

# THE PARABLE OF THE WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

Matthew 20:1-16

## CONTEXT OF THE PARABLE – *Matthew 19:16-30*

Jesus answers a question about obtaining eternal life for a rich, young ruler. In his own way, Jesus tells the man what he must do to get eternal life (go sell your stuff). In doing so, the disciples are confused by Jesus' answer. This is a turning point in the context. Jesus then directs his attention to the question the disciples have. Their confusion is caused by their (correct) understanding of the old covenant.

## PICTURE AND FULFILLMENT

- Under the old covenant, **if you were obedient**, then you got “stuff.” *Deuteronomy 28:1-14*
- Under the new covenant, **if God is gracious to you**, then you get (spiritual) “stuff.” *Romans 8:28-30*

## WHO'S ON FIRST?

In answering Peter's question, Jesus states “But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.” (*Matthew 19:30*) This is crucial to understand because it is repeated at the end of our parable and is the only explanation we explicitly get. Jesus is explaining a new covenant idea about “stuff” to men somewhat stuck in an old covenant mindset about “stuff.” In verse 30 Jesus is summing up what he has already said. He's just saying it in a different way.

## APPROACHING THE PARABLE

The main teaching we take from the parable should be the same as what Jesus was telling Peter. The “kingdom of heaven” isn't meant to describe the landowner. It simply refers to the reality of spiritual things, over and against worldly things.

Is this an allegory? Maybe. It does not have to be. It would fit that the landowner is God, the vineyard is God's favored people (ethnic Israelites and later the church as the new Israel), and the denarius is the eternal reward. But, they could just be elements of the story.

## POINT OF THE PARABLE

The point of the parable is to test our values. Do we value what those around us (the world) values? Or do we value the things that matter in God's economy?

Notice that Jesus uses a play on words to get his point across. In *Matthew 19:30*, the last are those who have left things to follow Jesus and the first are the rich. In *Matthew 20:16*, the last are those hired last and first are those hired first. The last (those who don't value “stuff,” but value Christ) will be those who are rewarded with spiritual “stuff.” The first (those who value “stuff”) will go to hell because they do not value Christ. *Matthew 20:20-28*