

The Generous Master

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Matthew 20:1-16

Men and women spend a great deal of time questioning God's character. Why did He let that happen? Why did He give her that and not me? Why is He so slow to act? Behind many of these questions sits a quieter one: Is God good to me, or is He withholding? Is He generous, or is He stingy with what I actually need?

This morning we're going to look at a parable Jesus told about a Master who was extravagantly generous — and a group of workers who could not stand it. The parable forces a question that cuts closer to the heart than we might expect: not "Is God generous?" but "Can I live with how generous He is?" Scripture records two accusations men bring against God, and both are really accusations against His generosity.

Accusation #1: God is not generous enough — He punishes me for what others did.

Accusation #2: God is too generous — He gives the latecomer what I worked all day for.

The prophet is ministering to the children of Israel during the Babylonian Captivity. As a prophet, his ministry involved repeatedly reminding and warning them about their sins, especially those for which they were exiled in the first place. One of those sins was accusing God of withholding — of being stingy with mercy, of punishing them for what others had done. We see this expressed in **Ezekiel 18:2**, *"What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'?"* The literal image is simple: if a father eats unripe, sour grapes, it's his mouth that should pucker, not his children's.

Ezekiel delivers a correction from the Lord: stop using this proverb. **Ezekiel 18** especially goes into detail, laying out case after case to establish the principle that *"the soul who sins shall die"* — the righteous son of a wicked father will live, and the wicked son of a righteous father will die. Each person is accountable for their own faithfulness. God is dismantling an excuse.

Israel calls God's ways unjust (**Ezekiel 18:25, 29**). But hear what God actually offers: *'Repent and live'* (**Ezekiel 18:30-32**). That is not the voice of a stingy God. That is generosity — the generosity of a God who calls sinners back to Himself.

In Ezekiel, the people accused God of withholding generosity — of punishing them for what others had done. In Matthew 20, Jesus exposes the opposite complaint: that God is too generous, that He gives the latecomer what the all-day laborer worked for. Same accusation, flipped. Both reject the Master on the same grounds — He isn't who I want Him to be. Scripture affirms that God's generosity is not partiality. He does not play favorites in giving it — the same gift is offered to all who come.

Romans 2:9–11, *There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality.*

Colossians 3:24–25, *Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.*

Notice how Jesus frames this parable. It opens with **Matthew 19:30** — *"But many who are first will be last, and the last first"* — and closes with the same line in **Matthew 20:16**. The parable sits inside that frame. Whatever Jesus is teaching, this reversal is the point.

I. The Participants Called by the Master to His Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-7)

Rd	Schedule	Pay	Scripture	The human lens
1	6AM – 6PM	1 denarius	Matthew 20:1-2	\$16/hr
2	9AM – 6PM	"Whatever is right."	Matthew 20:3-4	\$22/hr
3	12PM – 6PM	"He did the same."	Matthew 20:5	\$33/hr
4	3PM – 6PM		Matthew 20:5	\$66/hr
5	5PM – 6PM		Matthew 20:6-7	\$200/hr

II. Why Jesus Speaks in Parables

- A. He answers this in **Matthew 13:11-17**. He does not say, "because stories are easier to remember." His answer is judicial, covenantal, and prophetically bound.
 - 1. *"Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given... Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."* (vv. 11, 13)
- B. Parables do two things simultaneously:
 - 1. They **reveal** truth to those with ears to hear
 - 2. They **conceal** from those hardening in unbelief
- C. Jesus reinforces this in **Matthew 13** when he quotes **Isaiah 6:9-10**.
 - 1. Jesus tells us plainly that He used a literary device that concealed truth from the unbelieving. To understand Scripture (truth), the Spirit of God must illuminate the passage (provide light and understanding). That is grace in action.
 - 2. "Knowing Scripture" is not a matter of the intellect and human ability; it is a grace that God provides.
- D. While not every detail in a parable means something, the main figures do. Jesus Himself tells us what kind of story this is — it's about "the kingdom of heaven." So the Master is God. The denarius is the gift of eternal life. The laborers are those called into His kingdom, some early, some late.

III. The Objection to the Master's Generosity (Matthew 20:9-12)

- A. The reversal of the payment order was unusual, but illustrative (**Matthew 19:30; 20:16**).
- B. The amount paid by the master was just, but radically challenging (**Matthew 20:10-12**)
 - 1. This action was a direct challenge to man's sense of what he had earned and what he was owed.

IV. The Vindication of the Master's Generosity (Matthew 20:13-16)

- A. **His address:** *Friend (Hetairos)* is not a term for a close friend but instead it is used in a casual relationship; it is courteous, not close. (Judas, Mt 26:50)
- B. **His question:** *Did you not agree with me for a denarius?*
- C. **His instruction:** Take *'what belongs to you'* and *'I choose'* without any input from you. *'to give to this last man the same as I give to you.'*
- D. **His prerogative:** *'Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?'*
- E. **His indictment:**
 - 1. *'Do you begrudge my generosity?'* / *'Is your eye envious because I am generous?'* (This was an indictment of their covetous or envious heart. The phrase 'evil eye' was a cultural idiom for a look believed to cast a spell that harmed its object. Jesus uses it here as a metaphor for an envious, covetous heart..)
 - 2. Their charge against the Master was not grounded in a love for justice but in the selfish assumption that the Master's generosity to others took something from them. It didn't. The extra they wanted was pay they believed they had earned — and they had not.
 - 3. The reality? All the payments to the workers were generous, and all received generosity.

V. The Light for Our Path

- A. Every person who comes to faith in Jesus Christ receives the same eternal life (The thief on the cross received the same eternal life as Peter and John).
- B. God is not a debtor. Grace is given out of mercy to whom He wills. Salvation is an act of mercy that should first bring us to our knees.
- C. A person will not be shut out of the kingdom because they come late.

VI. Can We Live with a God this Generous?

- A. So, why does the world struggle with a generous God? *Because a God who gives freely to latecomers is a God who cannot be earned, negotiated with, or put in our debt. He simply gives. And what He gives is not what we asked for — it is what we desperately needed. Eternal life. Himself.*
- B. If God gave us what we had earned, we would all be lost. Every one of us. What we actually need from God is not what we've earned — it is mercy we haven't. And that is exactly what He gives us in Christ.
- C. The late-hour laborer didn't earn a denarius. The Master simply gave it to him. That is the gospel.
- D. You come to Christ at whatever hour, and you receive the full gift of eternal life — not because you worked for it, but because He is generous.