life. [Somebody] is ruling your life, either you are, or God is. ... There is no co-regency in this kingdom. There’s only one king, and [that is] Jesus.”

### 3. The Landowner And The Laborers

- a. **Matthew 20:1-7** - *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.’ ”*
  - i. Most Bible scholars believe the landowner went out to hire the first group of laborers at 6:00 a.m.

- ii. The landowner agreed to pay them one denarius, which was a fair wage.
  - iii. Each laborer agreed with the landowner's offer.
  - iv. The landowner made four additional trips to hire more laborers: 9:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m., and 5:00 p.m.
  - v. The last group of laborers were only required to work one hour.
  - vi. The first group hired agreed to one denarius, but the succeeding four groups of laborers agreed to work for the landowner based upon his promise to pay *"whatever is right."*
- b. **Matthew 20:8-16** - *"So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.' And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the heat of the day.' But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?' So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen."*
- i. It's interesting to note that the landowner wanted the last hired to be paid first, and the laborers who were hired first were to be paid last, which means they were forced, in a sense, to watch the other laborers receive their pay.
  - ii. The 5:00 p.m. workers must have been thrilled when they received a full day's pay for only one hour of work.
  - iii. The 6:00 a.m. workers *"expected"* to receive more than the agreed upon wage.
  - iv. Pastor Gary said, "[You] know what is so damaging to any relationship? It's when you have expectations, especially expectations that are not realistic. ... [The first guys hired started to think that they were going to get more because the last guys hired got a full-day's pay.] I picture [the 6:00 a.m. workers] high fiving each other as they [were] standing around waiting to get their pay."
  - v. The 6:00 a.m. laborers *"complained against the landowner"* because they had unrealistic expectations.
    - 1. **Matthew 20:10-12** - *"But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, 'These last men have worked only*

*one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the heat of the day.’ ”*

- vi. The landowner was faithful to his promise to pay each group of workers.
- vii. “An evil eye was a phrase in use, among the ancient Jews, to denote an envious, covetous man or disposition; a man who repined at his neighbours prosperity, loved his own money, and would do nothing in the way of charity for God’s sake.” – Adam Clarke <sup>1</sup>

#### 4. The Main Point

- a. Pastor Gary said, “The main point of this parable has to do with salvation, and how it is that some people come to faith in Jesus early in life, and some people come to faith in Jesus late in life, and some people come to faith in Jesus somewhere in [between]. Regardless, the reward is the same for all who come to faith in Jesus. We get our sins forgiven and we get the ultimate reward of heaven. In this parable that Jesus [taught, here] are the characters: the landowner represents God; the workers who were hired represent all of us who are called into a relationship with Jesus; the different times of the day represent different stages of life where we are called differently in terms of when we come to faith in Jesus; and the wages that they [were] paid is the ultimate reward of heaven that we receive at the end of the day from a generous God. ... Those who are saved at a young age have to be careful not to grow weary or to resent those who got saved by the skin of their teeth at the last hour, who still get all of the same benefits. .... Serving Jesus longer does not mean that there is a better retirement plan. Likewise, coming to faith in Jesus late in life or with a terrible past does not mean that you are going to be placed in subsidized housing and live off of food stamps in heaven!”

#### 5. Grace Is Not Fair

- a. Pastor Gary said, “Grace is not fair, and you ought to thank God that grace is not fair because if we all got what we deserved, that’s called justice and you don’t want that! ... What we all want is grace. [Sometimes] we just don’t want it for the other person.”

#### 6. Don’t Hold God To Promises He Never Made

- a. Pastor Gary said, “It’s easy to create expectations on God based on what we think God should do rather than on what he said he would do. It’s very dangerous to create those kinds of expectations. The landowner was faithful to his promises. The workers created unnecessary strife and disappointment for themselves when they thought that the landowner should take a different

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide2017-Mat/Mat-20.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Mat/Mat-20.cfm)

course of action, particularly as it benefitted themselves. ... **Resist the temptation to think that God needs to do more than what he has already done or more than he has already promised.**" (Emphasis added)

7. Don't Assume That God Owes You

- a. Pastor Gary said, "God doesn't owe us anything except for just judgment because of our sins. But incredibly, instead of giving us what we deserve, [which is justice], he graciously offers us what we don't deserve, the forgiveness of sins and the reward of heaven when we die. That's grace and mercy..."

8. Don't Complain About How God Chooses To Bless Others

- a. Pastor Gary said, "God loves to bless other people beyond what they deserve, but we often think that people need to get what they deserve. ... [We] selfishly [become] jealous and complain when others get blessed, especially when we compare them to ourselves. ... We have to stop this whiny song about how stuff isn't fair. ... We have to get over this. **When you get to the place where you have gotten from God what you don't deserve, then and only then will you be able to celebrate when others get from God what they don't deserve.** Some of you, and you know who you are, you have a fairness meter [about] life [and] you are always weighing everything. **You need to [destroy] the fairness meter because in a sense it's become an idol because you turn to your fairness meter, which is based on your system of equality instead of God's system of generosity.** ... As long as you rely on your fairness meter, you will never celebrate God's grace in the lives of others. Neither will you do for others the generous thing because you are too bound by the jealous thing. Be careful that your own self-interests don't blind you to the generosity and love of God toward others. (Emphasis added)

Discussion Questions

1. Read [Matthew 20:1-16](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Provide a brief understanding of what a parable is and why Jesus employed parables as a way of communicating with his hearers. (See #1 above)
3. Read and discuss the points in Pastor Gary's outline concerning the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. (See #2a through #2f above)
4. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. (See #2g above)

5. Spend time talking about the points in Pastor Gary's outline concerning the landowner and the laborers. (See #3 above)
6. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about unmet expectations. (See #3b-iv above)
7. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times when they have been sorely disappointed in a person or about a situation because there were unmet expectations.
8. Read and discuss the statement by Adam Clarke <sup>2</sup> concerning an evil eye. (See #3b-vii above)
9. Ask the people in your group to share how the Holy Spirit is changing them into becoming generous.
10. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the main point of Jesus' parable. (See #4 above)
11. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's statement about grace not being fair. (See #5 above)
12. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's three-point "action item" list: 1) Don't hold God to promises he never made; 2) Don't assume that God owes you; and 3) Don't complain about how God chooses to bless others. (See #6 through #8 above)
13. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.findbiographies.com/adam-clarke-81.php#:~:text=Adam%20Clarke%20was%20a%20famous,resource%20for%20over%20two%20centuries>