

# Being Faithful

Matthew 20:1-16

**Central Idea:** In these last days, our faith is proven by our faithfulness to God's mission.

## Introduction

I have noticed with the advent of all of these reality TV shows in our culture that we tend to have opinions and judgments about all sorts of things. It becomes a conversation piece when we find others who watch those same shows and have a run-down of all of their choices. We like this performer or that performer based on looks or style or ability. We are teaching ourselves how to make a standard of judgment in our culture. But then when we use these opinions and judgments about people in our own lives, we are told not to judge.

This phenomenon reminds me of a parable that strikes at the heart of what it means to willfully serve Jesus in the Kingdom of God in these last days. Some Christians get more years of service to the Lord because they come to Him at a younger age than others. Some Christians make up for their years of sin with more dedicated service to God than others. How many times does the Bible talk about not judging one another or comparing ourselves to one another.

We do this not just with service but with doctrine, with acts of kindness, and with so many other ways. Just the other day, a person who doesn't like Pentecostal theology made judgments about my salvation because I believe in speaking in tongues. This person felt compelled to explain how dangerously demonic my beliefs are and that I shouldn't press them on people. I was left wondering if that person thought I was saved! How we deal with one another and before the Lord in these last days is most important! Let's take a look at the parable of the vineyard workers.

## Text – Matthew 20:1-16

<sup>1</sup> “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. <sup>2</sup> After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, <sup>4</sup> and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ <sup>5</sup> So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. <sup>6</sup> And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ <sup>7</sup> They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ <sup>8</sup> 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.’<sup>9</sup> And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.<sup>10</sup> Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius.<sup>11</sup> And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house,<sup>12</sup> saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’<sup>13</sup> But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?’<sup>14</sup> Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you.<sup>15</sup> Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’<sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first last.”

I. God continues to add to His Kingdom daily!

A. He is always seeking new believers.

- i. As with many of the parables, the Father is shown to be the vineyard owner. It sounds like he’s quite wealthy because he continues to hire workers throughout the day.
- ii. The harvesting time is a quick time. Anyone who has ever been around farms knows that there’s only a certain amount of time that you have to bring in all of the produce of a field before it gets too ripe or begins to rot.
- iii. So this owner is going out into the marketplace on the same day over and over to get more workers because the work is not progressing fast enough. He most likely has a very large amount of produce to bring in.
- iv. That brings us to some important observations about the last days that we live in. They were inaugurated by Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection. And we all serve as workers in His world, His field.
- v. The first observation we can make is that as the time grows short for the fields, God wants to bring in a great harvest! Jesus says elsewhere that the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.
- vi. So many times I hear people reference places where the Bible speaks of people who are not interested in the Gospel, and yet, I see here that God has no problem growing a harvest. But the laborers are few, so He continues to seek more.
- vii. I think that sometimes we get hung up on the little things and we begin to miss the glorious big picture of a God who is looking for more workers to reap the harvest of souls that are just waiting to hear about Jesus and accept Him.
- viii. Other times, we are so busy disputing minor matters with one another within Christianity that we get distracted and forget about those who need Jesus and to be disciplined.
- ix. **Application:** We need to stop with “friendly fire” because it’s not so friendly and it does not help build the kingdom or bring others into the

harvest. When we begin to think more about ourselves and our comfort in serving Christ, we are getting off of the goal and the mission that God has put us here to accomplish. Are you too busy with the trees to see the forest?

B. He is always accepting more workers.

- i. God continues to bring in the workers and they do less and less work. It is not because they don't have a good work ethic. It is because they are working for less amount of time.
- ii. This of course raises several issues. In our world, when someone has worked longer at a place, like a university, they become tenured. Their time put in brings greater rewards with the passage of time.
- iii. In Christianity, the elders and the saints who have been in Christ for a long time are sort of like those who are tenured. People look to them for wisdom and for practical and spiritual advice. They can be a great resource for the Kingdom!
- iv. But there is also a grave danger of not being able to minister to younger people in Christ. By younger I mean less mature in Christ, not chronological age. The danger is that all that they have learned cannot be passed on because there is a generational disconnect or for other reasons.
- v. This continued hiring of new workers produces other problems. What if one Christian works harder for God or is more passionate than another? What if one Christian can do more or is "more talented" than others?
- vi. **Illustration:** I'm reminded of the end of the book of John when Peter and John are hanging out with Jesus after breakfast, and Peter has just been restored by Jesus from his denial. Jesus has just asked him if he loves Jesus and Peter has affirmed this thrice. Then Peter asks about John and his walk as a disciple and Jesus responds, "If it is My will that he remains until I return, what does that have to do with you? You follow Me." Peter was caught up in John's faithfulness to Jesus instead of his own. Jesus reminded him that we all walk our own walk with God.
- vii. We should not compare ourselves to one another. Each of us are uniquely designed for specific tasks. The Bible teaches us that we are all different members of the same body with different functions. We are supposed to work together for God's kingdom, not compare ourselves to one another. How can you compare apples and oranges? How can you compare the eye of the body to the foot? Both are needed.
- viii. **Application:** We need to learn that there are no MVPs in Christian service to God. The greatest among us is the least among us, the one who serves, and we are all serving Christ! This isn't about comparing one another. This is about serving with our unique gifts and fitting into God's plan,

about sharing the suffering and the joy of following Christ together, about encouraging one another and praying for one another and serving one another and winning the world for Christ! I love Christ's pointed command to Peter, "YOU follow ME." It's just you and Jesus. Don't worry about others. Get your mission in Christ done!

II. God decides how everyone will be rewarded.

A. He will reward all of His workers.

- i. See we, like these workers in this parable, are used to judging what each worker is worth and assigning a value to that person based on their work ethic or talents.
- ii. But the Kingdom of God does not work like that at all! We are not the judge. God is the Judge. He is the one who decides rewards and earnings. No one who serves Christ will be ignored when it comes time to give rewards.
- iii. We don't have the kind of God who picks favorites among His people. We are all His favorite! We are used to a world in which there is injustice, where people are not properly rewarded.
- iv. Instead, He will be fair with each of us in our reward. We are not used to that kind of righteousness, because we see examples of the opposite everyday in our lives.
- v. The first workers in the parable are given a day's wages at the end of the day. They get to agree on the price with the owner. After that, not one of the workers challenges the owner on what they will get at the end for their work.
- vi. Each one of them trusts in the owner to give them an honest wage. There is no discussion about specifics for their work. Most of them are probably happy to still find work as the day wanes on. Everyone's got to feed their family.
- vii. The way our world works, each person gets less for less work. So these who worked later in the day don't expect to get a day's wages. They come from a humble place of working less for the owner and being okay with what He feels is their work's worth. But those from the beginning of the day came from a high place of knowing their labor was needed.
- viii. **Application:** Many of us have moments where we argue with God about those who seem to not be following Him as faithfully as us. We get to a place like Peter who reminds Jesus a bit earlier in Matthew before this parable that they have left everything to follow Him. We begin to wonder if God is going to be fair to us in our recompense. We begin to think about reward and whether what we go through for Him is "worth it." But we

must stay the course, for He is a just and honorable God, and His recompense will indeed be worth anything we go through!

B. He will be fair with all of His workers.

- i. We find at the end of the day that the owner pays all of his workers, even those who worked for only one hour! It is shocking what he pays, but in the opposite way that we are used to seeing.
- ii. We would expect that those who worked for only an hour find that their pay was not even worth the labor they put into it, and yet, they are pleasantly surprised at the end of that hour of hard work.
- iii. What we might tend to forget is that the workers at the beginning of the day worked out their payment with the owner. They agreed to a fair denarius, the standard for one day's labor.
- iv. They knew what they were getting paid at the end of the day, and it was not unfair. It was the average fair market value for their work. The owner did not mistreat them.
- v. **Illustration:** We have become used to expecting what we could get in our society and working off of possibilities rather than realities. For instance, our government loves to talk about how much money it could have spent but saved through not spending it. Many put together a budget and go over it. Few put together a budget and meet or save money through it. We are approved for thousands of dollars more in credit than we can make at our jobs. We are taught to get what we could get rather than what we are actually entitled to.
- vi. When these workers begin to see the last workers who only worked for an hour receive a full day's wage, they were probably getting excited, thinking, "If they get a full day's wage, then I'm going to make out like a bandit! Yay!"
- vii. They began to judge their own worth based on others, and were then sorely disappointed that the owner stuck to the agreement that they made. They were angry over the amount they could have made, rather than the amount that they were guaranteed. What if the owner decided to give them less because as they continued to work, they didn't work as hard?
- viii. **Application:** We can get to a place where we expect more than what God has promised as believers. We seem to think that salvation and heaven become based on a graded system where our good deeds for Jesus entitle us to more of His rewards and blessings. But salvation is not a graded system of A-D. It is a pass/fail system. You are either saved by Jesus' gracious sacrifice, or you do not know Him. That's it, and that is way more than we have ever deserved!

III. God gives grace to all who are under His care.

- A. He gives out of His grace.
- i. The fact of this parable is quite similar to the point of another one, the parable of the prodigal son. In that parable, there is a son who demands his inheritance and goes and squanders it.
  - ii. But in that parable, there is another son who stays with his father and plays the obedient, good son. And yet, when the other son returns and the father rejoices and holds a celebration, it is the son who stayed who is angry.
  - iii. When the father speaks to the angry son, the son tells him that he has never asked for even a small goat to enjoy a party with his friends. The father's reply is that this son, like the other, inherits all he has and that he could have had that party.
  - iv. The son is angry for no reason because the father would have shared his inheritance with him as much as the other son demanded his part of the inheritance. But the "good" son never asked for what he wanted. He didn't realize that the father was gracious!
  - v. Here also in our parable today, the owner of the field in conversation with these first workers when challenged by them reminds them of two very important character traits of the owner.
  - vi. First, the owner wants to be gracious! The owner wants to give out of his kindness. Just as much as the workers in the early morning were treated with grace and given a job that paid a fair wage, the owner continued to bless others with a job.
  - vii. And not only did he want to bless them with a job, but he was moved with the same compassion to see their families eat that evening as the families of the workers from the beginning of the day.
  - viii. You see, in Jesus' day, if you didn't have a denarius at the end of the day, you would not be able to provide for your whole family. You would go without or have smaller portions.
  - ix. The owner had every right to give each group of workers after the first less than a denarius for that day, because they didn't work the full day. But God, the land owner, is gracious to all and acts out of compassion. He wants to provide for our needs! He sees the need, and gives grace to cover it!
  - x. **Application:** We can be so busy being selfish and upset about the amount of grace that God gives others that we forget He is gracious to us as well. We can put blinders on and not realize that others might need more than we need to get by. They might need more ministry than we do, or be less stable than we are at the time. We should not begrudge others who are receiving what they need from God when it seems like more than we get

from Him. The fact of the matter is that we have all received His grace! We are all being saved for heaven! The fact is that we have a gracious God, and we should rejoice over that instead of be upset with Him that He gave us less in our eyes than others.

B. He gives out of His generosity.

- i. The second fact about God, the land owner in this parable, that these first workers neglected to realize is that God has a generous nature. Not only is He gracious to everyone, but He is also generous!
- ii. The workers have a point about how He gave the money at the end of the day. God does not have to give us more than we deserve. He can pay a fair wage for half a day's work, or even an hour's worth of work.
- iii. But God went beyond that. Remember that God owns all things, and He can be as generous as He wants. Sometimes we look at the blessings God gives others and we develop an attitude of complaint rather than gratitude for our own blessings.
- iv. This happens when we focus on others rather than ourselves. Comparing is a dangerous practice in humanity. It can bring up pride, self-loathing and a host of other feelings and issues in us.
- v. We can't be happy for others when they are being blessed, and we are unhappy with the blessings God gives us. We get stuck on wanting more and being greedy rather than grateful that God gave us any grace.
- vi. When you look at your own situation and your own life, you begin to see that God is very generous with you as well. The problem is that we are seeing His generosity with others, but we are blinded to that same generosity with our situation.
- vii. **Illustration:** As someone who is legally blind, it would be so easy for me to see someone get healed and then ask God, "Why not me? Have I not served you all of these years?" In focusing on other people's blessings, I develop a hardness toward God's grace in my own life. I grumble and complain about what I think He should do for me rather than seeing how He has blessed me beyond measure despite my inabilities.
- viii. We need to learn how to focus on God's blessings for us rather than others. Hearing about God's generosity toward others should only serve to reinforce His generous nature for our lives as well as theirs, and it should serve as a point of praise to a generous God!
- ix. If we were unselfish just enough to realize that God is not just gracious and generous to us, but also to everyone else, we would be able to worship Him for His kindness toward everyone rather than be upset He is not more generous with us.

- x. **Application:** Let's not forget that God sees the things that we cannot see. And He is sovereign. He owns it all and can do with it whatever He pleases. It is not for us to decide how God uses His resources. We should be grateful that He chooses to be generous and gracious rather than angry that we can't get more stuff out of God! Let us learn to hear other's testimonies with a heart of gratitude that God would be generous to us and our brothers and sisters in Christ!

## **Conclusion**

We live in the days between the promise and its fulfillment, and while we are here, waiting on Jesus to return, we could begin to look at everyone around us and become more concerned with their walks with God rather than our own. We could develop warped views of a faithful and gracious God who is not gracious to us. But we must be faithful to serve God with gratitude in these last days. We must approach our work for God with a faithfulness that we continue to run our own race. God's mission is not about sitting on the sidelines watching others run their race. It is a mission where we need to participate and keep our eyes on Jesus and His grace rather than on other people. Let them run their race, and you run yours. Help one another, because God's mission requires teamwork. We must develop a team player mentality if we are to see God's mission accomplished by the time He returns! Let us be faithful in the small things and the large things.

## **Action Points**

- God is looking to have fully functional and grateful workers in His mission to save the world. Keep your eyes focused on Jesus instead of on the blessings of others. Start with you. How has God blessed you in your life? What's your testimony?
- God has given all of us more grace than we can remember. Each person has different needs and a different background, so what may appear like God is blessing others more might be a matter of individual care and generosity. When you think about your own life, God has been just as generous with you!
- God is full of grace and more generous than anyone else we know. What are some ways He has acted in grace when you didn't deserve it? What are some ways He has lavished His blessings on you in your finances, health, spiritual life?