

Serving in the Master's Vineyard

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[0:00] In about the eleventh hour, he went out and found others standing, and he said to them, Why do you stand here idle all day? And they said to him, Because no one has hired us. He said! To them, You go into the vineyard too. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So, what do you think about the parable found in our Gospel reading for today? What in the world is going on there, right? We find there that Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a master who hires workers for his vineyard. Now, I have to be honest, I have never been to work in someone's vineyard. Do we have anyone who has? Oh, Mark, you're, yeah, I believe that.

But it looks like most of us haven't. So, we don't really, our experience doesn't really tell us what that would be like. But of course, in the world that Jesus lived in, this situation wouldn't have been unusual at all. But I think even if we've never worked in a vineyard, we can probably follow what's going on fairly well. And the story really goes basically as you might have expected at first. The master, he hires people at the beginning of the day for a fixed wage. But then, throughout the day, he keeps hiring more people, doesn't he?

Hiring the people that no one else has hired. And by the time we get to the end of it, we find out that the people who have worked all day end up getting paid the same as the people who serve the master for only a short time. What is up with that? When are these vineyard workers going to unionize, right? Kind of seems unfair to us, doesn't it? Shouldn't the people who work longer and harder get the better reward? And if that isn't enough, Jesus tells us that this is what the kingdom of heaven is like. God is like the master in the story who, in our first reading, might strike us as unfair. What do we do with that?

I have to be honest. I think that this parable throws us, because we know really well the way that this world works. We don't know so well the way the kingdom of heaven works. God's kingdom just doesn't work the same way. In this world, we say that the unworthy should never receive any reward. In this world, we're tempted to think that everything is governed by karma.

[3:13] Good things happen to good people. Bad things happen to bad people. But that is just not the way that God's kingdom works. In God's kingdom, the unworthy are loved. Sinners are invited to come and to serve in the master's vineyard. And those who serve the master don't get what they deserve.

They get far more than they deserve. Because let's be honest, it's really true that those who serve the Lord all their lives, on the one hand, and then those who turn, who repent and believe the gospel, who follow Jesus as Lord later in life, they receive the same reward.

How is that? How could that be possible? Well, if our work in the Lord's vineyard and our time in service, so to speak, were the basis of the reward that we receive, it wouldn't make a bit of sense. But Jesus reminds us in Luke 17, that we all have to admit that we are unworthy and unprofitable servants.

Who is the worthy and profitable servant in the master's vineyard? None of us. None of us. And if that's true, then to be honest, the laborers who start serving the Lord early in the day, and the laborers who start serving the Lord near the end of the day, have something in common.

[5:02] They're all unworthy of the reward that they receive, but the master gives it anyway. And that should remind us that every gift we receive from God is just that.

It's a gift. Sure, Jesus calls us to follow Him as Lord. Sure, Jesus calls us to serve Him. But we could never earn the gifts that God gives to us, especially salvation.

No, everything that we have, every good thing that we have is a gift. And salvation is no exception. It's not something that we earn.

It is something that has been earned for us by another, the Lord Jesus. And when we receive our reward, our wages for serving the Lord, we're not receiving it because we've done great work.

No. We're receiving it because of the work of Jesus Christ. His perfect and sinless life, His dying for our sins, His rising again for us, it's something that we receive by faith, by repenting and believing the gospel, and by receiving Christ as our all-sufficient Savior.

[6:23] It is not something that we accomplish on our own merits. We don't earn it by our service. It is a gift. Salvation is a gift.

And that's why the servant who starts at the beginning of the day receives the same wage as the one who starts at the end of the day. Because ultimately, we don't get what we deserve.

We get a wage that has been earned by another, the Lord Jesus, on our behalf. Now, doesn't that go against everything we think intuitively about the way the world works?

We're told what? Work hard and you'll succeed. Goes against everything that the religions of this world teach.

Which might try to tell us, try hard to live a good life, and if your good deeds outweigh you're bad, then God will reward you. Or maybe those religions will tell us, be good and you will have good karma, and be bad and you will have bad karma.

[7:30] But the gospel is different, isn't it? This message tells us that we're sinners who will never be good enough to earn God's favor, to earn our salvation, but it also tells us that salvation has been won by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for all who believe the gospel.

So certainly, the gospel tells us to serve God, to follow Christ as Lord, to strive after holiness, but it tells us to do these things because we have been saved through the blood of Jesus, and we're grateful for the salvation we've received.

Not that we'll be saved by our own good deeds. But, for those of us who know this, it's really easy to fall into the attitude still of those who are envious because they've been serving all day while those others who came much later are getting the same reward.

I think that that, throughout the ages, has been a perpetual problem in the church. I mean, it's one thing to abstractly, right, rejoice in the salvation of others, but sometimes the sin in our hearts will make it uncomfortable to us when we actually see it happen.

Is God really calling someone like that to believe the gospel and to be a disciple of Jesus? Really? God? Are you really going to show mercy to sinners?

[9:13] Christians can easily fall into those attitudes of hardness of heart. We have to say, yes, God calls sinners to himself.

Yes, God shows mercy to sinners, and if that makes us uncomfortable, all we have to do is stop for a second and realize what we were before Christ called us, where we'd be without Christ, and even the ways in which we still stumble and fall short.

But when we look to Jesus and really look to Jesus, we see things in the proper perspective. The great preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones put it this way, and he said, this is Christianity, not your little goodness and mine, not what I am doing and not doing, not how much better I am than someone else, not even how much better I am than I once was.

No. You forget it all, and look to Christ. You see his perfect, spotless righteousness, and you know that if you believe in him, it is given to you and you are clothed with it.

His righteousness given to us, and we are clothed with it through faith in Christ. Thank God. If you realize, truly realize that it's all grace, it's all gift, then you can't find yourself wondering why others received something better than they deserve.

[10:48] That they received salvation when they didn't deserve it. Because guess what? You didn't deserve it either. Neither did I. We realize that. And we forget it all when we look to Christ.

And the amazing reality is that in the parable, we see the master of the vineyard hiring the people that no one else wants. These are like the kids who were picked last in dodgeball, right?

And that should be no surprise to us. Because the Lord is always calling the unworthy to believe in him and to serve him. He has a pattern of doing that, doesn't he?

And thank God that he does because that means that there is room in his vineyard for people like me. This passage doesn't just speak to the workers in the vineyard, though.

I think it also speaks powerfully to those who are outside. Those who have not been hired. Those who are being called to repent and believe the gospel.

[11:57] Those who don't yet know Jesus as Lord and Savior. Amen. I can't read hearts, so I don't know for sure if we have anyone here this morning that that applies to.

But if that's you, I want you to know that the message we find here is especially for you. You are being called to come into the Master's vineyard and to serve him.

You are being called to repent of your sins and to believe the gospel. You are being called to receive Jesus Christ this morning. The amazing thing is it doesn't matter where you're coming from. It doesn't matter what mistakes you've made. None of that matters. Why? Because this Master, this Lord, saves everyone who comes to him in faith.

This Master saves the unworthy. This Master even saves those who are spiritually dead in sin. He will save you if you ask him.

[13:01] The great evangelist and preacher George Whitefield once said this, Come all you liars, come all you Pharisees, come all you fornicators, adulterers, swearers, and blasphemers.

Come to Christ and he will take away your filth. He will cleanse you from your pollution and your sins shall be put away. Come, my guilty brethren, come for Christ's sake and for your immortal soul's sake, come unto Christ.

That call goes out to everyone without exception. I have to say, my friends, Jesus really can wash us clean from our sins.

We really can have our sins forgiven and we can have the guarantee of eternal life in Christ. So even if we are so weighed down with sin and guilt and shame to the point that we can't imagine anything else, even if we feel so totally broken, so lost, so unworthy that it seems impossible, Christ can save us.

How do I know this? First of all, because God's word says so. But, I got to tell you, I also know this from personal experience.

[14:31] The Lord saved me, unworthy as I was when I was dead in sin and unbelief. And he can save you too. Call on him. Turn to him for salvation.

Ask him to save you. He will. I've been there and I can tell you that he will. Commit yourself to serve him, the master in his vineyard.

You will have the reward of eternal joy and eternal life, won for you through the blood of Jesus. The master calls workers into his vineyard.

Some start sooner than others. Some toil during the heat of the day, while others stand outside waiting for a long time to heed the call to come.

yet at the same time, we receive the same reward. And that reward, my friends, is nothing less than Jesus Christ himself, the one who loved us and gave himself for us.

[15:34] That reward is nothing less than the glory of eternal life with Jesus. And it is a reward that no matter how hard we've labored, how hot the heat of the day has been, still always a gift that we never could have earned or deserved.

It's a reward that the gift giver earned for us by his death on the cross and is given to us as a free gift through faith in Christ. It's given to all who repent and believe the gospel.

It's given to all who receive Christ and it is amazing. So turn to Christ today. Come into the Master's Vineyard. Don't think about what you deserve or don't deserve.

Just look to Christ. He will be your guarantee of salvation and he will be your great reward. In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.