

OUR GOD IS GENEROUS IN THE [KINGDOM OF GOD](#)

Matthew 20:1-16

Key Verse: 20:1

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard."

Last Sunday we studied about the rich young man. He came to Jesus for eternal life. Jesus tested him by saying, "sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." But when the young man heard this he went away sad because he had great wealth. From time to time, we are like this rich young man. Most young people major in [engineering in college](#) so that they may secure their future life by making enough money. But Jesus told his disciples that at the last day, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, they will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. As we have thought about, "the twelve tribes of Israel" was a figure of speech about the whole world. The most important reward is eternal life. If we have no God's life in us, that is, we have no eternal life, we are all dead. Today we want to think about a parable that reveals one characteristic of the kingdom of God. Matthew was outstanding in talking much about the kingdom of God because he believed that Jesus is the Messiah, the King, King of kings and Lord of lords. Today Matthew teaches us one of the characteristics of the kingdom of God.

First, God made man to work hard. Genesis 1:28 says, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" This verse clearly tells us that God made man to work hard as the steward of God's world. If we work for the glory of God, this world is like paradise. But if we work for food that spoils, or work hard to eat three meals a day and sleep every night, this world is nothing but hell, where Satan rules. John 15:16a says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last." God made man and chose them and appointed them to go and bear much fruit--fruit that will last. This verse clearly tells us that we did not choose God, but God chose us and appointed us to go and bear much fruit--fruit that will last. God made us to do something. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." This verse tells us that God made man to work for the glory of God. St. Paul, who understood this theory, said in the last part of 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." Those who do not work for the glory of God absolutely do not have the privilege of eating food that God produced. Here we learn that God made us to work hard for the glory of God. As the landowner wanted to get workers, workers were also diligent to come early and work hard. One girl was the concertmaster in an orchestra. She was rebuked by the conductor and criticized by orchestra members. Then, that afternoon, she jumped from the third floor of the music stadium and immediately died of brain damage. She knew that she had to work harder so that she could be ready as the concertmaster of the orchestra. But she neglected to do so with many excuses. When we carefully observe, laziness was her root problem. These days laziness is one of the crucial problems of

this country. These days it is very difficult to evangelize white American girls. They do not do their homework well because they have to go to many parties. They know what would happen when they receive their report cards, but they are carried away by pleasure-seeking. Young American girls are the future mothers of America. But they are not better than young American boys. We are much grieved by white American girls because they are lazy to prepare to be mothers of this nation. If mothers are pleasure-seeking and are the incarnation of vanity, what would happen in this country? These days we see a national problem. If America tries her best as the only world power nation she has influence and power to solve problems through negotiation. But American politicians don't negotiate, because negotiation exhausts anybody. Instead of diligently negotiating, they bomb small countries. It is a tragedy for the United States of America to unleash bombs on Yugoslavia. Kosovo is mostly Albanian Muslims. So America is bombing the land where Christians are a majority. How can a Christian nation, America, bomb Yugoslavian Christians? It comes from laziness. If America negotiates persistently, this problem will disappear. But America doesn't negotiate persistently and instead bombs a Christian country. There is no compassion and there are no broken-hearted politicians for the world in the United States of America. May God help American politicians work hard like the landowner in the parable to get workers to the vineyard. America must work hard through negotiation instead of bombing. God made us with the dust of the ground and gave us his life to work hard for the glory of God. But the laziness of this country produces all kinds of evils. Laziness is the cradle of all evils.

Second, our God is generous in his kingdom. Today's parable starts with the landowner who works hard to get laborers for his vineyard, and the laborers who are waiting in a daily work agency for the owner of the vineyard to come and hire them. In a word, today's story is the story of hard work. Look at verse 1. "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard." He found several and hired them and he agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard to work hard. Look at verses 3-4. "About the third hour 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.'" The owner of the vineyard went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. About the eleventh hour 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. Here the timing is a little confusing. According to Jewish timing, 6:00 a.m. was the beginning of the day, the first hour. So the sixth hour is equivalent to 12:00 noon and the eleventh hour to 5:00 p.m.

In this passage some workers were hired at 6:00 a.m., the first hour; some at the third hour, 9:00 a.m.; some at the sixth hour, 12:00 noon; and some at the eleventh hour, 5:00 p.m. The work was finished at the twelfth hour, 6:00 p.m. At that time there were both servant and slave classes. They worked any time and any moment when it was necessary. But those who were free from the landowner depended on a daily work agency. How would the laborer be happy? He could be happy if there was always regular hard work. But laborers worked only during the

fruit harvest season. It was toward the end of September. And soon the rainy season followed. The fruit harvest season was a frantic race against time. So the owner went out to the corners of the city or to the daily work agency to hire many laborers. As we have read, some came early, at 6:00 a.m., some came at 8:00 a.m., some came at 10:00 a.m., some came at 12:00 p.m., some came at 5:00 p.m. when the work was almost over.

Look at verses 8-9. "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 the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius." Our God in the kingdom of God is very, very generous. He paid each of them one denarius--the same to the one who came at 6:00 a.m. and the one who came at 5:00 p.m., when the work was almost over. Rationally speaking, it is unfair to give the same amount of money to the one who came at 6:00 a.m. and to the other who came at 5:00 p.m. When they received it, the ones who worked all day began to grumble against the landowner, "These men who were hired last worked only one hour. We worked twelve hours." They said, "It is unfair. You have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day. We say again, it is totally unfair." Look at verses 13-14. "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you.'" Our God is the God of agreement. Biblically speaking, agreement is the same as covenant or the promise of God. In "Fiddler on the Roof" there is an example of agreement. Reptavia sang, "If I were a rich man, if I were a rich man." One day the woman matchmaker introduced a rich butcher, Laserwolf, to Reptavia's first daughter Zeitel. Reptavia and Laserwolf met together. Reptavia agreed to give his daughter to him. After he was drunken, he laughed and laughed and said, "I wanted to have a younger son-in-law than I." The next day the young tailor came to Reptavia's house. When Reptavia saw him, he didn't like him because he was a poor tailor, and he did not look like a strong man. But Reptavia saw that the tailor and his daughter loved each other and their hearts were burning with undying love. Then he changed his mind and broke the agreement with Laserwolf. At the wedding day, the rich butcher Laserwolf got angry and said, "Agreement is agreement. Agreement is agreement. Why did you change your agreement?" In Israel agreement was regarded as a promise. Jesus here agreed with the laborers who came early to give them one denarius. So they did not have to complain. But they expected more money from the owner because they came and worked in the heat of the day, all day. But contrary to their expectation, the owner gave the first and the last the same wage--one denarius. Humanly speaking, it seems to be a little unfair. But our God in the kingdom of God is broadminded. God's broadmindedness in the kingdom of God is revealed in Jesus in grace and truth (Jn 1:14). There were innumerable sick men. At the beginning of his ministry, when he saw so many sick people, he invited one lost one to the kingdom of God. One day, Jesus wanted to pray early in the morning and went to a solitary place. But people knew where Jesus was and many sick people followed him. Among them, a man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." What did Jesus do? "Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man, 'I am willing,' he said, 'be clean.'" Then the leprosy left him and he was

cured (Mk 1:40-42). On the way to Jerusalem to become a Paschal Lamb, Jesus' heart must have been bracing for the upcoming crucifixion. A crowd of people followed Jesus, not knowing where he was going. On the road there was a blind beggar. His name was Bartimaeus. Actually "Bartimaeus" is not a name. "Bar" means "son" in Greek, and Timaeus was his father's name. He was nameless under the sky; as a human being, he was a nameless person. Even a pet dog has a name, but this blind beggar had no name. And he could not see. But Jesus rebuked those who hindered his shouting and called him to come to him. Jesus let his disciples bring the blind man to him. Jesus immediately healed his blinded eyes. He received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. This is the character of the kingdom of God revealed in Jesus.

As we know well when we read the Bible, in Jesus' time there were many aristocratic religious men in the name of God. They were the Pharisees. They were the chosen people. They were supposed to be shepherds of God's flock of sheep who were suffering under the yoke of the Roman Empire. They came to know Jesus first through the book of prophecies. According to this parable, they came first and worked hard. But they complained that the landowner gave the same pay to those who came at the finishing time of the work.

Third, our God is sovereign (15-16). Look at 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?" This parable both directly and indirectly rebuked the Pharisees of Jesus' time. As we said before, the Pharisees were chosen people. They themselves were very proud of being chosen people. But the chosen Israelites were in oblivion. Their great mistake was that they did not know that Jesus came to save men from their sins. God gave his one and only Son Jesus Christ as a ransom sacrifice for the sin of the world. When he came to this world, he healed the sick and preached the gospel. As time permitted, he trained his twelve disciples. Many people went to Jesus for healing and to hear his divine talk. Then the Pharisees became very jealous. They tried to prevent Jesus' healing and preaching ministry. Finally the Roman authorities cooperated with the Pharisees and crucified him. In this way Jesus came to this world to save the world, and obeyed God unto death, death on a cross. But God did not leave him in the pangs of death; God raised him and made him King of kings and Lord of lords who judges good and evil on his throne. Here we learn Jesus' sovereignty. He came to this world in obedience to God. He died in obedience to God's world salvation work. Now he is the sovereign Ruler of all mankind, judging on his throne. Therefore, we can say that Jesus is the sovereign Ruler of history. But the prestigious and lazy Pharisees did not understand the generous God and his Son's grace. They did what they wanted to do. Finally, out of jealousy, they killed the Messiah whom they had waited for such a long time. There are many mistakes in the world. But the Pharisees' killing Jesus was an unforgivable mistake. Look at verse 16. "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." Many old Christians are very proud that they know many verses of the Bible, and they are elders and deacons and deaconesses of churches. But they are like old wineskins which are totally useless to God. God wants to use them, but they are old wineskins--so fragile to the powerful new wine. So Jesus said, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." Jesus strictly warned the Pharisees that they should be renewed from their old wineskin state and become shepherds for the suffering flock

of God's sheep. But they always said, "Old wine is sweet and good and new wine is sour and untasty." They never repented. So at the end of Matthew's Gospel Jesus cries very sorrowfully for his chosen people. They must not be attached to worldly things, such as money and old wine; they must come to God very humbly. They must recognize the sovereignty of Jesus, which he earned through his death on the cross.

Today we learn one of the characteristics of the kingdom of God. In order to be a member of the kingdom of God we must work hard. In order to be a member of the kingdom of God we must know the generosity of God. We must know our Lord Jesus Christ's sovereignty. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of God. But he gave up all the glory and power of the kingdom of God. He even gave up his righteousness as God. Jesus wanted to save his people. But the Pharisees killed him. They thought that they had no problem because they had killed Jesus. But they had a problem. Romans 2:8-9 says, "But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." The Pharisees killed Jesus, but they would know soon that Jesus is the sovereign God. Without believing the sovereignty of Jesus Christ we become like lawless people. May the generous God be with us. May the sovereign God of Jesus be upon us. May God help us to work hard for the glory of God. May God let you know that our Lord Jesus Christ is the sovereign God.