

Family Bible Study

9/20/2026



Matthew 20:1-16

The Parable of Vineyard Workers

Jesus said: ¹ “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. ² After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴ and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ ⁵ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶ And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ ⁷ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ ⁸ And when 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.’ ⁹ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰ Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, ¹² saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ ¹³ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last.”

14. The landowner says, “Are you envious because I am generous?” What does this question reveal about the real problem in the story?
15. Is it possible to believe that someone else has received an undeserved gift without feeling that we ourselves have received less?
16. The vineyard owner promises to pay “whatever is right/just (*dikaíos*).” What is “just” in this situation? Why do those who started work early object to this “justice”?
17. What does the parable suggest about our tendency to measure what we receive by what other people receive?
18. What might the repeated invitations to the unemployed workers—“*You also go into the vineyard*”—suggest about God's invitation?
19. In one of their songs, country artists Brooks & Dunn sing that “happiness on earth ain't just for high achievers.” How does this speak to the point of this parable?
20. Does the parable mean that our actions and faithfulness don't matter to God? Why or why not?
21. Is this a parable of grace or a parable of judgment?
22. As is usually the case with Jesus’ parables, the story of the vineyard owner and the laborers ends abruptly, with the drama unresolved. Did the laborers obey the vineyard owner and take their pay and leave? Or do they opt to continue shouting at him, demanding more? Why do you think Jesus doesn’t finish the story?
23. Who are the “latecomers” in the life of the Church today—people who may seem to have arrived late, contributed little, or not followed the expected path?
24. What would it look like for our congregation to embody the landowner's generosity rather than the workers' resentment?

Questions to Wonder with Kids

- In this reading, Jesus compares God's kingdom to the owner of a vineyard who hires a bunch of people to help harvest his grapes. Who are all the different people in this story? How are they different from each other? How are they the same?
- Did all the workers start working at the same time?
- What did the landowner promise to pay the workers?
- What happens at the end of the day, when the vineyard owner goes to pay the different groups of workers?
- Why are some of the workers happy about their pay? Why are others not so happy?
- I wonder what the newest workers thought about their pay...How do you think they felt, after having been hired only at the very last moment?
- I wonder about how the workers felt who started earlier in the day and worked longer...
- Do you think what the vineyard owner did was fair? Why or why not?
- I wonder why the landowner wanted to be generous to the workers who arrived late...
- Was the owner "fair" or "good"? Why is more important?
- What is the difference between earning something and receiving a gift?
- How do you think God is—fair or good, or both?
- I wonder what Jesus meant when he said "the kingdom of heaven is *compared* to a vineyard owner"... I wonder how the kingdom is like this very generous man...

Questions for Adults

1. In this passage, Jesus presents a parable, a story with a point. What stands out to you about this story?
2. Can you think of a time when you worked hard for something and you didn't get what you felt you deserved?
3. How do you feel about the actions of the vineyard owner?
4. Why did he pay the most recently hired workers first and the first hired last? Wouldn't it have caused less fuss to pay the 12-hour workers first and have them go off before they discovered the owner's generosity to the others? Why cause unnecessary trouble?
5. With whom do you identify the most, the workers who came in the early morning, at noon, 3, or 5?
6. What would you think about the laborers who were still hanging around at 5 o'clock, after everyone else had been hired and were working? Why hadn't they already been working?
7. Why does the owner keep coming back for more laborers? And why not just send the steward, as would have been customary?
8. Was it because there was still more work to do, or was it out of compassion for the unemployed?
9. Not every parable is an allegory, where each character represents someone in real life. but this parable does lend itself to this interpretation. Who is the vineyard owner in the parable? In Jesus' day, who would be the workers who were hired in the morning? Who are those who came later?
10. What is this parable *about*? *Who* is this parable about? How, exactly, is the "kingdom of heaven" like this vineyard owner?
11. What does the landowner promise each group of workers?
12. What exactly do the first workers complain about? Is it simply that they received too little, or that others received too much?
13. Why might the workers who were hired first have expected to receive more? The workers hired first received exactly what they had agreed to receive. Why, then, do they feel cheated?