

Matthew 20:1-16 // Grace, Kingdoms, and Palm Trees

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[0:00] It's like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. See, Jesus is explaining what his kingdom is like, exactly what it is.

Many people knew what a kingdom was. It wasn't an abnormal thing to think of. It wasn't something that they would be not able to relate to. There were many kingdoms in this world. There still are today. This parable is a great job of explaining that God's kingdom is a kingdom of grace. And therefore, we have to think differently when it comes to God's kingdom. The way of the world, the kingdoms of this world, they don't understand. The rewards that people get in this world, they don't relate.

And this is a very, very deep dive and look into it. Right before this, a rich young ruler came up, and you'll be familiar with the story. Came up to Jesus and said, how can I inherit eternal life? How can I earn it? What can I do?

And Jesus said, well, follow the law. And he said, I've been there, done that. I do that. And I wonder sometimes if he wasn't just in his mind thinking, check.

[1:09] Okay, what else you got, Jesus, right? Go and sell your things, all of them, and come and follow me. And it says that the young man went away sad because he had great wealth. And, you know, I don't want to get too far down into the nuances of that conversation, but I find it interesting because immediately the disciples were starting to ask questions.

We gave up everything. What do we get? You know? He was going to get eternal life. What about, you know, us who've been following you around pretty subtly and uncomfortably so, I might say. Food's not so great. You know, the rocks are bad pillows. You know, like, I mean, what are we getting? So Jesus shared this parable with them about the difference of the kingdom of God and how that's the wrong question to ask.

And he gave them this parable just simply to say, the last shall be first and the first shall be last. And it challenges our point of view when it comes to our Christian faith.

It should. Well, it did me. Maybe you're all perfect, but I am not. And it challenged me this week. It really did. Verses 1 to 16, and then I'll dive in.

[2:19] 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 going out about the third hour, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace. And he said to them, you go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right, I'll give you. So they went, going out again about the sixth hour, and the ninth hour, he did the same.

And about the eleventh hour, he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, why do you stand there idle all day? They said to him, because no one has hired us.

And he said to them, you go into the vineyard too. And when the 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. And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now, when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it, they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, these last worked only at one hour.

[3:27] And you have made them equal to us who have been born the burden of the day in a scorching heat. But he replied to one of them, friend, I'm 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? So the last will be first, and the first last. What a story. You can imagine this. If you let the movie play in your head.

And I always love to do this when it comes to the Bible. Just imagine this play out in your head. You know, this man, a landowner. He needed help. And he went and he got help. And these guys were thinking, a day's wage.

You know, they didn't really talk about it too much because they knew that a denarius was it. It was probably, I mean, I don't like to do this because there's time and all kinds of things that Jamie would know a lot more about than me when it comes to financial creep and whatnot.

[4:28] But it's roughly 100 US per day. Roughly. Depends on the weight and the quality of the silver. So it could be less, right? But it's, you know, for argument's sake, say that. So when these guys are hired, they're going to get this denarius thing.

Day's labor. Yes, I could use this. We'll go out and work. And I'm pretty sure, and I want to make the leap, that the 12-hour guys, okay, saw the nine-hour guys came in and went, it's okay.

It's all right. You know, they're going to work hard. We'll make sure they work hard, right? And then the six-hour guys come in and they're thinking, well, slackers, you know, right? And then the last-hour guys came in.

And I wonder if, you know, when they saw the last guys come up and get paid a denarius, I wonder if the 12-hour guys were thinking, like, we're going to get paid too. Right? We've earned this.

This is amazing. What a good job. Got to come back tomorrow. I wonder if some of this wasn't playing out in their head. And I wonder these things because of how it actually played out.

[5:28] There's two principles that we can learn from this. God can give completely set apart from what we earn or deserve.

He can give to someone that we may think, well, they haven't been here that long. They haven't deserved that. They haven't lived a long life like I have. They haven't, you know, whatever. They haven't been at the vineyard this long.

That can happen. This one-hour man, I'll call him, didn't earn a full day's wage. Did he deserve it? Not really. But it was up to the landowner to give as he pleased to those who he was going to give it to.

See, the reason for the generosity was the heart of the landowner. Not the hard work of that one hour. He wasn't doing 12 hours of work in one hour to prove himself, to earn himself. He wasn't lifting another guy that was working while he was working.

He was given grace in a kingdom of grace. God gives to us, not based on what we earn, not on what we deserve, but out of the riches of his kingdom.

[6:34] He gives to us freely. And that's a mercy I'm still trying to wrap my mind around. I'm imagining when I get to heaven one day, I'll have that part figured out. I'm still working on that.

So imagine two people here. And I'm going to just share a couple of people from my own life. And Kay, this is not you, though I love you dearly.

I had an Auntie Kay, okay? And she wasn't my real aunt, but she was like a pillar in our church community. And she just loved on the youth like you would not believe.

That's why everybody called her Auntie Kay. She was a missionary with her husband. She lived a life that, you know, I only hope to live. It was such a wonderful life for Christ.

And when she passed on, and I heard she passed on, it was like, wow, I am sure, I am certain, that with arms open wide, the Lord's well done, good and faithful servant.

[7:31] Kay serves, our Kay serves too, as a wonderful example of faith. Auntie Kay did as well. But I had to learn a lesson, and it was years and years and years later, when I was working in what's called the downtown east side of Vancouver.

You have to picture, you know, Skid Row of L.A., if it had a back alley, that's what this place was. It's a picture of it, actually, of my office wall, if you really want to see it. And the Lord told me to befriend a guy named Phil.

Now, I have to explain that Phil, I'm pretty sure his clothes were fused with his body. He never took them off. He always wore the same things.

And he smelled like that. And it's where I learned from a police officer that because smell is adaptive, if you do two really deep breaths with your nose, like that, you do that twice, that you'll get

used to whatever foul smell you're doing.

Well, I had to do this with Phil, okay? And the thing is, Phil was a hugger, right? So, you know, every time I was like, oh, I love you, Phil. Love you, Phil. You know, that kind of thing. And I would sit on the sidewalk with Phil and we'd talk.

[8:40] And, you know, he shared with me that he liked science fiction. And so there was a little used bookstore across the street on the main street. And I would go across and I'd buy him a \$2, \$3 paperback or whatever.

And we'd talk about it. So I knew that he was actually reading it. And for a few weeks, you know, when the Lord told me to befriend him, I thought, okay, okay. And a few weeks in, you know, I said, Phil, like, you know, I have to ask, like, where are you with Jesus?

Like, who is he to you? And it started this whole conversation and we ended up praying together.

And I truly believe Phil gave his life to the Lord. And it was about eight days after that, that a police officer that I worked with on other situations, she came to me and says, did you hear about Phil?

I'm like, no. What do you mean? Oh, he was murdered. To this day, it's still such a shocking thing to hear.

And I actually quit that work that day because I realized my heart is not capable of breaking that much. I'd seen some weird and rough things up until then in ministry.

[9:47] And that was a day that I stopped that particular form of ministry because I just realized I'm not strong enough for it. Things have happened since then. You know, I feel more on top of it.

But that was a moment of pain. And, you know, I struggled. I was like, Lord, why did I befriend the guy? Why is he in my life for like a handful of weeks and then gone?

And the Lord reminded me that the friendship was not what this was about. I was what was this about. That's what he had told me.

And I had comfort then because I realized that whether my sense of justice, understanding, believes it or not, the same open arms that welcomed Andy Kay into heaven were the same open arms that welcomed Phil in and said, well done, good and faithful servant.

That's God's economy that we don't understand. It didn't make sense to me. How can you live a life as a missionary, as a lover of people, a prayer warrior that influenced me to pray on so many levels?

[10:51] Right? This woman who stood by us thick and thin, who was there for us, provided for us, even just was like a lunch every now and this is Andy Kay. And then Phil, who gave me nothing.

And yet, the way that the Lord sees it in this kingdom of grace, they were welcomed the same. And that is a challenge for us. It's a challenge for us as a church, as a people, because our sense of justice, our sense of understanding, that doesn't, that math doesn't make sense.

And yet, in God's economy, it does. Does God have one heaven for Andy Kay and another heaven for Phil? No. He has the same heaven.

The same place. It's a beautiful thing when you think about it. Because God has given exactly what he promised to give. And that's grace.

God gave them exactly what both of them deserved. And that's grace. If God dealt with all of us according to what we deserve without his grace, well, heaven would be a pretty empty place.

[12:00] We need him. We need his rescue. And not everyone is going to be happy with God's kingdom of grace. Like I said, the 12 and the 9 hour men probably weren't too thrilled at this little financial arrangement that was going down over the vineyard.

But why? Because prideful people will not be happy with the kingdom of God's economy. Grace offends people. It does.

Because it doesn't make sense. With our sense of understanding. It doesn't. Grace says you can't earn it. You can't deserve it. You just have to receive it.

Grace gives all the credit to God and none to us. It isn't what we have done for him. It's what he's done through us. That's a humility that is challenging for us sometimes.

We need to push pride aside and come to the Lord with humility and then let him show us what humility really is. Because like I've said before, if somebody comes to you and says, I'm so humble, right?

[13:02] You know they're not. Right? Pray for them for humility. Grace treats us all equally.

Whether someone just walked in the church today or you've been here for 30 years, grace treats us all equally. What a beautiful, beautiful reality in the kingdom of God's grace.

Another reason why I think people don't like the kingdom of grace is a personal thing and it's disbelief of how much God loves us.

You may remember last week how I was kind of hammering on that. God loves you. And that can be very difficult for us to receive and to hear at times. Because we've been raised in circumstances where love is performative.

I will love you if you do this for me. I will love you if you are acting this way, behaving that way. If you accomplish all of this, then I will love you.

[14:01] Some of us were raised in homes like that. And so for us to think of a God who loves us because he loves us, that's like, wait, hold on a second. Oh man, okay, I've got to follow law.

Right. Right. I'll follow legalistic rules. And then I know God will love me. Or maybe if I shake 10 people's hands today, then I know God will love me and he'll smile on me.

Maybe if I give just this much, God will love me. And it's like, that's not the kingdom of grace. The kingdom of grace is that he created you.

He loves you. He died for you. End of story. Receiving that love can be our greatest challenge at times. Because in the kingdom of God, we receive the favor and the blessing and salvation of God, not by earning and deserving, but by believing and receiving.

And for so many of us, that's an entirely foreign concept. What do you mean I can be loved for who I am? What are you talking about? That's the kingdom of grace.

[15:14] You are loved for exactly who you are. But you are also loved. Do I not leave you there? You know, I had a funny conversation. It was actually in Orange County in California.

And I was walking around with those outside malls. And I was by myself, minding my own business. And these two guys come up to me. And they said, I am deeply offended by your tattoo.

And they were pointing to the one where I had Jesus on my forearm. And I said, okay. Part of me is kind of thinking, like, these guys are gay. Right? I mean, that was the energy, what they were projecting.

Right? And so I asked. I said, you know, like, I said, so are you guys a couple? And they said, yes, we are. And I said, oh, okay, cool. I said, so, you know, why does this offend you? Like, I mean, help me understand.

I actually really want to hear, you know, what you mean. And they went on for a little bit. And I said, did you know that you're loved? And did you know that because God loves me, I love you, just for exactly who you are?

[16:17] And that, we were not prepared to hear that. And I said, here's the thing, though, right? Is that Romans 3.23 says, for all have fallen short of the glory of God.

We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All means all. I don't care who you are, what you claim to be. You identify as. And I said, but it doesn't matter. I'm a sinner who needs grace. And I said, you guys are sinners who needs grace. We're exactly the same. We're three men standing here talking about this, you know. And I said, so, like, I can't explain why you've been hurt. I can't explain that. I don't know. All I know is that God loves us enough to not keep us where we are. So I said, the question I want to leave you with, right, is if you recognize that, what's he going to be moving you on from?

What sin is he going to be moving you on from? Because he loves you so much that he doesn't want to leave you where you are. I said, I have my bag of tricks. I can tell you my sin and, you know, and stuff and bore you all day.

[17:21] But you have to ask that of yourself. They let me pray for them, you know. One of them shook my head. The other one I don't think was too pleased. But that's the thing, is that that's how much God loves us.

It doesn't matter what we're coming to him with. He loves us. But he also loves us to take us beyond that. To make us into something that would make him smile. To be a person like his child.

To raise us in his home, in his kingdom, with his limitless love and grace. But if you're a parent, you know. You raise your children and your hope is they'll be bigger, stronger, and better than you.

You want them to be. Nobody wants to keep their children beneath them. You want your children to grow and be greater. And the Lord wants us to be more than who we are.

Not because we're not enough. But because he sees our potential. So, I know from what the Lord is saying here about the kingdom of grace. Is that he sees your potential.

[18:28] Doesn't matter how young you are. Doesn't matter how old you are. He sees your potential. And he loves you. And there's nothing you can bring to it. There's nothing you can do to earn it.

There's nothing you think you can clean up before you get there. He loves you. Period. And that's what this season is about. It's a love letter from our Father.

The cross is the greatest love letter the Father could ever give us. I love you this much. But we'll get into that next weekend. I have good news for you, though.

In the kingdom of God, you're loved for who you are. You put your faith in who Jesus is and what he did for you. Pride. Put it away. Come into God's kingdom of grace.

Unbelief. Maybe all this sounds too good to be true. Maybe you think I'm trying to sell you something. I'm not. I'm just a sinner. That's understood. He's a sinner. And I'm here because of grace.

[19:27] Not because of anything I've done to earn. Some will abuse this grace. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, if you've read the Cost of Discipleship, he calls it cheap grace. And it's where it's like the basics of it is just this.

Well, you know, if God's got grace for me, I'm going to do whatever I want. And then in my last moment, I'm going to come to Jesus and it'll be all good. You know?

It would be an interesting thing to consider if you knew when your last breath was. My friend Phil didn't. His life was taken from him. And I still to this day believe the Lord rescued him in his time, in his way, the way that I didn't understand.

But if Phil was one of those guys who said, nah, it's a nice story. I'll think about it. Maybe I'll settle down one day. It just doesn't work like that. Our time for Desciate is now.

Along with God's saving grace, he gives us a transforming grace. And like I said, he doesn't keep us where we are. He moves us on and closer to him. And sometimes that means things have to kind of get chipped away off of our shoulders.

[20:38] Some things need to be softened on our hard heart. Sometimes we need to be able to look at ourselves and say, Lord, I really need you to fix this. Or, Father, I've been called to this.

I have so much joy and I want to give it to everybody. Father, what do you want to do with it? Whatever it is we have in our hands, we submit to him. Because these changes don't happen all at once.

But there is a new creation. There is a change that happens from the inside out. And you can feel it. And you can know that things are different. He loves us enough to not leave us where we are.

And we want to live a life to honor him in all we do. My desire is that everyone here will receive the joy and the peace of his kingdom of grace.

And as we leave this place today, that we will be reminded that you're citizens of heaven. And here's the thing. If you're not, if you don't know Jesus, or you haven't taken him very seriously, what are you waiting for?

[21:49] Today's the day. And I'm going to close. And I'm not sure how this is going to work, quite frankly. But what I'd like to do is if you just bow your heads with me in prayer.

And as our eyes are closed, if you're feeling this sense that you want to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven today. If you're feeling this sense that you have questions and you want to ask about Jesus, just like those two guys did.

When they approached me. Then while heads are lowered and eyes are closed, just lift your hand. We have elders that will come and pray with you. Because it's that simple.

We can't complicate it. There's no religious thing we have to do. It's just a heart that says, yes. Yes, Lord. So if that's you, welcome, brother, sister.

And if you're out here this morning and it's just been a really dry season. And you love the Lord. But it's just been really dry.

[23:01] Come to the water. Let his Holy Spirit give you a time of refreshing here and now. And we ask, Lord, that this season we would not be lost or forgotten.

You'd remind us that we are saved. We are seen. We are heard. That you value us enough to die for us. And regardless of what family we come from, good or bad.

Lord, show us how important that is. That we belong to you. And so, Lord, if we just give you this day. We give you Palm Sunday.

Not that it's ours to give. But we just want to keep submitting and surrendering to you. And as we walk through the next few days. And we enter into our Good Friday service. We enter into a time of sunrise prayer. We enter into Resurrection Sunday. That, Lord, you just reminding us just how much you love each of us here.
[24:03] In Jesus' name. Amen.