

# The Parable of the Laborers

*The Gracious Landowner*

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I suppose no parable has been maligned more and misunderstood more than the parable of the laborers that went into the vineyard. Perhaps the way many translators have titled that particular parable indicates the misunderstanding because I want to help you see this morning not the laborers in the vineyard but the gracious landowner, and I suppose the reasons are varied but some perhaps are because the gross misunderstanding in our day concerning the grace of God and man's insistence to go about trying to establish himself before God based upon his merit, his works. The operative principle in the kingdom of heaven is grace. Nobody enters the kingdom of heaven apart from divine favor. Nobody enters apart from grace. That's why we sang this morning, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."

As we look to this parable this morning, I want for us to see four things. I want to spend some time in see the setting that this parable is given; we want to look at the story itself; we want to try and identify the central spiritual truth that's being conveyed in the parable; and the, Lord willing if we have time, try and extract some other spiritual principles that can be profitably gleaned from this text of Scripture.

So let's begin. The setting. We must go back to the preceding passage of Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler to establish the setting for the parable. In chapter 19, verses 16 through 22, we discover the rich young ruler who came to Jesus inquiring about eternal life and the dialog that ensued reveals that this man's heart was mastered by covetousness and Jesus states upfront what he requires of all disciples. 1. Undivided affection. He tells him, "Sell all that you have, give to the poor. Undivided affection and unconditional commitment and follow me." Verse 22 tells us that, "he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

Jesus then warns his disciples about the great barrier that riches can be to entering the kingdom. In contrast to the rich young ruler who refused Jesus' gracious invitation, Peter and the other apostles had left their worldly occupations and possessions at the call of Christ to follow him and it's Peter with this contrast in his mind, makes a statement in verse 27 to Jesus and he follows his statement with a question and look at verse 27, "Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" Jesus gives two answers to Peter's question. The first

answer is recorded in verse 28 through 30; the second question is the parable that we're going to examine this morning. So the setting is Peter's question and if we keep that in mind, it will provide the key to understanding the central message of the parable.

Peter's question, it betrays an attitude of selfishness and Jesus' answer is intended as a general rebuke to Peter for the spirit of his question. You see, Peter's adding up his merit points. He says, "We've given it all up to follow you," and then he says, "What's in it for me? What are gonna get out of this? What are we going to get out of our sacrifice and our commitment, I want to know that." Well, Jesus assures Peter and the other disciples of a reward. Verse 28, "And Jesus said unto them," Peter was speaking for the disciples so Jesus is speaking to them, "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me," you 12, "in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Verse 29, you see, verse 28 is to those 12, you shall sit on 12 thrones and you shall judge the 12 tribes of Israel, but verse 29 says, "And every one," that includes everyone throughout history that has met the requirements of discipleship, "everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Now why did Jesus express the rewards in these terms? Expressed as a percentage, an hundredfold or hundred times as much is 10,000%. Now the economy is doing well and everybody's eye is on the Dow Jones, and in the financial world an investment that doubles itself in 3 or 4 or 5 years even is considered an excellent investment, yet that is only 100% gain. Jesus promises not 100% but 10,000%. My mind has difficulty even comprehending that kind of return but that's what Jesus promises to everyone that has forsaken houses and brethren or sisters, father, mother, wife, children or lands for his sake.

So again the question: why does Jesus use such an astonishing amount as 10,000%? I believe that Jesus is trying to convey to the disciples and he's trying to convey to us that God's reward is out of proportion to our service and sacrifice. He's telling us that God's reward system is based not on merit but on grace and grace always gives more than we have earned.

Then in reply to Peter's question, Jesus promises great reward while issuing a general rebuke for the spirit of his question. I can almost hear Jesus reasoning, "You want what you perceived you have earned or deserve for your sacrificial service." You see, Peter's adding up his merit points but he's failing, like many of us do, that is failing to take into account our demerits, and if we're evaluating things on a basis of merit and demerit, most of us our demerits outweigh our merit, for you see, even the demerit of the selfish, demanding, "You owe me," attitude that's revealed in Peter's question, that Jesus rebukes, and may I say rebukes very graciously, has failed to be considered by Peter. And if you, this morning, can imagine a set of scales and on this side are your perceived merit, we're quick to recall the things we've done, the sacrifices we've made, the service we've rendered, but how often do we balance that out with our demerits? Our bad attitude? Our spirit of envy? Our telling that white lie? Our cheating here, cheating there? Failing to

love when we should have loved? And all the rest? I don't want God to deal with me on the basis of merit and I don't believe you do either.

The operative principle in the kingdom of heaven is grace and that's what Jesus is trying to communicate to Peter here. That leads us to the story. We need to understand that background or that setting. The gracious landowner. Before we look at the details of the story, let me remind you that we're looking at a parable. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. The word "parable" comes from two Greek words, "para," which means "alongside," and "bole," which means "to put or to place or to throw." So in a parable two things are put alongside each other to compare them. Perhaps it's helpful to think of an equation: A is like B because of C. A, a spiritual reality is like B, an earthly illustration, because of C, because of the question that Peter asks that gives occasion for Jesus addressing grace versus works.

So let's look at the story. Verse 1 says, "For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder or a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers to work in his vineyard." The Jewish workday began at 6 AM which was called the first hour. The landowner, he goes into the marketplace and he hires a group of laborers and after an agreement has been reached concerning their pay, a penny a day or a denarii which is equivalent to a good day's wages, this agreement was reached and they agreed to go into the vineyard and work.

The story goes on, the parable goes on and says that this landowner went into the marketplace and the marketplace was a place where men who were seeking employment, seeking work, would go and to gather with the hopes of securing some work, a day's work, two days, three days, whatever. So the landowner went to the marketplace about the third hour or 9 o'clock in the morning, and he saw men standing idle, simply that they were dependent on someone hiring them. We're not to read a whole lot into the fact they were standing idle. They were where men went to look for work.

Verse 4, it says that they were hired with the understanding, "Go into the vineyard," and there's no negotiation of wages, it just says, "Whatever is right, I'll give you," the landowner says to this group of workers. Verse 5 says he did the same thing at the sixth hour or 12 noon, and the ninth hour or 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and presumably with the same arrangement. "Go in and work in my vineyard and whatever is fair, whatever is right, whatever is just, I will recompense you." Verse 6 tells us that at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour or 5 o'clock in the evening, one hour before the day would end, he went and he saw others standing idle and he hired them and he sent them into the vineyard with the promise, "Whatever is right, you will receive."

At 6 o'clock, the landowner called the steward or the foreman over with instructions to pay the workers with specific instructions as to the order that he was to pay the workers, from last to first, and that's critical in our understanding of this text, and we'll focus on that a bit later. Verse 9 says the 11<sup>th</sup> hour workers received a full day's wages for one hour's worth of work, a penny or a denarii or a full day's wages, 12 times more than they had legitimately earned. Now there's no mention of the other groups that had been hired

throughout the day but the story runs to those that were hired at 6 o'clock in the morning who had worked all day, 12 hours, and verse 10 says those hired at the first hour who had worked a full day, a 12 hour day, received not 12 times what the others had received but the same pay, a denarii, a full day's wages for a full day's work, what they had agreed upon earlier in the day.

Now verse 10 gives some insight into what's happening with these various workers. When the first came, that is those that had worked a full 12 hours, when they came they supposed that they should have received more and they likewise received every man a penny. Now can you see these men standing in line? They may not see what the men who had worked one hour got paid but I'm sure that what they got paid drew a response from them and these men heard that. "Well, they got the same, they got a full day's wages!" Now they didn't have computers back there but they probably were math wizards and they were thinking in their minds, "Let me see, then that would mean that when he gets to us, we're going to get 12 days' worth of wages," but when the next group came and they received a full day's wages, now these men had worked 3 hours so they quickly recalculated, "Okay, we're not gonna get 12 times, we're gonna get 4 times. That's still good." The next workers came that had worked 6 hours, they got a full day's wages. So real quick they, "Well, we're gonna get twice as much." But can you imagine the chagrin when the foreman got to them and paid them the same as all the workers had received? You see, they were counting on getting more. That's what it says, "When the first came, they supposed that they should have received more."

They registered a complaint, verse 11 and 12 records the complaint of these workers. They grumbled at first. I don't think we have any trouble imagining that, right? People grumbling at work? They grumbled at first and then verse 12, they levied their complaint saying, verse 12, "These last have wrought but one hour and thou hast made them equal unto us which have borne the burden and heat of the day. This isn't fair. Look at those guys, they're not even dirty. They haven't even worked up a sweat and look at us. We've borne the heat of the day. Look at our hands and you call that fair?" This is the spirit of the complaint that they're registering.

Now here many of you, I thought I heard something a minute ago, I thought I heard many of you saying, "That's right. That's not fair. I agree." About two weeks ago, I decided to preach on this text and I was at the barbershop and I was talking to the barber and as I recall the details, I didn't raise this but he raised this parable in his mind. He said, "You know, I've never understood that. That's not fair." And I hadn't studied it sufficiently enough to give him a wise answer, so I'm looking forward to reflecting on my study and this sermon and going back and talking to him. But what he communicated to me is a spirit of many people, "This isn't fair." We need to understand something here. This is not instructions for labor negotiations, okay? This is not what this is about. This is the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner going into the marketplace and hiring men to come and work in the vineyard. We need to keep that in mind. This won't fly in the workplace, will it? We need to understand that.

But there's a setting of the record straight by the landowner and we see that in verse 13. He addresses the spokesman for the group. Verse 13, "But he answered one of them and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong. Didst not thou agree with me for a penny?" So the first thing, he didn't rebuke him harshly, he just reminds him, "Friend, I didn't do you any wrong. Didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Didn't you agree at 6 o'clock this morning when I went into the marketplace, didn't you agree to work for a full day's wages?" In other words, "Didn't you receive what you agreed to work for?"

Then he says in verse 14, "Take that thine is and go thy way." So he basically, he cuts the conversation short, "Take your money and go home. I gave you what we agreed upon in the morning. What's your beef? I will give unto this last even as unto thee. What I choose to pay others is no concern to you, so you take what you agreed to receive for a full day's wages and you go home."

I can hear the landowner saying something like, now I'm reading into the text here but it's consistent with what's going on here. "Have I missed something here? I'm the owner. I own this vineyard. Who do you think you are? I can do with it as I please and I'm not obligated to you to justify how I treat anybody else. I'm not accountable to you for my actions." And the real problem is revealed in verse 15. He says, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is thine eye evil because I am good?" Basically he's saying, "The problem's not with me, the problem is with you." The problem is not injustice on the part of the landowner, the problem is jealousy on the part of the workers.

Then verse 16 is Jesus' only comment concerning the parable. Many of the parables are followed by an explanation, we don't have that benefit here. The story is capped by this statement of Jesus, "So the last shall be first and the first last, for many be called but few chosen." Now this leads us to the spiritual message, the main truth that this parable was meant to convey. We need to understand that parabolic literature is basically, it's not an allegory, it's a story given to communicate one basic truth, not to say that there aren't other spiritual lessons we can learn but we're looking for the main message, the main truth, the central idea that Jesus is trying to convey.

Now I'll remind you of a couple of things we've already touched on that are important to our understanding. The parable is given by Jesus in response to Peter's question in chapter 19, verse 27, "Lord, we've give it all up to follow you, what's in it for us?" That's the question that Jesus is answering. The parable begins with a preposition, three letter preposition, "for," and it's there to show us that the parable that begins here is meant to explain further, to amplify the rule that's been laid down in verse 30 of chapter 19, and repeated with a slight modification in chapter 20, verse 16. What is this rule? Jesus concludes the promise of rewards to Peter and the disciples with verse 30, "But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first," and then the very first word of chapter 20 is, "for." Here is another place where chapter division has not helped us. I don't believe that it's accurate for there to be a chapter division here. This is a continuous flow of thought and Jesus restates that principle in verse 16 of chapter 20 with a slight modification. He says, "So the last shall be first and the first last, for many be called but few chosen." And to amplify just in case we didn't get it, to amplify the central message,

the order that the workers in the parable were paid underscores this basic rule that characterizes the kingdom of heaven. How were the workers paid? From last to first, so we see that principle being reinforced.

In the parable of the gracious landowner, Jesus is dealing with the selfish, envious and demanding attitude of Peter and the other disciples. Now lest you think I've read too much into Peter's question, that I've accused him wrongly, let me show you what we have the benefit of because of holy Scripture that someone standing there witnessing this conversation wouldn't have been aware of. Chapter 20, after this parable, turn very quickly to verse 20 of chapter 20, "Then came to him," that is, then came to Jesus, "the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons worshipping him and desiring a certain thing of him, and he said unto her, What wilt thou? And she saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit the one on the right hand and the other on the left in thy kingdom." Jesus answered and said, "You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I shall drink of and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with but to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." Then verse 24, "And when the 10 heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren."

Do you see the spirit that's in the heart of Peter and the disciples, this jockeying for position, this selfishness, this "What's in it for me?" This envy? And I believe that's what Jesus is addressing, and do you know what? That spirit so quickly can rest and abide in our hearts as well. "Lord, what's in it for me? I taught a Sunday school class for 18 years. Now something's not right here. Look at this guy next door to me, he drives a new car, has no problems, and we've got all this going on." Does that ever enter your heart? That's the spirit that was in the heart of Peter. That's the spirit that Jesus is rebuking.

The parable teaches that the standard of reward in God's kingdom is utterly different from human standards of payment. God rewards or we want to say God pays on the basis of grace, not works or merit. The operative principle in terms of human reckoning is that a person should be paid in proportion to his work and we have no problem agreeing with that, it's okay to agree with that, okay? And this is what's behind Peter's question: the more we do, the more we earn and the more God owes us. That's the spirit of Peter's question. The more we do, the more we earn and the more God owes us, and this parable was given by Jesus to teach us that the kingdom of heaven is not like that. The operative principle in the kingdom of heaven is grace and God is the gracious landowner here. He delights to be gracious. He delights to reward in excess, in vast excess to the proportion of the service that is rendered. Human reckoning is a day's work earns a day's pay. God's reckoning is an hour's work receives a full day's pay.

I fell a whole lot better. I was wondering whether we'd ever get to this. That is the central message of the parable, it's a message of grace but there are other spiritual lessons that we can learn, and we want to spend the last minutes we have examining additional application or additional spiritual lessons.

1. God will be no man's debtor. He is not obligated to anyone. You see, those that grumbled and complained forgot that the landowner was no more obligated to hire them than he was the others. He would've been entirely just to have passed them by in the marketplace earlier in the morning but was that occupying their mind when payday came? Did they say, "Boy, you know, it's been a long day. We've worked hard but, you know, I'm just thankful that we're able to work today. I'm glad that the owner of this vineyard gave us the opportunity to work today." No. That wasn't in their hearts at all so they grumbled, they were envious and instead they should have been thankful.

2. We need to avoid falling prey to the work-for-wages spirit with respect to spiritual matters. Blessings received are not based on merit, not based on works, they're not based on what we earn. You know, with some disdain I admire faithfulness. God rewards faithfulness but many times when faithfulness is pointed to, now here's someone 75 years old and they're shown in the paper with their Sunday school pins, you know, for 46 years they've never missed a service, they've taught Sunday school faithfully for 46 years, that's commendable but does that earn them anything in the eyes of God? Are they any better off? Are they any further up the ladder? Is there any favored position given for that? You see, to buy into that is a merit mentality, the more we do, the more God owes us. Wrong. Wrong. The only way you get into the kingdom of heaven is on the merit of Jesus Christ. You do not get in based on anything you've done or anything you could do if you live long enough. It's grace, my friend. God doesn't owe you anything but because he's the gracious landowner, he rewards and he blesses out of proportion to the service rendered.

You see, as the sovereign ruler of the universe, God has the right to require perfect obedience and faithful service from all of us without obligating himself in the least. We owe him, he doesn't owe us. We owe him such service and obedience and if we were able to perfectly obey every command that God has given, to faithfully perform every duty which none of us have or could, we could only say at the end of that, "I've simply done my duty." Write down the reference Luke 17. Go back and read verses 7 through 10 that underscores this principle. "I've simply done my duty."

Some of us struggle with that. Jerry Bridges tells this illustration that's helpful, reinforces this truth. Suppose that you perfectly obeyed all the traffic laws of your state, always stayed within the speed limit, always stopped, came to a complete stop at every stop sign, always used your turn signal, obeyed every traffic rule, do you receive any reward for that? Does the state send you a check at the end of the year and say, "You know, we went over the records and near as we know, you obeyed all the traffic laws, here's a reward." Not at all. That is what you're supposed to do. You've only done your duty. You do not by perfect obedience to the traffic laws obligate the state to reward you. All you can say if you've done all that, we'll leave that between you and the Lord, all you could say is, "I've simply done my duty." So it is with God. God will be no man's debtor.

A third lesson we see here, this parable teaches is that the sovereignty of God is pervasive in every area of life. Do not fail to recognize the sovereignty of God and his right to distribute favors as he pleases. We see that first in the area of salvation. This parable

teaches this. God is the gracious landowner who went into the marketplace looking for workers and it was he who asked them to labor in his vineyard. God is pictured as the one who continues to call men into his kingdom. He keeps going back and going back and going back into the marketplace of life and seeing men standing idle and do you know what? That's not a bad decision to come to. If you're lost this morning, God is coming to the marketplace and he's looking for workers in his vineyard not because he needs workers but because he wants to be gracious to you. He wants to give you a job and he wants to reward you out of his grace, and if you'll take the position and say, "I'm just idle. I'm just standing around. There is nothing for me to do. There's no place for me to go. I'm at my wit's end!" That's what he's looking for. He'll put you to work in his vineyard.

He's the gracious landowner. Why do you think he went into the marketplace looking for workers at 5 o'clock when the day would end in an hour? How much profit, how much productivity do you think those one hour workers produced? They probably never hardly got their hands dirty. Did he do that for his benefit? Did the landowner do that for his benefit? No. I think that's another picture of the graciousness of the landowner. He wanted to bless this man. He wanted to give to him. He didn't have work. He had a family he needed to feed. So he had him come and work and that man probably thought, "Well, you know, it's 5 o'clock and 1/12<sup>th</sup> of a day's wages ain't gonna buy a lot but, you know, at least we won't starve tonight." And can you imagine when he got in line, stuck his hand out that was clean, hadn't even gotten dirty, and he got a full day's wages, do you think he was thankful?

You see, there's a lot of people in this story, a lot of workers, not everybody was grumbling. Do you think those guys were grumbling? Do you think those guys had a problem with the landowner? Do you think they accused the landowner of being unfair? No. They saw the landowner as gracious. Their heart was overflowing with thanksgiving. That ought to be the heart of every child of God.

God is still going into the marketplace looking for those to put to work in his vineyard even up to the 11<sup>th</sup> hour but may I say to you this morning, if you're sitting here and you're counting on the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, I've heard men say this, "Well, you know, I'll wait until, I'll wait until the 11<sup>th</sup> hour," is what they're basically saying. "I'll wait until my older age and then I'll repent." My friend, that is a very dangerous and presumptuous position to assume. I read recently the man who plans to repent at 11 o'clock often dies at 10:30. Don't be presumptuous. Do not be presumptuous with God. I believe J. C. Ryle said one thief on the cross who was saved that none should despair, but only one that none should presume. The offer of salvation is come, it's free, it's extended to all and if the Spirit of God is calling you this morning, don't put that off. Respond to the gracious landowner.

He's also sovereign in his right to bless according as he chooses. This is basically what he said to these ones that came grumbling, verse 15, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?" It really underscores what we're told in Romans 9:20 where Paul's writing in response to the doctrine of election, "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, Why did you make me like this? Does the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble



purposes and some for common use?" What's the obvious answer to the question? Of course he has that right. This is his universe. It belongs to him and everybody in it belong to him.

And lest you think I'm reading election into this passage, I don't fully understand why Jesus adds what he adds to his one verse of commentary because this is really new, you don't see these words in the end of chapter 19 but you see it, Jesus said in verse 16, "So the last shall be first and the first last, for many be called but few chosen." That's the doctrine of election and many have a problem with that. Many want to rail and say, "It's not fair!" I think God's answer to that question is the same that he gave to these men in verse 15, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?"

We also see a lesson here concerning their motives for service. I remind you that the workers who went to work at 6 o'clock, it seems that there was a negotiation that took place. They came to an agreement with the landowner to go and work in the vineyard for a penny, a denarii, a full day's wages, but as you see the landowner going into the marketplace to hire additional workers throughout the day, every other time you don't see this going on. You see the words, well, let's see if I can find them very quickly here. "Go into the vineyard and whatever is right I will pay you." Now what lesson is there here for service? I think the immature believer keeps his eye on his reward. "What's in it for me?" That's what Peter was saying. He had his eye on his reward and that was his motivation. "Lord, I'm ready to cut my loses. I left my fishing business, I left my family, and you've been talking about a kingdom but it hasn't been materialized and I want to know what's in it for me, and if I don't see some promise of a reward here, I'm about ready to cut my loses and go back to fishing." And that's the spirit of a lot of folks. That's the immature believer that has his eye on his reward. The mature believer trusts the reputation and the character of the landowner and says, "Hey, I know about you. I know how you treat men. Yes, I'll go work in your vineyard and whatever is right, whatever is just, I know you're a righteous man, I know you're a just man, I know you're a fair man, I know that you're a gracious man, I'll work for you."

That's the spirit we need to have in our service and my question this morning is are you going to insist on your sense of what is fair, equitable, merited, or are you going to trust your case to the gracious landowner? I'm gonna tell you where I'm gonna cast my lot, I'm gonna trust the gracious landowner. I'm not gonna insist on my sense of fairness, my sense of what I've earned, and if you're wise, you'll do the same.

Let's cultivate the spirit of the 11<sup>th</sup> hour workers. Consider the two groups of workers as they left the vineyard to make their way home. Do you have that in your mind, these men going different directions? They all have the same pay in their pocket. Identical, a day's wages but there are some in the group that have greater gain from the day than others. I've already said that one group didn't think the landowner was unfair at all. They thought he was very gracious and as they made their way home, their hearts were overflowing with thanksgiving that at that late hour, 5 o'clock in the day, the landowner came looking for them and hired them, put them to work in the vineyard and they go the same pay as those that had worked all day. They were very gracious. They were very thankful. But the

others, even though they had the same amount of pay in their pocket, they really went home impoverished because they had a spirit of envy in their heart, they were grumbling, they were dissatisfied with the landowner and it helps us to understand what the writer of Hebrews says, "Godliness with contentment is great gain."

How contented are you this morning? Which are you this morning, are you an 11<sup>th</sup> hour worker? Is that in your heart this morning? Are you of the mind of those that had worked all day? May God give us the spirit of the 11<sup>th</sup> hour workers.

One last thing before we close. Let's guard our hearts and avoid the sin of envy. I'd be interested to know if you'll just come up to me today, tomorrow, anytime, I'd be interested to know if anybody as I read this passage this morning identified with the workers who worked only one hour. How many of you went, "Ah, I'm so glad for those guys that got full day's wages for only working one hour." I suppose or I surmise that most of us identify with those that had worked all day and got the same. I would...well, maybe it's not fair for me to judge but I know in my own heart we instinctively identify with the workers who have worked all day. We place ourselves in the shoes of those men instead of the shoes of those who'd worked only one hour. We look at society around us and instead of Jesus Christ, we feel pretty good about ourselves and we consider ourselves 12 hour workers and we expect to be rewarded accordingly. That attitude will rob you of joy, will open the door for envy to rule your heart. Families, 4-5 children in a family and it's easy to suppose you just as the lots have been, as God's providence, as God's dealings with you are, circumstantially it looks as though you've kind of, you didn't get the same gracious blessings that others have and it's easy to say, "Well, look how his life is. Look how he's been treated." And when you start down that road, there's no contentment there. There's a spirit of envy that will reign and rule your heart and you'll be bitter and you'll be sour and you'll complain. You see, it all grows out of a misunderstanding of the gracious landowner, the gracious God that's revealed to us in the Scriptures.

If you're saved this morning, you ought to be eternally grateful that God came to you at whatever hour he came to you in the marketplace of life and called you to himself and put you to work in his vineyard. This is a message of grace. May God help us to understand it. May God help us to live our lives reflecting that we understand it.

Let us pray.

*Our Father and our God, how eternally thankful and grateful we are for how you've dealt with us. You have not dealt with us according to our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. Yes, Lord, as we look at our merit, we very often forget our demerits, we very often forget what our wages have earned us, that your word reminds us for the wages of sin is death. Thank you for the gracious gift of life that comes through your Son. Father, open our hearts and our minds and enlarge our understanding to your grace. Help us not to fight against it. Help us to embrace it. Help us to revel in it. Help us to be communicators of it. Father, when the message of grace reaches our hearts, it liberates us, it sets us free, it frees us from a spirit of envy and of grumbling and allows*

*us to serve you wherever you've placed us with gratitude and thanksgiving. Holy Spirit of God, take your word this morning and minister to our hearts and change us and mold us and make us into the people that you desire for us to be. May your Son be exalted in our midst. May we love him, may we worship him, may we unreservedly give ourselves to him in response to what he's so graciously done for us. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*