

Matthew Ch20v1-16 - Entering The Kingdom

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- [0 : 00] If you haven't got a Bible with you, please, you can get one now and you might want to take some notes as well in the pen there at the table at the back as you came in.
- Thank you. So Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 20. Last week, Jason, our guest speaker, was talking about greatness in the kingdom.
- Today we're going to be thinking about entering the kingdom. Let's read from Matthew, Chapter 20, verse 1 to verse 16.
- Jesus is speaking. For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius, that's a day's wage, and sent them into his vineyard.
- About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, you also go and work in my vineyard and I will pay you whatever is right.
- [1 : 42] So they went. He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around.
- He asked them, why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing? Because no one has hired us, they answered.
- He said to them, you also go and work in my vineyard. When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.
- The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more.
- But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. Those who were hired last worked only one hour, they said.
- [2 : 56] And you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work of the heat of the day. But he answered one of them, I am not being unfair to you, friend.
- Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who is hired last the same as I gave you.
- Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious? Because I am generous.
- So, the last will be first and the first will be last. Well, let's pray. Father, in your grace and because you are kind and compassionate, would you pour out your blessing upon us as we gather here, upon our Sunday school as they meet at the same time.
- Father, in your grace, would you pour out your spirit generously, so that we may be moved, captured by your word afresh, and changed to see the wonder of who you are and the life you've called us to live.
- [4 : 30] So help us all, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, the other day I was driving to Mahon Point.

It was very busy, so everybody was on the hunt for a parking space. And being a good boy that I am, I waited patiently for someone to leave so that I could park.

Eventually, I spotted a car move down one of the aisles. And as I made my way up that row of cars, guess what happened? Another car, who had just arrived, went in ahead of me.

Couldn't believe it. I won't tell you what I said or what I thought. I wonder if that's ever happened to you. So frustrating, so annoying.

I was there first. I deserved that parking space. They were last in line. It's not right. And it's not fair.

[5 : 39] Well, Jesus has been teaching about who enters the kingdom of heaven. But it's not as we expect. Have a look back with me in chapter 19, verse 14.

Jesus said, Let the little children come to me. Now remember, children in that society were considered nobodies. They were the least and the last.

But, says Jesus, do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. And then in contrast, have a look at verse 23.

Jesus said to his disciples, Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom. The rich are the people of power and influence.

They are the best and they are first. But, says Jesus, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.

[6 : 49] You see, this is a reversal of the world's values. It turns everything upside down. As Jesus concludes in verse 30, chapter 19, But many who are first will be last.

And many who are last will be first. How can this be? It seems so unfair, so unjust.

Well, Jesus tells us a parable so that we might understand who enters the kingdom. Chapter 20, verse 1. For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.

A parable, the story that Jesus is telling, is a practical story which highlights a spiritual reality. In other words, it's a story with a deeper meaning.

So in this parable, the vineyard represents the kingdom of heaven. The landowner represents Jesus. And the workers represent those who enter the kingdom.

[8 : 07] It's a story that shows us that entrance into the kingdom is all by grace. Grace is that key that opens the door into the kingdom.

So three things I want us to see this morning from this story. We're going to look at the welcome of grace, the scandal of grace, and the generosity of grace.

Welcome, scandal, and generosity. So first, the welcome of grace. Let's read verse 1 again. For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.

It's a typical scene. The landowner goes off to the town to the unemployment centre. He goes early in the morning. It's about 6am at sunrise when the working day started.

And he finds himself some workers. An arrangement is made and everybody's happy. Verse 2, he agreed to pay them a denarius.

[9 : 21] Which, if you have a note in the bottom of your Bible there, says it's a daily wage for a labourer. Now that's extremely generous for somebody who would be unskilled.

So he agreed to pay them a day's wage and he sent them into the vineyard. But it seems the landowner has more room for workers.

So he goes back down to job seekers and we're told in the text that four more times he goes. He goes back at 9am, 12pm, 3pm, and then again at 5pm.

Each time he hires more workers. Now this isn't a story about how to reduce the unemployment. It's a story to tell us about God's heart.

You see, there's an order here. Because it appears that the ones who are up early and who are first in the queue, well, they're the ones that get hired.

[10 : 26] They're fit and healthy. They're the best of the bunch. They get employed first. And as the day goes by, the standard of employee begins to drop significantly.

As the best have been taken, so the dregs are left behind. The lazy, the good for nothing, the weak. The ones who always arrive late and go home early.

You know the type. Always taking their smoke break and their tea break. They're the best of the people faffing about, wasting their day. But that doesn't seem to bother the landowner.

Verse 6. About five in the afternoon, he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?

They're just hanging about, idle. Verse 7. Because no one has hired us. I wonder why.

[11 : 34] He said to them, you also go and work in my vineyard. You see, it's not just the best and the brightest who get employed, but it's also the least and the last.

Because when it comes to the kingdom of heaven, no one is outside the welcome of God's grace. It's like this.

Perhaps you know someone who heard the gospel. Maybe this is you. You heard the gospel and you responded straight away. You repented of your sins. You turned to faith in Jesus.

You were baptized as a sign of your desire to follow him. You've been committed to your local church. You serve and you give as you're able. In fact, your whole life has been about putting the kingdom first.

But maybe you know others who also hear the gospel. They've heard it many, many times. But they ignore it and they reject it.

[12 : 42] They make false commitments and promises. Oh yes, I'll be there. I'm going to change my life for real this time. But living as they please and they think of no one else but themselves.

But then late on in life, they do turn in repentance and put their faith in Christ. What do you think of that?

put yourself into this story. Think of yourself as the landowner. Who would you employ?

Well, as I thought about it, I would only employ the 6am workers. I might employ the 9am ones too. But I'm certainly not going to employ anybody after that.

Certainly not the 5pm hangabouts. But when it comes to the kingdom of heaven, no one is written off.

[13 : 47] Those who avail of the opportunity and respond straight away and those who misuse the opportunity and respond late, they're both welcome.

Now this is good news for you and I. because perhaps you feel you've wasted your life. Maybe you feel you've blown it.

Used every opportunity and chance you could possibly get. And everybody else just writes you off. But God writes no one off.

You see, it doesn't matter whether you're a 6am-er or a 5pm-er. Know this. Today is an opportunity to respond to the good and gracious call of God.

Don't waste it. The landowner is looking to hire workers for the vineyard. and we are all welcomed.

[14 : 53] So, the welcome of grace. Second, there's scandalous grace. Read with me verse 8.

When evening came, when the day's work had been done, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.

Now, that just seems all out of place, doesn't it? Surely, the ones who were hired first should get paid first. But this all seems to be round the wrong way.

The last ones getting paid first, I mean, that's scandalous. There's both a surprise and a shock. Look at the surprise in verse 9.

The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius, a full day's wage.

[16 : 01] Those who had started late, who had got hired last, who only got to work one hour, if even that, also get a full day's wage.

Well, you think, if the landowner is so generous to these guys, it can only mean one thing. Verse 10. So, when those who were hired first, they received, expected to receive more.

I mean, the landowner is going to give us a bonus here for what we've done. but each one of them also received a denarius.

They're shocked. They're stunned. It's a complete reversal of how we do things. You see, in the world's economy, it's all about performance.

Everything is measured by what I do. We learn it from when we are small, don't we? get your homework right and I'll give you a gold star.

[17 : 11] Keep your room tidy and you'll get more pocket money. Win the race or win your match and people are going to love you. Gets a little bit more sophisticated but it's the same as we get older.

Work hard and you'll get the promotion. Look well and keep fit and you will have the partner of your choice. better yourself and you will have a better life.

Performance, performance, performance. Do well and you will get what you want. Do badly and you will lose out forever.

That's the message we've grown up with. And that's what we think is the message about the kingdom of heaven. Well, the way of the kingdom is not the way of the world.

world. It's never about our performance but God's acceptance of us in Christ. You see, Jesus is teaching us that our performance counts for nothing.

[18 : 19] If performance mattered, then the ones in this story who had worked longer and harder would have received way more. and if performance counted, then those who had worked shorter and didn't even break a sweat would have received less.

But in God's economy, each one gets the same because it's all by grace. You see, the only performance that counts is what Christ has done for you.

Christ does everything. Jesus has lived the perfect life for you. He never sinned.

He obeyed God perfectly for you and for me. He lives the life that we could never live. But more than that, Jesus dies our death for us.

He was treated as sinful for us. He was punished for our disobedience. Jesus died the death that we deserve. But as we simply trust him through faith, we receive God's good and gracious free gift, the forgiveness of all our sins.

[19 : 43] Maybe there's sin that's weighing you down today. He forgives all your sin. God's presence of the transforming spirit, God living within you.

This is what we receive. The joy of being adopted into God's family to talk to the creator of the universe as our father who gives good gifts continually to his children, the support of his family, brothers and sisters around us today, the guarantee of life in God's eternal kingdom where everything will be put right.

All freely given to you to receive because of what Christ has done for you.

Our performance counts for nothing, zilch, zero, nada. The only performance that counts is what Christ has done.

God pays out to us what someone else has earned for us. God pays out to you today what Christ has earned for you.

[21 : 04] That's the scandal of grace. So there's the welcome, there's the scandal, and there's generous grace.

Look at verse 11. When those who had been hired first, when they received their pay, they began to grumble against the landowner.

These who were hired last worked only one hour, they said, people and you've made them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.

Time to get the unions involved. This is outrageous. I mean, who wouldn't be annoyed? These guys have done little to nothing, and they're getting the same.

I have sympathy for those who are up at 6am to go to work, these hard working people. If that were you and I in this situation, we'd be out, wouldn't be, with our placards, equal pay, taking to social media.

[22 : 20] It's completely unfair. Where's the justice in any of this? Verse 13. But the landowner answered one of them, I am not being unfair to you, friend.

Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. You see, the landowner has cheated no one.

He's treated everyone fairly. They got paid what was agreed. In fact, they've all got more than what they deserved.

You see, we need to remember that what we receive from God is not because of our performance, but because of his grace to us.

You see, at one level, these guys are right to grumble. We associate with them, don't we? We feel their heartache and their pain. This is not fair.

[23 : 30] But that's the point. You see, think about it. If God were to treat us fairly, we would get nothing. If God were to treat us justly, then we would have to pay for our own sin, and we would have to face his wrath.

If it's fairness from God that we want, then hell is what we've earned and what we deserve. You see, grace by definition is never fair.

Because grace is receiving what we cannot earn and what we don't deserve. That's not fair. But are we going to grumble about that?

I don't think so. Three things. to think about as we close that we must get to grips with. Here's the first.

God desires to give grace. Look at verse 14. The landowner, take your pay and go.

[24 : 42] I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. I want to give. God is not a mean, tight-fisted, vengeful God looking to squash any unsuspecting sinner.

No, God is generous. He longs to give grace. Consider how God has revealed his character to us.

Just look with me, please. Keep your finger in Matthew 20 and just jump back to Psalm 103. Psalm 103. Psalm 103.

Psalms 103. And let's just take in God's character, how he describes himself, how he reveals his nature to us.

The psalmist is recording a terrible event in Israel's past, where they sinned awfully. But this was the response.

[26 : 03] Verse 7. God made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

He will not always accuse. He will not harbour his anger forever. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

I want to sing that song again, don't you? Back to Matthew 20. God does not ignore our sin. It says very clearly he will deal with it, but his heart is one of compassion.

He is abounding in love. He desires to give grace. And this is the God who comes to each one of us today. Whoever we are, whatever you have done, he loves you.

[27 : 28] He loves you. His heart is for you. God desires to give grace. Second, God distributes his grace as he pleases.

Look at verse 15, Matthew chapter 20, verse 15. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money?

me? Or are you envious because I am generous? Again, it's speaking of God, isn't it? Grace is God's.

Grace belongs to God's. It's his property. Therefore, it's for God to give as he pleases. I don't have any right to it.

You have no claim to it. So who are any of us to say God can't give grace to this person or he can't give grace to that person? Who are we to tell God what to do with his grace?

[28 : 44] We need to understand that what God does is always right. He discerns, he decides, and he distributes as he pleases.

It might seem unfair to us, but we can be sure that everything God does is always fair and always just.

With God, no one is ever treated unfairly. Ever. So he desires, he distributes, and God demands grace from those who receive grace.

Grace is always unearned and undeserved, so none of us here can think of ourselves as superior to anyone else, and none of us need to feel inferior to anyone else.

Let's just read verse 11 and 12 again. when they had received it, their day's wage, they began to grumble against the landowner.

[29 : 52] Those who were hired last worked only one hour, they said, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.

Grace does. It makes us all equal. It levels the playing field. It doesn't matter who you are or where you come from.

It doesn't matter your background, your position, your status, the address, the colour of your skin. The only reason any of us can give for being in the kingdom of God is grace.

I cannot claim to be better than you, and you cannot claim to be better than me. Now, at one level, that's easy for us to say, isn't it?

But it's sure hard, very difficult to live. Perhaps you're thinking about someone in particular. Maybe someone has hurt you.

[30 : 59] Maybe somebody has wronged you. Trust has been broken, lies have been told, repentance has not been forthcoming.

Well, the last thing we want to do for that person is show them grace, right? Let's be honest. We want them to get what they deserve, so I won't talk to them.

We want them to get what they earn, so I will make sure they feel what I feel. well, let's together this morning look afresh into the mirror of God's grace.

And as we look into the mirror of God's grace, what do we see? One who has received undeserved grace.

We have no claim, we have no right, but through Christ we have received his gracious favour and blessing.

[32 : 04] Look into the mirror and we will see that we're all equal. Because the evidence that I have received grace, the evidence that you have received grace, is that you will show grace to others.

I will welcome others just as Christ has welcomed me. I will be scandalous in my dealings with others, in my generosity towards them.

How we treat each other will tell us if I am a bitter grumbler who angrily holds on to grace or a generous giver who desires to distribute his grace.

grace. What are you today? Are you a bitter grumbler withholding grace from someone?

Or are you a generous giver who desires to distribute that grace? grace? So, verse 16, the last will be first and the first will be last.

[33 : 28] In God's economy, everything is turned upside down. No superiority and no inferiority. All are equal. grace is the key that will open the door to the kingdom of heaven.

Let's just take a moment to reflect as we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Father, thank you for the welcome of your grace to us. Thank you for that surprising, shocking grace that gives to us more than we could ever expect or imagine.

Thank you, Father, for your generosity to us. Undeserving as we are, yet you have made us rich.

We praise you, we thank you. Help us to be changed by your grace that we are no longer a bitter grumbler but a generous giver.

[35 : 05] Change your hearts. Mould us and shape us. Father, in your goodness, pour out your grace upon us afresh.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're going to sing a well-known song. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound.

It's grace that begins the journey, grace that will keep us on the journey and grace that will see us through to our home with Him.

It's not because of us. Thank you.