LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

Matthew 20 (Part 1) :1-16

Laborers in the Vineyard

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · April 18, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

In order that we might better understand the context of what we're going to be looking at here in Matthew chapter 20, it's important that we kind of look at just the last few verses of the previous chapter that we covered last week. Chapter 19, pick it up there in about verse 27, 1927. It says, Then Peter said in reply, see we have left everything and followed you, what then will we have? Jesus said to them, truly I say to you in the new world or in the restoration of all things, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

But many who are first will be last and the last first. And that's how we continue this conversation now in chapter 20. For the kingdom of heaven, he says, is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. And after agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace.

And he said to them, you go into the vineyard too and whatever is right I will give you. And by the way, the third hour would be 9 a.m. This is the Jewish reckoning of time. The day starts at 6 a.m. and it ends at 6 p.m.

And technically speaking according to the Jewish reckoning of time, anything after 6 p.m. is the next day. Okay? I know it's a little bit strange for you and I, but that's the way they reckon time. So the third hour is the third hour after the start of the day, which is 6 a.m.

So you can kind of figure that out according. Now the Roman reckoning of time is different. But anyway, we won't confuse the issue here. Verse 5, so they went out going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour he did the same. And about the 11th hour, which would be 5 p.m.

So a one hour before quitting time. He went out and found others standing and he said to them, why do you stand here idle all day? And they said to him, because no one has hired us. He said to them, you go into the vineyard too. And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard came to his foreman or said to his foreman rather, call the laborers and pay them their wages beginning with the last up to the first.

And when those hired about the 11th hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it, they grumbled at the master of the house saying, these last worked only one hour and you've made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. But he replied to one of them, friend, I'm doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?

Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? So the last will be first and the first last.

Stop there. Let's pray. Jesus, open our hearts. As always, we rely upon you. We are dependent upon you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Jesus told, obviously, a lot of parables during his earthly ministry. And this one, as we saw by going back and looking at the end of the last chapter, was really kind of born out of a response that he was giving to Peter for that rather ingracious question about, you know, we've given everything, what are we going to get for it sort of a thing? And so we see here that according to what Jesus said in response to Peter in the last chapter, and then in this parable here in chapter 20, we see that there is a reward process for the children of God.

There will be rewards. Now, that could probably be considered good news or bad news related on whether or not you feel like maybe you've done anything deserving of a reward. But this parable reminds us to expect the unexpected as it relates to rewards. And so to underscore that sort of an idea that the first will be last and the last will be first, Jesus gives this story of this landowner who goes out to the marketplace or the city gate, depending on the city and where those guys would have gathered. And this is a very common sort of a thing in those days.

And he would go out and find what they called day laborers. And a day laborer was someone who would show up at the city gate with his tools in hand ready to work. And he'd get there by 6 a.m. or maybe even earlier because that was the start of the day. And he would be there and he would wait there for someone to come along and hire him for the day.

And it was very common back in those days for them to be paid roughly a denarius for a day's work. It wasn't a lot of money. In fact, it was enough to feed your family for that day. It really wasn't any more than that. So, you know, it wasn't a huge amount of money, but it was something that they did.

It was common. And you'll notice that in this parable, it says that the landowner and the men who were there at 6 a.m. agreed that a denarius was a fair amount for a day's labor. And so that's what they did. They said, you guys, you up for, you know, some work today?

Yeah, we want to work. How about a denarius for the day's labor? Yeah, that sounds fair to us. So, you know, they go out into the fields to work. And then we're told that about 9 a.m., so about three hours later, the landowner goes back to the place where people would typically gather to see if there's any more.

He obviously has more harvest to bring in, finds some men who have not yet been hired, and sends them out to work as well. The only difference is he does not promise them a denarius. He just simply promises them what is fair. In fact, he does that through the rest of his meetings throughout the day with those men whom he hires. He simply says, hey, you guys ready to go to work?

Yeah. All right. Well, you know, day's already started, so go ahead and go to work. I'll pay you what's fair. Okay?

That's all he says. And obviously, you know, these guys are okay with that, so they go ahead and they go. Now, this process is repeated then at noon and at three o'clock, and then also at five o'clock, one hour before the day is over. He goes out, still finds some guys standing around. What are you guys doing standing around?

He says, well, nobody's hired us. Well, go. Go and go to work, and so forth. And they go to work. The work day's over.

An hour after, he hires these last guys, and they're all lined up then to receive their wages. He tells his foreman to pay them, beginning with those who went out the latest at five o'clock, and so forth. And everybody is surprised, no doubt, to learn that the guys who were hired at five o'clock get a denarius for an hour. That's a pretty good deal. You know, it's usually they'd have to work 12 hours to make that much money, depending on whether they take some time off for lunch.

I'm sure they do. But the point is, you know, the guys who would have worked all day long would have gotten that much money, and here are these guys that have been out there for one hour, get that same amount of money. Well, that causes all the men who, they're seeing this, these men getting their money,

and they assume, it's a great lesson in assuming, don't ever assume. You know, I say that all the time. I try to live by that rule in my own life.

Don't assume anything, but I do. I do all the time. We all do. So these guys, they're seeing these guys, and they're, wow, these guys, they were out there an hour. They're getting a denarius.

Just wait till we get up in line, and what we get, oh man, he'll probably give us five or six, you know, denarius. Who knows? So they're all just kind of anxiously waiting to get up and get their stuff, and then they find out that they get exactly what they were promised. They receive a denarius as well, and so they begin to grumble against the landowner and kind of bring their complaint to him. And the landowner has to say, well, guys, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think you agreed to go out to work today for a denarius, did you not?

Well, yeah, yeah, yeah, but you know, we worked all day. We bore the burden of the day, the heat of the day. We did all the work, and here these guys came out there for one hour, some of them. Some of them came out just for a few. You gave them the same thing that you paid us.

The landowner basically responds and says, you know, friend, which is a way of starting off a very gentle rebuke. Start it with friend. That always helps. He says, listen, I gave you what we agreed on, so take your money and go. If I want to be generous, what's that to you?

If I decide that I want to pay somebody a whole denarius for a day's work, if I want to give a denarius for somebody who didn't do any work at all, what's that to you? Or are you envious just because I'm generous? Is that what's going on here? Is that the problem? Because I don't think there should be a problem because this is what we agreed upon.

But the reason that it was a problem for the workers is that it didn't seem fair. It's not fair. Isn't it amazing? We just have this sense of fairness. We see it come out in our children.

Just, yeah, it's not fair, they tell us. You did it for him. How come you didn't do it for me? It's not fair. We just have this real sense of fairness.

We want things to be fair. We find out that life isn't fair, but that's not the point of this particular parable. What is interesting, what is connected to this parable, though, is the idea of grace. We're going to talk about grace this morning because here's the thing about grace. What this farmer was doing was he was extending grace.

I mean, when you give someone something that they don't deserve, that's the definition of grace. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. He gave a lot of men that day something or actually, well, yeah, something they didn't deserve, which was more money than what they'd actually earned. That's an act of grace. But what's interesting about grace, you guys, is that often grace doesn't look fair.

It doesn't look fair. But you have to understand in this passage, there was no unfairness that was going on. The men who were promised a denarius received a denarius. They agreed to it. So there's nothing unfair about what this landowner did.

But it appeared to be unfair because he showed grace. And that is what they were complaining about. You know, oh, by the way, this is the other thing. I mentioned already that a denarius was not a lot of money at all. It was really just enough for a day to take care of your family.

Today's food, you know, today's needs, whatever, that'll take care of today. But I got to go out and I got to work tomorrow because tomorrow's needs are going to be met in tomorrow's workday. Apparently the landowner knew that. And he knew that the men who went to work at 9 a.m. or noon or 3 or 5 p.m.

also needed to provide for their families. And so he paid them what they needed to provide for their families, even though they didn't earn it. That's grace. Okay? That's the heart of God, you guys.

That's why Jesus is telling this parable. He is conveying to you the heart of God and the economy of God's kingdom. That's why he starts off this parable by saying the kingdom of God can be likened to. And then he tells the story. He wants you and I to make the connection.

That's why he's sharing this parable. He wants you and I to know that God is a God of grace. God has a heart toward his children to meet their needs. But he also wants you to know that while there are rewards that take place in the kingdom of God related to how we have served and what we have done, there are rewards. And there are even levels of rewards.

What Jesus wants to convey to you and I, that we are not to expect rewards to be doled out in the kingdom of heaven like they're doled out here on earth. You know? Because how they're doled out here on earth is according to merit, you know? What we've earned. You go to work, you punch a clock, some of you.

And you agree with your boss to a particular hourly wage if you're paid by the hour. And you punch the clock when you get there and you punch the clock on your way out and it records how long you spent working and they pay you accordingly. That's how rewards are set in this world. And that is the way you

and I would naturally expect that they're probably going to take place in the kingdom of heaven. And we would just kind of, you know, we hear about rewards and we go, whoa, rewards, sweet, you know?

So it's like, well, I'm going to punch the clock of God, you know, I'm going to serve the Lord. And, you know, we know we're not earning our salvation. We're past that issue. We're not like the Jehovah's Witnesses who are out, you know, knocking on doors so they can get somewhere special. That's not what we're doing.

We understand that salvation is by grace through faith and this not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, right? We know that. But we also know that Jesus said there are rewards that can come our way. And so the assumption, and this is what this parable is told about, to address assumptions, the assumption is that we're going to be rewarded like the world rewards those sorts of things. But if anything, this passage teaches us that in God's economy, it is not merit that prevails, it is grace that prevails.

God's kingdom is a kingdom of grace. And where God's kingdom is established, grace prevails. But grace, you see, takes us by surprise. What do you mean giving those guys the same amount of money you gave to me? See, the expectation is, I did more.

I'll receive more. Because that, you know what, that's, we can call that what it really is, it's law. That's law. Because you've got law on the one hand, you've got grace. The law says, I work this many hours, you pay me this per hour, this is what I get at the end of the day.

That's the law. Boom. It's something you can work out on a calculator, and you can put pencil to pen, or pencil to paper. Not pencil to pen. And you know what I meant.

And you can figure it out. Grace, you can't do that. Grace is just grace. God, why am I getting this? Because I love you.

Yeah, but I didn't earn this. I know. Just giving it to you. Yeah, but God, I didn't know no but God anything. I'm just giving you this.

God, I don't deserve this. That's right. You don't. I'm giving it anyway. Wow.

God, you're good. That's the point. That is the point. That's what you and I can take away from all this. You know, it's interesting, isn't it?

We love, some of us have a hard time accepting grace. We like the idea of grace, as long as it's coming to us, and maybe not to somebody else. That's what's interesting too about this parable is that there's this

natural tendency to look at grace being extended to other people, and to kind of go, hey, what's up with that? You know? Isn't it interesting that the workers who worked all day long, who stood in the back of the line and watched those other workers getting paid a full denarius for less than a day's work, immediately grumbled against the master for the fact that they only received a denarius, instead of saying, look at that.

Isn't he an amazing guy? Isn't this landowner, I mean, what a peach. Look what he's doing for these guys. Some of these guys only worked an hour. Some of them worked just a few hours.

He is so good. He knew that they needed a denarius to take care of their families today. They didn't care about that, though. They weren't sitting back going, oh, that's really nice. Now, see, their families get to eat today.

They were mad. It's crazy, isn't it? That's just kind of where we're at. We love grace, as long as it's coming to us. We're a little bit bothered by it when it comes to someone else.

We stumble over grace. We stumble over grace a lot. In fact, we stumble over it more often than we accept it or embrace it. There's a terrific quote that I found by David Guzik, who's a teacher in the Calvary chapels. I want to put this on the screen for you because I love it so much.

Some of you who are on Facebook already saw this. I posted it a couple of days ago. David wrote, the system of law, that's easy to figure out. You get what you deserve. The system of grace, though, that's kind of foreign to us.

God deals with us according to who he is, not according to who we are or what we've done. I want to leave that up just for a minute because that's one of those statements that probably be good for you to write down and think about for the rest of your life. Because that's just one of those things that we really got to get in touch with. We really have to allow this reality, this truth, to sink into the depth of our souls or we will continue. Lifelong to stumble over grace.

We all understand the law You know It's grace. We have a hard time with Because it takes us by surprise, you know, some of you may be familiar with Pastor Chuck's book that he wrote called why grace changes everything Amber is gonna absolutely kill me for mentioning it She likes it when I tell her ahead of time that I'm gonna quote a book Because then she can get extra copies in the bookstore, but I do my studying on Saturday night There's no chance, you know that she can do this ahead of time. So sorry amber. This is the way it's gonna go there Anyway, why grace changes everything is a tremendous book if you haven't read it, you should you should get it I don't know how many copies she has in the bookstore.

Actually, you know what I Probably shouldn't even tell you this but it's available in PDF form free online Okay, there you go little plug for all the poor people in the world.

That's all of us in this room so The the the point is yeah You can you can get a great great great book to read but there isn't in the opening pages of why grace changes everything Pastor Chuck says how beautiful it is to experience the freedom and joy of a love relationship with God yet how sad it is that so many That there are so many rather who insist on relating to God in a legalistic way Their righteousness is based on what they can do for the Lord Instead of on what he has already done for them They carry around a huge list of do's and don'ts to keep them bound to God Now, I don't know if that sounds a little bit like you but I Agree a thousand percent. There's no such thing, but that's My way of saying I More than agree with what he's saying here There are so many people bound up in the idea of I've got to do this To have God like me to be righteous in his sight and all these other things. Listen, we do what we do We to serve the Lord because we love the Lord not to get him to love us or whatever And we don't we also know that there are rewards coming and that's not a bad incentive Frankly for doing things. Otherwise, he wouldn't have told us he just said well, I might give you something. I might not we'll see But actually what he did is he bent over backwards to say?

Oh, I'll reward you In fact at the end of chapter 19, you know, Jesus went into great detail He says in fact, he even told you what how God's economy figures out those kinds of things hundredfold Hmm, I like that. He said whatever you give whatever you did, whatever you you'll get it a hundredfold back I like that. I you know, I Didn't really go fishing for that, but he gave it so I will accept it Thank you. Very cool But that is but what I serve and what I do and how and what I don't do is not my righteousness Because you see I understand grace I understand that I'm saved by grace through faith And so forth Let me let me read if I could for you just a little bit more I want to read a little more excerpt I'm just gonna read this to I'm not gonna put it on the screen from pastor Chuck's book why grace changes everything because again, this is in the opening chapter and he lays the foundation for his own understanding of How he was raised to kind of see God in a more and have a more legalistic Relationship with God and how he had to undo that Later in life, but he he writes and he says I am no stranger to that depressing kind of negative righteousness As I was growing up, I considered myself one of the most godly kids on the block Because of what I didn't do I Didn't smoke. I didn't dance.

I didn't go to movies. I was taught that such things were utterly sinful So not only did I avoid those things? I also believed I was far more righteous than my weaker friends who indulged in them That's what legalism does to you. By the way gives you that sense of you know, I'm better than you, right? I Thought I

was much more holy than the kid who was known to pick up old cigarette butts and smoke them on the sly I Was above all that and I was pretty sure God noticed Still I had a big problem.

Although I didn't go to movies. I longed to see Snow White So I felt condemned I Would get saved again every Sunday night and I would promise God that next week. I was going to be different. I Was lucky if my relationship with him made it past breakfast Monday morning Because my righteousness was a matter of willpower and effort before long my relationship with God became a tremendous strain Every summer I would attend our church youth camp on the last evening we would build a huge bonfire and gather around and sing worship choruses such as I Surrender all and I will follow thee my Lord and during this emotionally charged time we were asked to write on a piece of paper either an area of our lives that we wanted God to change or a commitment that we wanted to make and each of us would then take a Pine cone and we'd wedge our commitment paper into it and toss it in the fire and as I watched my pine cone burn tears would run down my cheeks and I would tell God that I wanted my life to Be consumed by his love and that I wanted to give myself completely over to serving him And as we left the bonfire, we were directed to a little table where camp leaders had laid out a stack of cards that read I promise by the grace of God That in the coming year, I will never enter a theater. I Will never smoke a cigarette.

I Will never drink an alcoholic beverage. I will never use foul language and I will not attend any dances Endquote We would sign these commitment cards and carry them around in our wallets all year long. Now listen to this He says I was careful to keep all of my commitments But I also ended up in a draining Legalistic relationship with God I Had very little joy in my walk with Christ Because I was tied to God by a contract Is that powerful Are you tied to God through a contract? Have you made promises Promises you can't keep Have you made promises to God to be better to do better God, I'm gonna do better God I'm gonna try to be good I'm gonna try to live my life You know, I'm just God I'm just really trying hard, you know, you hear it in people's voices and they'll talk about their their walk with God I'm just I'm trying so hard to walk with God It's it's it's not a it's not a love relationship for those folks It's a contract it's a list of do's and mostly do nots and And if they can just keep the list if they can just hold on and do what they've said that they would do or not do Maybe maybe things are going to be okay But people let me say again that is living under the law That's living there's no different than living under the the law of Moses no difference It's a legalistic Contract that binds you to God but makes you miserable because you can't keep it and Besides with the law, you never know if you've really truly measured up Are you saved and going to heaven? Hope so We'll see one day when God weighs the whole thing Where's the joy in that?

There's no joy in that And You're just hanging on by a thread you're just I got a hoping upon hope that maybe Possibly before I die I can just do enough good things that I can tip the scales in my favor That God will look at my life and he'll go Yes squeaked in buddy There's no joy in that Joy Comes from grace Joy comes from knowing There's no possible way That I can please God Apart from what's the Bible say faith? Isn't that what it says? Apart from faith. It is impossible to please God without faith. You can't do it Because without faith you got the law you got works You can't please God through keeping a promise saying I'm going to I'm not going to The joy comes from understanding people that Jesus came to satisfy the demands of the law and He did it.

I'm very pleased to tell you that today. He did it. He did it perfectly he satisfied all those demands that you and I have been trying to keep but couldn't and after satisfying the demands of the law and and keeping himself completely and perfectly free from sin he then became the perfect sacrifice for you and I and he died on the cross for sins that he didn't Commit which were the ones that you and I did do And having died on the cross he bore that sin perfectly before the father and It has been punished in Christ Your sin my sin. It's all been punished the punishment has been taken the verdict has been rendered the sentence has been given and Whereas the Bible says that the wages of sin is death Jesus paid that price for you and I so what's left What's left Grace Grace There is now no longer this earning relationship this merit relationship this Legal Binding relationship between you and God now it is a love relationship of grace where God pours out blessings and and and glory and wonders that so far go beyond What we could imagine that we realize wait a minute This isn't right You're gonna give me a hundredfold. Is that what it says?

The law doesn't say a hundredfold the law says you you know, you you put in your day you get paid for your day He's gonna pay you a hundredfold That's not earning that's not merit that's grace you see and When we get a hold of grace it changes our lives Because suddenly my walk with God is predicated Upon Love and his goodness not mine and He blesses and I say, thank you. God. You're good, and I don't deserve this and He delivers and I say, thank you. God. I don't deserve your deliverance And He pours out Abundance and I say God I don't deserve your abundance And all the while he goes, I know I know and I know it delights me to do it If we don't get a hold of grace we are going to be surprised Just like those workers who went out in the vineyard we are going to be surprised maybe a little angered When we see God blessing others in a way that they don't deserve But if we truly get a hold of grace We will start to see what God is doing in the lives of others is just an expression of his incredible goodness and we will rejoice That God has been gracious Not that we have earned anything from him or merited any of his favor, but that God has been gracious Amen, that's where I want to live Grace Street 101 You You