



# STORY TIME

Discovering the Parables of Jesus



# Why is it important to study the Parables?

- One-third of the recorded sayings of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels are in parables.
- If we do not understand the parables, we miss what may be known about the historical Jesus. One must understand parables to know Jesus.
- The parables are designed to portray a reality. In a world of metaphorical redescription, the reality behind the parable is dramatized in word-pictures. (Brad H. Young)
- The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar or sometimes identical wording. They stand in contrast to John, whose content is largely distinct. (Wikipedia)

## Hebrew noun mashal מִשָּׁל

- Definition: a parable, proverb, riddle, anecdote, allegory
- It defines the unknown by using what is known.
- The mashal begins where the listener is, but then pushes beyond into a new realm of discovery.

## Greek noun parabole παραβάλλω

Definition: a comparing, comparison of one thing with another, likeness, similitude, juxtaposition

# 39 Parables of Jesus

PARABLE/LESSON	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE
Wheat and tares	13:24-30		
Barren fig tree			13:6-9
Children in market	11:16-19		7:31-35
Budding Fig Tree	24:32-36	13:28-32	21:29-33
Lamp under basket	5:14-16	4:21-23	8:16-18
Dinner guests			14:15-24
Divided Kingdom	12:24-30	3:22-27	11:14-23
Faithful servants			12:35-40
Feast invitations			14:12-14
Friend at midnight			11:5-13
Good Samaritan ✓			10:25-37
Great physician	9:10-13	2:15-17	5:29-32
Groom's attendants	9:14-15	2:18-20	5:33-35
Growing seed		4:26-29	
Hidden treasure	13:44		
Humbled guest			14:7-11
King's messengers			14:31-32
Laborers in vineyard	20:1-16		
Leaven	13:33		13:20-21
Lost coin			15:8-10
Lost sheep			15:4-7

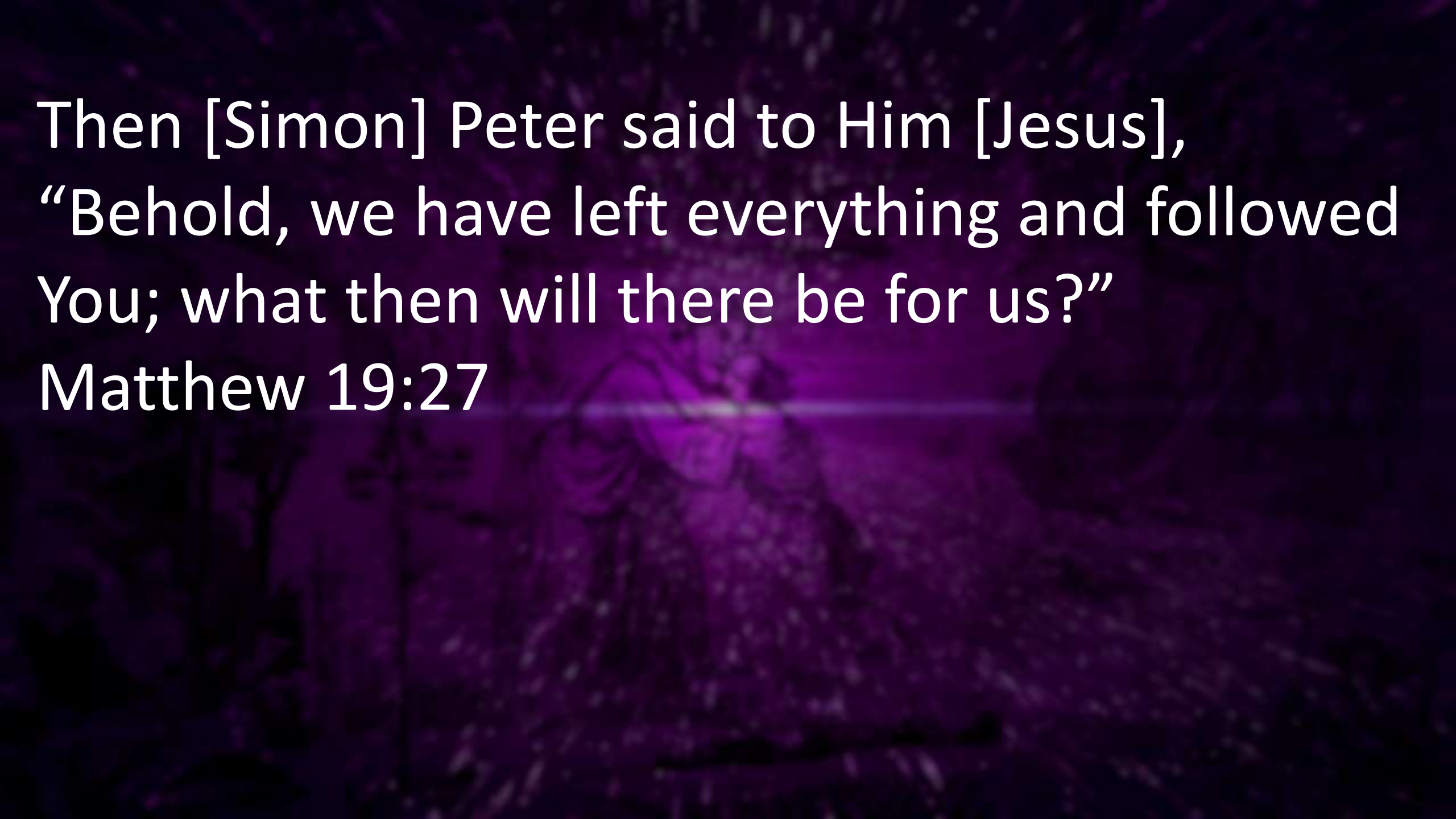
PARABLE/LESSON	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE
Marriage feast	22:1-14		
Mustard seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19
Net of fish	13:47-50		
New cloth	9:16	2:21	5:36
New wine	9:17	2:22	5:37-39
Pearl of great price	13:45-46		
Persistent widow			18:1-8
Sower ✓	13:3-23		
Rich man			12:13-21
Talents ✓	25:14-30		
Minas			19:11-27
Prodigal son ✓			15:11-32
Steward and rich man			16:1-8
Ten virgins	25:1-12		
Great Supper			14:15-24
Two sons	21:28-31		
Merciless servant in debt with his master ✓	18:23-35		
Wicked Vinedressers	21:33-46	12:1-11	12:35-48



# The parable of unexpected wages

Matthew 19-20

# A Quick Survey



Then [Simon] Peter said to Him [Jesus],  
“Behold, we have left everything and followed  
You; what then will there be for us?”

Matthew 19:27



- Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. Matthew 4:18-22
- As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector’s booth; and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he got up and followed Him. Matthew 9:9



And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you **who have followed Me**, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon 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 farms for My name’s sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. **But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.”**

Matthew 19:28-30

Jesus said, “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner [Greek *oikodespotes* – homeowner] who went out [to the marketplace] early in the morning [6 am] to hire laborers for his vineyard.”  
Matthew 20:1

\*Planting, maintaining and harvesting vineyards in first-century Israel was strenuous work requiring hard physical labor in the heat of summer. Often, additional laborers were required to get all the work done.



# The Landowner

The parable portrays a major farming operation with a large estate, management staff, and numerous groups of day laborers who are working in the vineyard. This picture emphasizes the power and authority of the owner of the vineyard. As the most prominent actor in the drama, the whole story revolves around him and his actions. He is not detached from the scene. As the magnanimous and wealthy nobleman of the estate, he is involved very much with the intricate affairs of the sizable operation. He hires the workers and gives orders to his steward concerning the amount of payment for each person as well as the process in which the last are paid before the others. - Brad H. Young

# The Bible compares God to a vineyard owner

- For the **vineyard of the Lord of hosts** is the house of Israel and the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress. Isaiah 5:7
- “Many shepherds have ruined **My vineyard**, they have trampled down My field; they have made My pleasant field a desolate wilderness.” Jeremiah 12:10



“When he [the vineyard owner] had **agreed** [Greek *symphoneo*] with the laborers for a **denarius** for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.”

Matthew 20:2

# How much was a denarius worth?

- A denarius [singular coin] was a day's wage for a common workingman or a Roman soldier.
- In today's world, at a \$7.25/hour minimum wage, it would be worth \$58.
- This was a fair wage according to the market, but it was not a lot of money.



“And he went out about the third hour [9 am] and saw others standing idle [without work] in the marketplace; and to those he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is **right** [Greek *diakaios* – just, fair AND unspecified] I will give you.’ And so they went. Again he went out about the sixth [12 pm] and the ninth hour [3 pm], and did the same thing.” Matthew 20:3-5

\*Why did the vineyard owner not hire more workers at earlier times? It seems that he hired all that he could find at each visit to the marketplace. The parable gives no indication that any workers were left out. – Amy-Jill Levine

Managers usually know how much labor they need; the same is the case with landowners. That our householder returns to the market over and over again suggests either that he is clueless about the number of workers he needs, that he has an insufficient number of workers although he has hired everyone available, or that he has another agenda... The householder continues to go to the market, but the parable makes no explicit mention of the need for more labor. Unclear as well is why these other individuals are in the marketplace, but not hired. We do not know if they had been there since dawn, but were not chosen in the first several rounds of employment, or if they arrived later. They may have already worked another job. Perhaps they were sons and daughters taking care of aging parents or little children. Perhaps they had come from a neighboring village where employment was lacking... The workers are all part of the same labor pool, they are all found in the same place, they all go into the same vineyard... The parable makes no qualitative distinction between those hired early and those hired late in the day.

— Amy-Jill Levine



“And about the eleventh hour [5 pm] he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘**Why have you been standing here idle all day long?**’ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’” Matthew 20:6-7

\*The parable does not mention the harvest but the actions of the landowner who hires workers all day long would suggest the urgency of harvesting the produce. Harvesttime work in a vineyard is toilsome manual labor, which taxed even the strongest worker’s physical stamina and concentrated energy.

– Brad H. Young

The urgency of the harvest made each hour crucial. For maximum profit the grapes must be harvested at an ideal time. One day too late and the crop may be lost. One day too early may cost dearly in the marketplace. The wealthy landowner monitors the process very closely and hires laborers accordingly. The owner or his manager must calculate the amount of time required to gather produce from each section of his vineyard. Some laborers are more proficient and gather the grapes in less time. All variables relating to the harvest must be carefully considered during the entire process, and above all the right number of laborers must be employed for a successful harvest. While the parable does not explain the actions of the landowner, bringing in new workers when others are tired may increase productivity by creating fresh morale among the weary laborers. – Brad H. Young



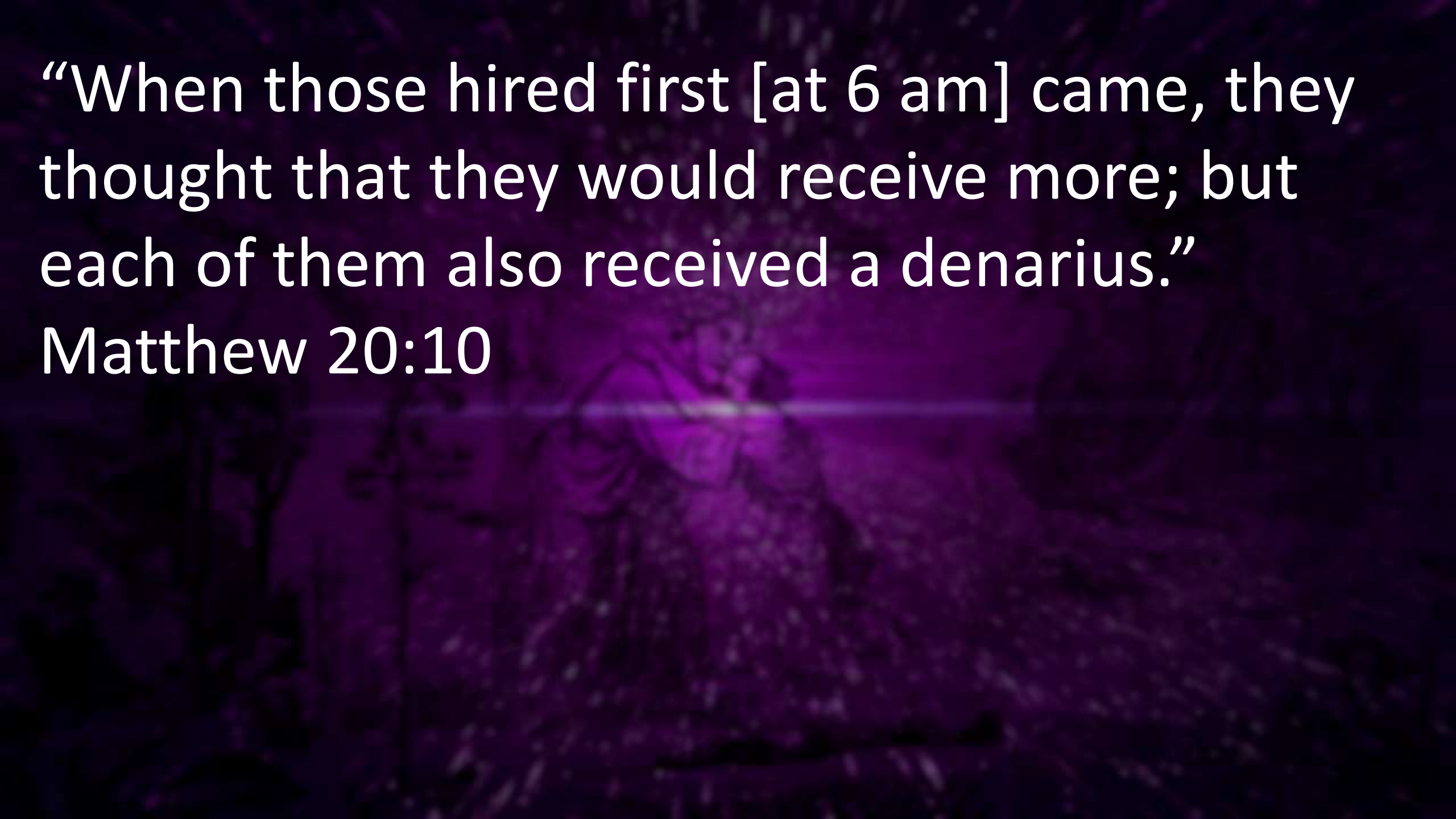
“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard [Greek *kurios tou ampelonos*] said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.’ When those hired about the eleventh hour [5 pm] came, **each one received a denarius.**” Matthew 20:8-9

\*This shockingly generous act creates a buzz in the crowd. The workers who labored all day quickly do the math. “If those one-hour workers got a denarius, then we’re in the money,” they are likely thinking.

– Jonathan Pennington

“When those hired first [at 6 am] came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.”

Matthew 20:10





# Is this fair?

In the context of Jewish theology, all are rewarded justly according to their obedience rather than job performance alone.

“Moses our teacher served Israel one hundred and twenty years and Samuel only fifty two. Nevertheless both are equal before the Omnipresent. As it is said, “Then the Lord [Yahweh] said to me, “Though Moses and Samuel stood before me... (Jeremiah 15:1); and thus He said, “Moses and Aaron were among His priests, Samuel also was among those who called on His name (Psalm 99:6); concerning them and others like them He says, “Sweet is the sleep of the laborer whether he eats little or much (Ecclesiastes 5:12).”

-Masekhet Semachot in the Talmud

“When they [those hired first] received it, they **grumbled** at the landowner, 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 [dusty desert winds from the south].’” Matthew 20:11-12

Remember what happened earlier in the day?

“When he had **agreed** with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.” Matthew 20:2



The order of payment is the inverse of that of labor. This is almost a necessary part of the Parable. If the first laborers had been paid first, they would either have gone away without knowing what was done to the last, or, if they had remained, their objection could not have been urged, except on the ground of manifest malevolence towards their neighbors. After having received their wages, they could not have objected that they had not received enough, but only that the others had received too much. It was not the scope of the Parable to charge with conscious malevolence those who sought a higher reward or deemed themselves entitled to it. Again, we notice, as indicating the disposition of the later laborers, that those of the third hour did not murmur, because they had not got more than they of the eleventh hour. This is in accordance with their not having made any bargain at the first, but trusted entirely to the householder. But they of the first hour had their cupidity excited. Seeing what the others had received, they expected to have more than their due. When they likewise received a denarius, they murmured, as if injustice had been done them. And, truth and fairness seemed on their side. For, selecting the extreme case of the eleventh hour laborers, had not the Householder made those who had wrought only one hour equal to them who had 'borne the burden of the day and the heat?' Yet, however fair their reasoning might seem, they had no claim in truth or equity, for had they not agreed for one denarius with him? And it had not even been in the general terms of a day's wages, but they had made the express bargain of one denarius. They had gone to work with a stipulated sum as their hire distinctly in view. They now appealed to justice; but from first to last they had had justice. - Alfred Edersheim <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/edersheim/lifetimes.x.v.html>

“But he [the vineyard owner] answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go, but 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 **what is my own**? Or is your eye envious [evil, stingy] because I am generous?’”

Matthew 20:13-15

\*Their emotional turmoil is because of expectations based in their envy, not injustice. – Jonathan Pennington



All the workers in the parable seem to have performed their jobs well, even though some worked much longer than others. In fact, all the laborers in the vineyard fulfilled the requirements of their assigned tasks. The issue was time and not job performance...

[The landowner] was fair and just when he showed grace to the latecomers. His generous nature challenged the others to follow his example. The story tells us about God and His unlimited grace for each person. — Brad H. Young

Jesus said, “So the last shall be first, and the first last.” Matthew 20:16

No matter how long or how hard a believer works during his lifetime, the reward of eternal life will be the same given to all—an eternity of bliss in heaven in the presence of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43), whose life of service was limited to a moment of repentance and confession of faith in Christ, received the same reward of eternal life as the apostle Paul. Scripture teaches that there are different rewards in heaven for different services, but the ultimate reward of eternal life will be achieved by all equally.

<https://www.gotquestions.org/parable-laborers-vineyard.html>



Jesus was teaching that the matter of rewards is under the sovereign control of God, the “Landowner” in the parable. God is the One before whom all accounts will be settled. Many who have prominent places will someday find themselves demoted. And many who often find themselves at the end of the line will find themselves promoted to the head of the line: The last will be first, and the first will be last. In the final accounting, the Lord’s analysis will carry the greatest and only important weight. - Bible Knowledge Commentary

Jesus challenges His disciples not to look to what others have and become bitter and jealous. Rivalry is soul-destructive because all of life is a gift from God. This parable gives us a vision for God's generous grace toward us and toward others. Life is found when we fix our eyes not horizontally on what others have but vertically on the generosity of the whole-earth landowner, King Jesus, who calls us friends and who gives wisely and generously.

- Jonathan Pennington



# Four things stand out clearly in the Parable...

- the abundance of work to be done in the vineyard
- the anxiety of the householder to secure all available laborers
- the circumstance that, not from unwillingness or refusal, but because they had not been there and available, the laborers had come at later hours
- that, when they had so come, they were ready to go into the vineyard without promise of definite reward, simply trusting to the truth and goodness of him whom they went to serve

For He [the Lord] says to Moses [in Exodus 33:19], “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. Romans 9:15-16

Whether God calls someone early or late in life to partake of His grace, the glory and praise for our salvation is His and His alone and in no way amounts to unfairness. Just as the landowner has a right to do what he wishes with his own money, so does God have the right to have mercy on whom He will have mercy.

- <https://www.gotquestions.org/parable-laborers-vineyard.html>

No-one was underpaid; it was just that some were treated with ‘unreasonable’ generosity. That is what the kingdom of heaven is like. God’s grace is not limited by our ideas of fairness; His gifts are far beyond what we can deserve.

- New Bible Commentary





**A Quick Survey...**

**Maybe today**