

January 24, 2010

**THE EXTRAVAGANT JUSTICE OF GOD**  
**MATTHEW 20.1-16**

*All members of God's kingdom, no matter at what time they enter the kingdom or what station they have in the kingdom, equally inherit the promise of life in the kingdom.*

**1. THE LABORERS HIRED BY THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE (1-7)**

***The kingdom of heaven, the master of the house, & the vineyard (1):*** connected with previous (19.16-30) by “for” (in sense of “because”). Also thematically: kingdom of heaven, rewards, the Master is “good” (cp. 19.17), and “the first-last & last-first.”

19.30 & 20.16 - Jesus is dealing with the same principle but with another twist.

Parables concerning the kingdom of heaven. (Cp. ch. 13) Parables = allegories - stories that speak about another story emphasizing certain aspects of the story. *Pilgrim's Progress* is a parable in this sense.

Jesus' parables are stories about God's story—history—in terms of the whole world but many times focused upon how that story is worked out in Israel in particular (since Israel is the world in miniature).

This story finds its focus and climax in the kingdom of heaven, God's promised future for his people and the world.

Kingdom of heaven: God's throne is in heaven (Isa 66.1; Ps 11.4; Mt 5.34-35). Kingdom of heaven = God's rule on earth as it is in heaven (cf. Mt 6.10). This kingdom is here now in Jesus and will be consummated in the future.

Master of the house (NKJ “landowner”) = God himself.

Imagery of the house not incidental. Israel = house; e.g. “the house of Israel.” Also extends to the whole world b/c the whole world was made to be a house in which God and man were to dwell together.

House is to be “constructed,” ordered, & glorified by man. When complete God comes to dwell with his people. Heaven and earth are joined. Realized in shadow form in Tabernacle & Temple.

Image of vineyard. Israel = a vineyard (cf. Isa 5.1; also Jer 12; Ps 80; *et al.*)

The whole world is a vineyard. Looks back to the original Garden as well as that which Noah planted after coming off of the ark.

Not random illustrations. Important to understanding the relevance to original audience as well as God's purpose for man.

***Different workers hired at different times (1-7):*** story is divided by morning (1) and evening (8).

Dawn of a new day = the kingdom of heaven being inaugurated. The day = history that ends at evening in which each man will receive his reward; i.e. judgment day.

Man is created by God to be a “gardener,” to cultivate and protect the garden with the expectation that he would give account. Master of the house (i.e. God) is bringing in and making new Adams, new images-of-God.

Agreement for denarius for the first workers hired. Normal wage for a day.

3<sup>rd</sup> hour (9 am) - he will pay them what is “just.” No specific amount. Dependent upon the faithfulness of the Master to do what is just. 6<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> hours (noon & 3 pm) does likewise.

11<sup>th</sup> hour (5 pm) - emphasis seen in length of discussion with them. “No one has hired us” - possibly undesirables.

Jesus is beginning a new ministry. The 12 are first workers. There will be others who come in later, some of whom will be undesirables (e.g., like the tax collectors and prostitutes with whom Jesus has been associating) as well as Gentiles.

**2. THE LABORERS PAID BY THE LORD OF THE VINEYARD (8-16)**

***“Injustice and grumbling (8-12):*** “When evening came” - marks the close of the day and the time for pay.

“Lord of the vineyard” (another name for “master of the house”) tells steward to call laborers and pay them from last to first. All receive a denarius (i.e. pay for a full day’s work).

The first workers react believing that the master has been unjust. Equal pay for very unequal labor is not fair.

Meaning: the disciples are the “first;” i.e., first in the kingdom of God in time and in authority.

But throughout the day God will bring in others. Even just before the end there will be some to come in. They may even be those undesirables with whom no one wants to associate.

All will receive the same kingdom inheritance. They will all be a part of the same consummated kingdom.

Temptation for the disciples to grumble b/c the late-comers receive the same thing as them.

***The prerogatives of the lord of the vineyard (13-16):*** Master says he has not been unjust. They want the other workers to have less than them in one way or another.

Agreement with the first workers was a denarius and he paid what he promised. He tells them to take what is theirs and leave; i.e. be content that they have received justice.

The Master’s money is his to do with as he pleases. He is just with the first workers and extravagantly generous with the last workers. He has that right b/c he is the owner.

The generosity of the Master is what the first workers are grumbling about. “Is your eye evil b/c I am good?” “Evil eye” has to do with being stingy or begrudging goodness given to others.

All in context of the master being just. Justice is **not** the opposite of mercy in every case. Injustice or caprice is the opposite of justice. Sometimes it would be unjust not to show mercy.

Justice is doing what is right as defined within a certain context and by a certain code.

God’s covenant with us: he has promised to forgive us (mercifully) when we confess our sins. If God refused to forgive us when we confessed that would not be just.

Not b/c we earned or deserve forgiveness. B/c God made a covenant with us in which he promised to forgive. He is faithful and just and will forgive (cf. 1Jn 1.9).

Note also the Psalms in which God’s people pray for God’s justice (e.g. Ps 7). Not about them being sinless, but about God doing what he promised he would do.

God’s covenant, kingdom justice is generous. It is extravagant in its grace and magnanimous in its mercy. God’s justice toward his people is not a cold, steely, and stoic distribution of retribution.

God’s justice toward his people is saving and therefore generously merciful. For God to do otherwise would be unjust. It is God’s justice that saves all of his people—from last to first—causing them to inherit the same kingdom.

It would be unjust of God **not** to give the kingdom to his people w/o regard for what time they came into the kingdom.

1. *We must not begrudge newer, gifted people in our particular church.*
2. *All commitments to the kingdom of God, no matter how great or small, are equally rewarded in the end with life in the kingdom.*
3. *Rejoice in the extravagant grace of your God!*