

Men have often viewed the justice of God as “unfair” or “unjust.” The reason behind this is men don’t view God as holy. And their view of God is low and their standard of who God is related to their own standard. So when men see something they perceive as unjust it’s because they are looking at their own standard not God’s.

Romans 2:9-11, “There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.” God doesn’t think in terms of ethnicity or culture or social status. Furthermore, Colossians 3:23-25, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.” Simply put, God punishes those who do wrong and blesses those who do right. And He does so with utter impartiality.

No greater area of impartiality is God’s salvation for men. No matter what, where, how long, how old, or the circumstances you find yourself in, God’s saving grace is for all who will believe and it’s the same salvation to young, old and middle aged. Salvation has no preference list.

POINT 1 - THE PARABLE ITSELF AND IT’S MEANING

The parable teaches a magnificent truth about the Kingdom of Heaven. It’s like a landowner who went out to find laborers for his vineyard. For some context we need to understand what it meant to work in a vineyard in these days.

- It was hard labor
- Vineyards were generally planted on a slope
- Every year both new and old vines had to be pruned

The laborers were not to be paid a detestable amount, but a fair amount. God commands this. Leviticus 19:13, “You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.” They were to pay them at day’s end not hold onto it until morning. Deuteronomy 24:15, “You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he will not cry against you to the Lord and it become sin in you.”

The workday started at 6:00am and ended at 6:00pm generally. They would gather in hopes of finding work to feed their families. They weren’t lazy. The owner went early and then at the third, sixth, ninth and eleventh hour. When asked why they weren’t working (vs. 6) they responded because no one hired us. The owner said to go into the vineyard and work.

When the days wages were to be paid per the law, we see something unusual. The last were to be paid first. We go back to Matthew 19:30 and find the statement that is reiterated here. It shows man’s idea of fairness and God’s, and how they cannot be equal.

POINT 2 - THE OBJECTION TO THIS (VS. 11-12)

Again, men always reject God's ways because they seem unfair. The human reaction is one worked 12 hours for the same pay as the one who worked only 1. In our eyes that seems unfair. Solomon understood this in Ecclesiastes 7:15, "I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness." None of these men were paid wrongly or short changed. They all agreed to work for a certain wage for the day. That's it.

To dig into the parable and its meaning let's try to understand who and what is represented here.

- The vineyard is the kingdom itself
- The landowner is God the Father
- The foreman is Christ
- The laborers are believers
- The denarius is eternal life

The point being is every single person who comes to Christ receives eternal salvation. There are no exceptions or variations as in reference to when you came to Christ. Whether you come to Christ as a child or late in life or on a death bed.

The thief on the cross had only a few minutes or so. Yet he in enjoying fellowship with the Apostles and saints of God. He never attended a bible study, prayer group or read the law. Yet, based upon his faith and repentance, he is in glory with God. It was a brief time of thanksgiving for him, yet others, would suffer greatly for the gospel. Both will enjoy the glories of heaven.

The subject of the parable isn't personal rewards, but a common blessedness of eternity that all believers will enjoy. The immature, weak Christian has the same prospect of heaven as the mature, self-giving believer. All believers will receive the crown of life, crown of righteousness, crown of glory. The Greek phrasing behind these promises refer to the future blessing of all believers.

POINT 3 - THE HUMAN INJUSTICE

To human minds this seems unfair. But let's define fair for a moment. No man is worthy of salvation. No man can do justice in the eyes of God and satisfy His wrath. Isaiah 64:6, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away." This is who you are. No matter what you think of justice or what is right or what is fair or not. You are filthy. If God were fair, and give you what you deserve and earn, it would be hell.

Salvation is not in any way deserved. It is freely given to those who believe and repent, and it is God who give it. Everyone will have room in the Father's House, John 14:2, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."¹ No seniority list. No early boarding. No sky priority pass.

POINT 4 - THE SPIRITUAL TRUTH FOR US TODAY FROM THIS PARABLE

¹ KJV

First, the principal is that God is the one who initiates and accomplishes salvation. The landowner went out looking for workers. God does the seeking. God does the saving. We have nothing to add to His salvation for us. And whether He sought us late or early in life, we have the same eternal joy of salvation in heaven with Him. Keep praying for that one who seems too far gone. Keep praying for the one who has lived most of his life in rebellion. Pray for that little child of yours to know Christ early.

Second, God establishes the terms of salvation. The workers worked different hours, skill levels and times, but the same pay. The measure of God's gift of salvation is not based upon man's knowledge or skill or learning. It's not even based upon his accomplishments. But it's based upon God's grace which does not change and does not vary.

Third, he kept going back to the market place to call men. You should be glad that He kept coming after you. Here is what Jesus said in John 5:17, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." He will keep coming and calling until the end of the age.

Fourth, He redeems those who are willing. Everyone at the market place was needy. They had no hope of work but only what the landowner would give them. They had given up on their own resources and looked only to the landowner. When you come to know Christ, you put aside all you know and do. You don't bring your stuff with you. You don't negotiate with God on the terms of salvation. John 6:37, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."

Fifth, God is compassionate on those who have no resources, no hope, and acknowledge their hopelessness. The last group told the landowner they were idle because no one would hire them. He said go into the vineyard too.

Sixth, all that came into the vineyard worked. It may be the last hour, but they worked. Grateful to have a job, grateful today to have salvation we work for the gospel to be honored and to make much of Christ.

Seventh, this parable is rich with God's divine, sovereign grace. The men's work had nothing to do with what they were paid. Your work, efforts, good thoughts, or intentions mean nothing in God's never ending, endless supply of grace. Your best efforts fall short, always, Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

CONCLUSION

From the last one in to the first one in, all are equally saved and equally shown mercy. I don't want to belabor this point, but when the landowner paid the last first and the first last, it tells us the truth of God's equality in salvation. Herein lies the great truth of God's grace and mercy in vs. 15, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?" God is under no obligation to save you. He did so by seeking you out and offering you grace.