

20:20 Vision Ministries – Devotions by Roger Browning Week 11 (March 12-18, 2017)

This week, we will study my favorite parable on the Kingdom of Heaven. In order to write more commentary, I have omitted daily printed verses. (Reprinted and updated from week 38, 2013)

Sunday, March 12 (read Matthew 20:1-16)

I am asking you to read this parable each day, but it will take the entire week to develop these teachings of our Lord. It is imperative to understand the symbolic pictures painted by Jesus if we are to understand the parable itself, so we will start there in today's study. The landowner is none other than **God the Father**; the vineyard is the **kingdom** and the foreman for the work is **Jesus**. The laborers are **believers** who have accepted the Lord's plan of salvation; the denarius is **eternal life**; the workday is our **time of service** on earth, and evening pictures **eternity**. The owner goes out at 6:00 in the morning and sees able-bodied men anxious to be employed for the day, so he hires them for a denarius (v. 1-2). A denarius is a day's pay for a Roman soldier and is considered to be good pay for the Jewish workers. We will follow the story in tomorrow's devotions.

Monday, March 13 (read Matthew 20:1-16)

The landowner (God) goes back into the marketplace at the third hour (9:00 a.m.) and hires more workers. They trust the landowner to be fair, although He doesn't tell them what their pay will be (v. 3-4). He goes back out at 12:00 noon and again at 3:00 p.m. and makes the same offer to those who are still there (v. 5). Finally, He goes back to the marketplace at 5:00 p.m. and finds others standing around. They answer His question (v. 6) by stating that no one has hired them, so He offers them an hour's worth of work in His vineyard (v. 6-8) for an undetermined salary. These late-hires are probably older and weaker. Perhaps they are not able to spend a full day doing vineyard work in the hot sun. For whatever reason, they find themselves working alongside those who have already put in eleven hours of labor. God is about to teach them (and us) a wonderful lesson on mercy and grace. Do you have ears to hear what He is saying?

Tuesday, March 14 (read Matthew 20:1-16)

The owner surprises the exhausted twelve-hour workers by **first** paying the men who have worked for only one hour. To their amazement, the latecomers each receive a full day's pay for their short labor (v.9). The other workers are not jealous at this point because they **think** the generous landowner will give them much more in proportion to hours worked. Imagine their disappointment when they receive the exact same pay as the one-hour workers (v. 10). Their shock turns to grumbling against the landowner (v. 11). Many of today's Christians are also shocked when they read this parable. They agree with the all-day workers that the landowner is not fair. That's because they still have a long way to go before they can understand the **mercy** and **grace** of our Lord. We will continue to follow this story in tomorrow's devotions.

Wednesday, March 15 (read Matthew 20:1-16)

The workers who have labored all day lodge their complaint against the generous landowner (v. 12). He reminds them that they have made a verbal agreement to work all day for a denarius (v. 13). What others make is none of their business; they are being treated fairly according to the agreement. Allow me to share a personal story to illustrate why I stated in the introduction that this is my favorite kingdom parable. I was an underwriter at State Farm in 1965 making \$1.96/hour. I applied at Stromberg Carlson (telephone maker) and asked for \$2.11/hour. To my surprise and joy, they hired me and sent me to work "in the vineyard." Another man was hired the same day for an identical job and went through orientation with me. About mid-day, he looked over at me and said, "This is a lot of stress for

\$4.25/hour.” You can imagine my surprise. In a moment, I went from being thrilled with my salary to being very dissatisfied. I will conclude this story and tell you the beautiful ending in the next two devotions.

Thursday, March 16 (read Matthew 20:1-16)

Armed with private information that I had no business knowing, I walked into my boss' office and told him my discovery. He reached into his desk drawer and pulled out both personnel files. Calmly, he said, “On your application, you specifically asked for \$2.11/hour; your co-worker asked for \$4.25.” I quickly found out the meaning of James 4:2-3! It took me five years and a transfer to Arkansas to get up to \$4.25/hour where my co-worker started. Where was God in all this? I'm glad you asked; now I will tell you. Long after I left Stromberg Carlson, my alcoholic former boss was on his deathbed. Before going into a coma, he told his son to contact me to do his funeral saying, “He is the only true Christian I ever met.” I received permission from his son to visit my boss and pray with him. That's where the story really gets exciting! On my way to my friend's house, I was listening to a tape from evangelist Earl Bowers. He stated that many people go out to witness without talking to God first. The thought made me pull into a public park and pray for God to open the door ahead. I knew that the person I was about to visit had been in a coma for more than ten weeks and could not speak because of having his voice box removed due to throat cancer. What could God do? After praying, I continued on to my boss' house and found him seated in a chair at the table. His nurse told me that he had opened his eyes just minutes before I came (while I was praying). Miraculously, he recognized me and reached out his hand to take mine. I presented to him God's wonderful plan of salvation and asked him if he wanted to receive Jesus into his heart. He took a piece of paper and wrote, “I do! I do!” I asked him if he wanted to be baptized Methodist style since immersion was out of the question due to his condition. Again he wrote, “I do! I do!” I baptized him and thanked God for His generous offer of salvation to a sinner on his deathbed. My friend closed his eyes and returned to his comatose state for another few days before checking into heaven. Do you see the meaning of this parable now? We will summarize the story tomorrow.

Friday, March 17 (read Matthew 20:1-16)

The significance of this parable is this: God offers the same gift of salvation to every person on earth. It doesn't matter whether he/she receives His gift as a young person or on his/her deathbed. Each recipient of His grace is given **eternal salvation** and a **mansion in glory**. It is a **joy** to work many years in His vineyard, not a burden. We should all rejoice when any sinner comes to Jesus just before his last breath. We must understand that all are sinners in God's eyes and that to Him, one sin is just as bad as another (see James 2:8-11). Thank the Lord for His mercy and grace today and think of yourself as “the chief of sinners” (see 1 Timothy 1:15). You will never need to compare someone else's situation to yours again!

Saturday, March 18 (read Matthew 20:1-16)

I want to spend one last day on this very important parable. Jesus teaches that everyone who comes to Him will get the **same gift** (eternal life). That is not to say, however, that there will not be different **rewards** in heaven (see 1 Corinthians 3:10-15). Jesus will reward each of us according to our works of obedience. Works have nothing to do with our entrance into heaven, but they do count in determining responsibilities we will be given **in heaven**. We will all appear before Christ at the Bema judgment to receive rewards (see 2 Corinthians 5:10). Many, like the thief on the cross (see Luke 23:40-43), come to Jesus late in life and have very little, if any, fruit to display. Others (like Dr. James Dobson and Billy Graham) come to Him early in life and serve Him for many years. Great will be their rewards in heaven! Praise Him today for providing salvation full and free to anyone who comes to Him at any time.