

**“Grace: the Heart of God”, Matthew 20:1-16 (Sep 20, 2020)**

**(Slide 1)** Help wanted! There is job description, after you hear it, let me know if you are interested in this job. There are tons of vacancies. --- Listen carefully!!!

1. you should stay alert for 24 hours /7 days
2. you should work when others get rest
3. there is no chance for promotion
4. no equipped office
5. no social reputation
6. no monthly paycheck
7. you may not work at what you want to do but where you are needed
8. you may have to go against your family

How does it sound? Do you think it sounds terrible? Is there anyone who is interested in applying? When you heard this job description, how did you feel about it? You might think that it is an anachronism, or it does not make sense at all for “help wanted”, so no one would like to apply for it. I think some of you have already figured out what this job is. **(Slide 2)** This is a job description of disciple of Jesus Christ. And, surprisingly, you already chose this job, so you are here this morning. I would like to welcome you to the world of a terrible job in the name of Jesus Christ! Don't get discouraged, I'm just kidding! Let me welcome you again. Welcome to the world of love! Because we all know that the only reason why you chose this job is love of Jesus Christ.

**(Slide 3)** Today's gospel scripture tells us about one story that is very difficult to understand with commonsense. A landowner went out to hire laborers for his vineyard. But, interestingly, he did not hire all the laborers at once, he went out to hire again and again. And he called the laborers and gave them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first. Everyone might expect he would pay more for those who work longer. But everyone got paid the same, the usual daily wage. The workers who worked longer got angry, so they complained about their wages. However, this complaint was not accepted, because they already agreed to the usual daily wage before starting work. If you read this scripture without any thoughts, you may want to stand on the side of the laborers who work longer. This is because we all grew up in a capitalistic society, taking it for granted that workers get paid

according to how much they work. It is a socially accepted idea, but in this story, a landowner broke away from common sense by paying all workers equally. I was also one of the people thinking that it is unfair, if everyone gets paid the same no one will like to work longer.

**(Slide 4)** However, when I paid attention to what this landowner did at first, it gave me an “aha moment”. The landowner went out to the marketplace to hire laborers not just one time a day, but many times during the day. If he just needed a workforce, he should have hired many workers at once in the morning so that he could only choose strong and diligent workers, but he went out to the marketplace again and again. Also, I noticed what that landowner said when he hired the laborers, “you go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” He did not tell them to work in the vineyard, but to go into the vineyard. Although he could choose only strong and diligent workers at once in the morning, he went out again and again, and even he hired those whom no one wanted to hire. It seemed that he hired people not to make them actually work, but rather to give them an opportunity to get paid.

From this parable of the laborers in the vineyard, we see the heart of God for us. First, we see the comfort of God. A landowner did not care when each laborer came to his vineyard. He just paid every worker the same. Likewise, God does not count when you enter God’s kingdom. No matter when you become a true believer, everyone is equally dear and precious to God. Secondly, we see the infinite compassion of God. A landowner hired the last in the marketplace, but he did not treat him as the last, rather he treated him as the first. He showed his compassion for those unemployed. Likewise, God never treats us as the last or loser, He always treats us as the first and beloved one. Although no one recognized me in the world, only God pays attention to me. Thirdly, we see the generosity of God. A landowner paid not based on the length of the work, but all the same. Likewise, in God’s sight, all service ranks the same. God does not count the amount of what we give, but the love in our heart when we give it. Lastly, we see the grace of God based on agape love, which is unconditional love. A landowner treated everyone with the same attitude-fairness and justice, and same heart. Likewise, God’s grace is for everyone. God’s grace is not distributed according to our service, but rather it is unconditional.

**(Slide 5)** As John 3:16 said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” God gave us the most precious gift which is eternal life by God's unconditional grace. We can't earn it by our efforts, and we don't deserve it. However, it is just given by God's grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 said, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God- not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” In addition to this, this parable gives a clear message to us - the disciples of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 19:27, Peter asked Jesus, “Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” Just like Peter, when we heard this parable, we may be concerned about God's smaller consideration of our service and dedication to God. However, this concern comes from our self-pride. We already have enjoyed our privilege as Christians—God's mercy, grace, love, and freedom.

**(Slide 6)** In this sense, this parable reminds me of the parable of the prodigal son. As Christians, we may stand on the side of the elder son who was complaining to his father because he accepts and celebrates his prodigal son's return. Then, his father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.” I bet when the workers were hired, no matter when they were hired, they must have rejoiced, also they must have delighted while they were working. We never forget the joy of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. We should appreciate that we are able to serve, rather than having a sense of self-superiority. As it is written, the last will be first, and the first will be last. No one knows for sure, who will be the first and who will be the last at the end. I would like to remind you of one thing by editing what Psalm 24:8 said. Taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who enter into God's vineyard. We already got hired by God. And even, we know all that is God's is ours, since we children of God. As a landowner searched for workers not to make them work but to send them to the vineyard, God is searching for the lost sheep to send them to the kingdom of God.

The key word is to the kingdom of God from today's message. I'd like to share this picture with you to explain one of the practical ways to work for the kingdom of God in our places. **(Slide 7)** I'd like to share this picture with you. I brought this one from one of our faithful & dedicated church member's Facebook. Surely, I got permission from her and this kid's family to use this

picture. He is her grandson. He is living in another state and was preparing to go back to school at that time. Grandma made this mask herself for back to school. This beautiful and meaningful picture touched my heart a lot and reminded me what social and racial justice is. When I prayed for him and his family, God gave me the time to think and imagine his grandma's feeling when she made this mask for him. Surely, she was happy to make it for this lovable kid, but I guess that she may be a little thoughtful and considered the reality of putting "Black Lives Matter" on his mask. One thing I could guess easily that she made it with lots of prayer while thinking of her beloved grandson. It is a grandmother's heart and mind for a kid.

Again, I want to remind you last week's sermon message that we are privileged people who canceled 10,000 talents from God. As the privileged Christians, we have a duty for the kingdom of God and making a good society without any racial issues. The first step is to pray for the kingdom of God for God's justice and righteousness and then try to do your best to support it by your action. Small or big is not important, the most important thing is to involve it by your own action as Christians with prayer. Remember that they are also our family, friends and neighbors.

**(Slide 8)** Come back and wrap up today's message, the kingdom of God. If you were still just standing and wandering, please be found by God. Or if you were already found by God so you have worked hard for God's kingdom, don't be jealous of others who don't even know who Jesus Christ is. As a first knower of him, let us fully enjoy the joy of being first workers. God's first comers, keep working hard for the kingdom of God, not falling behind the last but remaining as the first. Our God who has unconditional love and grace will remember you as the first.

Praise God, Amen!