



A just weight
and balance

are the
LORD'S:

Thus saith the Lord...

- **Matthew 20:1-16**
 - **Parable**
Laborers
In The Vineyard

- As the conflict between Jesus and His adversaries began to intensify, and as the time for our Lord's sacrificial death drew near, **He said some very shocking things.**

- When some parents sought to bring their little children to Jesus, so that He could bless them, the disciples rebuked them for doing so.
 - Jesus was too busy and too important to be interrupted by children.

- Jesus corrected
His disciples,

instructing them to allow the children to come to Him, because, He said, “*the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these*”
(Matthew 19:14).

- The scribes and Pharisees didn't see it that way.
- They thought that heaven belonged to them, because of their religious efforts, and because of their positions.

- Then, Jesus was approached by a man we know as **“the rich young ruler”** (**Matthew 19:16-22**).
- This man wanted to know **what it was that**
he must do to
inherit eternal life.

- Since this man felt that he had fully kept the law from his youth, Jesus had to show him how far he came from measuring up to God's standards.
- Jesus told this "rich young ruler" to sell all that he owned and to give the proceeds to the poor.
- That was too high a price to pay, and so the rich young ruler went away sorrowful.

- Jesus then turned to his disciples and pointed out how hard it is for the rich to enter heaven.

- When Jesus said that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter heaven” (Matthew 19:24), the disciples were shocked.

- In that day, many assumed that the rich all went to heaven, while the poor went to hell.

- They believed that wealth was God's reward for being righteous,

- While poverty was God's punishment for sin.

- Jesus then turned the religion of that day upside-down.

- He said,
“many who are first
will be last,
and the last first”
(Matthew 19:30).

- Jesus then went on to tell the parable of The Laborers In the Vineyard. (Matthew 20:1-16)

- Mrs. Stevens was a 3rd grade teacher.
- An “old school” teacher who maintained a strict sense of order in class but who genuinely cared about each of her students.
- On the first day of school she asked students to line up for lunch and there would be a mad scramble to get to the front of the line.

- After the students had lined up,
Mrs. Stevens went to the back of the line,
smiled and said,
“This is the front of the line,”
and led the class to lunch.
- The next day when students lined up for lunch
they all scrambled to be last in line.

- So Mrs. Stevens went to the middle of the line and said, “Today this is the front of the line.”
- Eventually all students got the message and the scrambling to be first stopped.

- As annoying as Mrs. Stevens was she taught a vital lesson.
- Our Lord's parable today can indeed be annoying because when
 - it comes to merit,
 - to getting what you've earned
 - "thank-you Jesus for recognizing my worth"
- It turns everything upside down

- We live in a world in which people scramble **to be first all the time:**
- **kids in elementary school** scrambling to be first in the lunch line,
- **high school students** scrambling to be in the top ten percent of their class,
- **college students scrambling to** get into a certain fraternity or sorority,
- **employees** scrambling for promotions,
- **parents** scrambling to get their kids ahead.

- In the world we live in the scrambling
to be first
never stops.
- It goes on and on and on.
 - But in the kingdom of heaven it is different.

- Sometimes it is the same with Christians.
- We too can be preoccupied with rank and opposed to God's grace.
- But the truth is that in God's eyes we are all sinners in need of grace;
- no one outranks anyone else.
- We are all in the same boat.

- **Our notions of justice**
cannot help but
be influenced
by our own circumstances
and by our opinions
about what we
and others deserve.

- We insist **justice** has to do with equality,
- but a lot of the time **it's a word we toss around** to keep people and things we don't like at bay.
- **And then along comes Jesus,** eager to mess even more with our regular attitudes about what's right or fair.

- Maybe no other words attributed to Jesus **cause as much offense to ethical calculations** as his **Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard** (**Matthew 20:1-16**).
- **How annoying!**

- He likens “the kingdom of heaven,” to a situation in which hardworking, reliable people get shafted.
- Or do they?

- It's A Parable About *God's Graciousness*

- So excessive is God's propensity to give and care, it violates our instincts about fairness.

- Such justice looks rash.
 - It almost makes God out as being indifferent to what is just.
 - But, then again, the landowner does give the complaining workers exactly what he promised them.

- It's A Story About People In Need
- We learn more about God when we travel deeper into the world the parable imagines and consider its other characters.

- Suddenly, the landowner finds himself looking for workers **late in the afternoon?**
- **What kind of people are the last to find jobs,** added to the rolls only when there's no more labor available?

- Nothing suggests that those characters in the parable are irresponsible or lazy.
 - More likely, they are unwanted.

- Who spends the whole day waiting to be hired

but doesn't find success until the end of the day?

- sus' time, these would be the weak, infirm, and disabled.

- Maybe the elderly or anyone with a bad reputation.

- A God who is “just,” then, is inclined to show special generosity to the poor and outcast.

- No wonder the respectable people get anxious.

- Our Lord's parable is a story about value
 - In the end, it's not about unfair payments.

- At the parable's conclusion, the full-day workers don't moan that they have been cheated.
- They complain instead to the landowner, "You have made them [the one-hour workers] equal to us."
- That's the real issue!

- It's not the generosity that makes them angry.
- The real issue is this:
 - the value,
 - the worthof the individual.
 - The laborers,
that's us,
thinking we can claim
a sense of
privilege or superiority.

- This parable may sound as if it described a purely imaginary situation,
- but that is far from being the case.
- Apart from the method of payment, the parable describes the kind of thing that frequently happened at certain times in Palestine.

- The grape harvest ripened towards the end of September,
- And then close on its heels the rains came.

- If the harvest was not gathered **before the rains broke,** then it was ruined;
- And so to get the harvest in **was a frantic race against time.**
- **Any worker was welcome,** even if he could give only an hour to the work.

- The pay was perfectly normal; a denarius was the normal day's wage for a working man;

- The men who were standing in the market-place were not street-corner idlers, lazing away their time.
- The market-place was where a man came first thing in the morning, carrying his tools, and waited until someone hired him.

- The men who stood in the market-place were eager and waiting for work,
- And the fact that some of them stood until five o'clock in the evening is the proof of how desperately they wanted to work.

- These men were hired laborers; they were the lowest class of workers, and life for them was always desperately precarious.

- Slaves and servants were regarded as being at least to some extent attached to the family;
- Their fortunes would vary with the fortunes of the family,
 - They would never be in any imminent danger of starvation in normal times.
 - It was very different with the hired day-laborers.

- They were entirely at the mercy of chance employment;
- They were always living on the semi-starvation line.

- This parable is indeed a grand parable.
- It is in one sense a warning to the disciples and to us.

- It is as if Jesus said to them,
"*You have received great privilege.*"

- In later days
others will join you.

- *You must not claim
a special honor*

- and a special place
because you were Christians
before they were.

- *All are equally
precious to God.*

- There are people who think that, because they have been members of the Church for a long time, the Church practically belongs to them.
- Such people resent what seems to them the intrusion of new blood or the rise of a new generation.
- In the Lord's Church seniority does not necessarily mean honor.

- There is an equally **definite warning**
to the Jews.
- They knew that they were the **chosen people,**
nor would they ever willingly forget that choice.

- As a consequence they looked down on the Gentiles.
- Usually they hated and despised them, and hoped for nothing but their destruction.

- This attitude threatened to be carried forward into the Lord's Church.
- If the Gentiles were to be allowed into the fellowship they must come in as inferiors.
- In God's kingdom there is no master race.

- In this parable we find the comfort of God.

- It means that no matter when one enters the Kingdom,

- Early or Late.
- In the dawn of youth,
- In the midday of life,
 - Or when the sun of life is setting.
- **All are equally dear to God.**
 - Is there room for an “eleventh hour” man?

- In the picture of the holy city in the Revelation letter there are twelve gates.
(Revelation 21:12)

- On the East is the direction of the rising sun,
- whereby one may enter in the glad morning of his days;

- On the West is the direction of the setting sun,
- whereby one may enter as life is setting.
 - No matter when one comes to Christ, they are equally dear to him.

- Sometimes a man/woman dies full of years and full of honor, with the day's work ended and life's task completed.
- Sometimes a young person dies almost before the door of life has opened at all.

- From God they will both receive the same welcome,
 - For Jesus is waiting for both,
 - and in His care for neither has life ended too soon or too late.

- Here then is the infinite compassion of God.
- There is an element of human tenderness in this parable.

- In that market-place men stood waiting because no one had hired them;
- In his compassion the master gave them work to do.
- He could not bear to see them idle.

- Here also is the generosity of God.

- These men did not all do the same work; but they did receive the same pay.

- Here we have two great lessons.
 - The first is, "All service ranks the same with God."
- It is not the amount of service given, but the love in which it is given which matters.

- A child may give you a birthday card purchased with money or one their little hands made for you.
- Which has the more value?
- Which touches our heart the more?

- God does not look on the amount of our service.

So long as it is
all we have to give,
all service ranks
the same with God.

- The second lesson is:
all God gives
is of grace.
 - We cannot earn what God gives us;
 - We cannot deserve it;

- What God gives us is given out of the goodness of his heart;
- what God gives is not pay,
 - But a gift; not a reward, but a grace.

- Many still cling to a sense of entitlement and rank.
 - Shaking it off is like trying to shake off a spider web we've walked into,
- And we don't really want to shake it off anyway.

- But, again, in the kingdom of heaven God's grace supersedes
- all scrambling to be first,
 - all entitlement,
 - all rank.

- One is not a Christian if first concerns are pay.

- Peter asked:

"What do we get out of it?"

- The Christian works for the joy of serving God and his fellow-men.

- That is why the *first will be last* and *the last will be first.*
- It is the paradox of the Christian life that
 - He who aims at reward loses it,
 - He who forgets reward finds it.

- Even in the church people often find this parable to be quite annoying.

- This “annoying”

Parable of the Landowner

reveals the

good news

of the gospel,

- That God is

a gracious God.

- And that he has chosen to give his grace to you and me,
- Especially in light of our constant failures.

- All human merit
shrivels before
God's burning,
self-giving love.

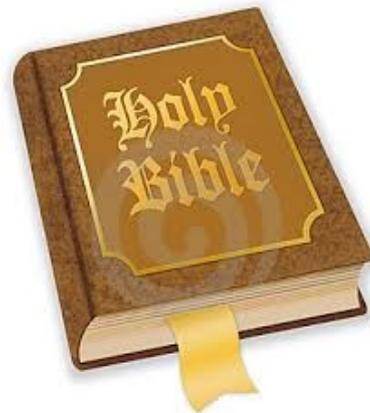
- Grace,
”Amazing Grace”,
is the burden
of this story.

**The doors of the church
are open.**

**The Spirit and the Bride
Say**

“Come”.

Revelation 22:17



- 07-15-2018 Tryon, NC