

# Stories Jesus Told

## The Extravagant Generosity of God

Matthew 20:13-16

February 13, 2021

### The Context:

Our next story comes on the heels of Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler who went away sad because what Jesus asked him to do was too difficult.... *"sell all your stuff, give to the poor, then come and follow me."* {Matthew 19:16-22}

The rich and well to do in Jewish society were always viewed as blessed of God and entitled to heaven **BECAUSE** of their wealth and Jesus had just thrown a hand grenade into the foxhole by saying that it was easier for a camel to go through the *"eye of the needle"* than it was for a rich man to enter heaven. {Jewish legend stated that there was a small gate in Jerusalem that a camel could get through only on its knees and with great effort}

*"Well!! If it's difficult for a rich man to get into heaven than who can be saved?"* Thought the disciples.

Peter piped up and asked, *"we have left everything to follow you, what will there be for us?"* In other words, what do we get out of our devotion to you?

Jesus responded, *"... when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you will also sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Everyone who has left everything for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. "But many who are first will be last; and the last, first."* {Matthew 19:28-30}

Hey that sounds pretty good.... The compensation package sounds right and we get to sit on thrones and judge all Israel, Cool!! But, what does this first/ last and last/ first bit mean?

The disciples still did not understand that it was --- and is --- the unmerited grace of God and **NOT** wealth or position or works that open the doors of heaven. Knowing that He needed to correct this misunderstanding, Jesus told them a story:

### The Parable {Matthew 20:1-16}:

**The Kingdom of Heaven is like a Landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> When he and the workers agreed on the wage - a denarius for the day, he sent them out into the vineyard. <sup>3</sup> At the third hour He saw others standing idle in the market place and hired them as well. <sup>5</sup> He did this again at the sixth and the ninth hour. <sup>6</sup> At the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing around and asked them why they had been idle all day; 'Because no one hired us.' They responded. 'Go and work in my Vineyard' He told them.**

**At the end of the day the Owner of the vineyard asked the foreman to call all the workers in to collect their wage, beginning with the last group. Those hired at the end of the day received 1 denarius. When it was finally the first groups turn to get paid, they expected to be paid more, but were also paid 1 denarius. They began to complain to the Landowner, 'The men you hired at the end of the day only worked an hour yet you have paid them the same amount you paid us, who have been working through the heat of the day'. The Landowner replied, 'Friends, I am not taking advantage of you. Didn't we agree on your wage? Now take your pay and go home. It is my choice to pay the last group the same wage I paid you. It is not against the law to do with my money as I wish. Are you envious because of my generosity?' ---- "Thus the last shall be first, and the first last."**

### The Lessons:

#### The Landowner:

The landowner went looking for people to hire – He went in search of them ---- Sound familiar?

- **Genesis 3:9** - Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

Throughout the story it was the Landowner who was proactively searching for workers and when he found them, **HE** invited them to join **HIS** team and work in **HIS** vineyard for a set wage. He didn't just do this once --- he did it all day long.

At the end of the day each group received the promised wage. The Landowner made no distinction between the groups – they **ALL** received the **SAME** compensation

Salvation has been extended to **EVERYONE** and that includes those who first believed as well as those who believe at the last minute. The reward is the same – eternity with Jesus.

- **Genesis 15:6** - Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.
- **Luke 23:42-43** - Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup> Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth today, you will be with me in paradise."
- **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17** - For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up **together** with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.
- **Hebrews 11:39-40** - These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. <sup>40</sup> God had planned something better for us so that only **together** with us would they be made perfect.

That is the extravagant generosity of God –

### The Employees:

The original team had a problem = last week we identified it as comparative righteousness. They focused on what they had done compared with what the later team members had done and concluded that they were **ENTITLED** to more compensation because they had worked all day while others had only worked an hour.

We live in a merit-based world. If you work for 8 hours, you receive 8 hours-worth of pay and if you work more than 8 hours you get time and a 1/2. If you work for only an hour, you definitely **DO NOT** receive 8 hours-worth of pay..... That's how the world operates and we can get awfully twitchy if someone gets more than they deserve.

That is the position the 1<sup>st</sup> group took, even though they had been paid exactly what they had been promised.

There was no sense of gratitude toward the Landowner. They forgot the fact that they would still be standing on the corner if the Landowner had not gone looking for them. It was because of the **INITIATIVE** and **GENEROSITY** of the **LANDOWNER** and **HIS** invitation that they were getting a pay check at all. They were not a part of the team because of who they were but because of who the Landowner was.

The disciples had this same problem. They were constantly pre-occupied with their *"preferred"* status. They cherished a spirit of self-exaltation and superiority and constantly made comparisons with each other.

- **Luke 9:46** - And an argument arose among them as to which of them might be the **greatest**.
- **Luke 22:24** - And there arose also a dispute among them *as to* which one of them was regarded to be **greatest**.

They had forgotten that their *"status"* had nothing to do with them and everything to with Jesus.

- **Matthew 4:19-20** - And He said to them, "**Follow Me**, and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>20</sup> And they immediately left the nets, and followed Him.
- **Matthew 9:9** - And as Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, "**Follow Me!**" And he rose, and followed Him.
- **John 1:43** - The next day He purposed to go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "**Follow Me.**"

That was then and this is now and Christians face the same temptation toward entitlement and self-promotion, therefore, this story applies to us too:

- **Ellen White {COL 401-402 Adapted}**: All boasting of merit in ourselves is out of place:
  - **Jeremiah 9:23-24** – "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, <sup>24</sup> but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.
  - **Ephesians 2:8-9** - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God --<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.

There is no occasion for one to glory over another or to grudge against another. No one is privileged above another, nor can anyone claim the reward as a right. The first and the last are to be sharers in the great, eternal reward, and the first should gladly welcome the last. He who grudges the reward to another forgets that he himself is saved by grace alone....

It is not the length of time we labor but our willingness and fidelity in the work that makes it acceptable to God. In all our service a full surrender of self is demanded. The smallest duty done in sincerity and self-forgetfulness is more pleasing to God than the greatest work when marred with self-seeking. He looks to see how much of the spirit of Christ we cherish, and how much of the likeness of Christ our work reveals. He regards more the love and faithfulness with which we work than the amount we do.