

# Kingdom Wages

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Preacher: Elliott Lytle

[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome, everybody, to City Grace. We're doing a series on parables. And like many of the parables we've done, we're going to take a look at a parable this morning that when we first read it, it's going to strike our sensibilities a bit in that it's easy to read and it's easy to understand, but it's maybe a little bit hard to process because like so many of these parables, depending on what you bring into the situation, whatever your proclivities are, this is either going to sound like a story that is very fair or very unfair.

But like all the parables, it has a bigger kingdom principle that Jesus is trying to show us. And if we take the time to look, it's actually not going to be that hard to see it.

So we're going to jump right into Matthew chapter 20. You can turn there in your Bibles. If you don't have your Bible with you, no worries. It's going to be on the screen behind me. And in Matthew chapter 20, verse 1, Jesus speaking, it says this.

For the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. And after agreeing with the laborers for a denarii a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

And going out about the third hour, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace. And he said to them, you too go into the vineyard and whatever is right, I will give you. So they went. And going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.

[ 1 : 27 ] And 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. And he said, you go into the vineyard too.

And when the 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. And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarii.

Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarii. And on receiving it, they grumbled at the master of the house saying, the 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.

But he replied to one of them, my friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarii? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I gave to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? So the last will be first and the first last.

[ 2 : 41 ] This is God's word to us. Now like so many of the parables we've read, on the surface, very easy to understand and accessible story.

A landowner needs people to go out and work in his vineyards and so he goes into the market where you would find these day laborers to find help. And so he goes in the morning and he finds them and he agrees with them on what is effectively about a day's wage, a fair day's wage, this denarii.

And they set about their work. But apparently he needs as much help as he can get because throughout the day, over the course of what is effectively a 12-hour day, he keeps coming back to the marketplace and he's like, I need more laborers.

I need more laborers. And each time he finds them, he says, well you go too and I'll pay you what's right for it. And he does this right up to the 11th hour, literally the last hour of the day and he sends people out.

And then when paying time comes, he starts with those that were hired at the 11th hour, literally, again, the last work hour of the day. They worked one hour of the 12-hour shift and he pays them a

full day's wage.

[ 3 : 57 ] And so naturally, when those hired earlier in the day hear that, they start to grow in their anticipation, right? Because they presume, hey, if he's given them a full day's wage, what are we going to Applebee's tonight, right?

Like they assume they're going to make bank today. But when the owner gets to them, he pays them a day's wage. Which is, by the way, what they agreed to at the beginning of the day. But because they had been paid the same as those who came later in the day, they start to grumble and they say, why did those who only worked an hour get paid the same as us?

Now like many of the parables, again, I think the first temptation here when hearing this is to laser focus in on the details of the story and how it makes you feel.

And that can take you in all kinds of wrong directions, right? Like maybe the first thing you actually feel is a sense of your fairness being pricked because that does sound like a bum deal, right?

[ 5 : 00 ] Like those who went out last, they worked one hour, I did the hardest part of the day, I didn't get paid the same. Or maybe you look at this as we often do and you immediately start to try to think about what kind of commentary is Jesus making on how to set an economic system up, right?

Like what does that tell us about how we buy and sell goods? But like the other parables, Jesus is using the story to get across a big idea about what God's kingdom is like and how it works.

And this is actually one of those parables where he gives you the thesis statement. And you can actually see it not only at the end of this passage, but it's right in the text immediately preceding this.

So if you flip back to Matthew 19, at the end of that chapter, there's this section where Jesus is kind of talking to his disciples about how nothing you give up for God, like you can't out-give God, right? Like they're asking, what are we gonna receive for what we've given up? And God is basically telling them, nothing you give God gets wasted. And there's nothing you give up that he's not gonna give you back a hundredfold.

[ 6 : 12 ] And you're gonna get eternal life with it, like an eternal kind of life. And then he ends chapter 19 with this cryptic statement. But many who are first will be last and the last first.

And then again, he tells this parable in chapter 20 and at the end, he reiterates, so the last will be first. So when you approach this parable, our questions, the way we approach it has to center around that idea.

The last will be first. So what does that mean? Like what does that tell us about this parable? And I think we can probably look at the most obvious detail first, which is the parable centers around the idea of wages.

And the story doesn't really unfold like you would expect it to. And that's really kind of interesting because this parable starts by showing us that the last will be first because kingdom wages aren't like worldly wages.

Now your wages are kind of an interesting thing in any society and particularly in our society because there are really a lot of ideas about it. And on the surface, you might start with the very simple presumption and idea that wages are just the right and just and fair reward you get for your labor that's given to some business or some cause.

[ 7 : 44 ] But you don't have to live too long to start to get this picture of, I'm not sure that's exactly how it works. I'm not sure that's exactly how we decide how much somebody gets paid.

Years ago, there was this movie made called Moneyball, which really just chronicles how the general manager of the Oakland Athletics, Billy Bean, takes one of the poor teams in Major League Baseball and through, so he can't compete with the other teams just based on how much money. He can't buy the best players. So they try to get really creative with like advanced analytics and creative player evaluations. And he takes a team that's at the bottom of the league in terms of talent.

And he moves it into a place where it can contend with the big boys. And though they don't win the World Series, they make a lot of noise and they get to the playoffs and they have this big winning streak.

And it's enough, he accomplishes so much with such a small budget that it really gets the attention of some of the bigger clubs. And so like at the end of the movie, it depicts where he goes out to Boston to do an interview with the owner of the Red Sox.

[ 8 : 54 ] Big franchise, big money, right? And when he gets back to Oakland after that interview, his assistant asks him, would they at least make you a good offer?

And he really doesn't want to tell him because for him, this hasn't been about money. He kind of wants to change how the game is played. But his assistant keeps bugging him. He's like, what is it? What is it? Tell me. What is it?

And so finally, he takes a piece of paper and he pushes it across the table and his assistant takes it and he opens it up and he closes it and he puts it on the table and he says, and that makes you the highest paid general manager in the history of sports.

And again, because money's not what he's interested in, he says, so? Does it matter? And his assistant says, look, you're not doing it for the money.

You're doing it for what the money says. And the money says the same thing to you that it says to any player that makes big bucks. That you're worth it. I think sometimes we think about wages maybe like that's what it is.

[ 10 : 03 ] Like wages are something that are paid based on what you're worth. But then when you peel that onion a little farther, I think you could even argue that wages often are more not even about what you're worth but about what people value.

And make no mistake, that is an incredibly charged topic in our culture and obviously and honestly sometimes it doesn't really speak well of us, right? Because I mean on some level probably most of us can get on board with the idea of like certain professions getting paid more, right?

Like doctors get paid a lot of money because there's a lot of specialized training and a lot of risk but then there are other professions that we at least on the surface say we value that don't get paid much at all.

And the truth is professional athletes who we were just talking about make more than all those people. And girls who post pictures of themselves online make more than all those people.

It doesn't always make sense and it doesn't always speak well of what we value and I say all of that about wages to simply say this as we go into it.

[ 11 : 19 ] A knowledge of how worldly wages work isn't going to help you at all in understanding this parable because the wages of the world and the wages of the kingdom are not the same thing.

Maybe to say it more bluntly the value system in the kingdom is very different than the value system in the world. The first will be the last and the last first.

Which means things that are valuable to the world may not carry that much weight in the kingdom and by the way you can't always see it. I mean I think this is probably self-evident but you cannot tell by how rich or famous or celebrated a person is if their works have any kingdom value.

And honestly most of the time you're not in a great place to judge it. So if that is the case then how am I to understand kingdom wages like how am I to understand this parable that seems really unfair on its face.

how do I know what God values and what his kingdom is and how it works. And again I think Jesus tells this parable to help us in this regard because once you get past the wages you see the parable isn't just about what was paid it's also about who receives them.

[ 12 : 47 ] Because this parable also gives us this other big idea which is the last will be first because God cares about the least of these. Now this scene of workers standing around in a market to get selected for work would have been really familiar again to the hearers in Jesus' day.

Like workers going down to the marketplace they're kind of like day laborers right? Like they're there they don't have a regular job and it's not a great gig right?

Because there's no security in it right? Your day-to-day substance is dependent on whether you get picked or not. And so already there's kind of this element of I don't know if I'm going to get picked am I going to be able to go out and get food money for my family?

And you can also imagine that it's kind of terrifying particularly if you're a little bit weaker or a little bit smaller or if you have some form of handicap you just might not get picked much.

When I read that I couldn't help but think of a scene from another movie that they made a couple years ago called Cinderella Man and it depicts the real life story of this boxer named James Braddock who lived kind of in the 20s and 30s in New York City and he's kind of becoming a famous boxer but then during the Great Depression he loses a lot of his money after the stock market crashes and so he kind of finds himself scraping by week to week on the streets of New York and he has to go out to try to get labor day by day and like they depict this in the movie you

know he goes down to the docks and there's like you know 40, 50, 60 guys standing down there and the foreman comes out and he's like I need five today.

[14:33] Five. Right? And so you got this whole crowd of guys standing at a gate trying to get money for their family and it's nerve wracking right? Because the guy's going down going one, two.

And you're like man am I going to get picked or not get picked? There's like sort of again a random element to it and not only is it hard to get picked when your odds are that bad it's basically impossible if you've got any kind of problem and we know that because at one point in the movie he breaks his hand and him and his wife have to go to like great extents to cover up the white cast with shoe polish so it's kind of not obvious because if they see you have a cast you're not getting picked. And that's probably what we'd expect from this world right? The strong succeed. Those who produce the most and provide the most economic value get selected but that's not what happens in this story Jesus tells.

The master goes out again and again and again to find laborers and every time he comes back he finds more and he keeps going out to the very end to the only people that are left are the last of the last.

The runts of the litter. The ones that nobody else would pick and again you know that because he asked them why are you standing around and they don't say ah we're just not into working today.

[16:01] Nobody's picked us. And he says will you get out there as well. And he is just as happy to pick these laborers as he was the cream of the crop earlier in the day.

which tells you a couple things about the master. One is that he obviously wants a lot of people involved in the work. There's apparently no shortage of work to do and he's going to keep going out and looking for people who are willing to engage in that work.

But it also tells you that the story is a lot more about the generosity of the owner and who he wants to give work and wages to than it is about the quality of the labor of the laborers.

Now again it's okay to be honest here and admit if that still strikes your sensibilities as unfair that that would be normal. Like this is the type of story that is intended to offend your pride in a way you don't want it to.

I earn my way. I am not okay with someone else who worked less than me making more than me.

[17:21] But if you feel like that again if I could just kind of humbly put before you I think that's a mistake on two fronts. First I would I know at least when I feel that way about something what I found is usually I'm making the wrong assumption in that that the reason I feel that way is because I think I'm one of the first.

Like I don't see myself as one of the last to be picked as one of the least of these but in reality all of these parables are showing us this picture of the one who is able to draw near to God is the one who realizes you don't have anything to offer.

you don't have anything God needs. You cannot put him in your debt. In all the ways that matter to a holy God you are the last.

And you have to see yourself like that. I mean if you want to if you really want to get down to it maybe even more offensive the Bible says none of you measure up to God. We are all sinners. sinners. We miss the mark. We fall short. And the Bible says the wages of that sin that you've done is death. Eternal death.

[18:44] Separation from God. That's what you've earned. But the thing is if you know that which is the interesting thing about the gospel if you know that fact which is not a great fact to think about.

it's actually a blessing because then it means you're in a posture where you can actually receive what Jesus wants to give you. Because this parable isn't trying to convince us that God is fair in the way that we want to think about fair.

And just as a side road it's also not proposing a pay system for how a business works right. Again you don't have to read everything in a parable. it might be appropriate to go to your boss and say hey I don't understand why I'm working.

Like he's not trying to get in those weeds. He's not trying to convince you God is fair. He is trying to convince you God is good. And whether you know it or not what you need is a good God not a fair God.

Because fair is you pay, you receive the wages of the sin you've done. And that's not what God is interesting in giving. He is an exceedingly generous king.

[ 20 : 08 ] And because he is this parable also shows us that the last will be first because no one is ever going to get less than the best in God's kingdom.

Isn't it really interesting that if those who came later had gotten paid less those who came first would have had no complaint.

Like they wouldn't have felt bad about the denarii that they got because that's what they agreed for. So if they'd have got paid less they would have been totally fine with it. Their beef wasn't that they got underpaid.

They got paid fairly. They paid what they agreed to work for. Their complaint was that the owner chose to be generous to someone else. I mean it shows you that it's not the wages that are offensive.

It's the owner being generous that is offensive because now they don't feel that the others have earned something that they don't feel they've earned and they have been elevated to their level.

[ 21 : 20 ] I mean there's really like a whole separate sermon in there beware the poison of jealousy. Gratefulness is a mark of living in the kingdom.

I mean that's part of what the gospel does when you realize that you didn't really have anything to offer God and what you had earned was the wages of sin.

The one thing it does if you can let that in your heart is it forever robs you of the ability to look down your nose at anyone. And it also forever robs you of trying to build your identity on some little sandcastle that you made yourself.

Like either you have an identity and are made blessed in Christ or you're not. God. But the bigger picture here in this parable is that this owner wants everyone to get the best of what he has.

He wants everybody to get the fullness of his kingdom. And really that's something that should be celebrated because if we can take our eyes off of comparing ourselves to somebody for five minutes you would start to see that in God's kingdom every laborer gets all of the kingdom.

[ 22 : 44 ] All of Jesus. You don't get less because you were late to the party. I mean God throughout scripture he may give out different kingdom rewards but they're all done based on his grace.

On the goodness of what he wants to give. And the point is that you're not going to get short changed. That God is not going to hold back the best.

He can't give anything less than all of himself. I still think to me probably the one of the best pictures of this in scripture and it's just a story I gravitate to over and over is when Jesus is being crucified there are thieves being crucified with him.

And one of them is just defiant to the end but the other thief is a little bit repentant and that thief is a really interesting story because what happens to him immediately dismisses two errors in thinking that people have when they approach God.

One is that if your thought is the way I'm going to impress God is I'm going to store up a life of good works. I'm going to do a lot of good things. I'm going to live and I know I'm going to mess up something there but really I'm going to hand that to God and he's going to kind of weigh it out and that's what's going to determine whether God accepts me or not.

[ 24 : 12 ] This thief doesn't have that. He's got nothing in his past to offer. He doesn't and we know that because he says we are judged justly.

Okay it's not like you know in the Shawshank redemption where it's like you know didn't do it like he says this is what I deserve. A cross is what I deserve.

So we know he doesn't have a life that is worthy of being held up before the father and the interesting thing is because he's on a cross he can't do the other thing that we think which is okay I'll I'll ask for forgiveness and I'll start getting it right from here on.

He's got nothing left to give. He is a man hanging beside Jesus with just like the very nub end of a wasted life.

Like the last flickering flame of a life that's been completely thrown away and the only hope he has is mercy.

[ 25 : 15 ] And so he says Jesus I'm judged justly but if you could just remember me and show me mercy in your kingdom. And Jesus who is by the way in the worst moment of his life still has the love to say yeah today me and you are walking in the paradise brother.

Everybody gets the fullness of God and his kingdom. When Jesus gets near the end of his life he prays kind of this high priestly prayer over those who follow him and those who will follow him in the

centuries to come and in one section in John 17 when he's praying that prayer he says this Jesus says speaking to his father he says I do not ask for these only but also for those who will believe in me through their word.

Let's just pause right there. Do you think the prayers of Jesus are effective? Like if a prayer was going to work do you think the one that comes out of Jesus' mouth is in accordance with his father's will?

And if you believe that look at what he's saying. He's not only looking at the people in front of him. I do not ask for these only. He's literally looking throughout the ages to every face in this room and every face in the ages in between.

He's thinking about everyone that will follow him. He is lifting up you if you are a follower of Jesus before his father and he says God I pray that they may all be one just as you father are in me and I am in you.

[ 27 : 11 ] May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you sent me. The wages of God's kingdom are nothing less than union with God himself.

If that's the case God can't give a little piece of himself. That's why the laborers at the end get the same as the ones at the beginning because God doesn't know how to give anything less than all of him.

And it's a fact to be celebrated. You know there's a there's another common phrase in our business world that you might have encountered and it's this one where someone will say well you know in this business it's not what you do it's who you know.

And I'll be honest with you that is certainly true whether you think it's a good thing or not. I mean there are obviously some places where that goes sour right? Like when somebody gets ahead just because they're the boss's son or they're friends with somebody and everybody kind of has to endure their incompetence just because you know they get the job because they and it's not something people like but whether you see it as good or bad there's also just this reality that relationships are part of how life and business works and at any job you work and this is really tough for some people there comes a point where it's no longer about skill.

It's like it's not about you become the most skilled thing at some point to continue in advance it's about having a network. It's about someone who's your boss or who is established in the business decides to show you favor.

[ 28 : 58 ] And while that probably is an uncertain reality in like business and life it's actually a blessed reality in the kingdom because when you step back you start to realize again it's not a parable about wages like the laborers were paid good wages because they knew a good master.

And that good news those good wages weren't just for some it wasn't just for the ones that were capable of really earning it. It wasn't about what you did it was about who you knew.

And this master couldn't give out anything less than his best. That's the person you want to know.

And that same master all throughout scripture it tells us that same master is still looking for laborers today.

Like that offer is still on the table and it doesn't matter if you're at the first hour or the sixth hour or the eleventh hour. He wants you to go into the field and he'll give you all of the kingdom.

The band comes up today. If you're if you're not a follower of Jesus and you're here again just it's it's always such a blessing that you're here.

[ 30 : 22 ] I know it's weird to be in a church if it's if it's not something you believe in or kind of not your thing then you know I don't know how you would receive a message like this but I would bet if nothing else we could at least agree on this the value system of the world is messed up.

What we value as a person what we value of a society and what it who is rewarded and who is not rewarded is not always right in this world. But I hope you can also see that the value system of Jesus and his kingdom is not the same.

Jesus offers the best to everybody. He offers to pay a debt for sin you can't. He will accept those wages of death that should have been yours and he will invite you into an eternal kind of life.

And he can do that because he's God because God in his great power has raised him up to life and it's an offer he gives to you like I can raise whatever feels dead in your life to like literally your soul.

If there's any part of you that that sounds interesting to I would love to talk to you about that. There'll be a prayer on the screen there's a way maybe you could express that from where you're at or if you want to talk to somebody we'll be down front.

[ 31 : 45 ] if you're not a follower of Jesus I think it's or if you are a follower of Jesus I think it's helpful to just remind yourself of this because life will beat it out of you God is not going to short change you God is not going to rip you off however you think your life is going God is fully vested in giving you the very best he gave the very best to a guy hanging on a cross who gave him the last like 18 minutes of his life he's not going to short change you he is never going to deal with you on the level of what you have earned he only knows how to give all of himself how to offer it how to invite you in and that is something to embrace if you've fallen into the trap of I think God is holding back he doesn't know how to do that and if you've fallen into the trap of pride of

I really feel like I've earned something better then let the spirit prick that out of you let the spirit push that out and remind you that you didn't have anything to offer either but it's okay because you're going to get the best as well if you're a follower of Jesus once you've come before him we got a moment here at the end where you come and take communion and again like so many things in scripture it's a testament think about what Jesus is saying like I'm giving you every like my literal body and blood everything he is nothing held back wasn't just bread and wine he was saying you you get to have like I'm giving you can embrace that father we give you this moment I just pray you would do in our hearts what you will

I pray if there is pride that keeps us in a place of separate from you because we don't we don't want to feel that others who haven't earned it God I just pray you remove that and I pray you let let people taste the freedom that comes in that you Holy Spirit give us the grace to see that let us partake of this communion and let us literally just feel the presence of Jesus with us reminding us there's no lengths he wouldn't go to we give you this in Jesus name! to to to him to him! he him to him him to him!

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