

# The Kingdom of heaven is like...

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Preacher: Chris Fry

[0:00] It's a good story, isn't it? And it's even better when you read it out loud.

! While superficially, it looks like a story that the people of the land and many of his 12 disciples knew all about this.

While superficially, it looks like that and something that they can readily identify with. It does have some major and very subversive surprises in it.

After all, this story isn't about the kingdom of earth, but it's about the kingdom of heaven. And that's important for us to note, as in so many parables, for the kingdom of heaven, verse 1, is like a landowner who went out early in the morning.

This is what the kingdom of heaven is like. And it's not just a kind of a sort of polite phrase to introduce every parable, but it's a very serious statement about the kingdom that the Lord Jesus Christ was introducing and about which we, by grace, are members.

[1:33] And things are done differently in the kingdom of heaven. More particularly, the story is about work in the kingdom of heaven, so the picture of the vineyard is used, as we see in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Lord has a vineyard and he sends workers into it. And so this is coming close to home. Now, who is Jesus talking to? It's actually not clear, particularly from the text that we read.

It doesn't say he talked to the crowds or he talked to his disciples. But I think it is actually quite strongly suggested from the context that this is a message for Jesus' disciples, and especially the 12.

So, of course, there were others who were disciples of Jesus. But it is the 12 who are being referenced here. And when Peter spoke in chapter 19, he's looking around at the other 11.

And he's making a statement about them as well. He's a spokesman for the 12. And what we can see in chapter 20 is that there's a definite connection between this parable, what's just happened in chapter 19.

[2:56] Notice at the beginning of verse 1, it says, For the kingdom of heaven is like. So the division in our Bible between 19 and 20 is uninspired and actually not very helpful.

Because it's not a separate story. There's a great linkage between 19 and 20, which is why we read the two together tonight. So chapter 19 has thrown up some major surprises.

And here are a couple of them. Jesus welcomes little children. Something about them has the flavor of the kingdom of heaven. Well, no one thought like that.

And secondly, riches and social standing count for nothing in God's kingdom. But the disciples, and Peter speaks for them, says, How can anyone then be saved?

This was astonishing for the rich young ruler and for Jesus' disciples, even though they had been with him all this time.

[3:58] They hadn't grasped that point yet. This is so important that Jesus devotes teaching time to this. Let's look at Peter's cry in chapter 19, verse 27.

Because Jesus uses this parable to pick up on Peter's cry when he says, We have left everything to follow you. What then will there be for us?

He says, Well, we're not like this rich young ruler that we've heard you dealing with. We haven't held back. We've sacrificed everything.

Well, he would learn that there was more giving up required. But there's no doubting the sincerity of his heart cry. He speaks for himself and, as per usual, he speaks for the other disciples as well. Because it was quite evident the way that they had behaved, the sacrifices that they had made to leave everything to follow him. And Jesus, in the following verses, tells him and them of what will come to them in the life to come and to an extent, according to the same reference passages in Mark and Luke, in this life as well.

[5:20] But the focus is definitely on something they'll have to wait for. They won't have to expect palaces and grand treasure in this life. No, there will be blessings in this life.

But, in inverted commas, and in parenthesis, it says, with persecution. It's not going to be straightforward.

It's not going to be the easy life of the rich young ruler. They're not going to have a parallel kind of existence. It's going to be very different. But there will be blessings in this life. But their true blessings and their true treasure and their true hope is going to be in the world to come.

The thrones they're going to sit on are in the world to come. The privileges they're going to enjoy are in the world to come. And what a necessary reminder that is for each one of us tonight who have put our hand to the plough and are following Jesus Christ just to know that in this life, you will have tribulation.

Be of good cheer. I've overcome the world. Our real hopes are set above. It's crazy that we don't set our affections on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, because that's where all the treasure is.

[6:43] That's where all the joy and blessing is. But we don't, do we? Because we are so world conscious. We find it very hard for our minds to be transposed.

But really so much of the gospel record is about encouraging us to know that this life is temporary and transient and there is a life to come and we should have our treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt and destroy.

They'll not grow rich in any conventional sense. In fact, everything will be with persecution and as history testifies, in most cases, premature death. But they went to their deaths with cheerfulness even, knowing that they were going to receive a rich welcome in the land to come.

There's something else about Peter's cry that Jesus will address in the parable isn't explored in chapter 19. What will we get? Says Peter. I'd ask, was he right to ask that question?

What's the attitude behind Peter's words? Was he still lingering in the rich young ruler's territory? And saying, well, we've left everything. There's got to be a lot there for us as well.

[8:22] Is he right to ask that question? And I draw your attention to chapter 19, verse 30 where Jesus summarizes what he's been dealing with when he spoke about little children and he spoke to the rich young man and then he speaks to Peter.

And he says this, but many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first. How familiar we are with that phrase. And indeed, it's almost common currency in the secular world as well.

It's repeated three other times in gospel accounts. and it's clearly full of great significance. But what is it actually saying?

And if there's one section of this whole passage that I've been struggling with or wrestling with is to try to understand what does this really mean? Many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first.

You can plow through the commentaries and you can see plenty of ideas that have been offered.

They all kind of seem to fall short of the magnitude and the significance. You can just imagine Jesus not sort of mumbling these words at the end of this discourse but catching all their eyes and saying, many who are last will be first.

[9:46] Many who are first will be last. It would be lovely if he expanded on that a bit, wouldn't it? Lovely to explain that a little bit more for our benefit. So it's left to us but in the help of the Holy Spirit to try to sort of piece together that jigsaw and understand.

Well, on the basis of the storylines of chapter 19, I think we can say this. The likely winners turn out to be losers. You know, this rich young man, not only did he have the riches and the status,

because he was a ruler as well, all of that put him right up in terms of the pecking order and his sort of access to God was great and it was like, one thing he lacks, he's got it so near the finish line, so near that point.

But is it an inch or is it a thousand miles? And Jesus is suggesting that actually it's the latter.

There's something fundamentally wrong with the rich young ruler.

It's not just that there's a little bit that he hasn't got quite right. He just needs to patch up that bit of his life. But there's something about his whole approach and attitude which is not pleasing to God. And whilst he retains that approach and attitude, like all the others around him, he will be a million miles away from a relationship with God.

[11:29] Everyone was telling him, you're one of the first. A Jew of Jews and blessed in it. The promises of God have been poured out upon you in abundance.

What do you lack? Surely very little. But it seems to me that Jesus' words here suggest there's something fundamentally wrong in the attitude of a man like that.

And therefore in any of us who have the same sort of attitude that somehow somehow we can merit by the obedience to God's commands that we can somehow get into God's favor with as much sincerity and heart motivation as we can muster.

And Jesus in a single sentence here undermines all of that. It's a bit telling, isn't it? And on the other hand, he says many who were last will be first.

The most unlikely, the ones who were shunned and regarded as having no place in the religious life of Israel perhaps.

[12:49] well, there's surprising examples of those who are going to turn out to be welcomed with open arms into the kingdom of heaven. And didn't Jesus as he went about his earthly ministry choose some of the most unlikely people, put his finger upon them as it were and said, well, you follow me.

where are their credentials? I don't have them. They're despised and rejected by men but, well, they're welcomed into Christ's kingdom.

This is a radical statement, isn't it? It's really radical and it undermines the health and wealth heresy. I'd like us just to look at Luke 13, 28 to 30.

Luke 13. This is one of the other passages that has the same phraseology in verse 30.

This is a section titled The Narrow Door. Make every effort to enter through the narrow door because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

[14:16] These are the people who say, open to us, Lord. And he'll say to them in verse 25, I don't know you or where you come from.

And he'll say, we had a drink with you, we taught in our streets. He'll reply, I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers. Then there'll be weeping there and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves thrown out.

People will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places in the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed, there are those who are last who will be first and first who will be last. And here there's a very pointed reference to the fact that the Jews enjoyed enormous privilege as the people of God. But they spurned that repeatedly and climactically in their persecution and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

their true self was revealed even though they thought themselves privileged and the inheritors of the kingdom and they'll be the first ones to be there.

[15:37] But instead, people are going to come from the east and west and north and south and they'll take their places at the feast in the kingdom. A very clear reference to the pagans, the Gentiles, the neglected, the cast off, the unblessed.

They're going to take their places in the kingdom. Something has gone ridiculously upside down here. Those who thought they should have a sort of a gold card entry into the kingdom are going to be shut out and those who had no expectation of having a relationship with the God of Israel are instead going to find themselves welcomed with amazement and thankfulness into their feast.

Here we are tonight. Isn't that right? It's Gentiles to a man and a woman. And 2,000 years ago the Pharisees would have said of us there's no place for you with the God of Israel.

But by God's grace we're here and we find that our hearts have been opened and we have been called effectually to belong to this kingdom. And we shall find ourselves amazingly there at the wedding supper of the Lamb.

The last should be first and the first should be last. Some people have taken this chronologically and there is a case for saying that for after all the offers of mercy were brought so distinctly and uniquely to the people of Israel.

[17:35] and the door to the Gentiles was set ajar through the Old Testament prophets and then broken open on the day of Pentecost.

And we live in these latter days. So chronologically there is a case for saying first and last. But I think it's also a sort of metaphor. It's a metaphor of the expectation.

Those who consider themselves definitely last in the queue are going to find themselves to be first and the other way around. Because that's the way God deals with people and that's the way he's chosen to do so.

There's more to be said as we shall see in the vineyard parable. So let's look at firstly some helpful details just to give a little bit of introduction or some context and flavour to the story.

Firstly there's a lot here which is very unconventional or there's nothing unconventional rather in much of this story. So workers are hired on the spot in a marketplace. That's exactly how it was done.

[18:45] They didn't go to the employment exchange, they didn't answer an advert, they didn't pick up a phone, they didn't have any references, they stand in the marketplace early in the morning trying to look as best they can.

Will someone come, will someone say, come, I'll give you some work, I'll give you a day's work. There's a great scene in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, you've read Thomas Hardy's book, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, where Gabriel Oak wants to be hired, he's a shepherd by trade, but no one seems to have a need for a shepherd, so he changes his clothes on the hiring day so that he can be hired in some other fashion and capacity, so someone will want him.

So it's very similar, that only happened 200 years ago, that was the way things were done then, that's the way things were done here. Jesus not only knew this by observation, but he was a labouring man himself.

He knew the price of things, including a day's wages for a carpenter, making a wooden table, or mending a door, because his dad had tutored him in that. Remember, he didn't go into public ministry until he was 30.

So what was he doing in the days when he was fit and able to use the toolbox? He was surely with his dad, and surely there was bargaining and haggling, went on in the carpenter's shop, as Joseph, or maybe later, Jesus took over the business, because we possibly think Joseph died at quite early age, and so forth.

[20:24] So he knew how things were done. So this was a familiar scene for him. And hiring could happen at any time.

That's why the workers are hanging around in the marketplace. In some cases, they've waited all day. That's what we read later on in the passage, isn't it? All day waiting to be hired.

It's an amazing thing, isn't it? The Jewish clock ran from 6 o'clock in the morning, early in the morning, the beginning of the first hour, to the evening, which was the 12th hour.

So you do the mass, and that meant that the third hour started at 9 o'clock in the morning, the sixth hour was the middle of the day, the hottest part of the day, at 12 o'clock. And so we see here some workers who were potentially they'd been there all day, or at least they'd come later in the day, perhaps they'd wandered off and came back, and there were some workers, there at 5 o'clock in the evening, and still being willing to be hired to do something.

And the early morning workers were hired conventionally. A denarius for a 12-hour shift was a going rate for a labourer or a Roman soldier. It was the living wage.

[21:44] And the landowner agreed to pay them. people. Please look carefully at what is said in verse 2. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

Agree means there was a dialogue. There was something said between him and the worker, and possibly each worker in turn, assuming there wasn't a trade union sort of involved here in a negotiation, each one of them was sort of finding out what was being offered and buying into it. So this denarius, this penny, was enough to keep a working man alive and possibly give a bit for his family. For one day, for one day, it was a bit on the borderline.

And that was the way the economy worked. People were hired for the day. There was great uncertainty in the labour market. Perhaps they haggled.

Perhaps the workers said, we want more, and the landowner said, no, that's what we're going to offer you, and that's what was agreed. And he agreed to pay them that.

[23:07] But it was a fair conclusion. And it was important to note that all this was unsurprising and very conventional. And all the workers were paid at the end of the day.

Did you notice that? The way they close is that they're all brought in from the vineyard, and they're paid at the end of the day.

There's a very powerful statement in Deuteronomy chapter 24, and I think it's worth looking at because it has something to say to us in our day and generation, and the reason why we see that the anguished cries of the Lord, the angry cries of the Lord, when workers are oppressed.

Deuteronomy 24, verses 14 and 15 says, do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns.

Pay him his wages each day before sunset because he is poor and counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin.

[24:22] So roll on, hundreds of years, you find in the book of James, where James is sort of voicing the concerns of God and his anger at the oppression that is wreaked by unscrupulous employers who do not pay their workers as has been agreed.

Non-payment of what people are owed, whether they're an individual or a company or someone who's just done your gutters, as we have, and so forth, they're relying upon that.

That's a word for us, isn't it? It's a testimony to Christian integrity if we are able to demonstrate that we are not one of those who say the checks in the post, but we do pay our dues promptly.

Employers beware. But there is something different in this story. Whilst the pay of the early morning workers were specifically agreed as a denarius for the day, look at verse 2 again, he agreed to pay them a denarius for the day, sent them into his vineyard, there's no such statement about the other four hiring occasions.

In the case of the third hour workers, the landowner simply says, I will pay you whatever is right. Verse 4, he turns it on his head, it's almost like a command.

[26:01] He's saying, you want work? Go into my vineyard, I'll pay you what's right. And there's no discussion. There's no investigation on their part.

They don't stick around saying, hang on, we need to talk about this. It's all rather remarkable, isn't it? The sixth and the ninth hour workers seem to be treated identically.

The landowner, according to verse 5, did the same thing. And the silent implication of the text is that the eleventh hour workers had the same treatment. None of these knew what they were going to get at the end of the day.

They were grateful for work, trusted the landowner to do what was right and got stuck in without questioning. Pretty unusual.

Would you start a job without understanding what you get paid for it? this is the kingdom of heaven. And even more surprisingly different is this, and you know this, all the workers get paid a denarius.

[27:11] There's one coin for each of them. The early morning workers would expect that. After all, that's what they agreed. It's interesting. This is a very visual parable.

You can sense. So they're toiling away. Three hours later, another group of workers turn up, and the first lot said, well, how did you get on with this land owner? What's he agreed to pay you? And so they said, oh, well, we didn't have that discussion at all. We've just come. Oh, fools. Oh, fools, says the first lot.

you could have got a deal out of this, instead of which you might get paid nothing. The land owner might come to you at the end of that day and say, well, thanks very much.

I hope you enjoyed the day. That's good on your CV. You don't. You just lay yourself open to exploitation, don't you?

[28:08] They trusted the land owner. Well, the early morning workers expect the denarius.

That was what the agreement had been. But the others also get the denarius, even though in the case of the evening hour workers, they'd only worked one twelfth of the hours that the early morning workers had done.

Do you know the mathematics? 8.3% of the time they spent in the evening. Oh, they're not going to get much, are they? But, amazingly, amazingly, they still get 12 times the daily living wage, effectively for doing that one hour's work.

It's pretty amazing, isn't it? It doesn't make any economic sense why the landowner should behave in what appears to be a pretty arbitrary fashion.

As he just having a big spate of largesse, is it his birthday? Has he just got a lot from his stocks and shares? He's got money to spare and to blow, and he's just saying, oh, tell you what, you can all have them, all have that.

[29:31] something deeper than that. This is his character, this is the way he is, this is the sort of landowner he is. If he was doing it the next day, he'd do the same thing, because this is the way he behaves.

The secret's out. This person is rather special. And even more surprisingly, let's catch up, he's making a point.

I want you to notice this very carefully. The landowner starts with the payment of the late shift people. Now, that seems really odd, doesn't it? You've got guys who've been out there working 12 hours their hands are calloused, they're tired out, they've borne the heat and burden of the work and the day, haven't they?

It's been a long day, and the one thing they want to do is to have their money, get home, have some supper and go to bed. Instead of which, they're told to wait in a queue, because the people who are going to get paid first is the last shift.

The guys who just work for an hour, who are still fresh, they could do plenty of hours more work, but that's not the way it's working. Nightfall is coming, they can't work a vineyard in that condition as well, so they're the ones who come up first.

[31:06] Why? Because the landowner is going to make a point, is make it a really important point here. Humanly, you would have thought the early morning workers might have been dealt with first, but they have to wait and watch as each of the later workers gets paid and trots off happy, we assume.

Not so the early morning workers. Not only are they forced to wait, but they see what the other workers are getting. The evening shift, each get a denarius, and the early morning crew think, wonderful, hmm, if they're being given one, we'll get twelve.

that's fair, isn't it? Hourly rate. Their temporary joy turns to puzzlement as the ninth hour workers also get one denarius, but that still offers a bit of hope.

Maybe there's been a mistake somewhere. Not so as both the sixth and the third hour workers, they all get one denarius, they're all in the same position.

But at least, well, what could they expect? They just trusted the landowner. But the early morning ones, well, they'd done a deal, and as far as they could see, something had shifted in terms of their terms and conditions by the behaviour of the landowner.

[32:29] And then finally, finally, finally, it's their turn. One denarius for the early morning workers. What seemed fair in the morning now looks very different, and they complain.

So here's a good pause point. Just close your eyes, as it were, put yourself in their shoes, think of yourself in that queue, end of the day, you're tired, weary, you see what's going on, what would your reaction be?

Well, their reaction was to complain. Okay. Okay. So why did the landlord go through, landowner go through all this aggro?

Because he could have done it completely differently, done it the other way around, and no one would have been any the wiser, as it were. He's making a point. The attitude of the early morning workers is being exposed and is in stark contrast to the attitude of the later workers. We don't find the third and the sixth and the ninth hour workers all lining up in the complaint queue. They're all happy.

[33:48] They've trusted the landowner to do what is right. As far as they're concerned, it has been right. The problem lies with those first ones. For the first ones, it's a matter of the kingdom of earth thinking, and for the others, it's embracing the way of the kingdom of heaven, because those two kingdoms operate in different ways.

Which side do we instinctively find ourselves on? Well, we'll come to that in a bit, but let's look at the landowner first. As in many other parables, the landowner stands for God, the Father, and the character of the living and true God is pieced together parable by parable.

So we don't get a complete picture of our mighty and wondrous and multifaceted God by looking at one parable only, but here these are grand truths which come clearly out of the text.

We see his authority, he's in charge from beginning to end. Verses 14 and 15 of chapter 20. Take your pay and go, I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you.

Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Well, we can see who's in charge there, can't we? He's making the statement, he's calling the shots, he's saying it's entirely in my gift, in my hand.

[35:16] You haven't got a leg to stand on. May sound harsh, God. This is one aspect of the character of God.

He is a God of authority. He is a God who doesn't bargain with his creation. He doesn't ask for wisdom because he is wisdom.

He's a God of generosity. Verse 15, don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money or are you envious because I am generous? They're saying you're not generous.

He's saying I am generous. Who's right? There's only one answer to that. God is generous. That's a beautiful thing, isn't it?

He's a God of authority but he's also a God of generosity. And we hold those great truths together. Because God is good. God is loving.

[36:19] And God is kind. And God is compassionate. And he's a generous God. And he says, you can see the generosity that I've just been displaying.

Magnificent generosity. But other landowners would act in the way that I have. You can't find it. But God is generous like that. And he's so generous to us, isn't he?

I hope each one of us can look back on our lives and give testimony to the fact that he gives far more abundantly than we could ask or even imagine. We give testimony to that, can't we?

He is such a supplying God. He doesn't just give just to the edge, as it were, but he overflows with kindness. And is it lovely when prayers are answered and we see that little touch of generosity has sort of entered in, in a way.

His kindness, it sort of wraps up the presence of an answer prayer and we know that a generous God has been on the case. It's a blessing, isn't it? And how thankful we should be because of that.

[37:23] To thank God for his generosity, perhaps in your small groups later you might want to do that. Thank God for his generosity. And he's right in what he does.

Verse 4, he told them, you also go work in my vineyard, I'll pay you whatever is right. That's a great thing, isn't it? Because he's a righteous God. So he does what is right all the time, consistently.

He never falls down on the case. He never gets it wrong. He never has to apologise. He says, I made a mistake there. This person should have got what you've got. Everything he does is right. Isn't that an amazing thought? Isn't that a great encouragement to us in our lives? The sovereign God is our heavenly Father.

And he always does what's right. And so we never have a reason to complain about his actions and activity. We may not understand them, but we have no reason to complain about them.

[38:24] And that's a great comfort, isn't it? As we think about our lives and the things that we're going through, the things that are

inexplicable, the things that are hard and difficult, shall not the judge of all the earth do right.

That's a great thought, isn't it? to be able to know that he will always do what is right. And he asks us to trust him in that respect.

And then we see the rule of grace. Grace is freely offered. In the kingdom of heaven, God chooses us to be workers in his vineyard because of unmerited kindness.

It's arguable in a way what the role of those early morning workers were in this parable. It was God's mercy to show them how he acts, but they read it the wrong way.

And it's very sad to see them all going away grumpy. Murmuring, complaining, unsatisfied. Because in a way they'd seen God's generosity work. And they could have picked up the clue.

[39:28] But they didn't. Well it doesn't appear so at this time. On the other hand the other workers were given grace to see and accept the landowner's kindness and simply accepted the invitation go and work in my vineyard.

Well isn't that, well firstly it's a gracious thing because they were doing nothing. So people made in the image of God doing nothing. It's a very sad testimony isn't it?

Very sad statement. How many people there are in this world who are effectively doing nothing because they're not working in God's vineyard. world? But one wonderful thing is that they saw something in this landowner that caused them to say, well they didn't say anything actually they just went and did it.

He said go and work in my vineyard and I'll do what's right. And they go and do it. Where did that trust come? We're a very distrusting sort of people normally aren't we?

Where did this trust that they had come from? It must have been a gift of grace surely. How do we come to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? It's a gift of grace.

[40:43] It's mercy. It's kindness. He does that work. Taking a rebellious hard heart and making it a trusting one. Faith is a gift of God.

God. How like the gospel of Jesus this parable becomes more and more. Our role is not to argue and complain but to hear and be thankfully obeying.

If we insist on merit being the qualification both to begin with and going forward we will have despised God's mercy and missed out on his blessing. We'll be stuck with the early morning workers.

And then we see the attitude they had to their fellow workers. Well there was envy and there was greed and there was complaining.

Why is someone apparently more blessed than me? Every denarius that the later workers received seemed like a denarius that the early morning workers felt really belonged to them.

[41:52] They were seeing it going into that person's hand. Saying that really belongs to me. I should have that. And they were complaining. Which is probably one of the chief sins of the desert wanderings.

A sin that's repeatedly criticised and highlighted in the New Testament. Don't complain. Don't murmur.

that's what they did. Don't say that. If we entertain such thoughts about fellow Christians we are essentially criticising God and his gracious ways.

If we say someone's more blessed than I am. If someone seems to have more gifting than I have. If we become envious of people and the way that they are.

If we start complaining and gossiping against brothers and sisters what we're essentially doing in the end is actually criticising God's dealings with one another. And that's extremely serious.

[42:58] Our argument then isn't with the person. It's with God who apportions his mercy as he wills to each one. And some seem incredibly blessed and some seem sort of bereft and sometimes some people's lives seem full of sorrow and some feel full of happiness and joy.

And we look at that superficially. And it's easy to complain and to compare ourselves. And the Lord Jesus encourages us here not to be those sort of people.

But rather to be those who are so grateful. For the grace that we have received. And to be thankful for it. And to recognise God's grace in other people as well.

And to thank God for that. So the last will be first. And the first will be last. So this is my take on this phrase and it's this.

This is not chronological. But in terms of the maximum display of God's values in the kingdom of heaven. God's grace in the kingdom of heaven. The extreme generosity of God and the trusting thankfulness of those who gladly receive such goodness is reflected in their attitude to God and their fellow workers.

[44:16] The kingdom of earth is not like the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is marked by God's generosity. It's marked by trusting thankfulness.

It's marked by the glad reception of the goodness that people see in the loving heavenly father. And it's marked and reflected in their attitude to God and their fellow workers.

So recently we've been thinking about thankfulness and what an important quality that is. It's the complete opposite of the complaining spirit which is abroad in this world.

But we're not brothers and sisters. We're not in that category. We're not kingdom of earth people. We're kingdom of heaven. And the one thing he went found around the throne of grace in heavenly places is complaining.

There's not going to be a word of complaint is there. We should all look back on our lives and we will marvel at God's long suffering for parents and graciousness to us. And we shall say praise God.

[45:16] We're so thankful. We're so thankful when the scales are taken from our eyes and we see things as they really are. As they really always have been but our hearts were too hard to receive it and sin got in the way.

So we practice now on earth for the greater and everlasting celebration that will take place in the world to come.

It would be so good, isn't it? Come to our deathbeds with thankfulness in our hearts. I'm thinking of an anecdote story.

I won't even go there. Two quotes. Life is found when we fix our eyes not horizontally on what others have but vertically on the generosity of the whole earth landowner. I like that phrase.

That's where we find life. Never be afraid of the will of God. I can't remember where I read that. But what a helpful thought it is.

[46:23] Never be afraid of the will of God. Why not? Well, because God is good and he's right and so forth. So even though we don't know what God is doing, we can't understand it.

We don't know the outcome of things. He is to be trusted because his will for us is perfectly right and good. It's absolutely tailored for us and brings glory to him.

And I've just wondered if there's any application of all of this. It's like a PS really. To the world that we live in.

You could say these are very good things for the church of Jesus Christ to enjoy and so they are. But is there something for us to learn about the way employers and employees should behave towards one another?

We're very used to the 21st century model where in response to abuse of workers and so forth, trade unions came up and there was collective bargaining and, you know, the tussle goes on all the time, doesn't it?

[47:33] But what happens when employers behave with generosity? What happens when employees can see that they're being cared for and thankful for it? I've read some recently wonderful story about a man called William Hartley.

What do you think William Hartley might have done in his life? He made jam. He made jam. He started as a boy at 16 years old in his mum's grocer's shop and he thought, hmm, there aren't many people making jam out there.

I shall make jam. And he became a world leader. But William Hartley was a Christian. And as a result, he had such a positive attitude towards not only his work to do it well, but towards his workers.

And he did outrageously beautiful things for his workers. This was the era, this is the 19th century, 1885.

And there were other people out there, Cadbury. We're doing the same sort of things as well. Model villages, places for workers to be. In every possible way, he wanted to bless them.

[48:50] He wanted to do as he would be done by. He wanted them to enjoy working for him. He wanted to say to them, every single worker, my door is open.

If you want to come to talk about anything, do so. If he went into a factory and saw something was too hard for someone to do, he would say, we've got to improve this. If it was a situation where they had a trolley with all the goods aboard and he couldn't shift it himself, he'd say, scrap it, we start again and do something that workers can manage.

He looked after them in life, he looked after them in death. And what a testimony, what a legacy. And, you know, it's a wonderful thing. There's a little book about him actually, just come out, William Hartley, I've got it in my bag.

That's a testimony. The 19th century was full of these sort of philanthropists. Why not the 21st century? Well, possibly there are. Perhaps we haven't had the books written about them.

But if you're an employer in some way or other, wouldn't it be great if you were able to take that example? Because you're like your heavenly father who causes his reign to, his son to shine on the just and the unjust.

[50:03] And he's not, he's just a good and generous God and he does good things. And if you're a worker, well, there's a good case for trusting God for the outcomes of a workplace situation.

I will give testimony here. I've worked 50 years in my industry. I've never, I've never been concerned about what anybody else has been getting. I've always thought I've got paid far more than I've I deserve.

I do generally felt that. I've enjoyed my work and I've just felt, well, they're prepared to pay me that much. I haven't sent money back. Because you could put it in the box at the back for kingdom work. But when it came to issues of promotion, fresh job and so forth, I've always just been amazed at what God has done, how he's provided, how he's supplied.

And so on. I'm not saying there isn't another side to this case, but I'm just saying, if you have a good employer, and I have enjoyed a good employer, it's quite a blessing to work as an employee in that situation.

[51:14] And here's something which is for us, isn't it? To enjoy and to take to heart. Because in some way or other, if you're in a workplace situation, you're either an employer or an employee.

Enjoy. my word, time has gone. We've got a lovely song to sing.

I want to suggest we just go into small groups for just five minutes.