
Lesson Overview

Biblical Passage	Matthew 20:1-16
Supporting Passage	Romans 3:1-31
Memory Verse	Romans 2:11
Biblical Truth	God shows the same love and grace to all who respond to His call, regardless of when they come to Him.
Context	Jesus told a parable comparing the Kingdom of God to a vineyard owner who hired laborers at different times of the day yet paid them all the same agreed upon amount, thus emphasizing the landowner's grace and generosity.
Learning Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will understand that God gives grace to all His children according to His own measure.• Students will apply their understanding of God's grace in evaluating their motives for serving God.
Prayer Suggestions	<p>As you prepare to teach this lesson, pray for your students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pray that your students will understand how vast God's grace is.• Pray that your students will become instruments of God's grace, sharing freely with others who need Him.• Pray that your students will commit to serving God out of love for Him, not out of desire for blessings.

Biblical Commentary

Investigation

Context helps us understand biblical passages. This passage is preceded by the story of the rich man and Jesus (Matt. 19:16-30). When the rich man asked what he must do to enter heaven, Jesus told him to sell his possessions and follow Him. When he didn't, the Master said, "It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:23). The disciples responded in amazement. Jesus declared, "With man this **salvation** is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). This is the correct understanding of salvation: Only God provides the way. The following interaction between Jesus and His disciples teaches such a lesson. God is not limited by worldly concepts. In fact, as the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard unfolds, we see God's ways are not the world's ways.

In God's Kingdom, worldly values are reversed. Jesus taught God's grace is independent of worldly wealth. Fame, fortune, and importance aren't required to enter the Kingdom. Humility is. The final verse of chapter 19 ends with the same thought as the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard: "Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first" (Matt. 19:30).

In this parable of a vineyard owner, Jesus illustrated God's graciousness to "the last." For the purpose of teaching a powerful lesson, Jesus radically included a twist in the ending the audience wouldn't expect.

Importance

This passage teaches that **Jesus is God and Savior**. This passage of Scripture is important for students because it demonstrates that Jesus shows the same love and grace to all who respond to His call, regardless of when they respond.

Interpretation

Matthew 20:1-2 Jesus began this parable like He began many others: "The kingdom of heaven is **like** . . ." The comparison in this parable is to a landowner. He needed to hire workers to care for his field. About 6 a.m. ("early in the morning"), he went to the local market where unemployed workers would gather each morning. He promised to pay the workers a denarius for their day's work. The going daily wage for a worker in the first century was one denarius.

The landowner, in hiring workers, showed them kindness. Without a job, they were idle and wouldn't have money.

Matthew 20:3-5 After the landowner hired the first set of workers, he returned to hire a second set. It was now

around 9 a.m. He promised to pay them “whatever is **right**.” He also hired groups of workers at noon and 3 p.m. The new workers joined those already working in the field. His promise to pay “whatever is right” left the amount open; he revealed his definition of right at the end of the parable.

Matthew 20:6-9 Finally, the landowner hired a last group around 5 p.m. He asked this last group an important question: “Why have you been standing here all day long **doing nothing**?” But no one had hired them yet. The fact that the workers had been in the market does not indicate laziness or unwillingness to work. Their waiting all day illustrates their desire to work. By going to the market, the workers were ready to be hired but did not receive an offer until the end of the day.

The next hour, quitting time, the owner called the workers forward so the foreman could pay them. Having only worked an hour, the last group joined the other workers. From our human perspective of fairness, we would think they should only be paid for the hour they worked.

Matthew 20:9-12 Here, the story twists. First, the foreman paid the workers who were the last to be hired. Those who were hired last only worked one hour yet received a full wage. The first ones hired may have started calculating what sort of bonus they would receive; surely they would receive more money since they had worked longer. However, they too each received one denarius.

The landowner’s action caused those hired early in the day to grumble against him. Because they had worked longer, they expected to be paid more. Reminding the landowner of the longer hours and the heat of the day, they expressed their anger against their employer.

Matthew 20:13-16 The landowner responded in a mild rebuke, calling one of them “**friend**.” He reminded the ones complaining of his promise to pay them one denarius for a day’s work. This he had done. The owner pointed out the workers’ jealousy but acknowledged his own fairness. It was his money, and he could be generous if he was so inclined. Jesus concluded the parable by repeating the reversal: “The last will be first, and the first will be last” (v. 16; Matt. 19:30).

In Jesus’ time, there were religious leaders who assumed they had privilege in God’s **kingdom** (Luke 18:11). Even Jesus’ own disciples believed their position with Jesus gave them a privileged place (Mark 9:33-34). God recognizes no such privilege. He is not concerned solely with our service. While God does promise us salvation, eternal life, and glory with Him, He does not give us these things in exchange for our service. Rather, God gifts us with His riches according to His own desires.

Implications

God calls us to participate in Kingdom service and rewards us for that service. The workers in the story all received reward just as the landowner promised. Christians can know God will provide rewards for those who serve Him. But God’s blessings are given in His grace according to His own measure, not according to our work. Does your life show real evidence of service to God? How are you challenging your students to serve God? In this parable, Jesus pointed out the danger of a sense of entitlement in the Kingdom. There are modern-day Pharisees who feel entitled to special consideration because of their service to God. The motivations behind your service are important. Do you approach your place in the Kingdom with a sense of personal entitlement? Is your life motivated by reward or by the awe you feel toward the immeasurable riches God has freely given you? In what ways do you struggle with the feeling that you deserve more?

Teaching Plan

Connect

Review Questions

(5–8 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will answer five review questions from the previous lesson.

Download the “Review Questions” activity sheet. Print one copy for your own use.

After greeting students, use the review questions to test what they can recall from the previous lesson as well as to provide context for today’s lesson.

Master Teacher Option: What a Job

(15 minutes, moderate set-up)

Students will act out on-the-job scenarios.

Download the “What a Job” activity sheet. Cut apart the group assignments.

Divide students into four groups. Give each group one of the four scenarios from the “What a Job” sheet. Tell students that they will have five minutes to come up with a short skit based on their scenario. Ask teams to present their skits. When they finish, say: **These skits may have made you think about potential on-the-job situations. The lesson we will look at today deals with a similar situation. Jesus’ teaching on this topic might just surprise you.**

Explore

Master Teacher Key Study: The Parable of the Vineyard Workers

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will examine Jesus’ parable about the workers in the vineyard as recorded in Matthew 20:1–16.

Print one copy of the Master Teacher Key Study for your use. Provide a copy of the Student Worksheet and a pen for each student.

Pass out pens and copies of the Student Worksheet. Then, use the Master Teacher Key Study to teach Matthew 20:1–16.

Transform

Deeper Discussion

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss God's graciousness to all who trust in Him.

Learning Goal: Students will apply their understanding of God's grace in evaluating their motives for serving God.

Lead students to discuss these questions:

- **What is your motivation for serving God? Why do you “work” for Him? Describe in your own words how God's grace works.**
- **Why is God's grace not proportionate to the amount of work we do as Christians?**
- **Think about your life. Are you satisfied with your level of commitment to God? What changes can you make if you are not?**

Explain to your students that most of us feel a sense of entitlement at times. We don't always see the dividends of our investment in the Christian life. Sometimes someone new comes along, receives God's grace and seems like the favored one. Still, God's grace is not based upon the amount of work we have done in the Christian life, nor is it based on how long we have known Christ in a relationship. God's grace is given freely to everyone at any time in his or her life. They receive the same amount of grace that you have received. This is not our way of thinking, but it is God's way; He loves us without limitations.

Master Teacher Option: Ted Bundy

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will hear the story of Ted Bundy and his professed belief in God.

Download the “Bundy Interview” activity sheet.

Learning Goal: Students will apply their understanding of God's grace in evaluating their motives for serving God.

Read the “Bundy Interview” sheet. Lead a discussion about how “fair” it is for God to treat someone like Ted Bundy with the same compassion He treats a person who has served Him for life. Point out that God's grace is available to all who will receive it. It is not our place to pick who is worthy of God's love and grace.

Take Home Activity

Family Devotion

(10-15 minutes at home, easy set-up)

Distribute copies of the Family Devotion to students and encourage them to share the devotion with their family.

A copy of the Family Devotion will be included in your lesson PDF download.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)

*Use these questions to review the content from Lesson 30: "The Parable of Lost Things"
The correct answer for each question is printed in bold, italic font.*

1. In Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet, the king was preparing the banquet for whom?
 - a. **His son**
 - b. His daughter
 - c. His friend
 - d. His servant

2. In Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet, what happened when the king sent for his invited guests?
 - a. They came quickly.
 - b. They were afraid to come for fear of the King.
 - c. **They simply did not come.**
 - d. They brought uninvited guests.

3. In Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet, what becomes of some of the servants who told the invited guests to come to the banquet?
 - a. They ran away.
 - b. They were offered new jobs
 - c. **They were mistreated and killed by the invited guests.**
 - d. They returned with many guests.

4. In Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet, whom did the king tell the servants to invite after his invited guests refused to attend?
 - a. People from foreign countries
 - b. **People in the streets, both good and bad**
 - c. Field hands
 - d. Nobility from surrounding kingdoms

5. In Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet, what became of the guest who dressed inappropriately?
 - a. He was asked to leave quietly.
 - b. He was given wedding clothes to wear.
 - c. He decided to leave of his own volition.
 - d. **He was to be bound hand and foot and thrown out into the darkness.**

LESSON 31

PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD WORKERS

Biblical Passage: Matthew 20:1–16

WHAT A JOB

SCENARIO ONE

You receive your paycheck this week and notice it is about three times what you had expected. You go to your boss and tell her. She replies, "Oh, I forgot to tell you. Your check is correct. I thought you could use the money."

SCENARIO TWO

When you get your schedule for next week, your boss has you down for too many hours. You tell him you have after-school activities and don't want to work too much. The job is turning out to be more than you bargained for.

SCENARIO THREE

A new employee starts work today. He's getting the same amount per hour you are paid even though you've been working faithfully for two years. You run into your boss shortly after you find this out. What do you say to her?

SCENARIO FOUR

You go above and beyond the call of duty at your job. You stay late, do the hard jobs nobody wants, and are the one others go to for advice. You wonder if your boss notices because he never compliments you on your work.

THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD WORKERS

(15-20 minutes, easy set-up)

Use this outline and any of the corresponding activities to share the Biblical Truth with students.

Use this outline and the Biblical Commentary to prepare to share the truths of this passage with students. Download the Master Teacher Worksheet. Print a copy for each student. Encourage students to take notes on their worksheets as you teach. The three images on the worksheet correspond to the three points in the Master Teacher Key Study.

Introduction: In Jesus' time, there were religious leaders who assumed they had privilege in God's Kingdom. Even Jesus' own disciples believed their position with Jesus gave them a privileged place—and they often argued about who was most important. Sometimes Christians today have the same problem, thinking themselves better than others. God recognizes no such privilege. God promises salvation, eternal life, and glory to those who come to Him in faith. He does not give us these things in exchange for our service. God gifts us with His riches according to His own desires—but the greatest gift He gives is the promise of an eternal relationship with Him.

Illustration: Are you a freshman? Senior? These are important designations in school, for they place you into a group that shares age and experiences. But these designations also *exclude* you from other groups. Juniors in every high school make plans for how they will succeed in their senior year. Seniors everywhere view the actions and energies of the classes below them as beneath them. In this story there are several distinct "classes" of workers sent to the field at different times of the day. Who do you think considered themselves most important? The ones who had been working the longest, of course.

1. Groups (Matt. 20:1-9)

- Use the Biblical Commentary to distinguish the five groups of workers.
- Some of the last group sent to the field may have been doing nothing all day.
- The landowner showed great kindness in providing jobs for people who would otherwise have wasted the day.
- We are each without purpose—just hanging out wasting time—apart from the purpose given us to serve in the Kingdom of God.

Illustration: It happens every Monday during college football and basketball seasons—the rankings are tallied and published. People all over the country scan these listings to see if their team has been given respect by the coaches or sportscasters who vote, or has been ranked lower than they should be. These are very subjective measures—based on the opinions and attitudes of individuals in different regions. We love to compare our team to others and are ready to gripe when we feel we have been disrespected or treated unfairly.

2. Gripes (Matt. 20:9-12)

- A denarius was a day's wage.
- Use the Biblical Commentary to explain how Jesus put a twist on the story at the end.
- Ask students whether they would feel cheated or mistreated if put in the same position as the earliest group of laborers?
- The landowner gave them exactly what he promised—and God will, too.
- One of Satan's favorite tools is to convince people they are better than others.

Illustration: Labor negotiations can be tough. They can also interrupt life. When labor unions and employers are seeking to work out a new contract, or collective bargaining agreement, occasionally workers will strike, leaving their jobs in order to get the attention of company leadership.

3. Grace (Matt. 20:13-16)

- Use the Biblical Commentary to describe the interaction between the landowner and the laborers. Grace is God's unmerited provision for us. God doesn't give us what we deserve but what He desires for us to have.
 - According to the Scriptures, the "wages of sin" is death. Ask students if they would prefer the wage they have actually earned or the gift of God's grace?
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Conclusion: The nature of the world's value system is for people to compare themselves to others to evaluate whether they are worthwhile. In Christ Jesus, we are all valuable. When God looks at us, He does not see our good deeds. He doesn't compare us to others. Rather, God sees the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins. He sees us as made right through Christ. The workers in the story all received reward just as the landowner promised. Christians can know God will provide rewards for those who serve Him. But God's blessings are given in His grace according to His own measure, not according to our work.

LESSON 31

CHRISTOS
STUDENT EDITION

PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD WORKERS

Biblical Passage: Matthew 20:1–16

Memory Verse: Romans 2:11 “For God does not show favoritism.”

NOT WHAT YOU EXPECT

GROUPS

GRIPES

GRACE

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is your motivation for serving God? Why do you “work” for Him?
- Describe in your own words how God’s grace works.
- Why is God’s grace not proportionate to the amount of work we do as Christians?
- Think about your life. Are you satisfied with your level of commitment to God?
What changes can you make if you are not?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT . . .

“It is in the character of very few men to honor without envy a friend who has prospered.” — *Aeschylus, Agamemnon*

BUNDY INTERVIEW

Ted Bundy was an all-American boy turned serial killer. In his last interview with Christian author, speaker, and radio personality James Dobson, Bundy told Dobson that he came from a Christian family. Bundy expressed remorse and regret for the 23 murders for which he had been convicted.

Bundy said that his abnormal passion for sex and violence was rooted in the early years of his life when he found discarded pornographic material in his boyhood neighborhood. Bundy said that when the magazines were not enough that he took his fantasies to the next level.

Bundy admitted to Dobson that he was addicted to sex and violence. He warned of the dangers of pornography and its negative influence and potentially fatal results on young boys.

While talking with Dobson, the lights of the prison dimmed. Bundy knew that the electric chair that he was to sit in only hours later was being tested.

Bundy talked about God and forgiveness with Dobson. This has led many to believe that Bundy received God's grace and forgiveness at the end of his life—after brutally murdering over 23 women—and at his death went straight to the arms of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Source: Dobson, James. "Fatal Addiction: Ted Bundy's Final Interview." In *Life on the Edge*. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1995. <http://www.pureintimacy.org/gr/intimacy/understanding/a0000082.cfm> (accessed November 1, 2005).

LESSON 31

PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD WORKERS

Biblical Passage: Matthew 20:1–16

Josh had recently moved into a new community of affluence—but Josh didn't come from an affluent family. His parents drove used cars, had fixed incomes, grappled to make ends meet, and scraped to put something back into savings. Josh had a car to drive, but it wasn't like the sleek cars that other students in his high school had.

In spite of all the material shortages, Josh didn't seem to care. He could have carried a chip on his shoulder, thinking that he was always on the short end of the deal. But what he had surpassed anything he could have possibly received monetarily. Josh had a relationship with Jesus Christ that had transformed his life. To him, this was all that mattered in life. He might not have all the physical signs of wealth, but people still took note of what he did have, something for which they had a longing.

Read Matthew 20:1–16. Jesus told a parable about what seemed to be disproportionate wages. Perhaps the people who heard the parable failed to understand that God's grace is not disproportionate. It may seem in our worldly way of thinking that some have more than others and have worked harder and longer to deserve more. But in reality, when we have God's grace, we have everything we need in full.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS:

- What is your reaction to the way in which the owner of the vineyard handled the payment of his workers?
- How would you compare this to the way in which God gives out His grace to people today?
- Does it matter if some have known God's grace for most of their lives, while others receive His gift of salvation at the end of their lives? Why or why not?
- What will you do today to express your gratitude to God for this great gift that will never end?