

Our Generous Father

WORSHIP & SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

AS WE GATHER

God the Father draws people to faith in His Son through the invitation of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit. He saves people at all ages and in all sin conditions purely out of His great mercy and love. He is the most generous Father. And Jesus Christ sends believers out into the world to serve in His name. Some of the last that He sends will be first and some of the first, last. Praise be to God! Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Isaiah 55:6-9

Repent and call upon the Lord

"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30

To live is Christ, to die is gain

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear... For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better... Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ...

Matthew 20:1-16

The Parable of the Vineyard Workers

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard... And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing... 'You go into the vineyard too.' And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.'... '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."

DEVOTIONAL REFLECTION

God our Father is generous, abounding in blessings, overflowing with love, and sharing of all good things with us that He might save us to live in His eternal Kingdom. Amen.

Jesus told the disciples about a vineyard owner who hired workers at different hours of the day (Matthew 20:1–16). When it was time to pay them, he gave each the same pay. Now, one who had come to work early expected to get more than the last hired. But the owner replied, *"Friend, I am 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?"* And Jesus noted: *"So the last will be first, and the first last."*

Sometimes I run across a person who has been an unrepentant sinner his whole life, but shortly before dying, he hears the Gospel and converts to faith. I have had people say, "It is not fair that he is in heaven. You don't know how bad he was." But the point Jesus is making in Matthew 20 is not how bad the last worker was and how little he did for the kingdom, but how good God is and how He has made the man new in Christ.

God is generous beyond belief. His loving kindness endures forever. The Bible tells us that *"everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved"* (Romans 10:13). The person who begrudges God's right to save people does not understand the meaning of grace and its purpose to save sinners of all kinds who hear the Gospel and repent.

The greatest in the kingdom is the "last"—the person who knows that he is most needful of grace and mercy from God. He loves much, because he knows that he has been forgiven much. Before God we cannot be smug, but ever mindful that all good works are only good because they have been planned by God and washed by the blood of Christ.

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SUMMARY REVIEW

God our Father is _____. Jesus told a parable about a vineyard owner. Some of the first hired thought that they deserved _____ than those who were hired _____. But, the owner was _____ to all, especially the last. The owner told one of the first that he had the right to be _____ with what belonged to him. This parable shows us that God is _____ even to those who respond late in life. Salvation is by _____ through faith. Therefore, "the last will be _____, and the first _____."

STUDY & REFLECTION

1. What sign do you have that the owner (God) wants all people to be saved? (vs. 1–7)

2. Why do you think the owner paid the last workers first, and how did the first react? (vs. 8–15)

3. Reflection: Do you consider yourself to be "first" or "last" before God? (v. 16)