

## Matthew 20:1- 16

### **The last will be first and the first will be last.**

**Introduction.** This is another parable to illustrate an aspect of the values of the 'kingdom of heaven' = God's rule.

#### **Vv. 1-7 Hiring workers throughout the day.**

Hired group 1 to be paid a denarius (usual daily wage).

Hired group 2 arrive later, 9am, also to be paid a denarius.

Hired group 3, mid-day, to be paid 'whatever is right'.

Hired group 4, 3pm, to be paid 'whatever is right'.

Hired group 5, 5pm, 'go and work in my vineyard'.

#### **Vv. 8-12 Pay time.**

End of working day each worker was paid starting with the last hired. Each received a denarius (full day's pay). The ones hired first, at the beginning of the day, expected to get more because the others had only worked part of the day. They began to grumble when they also only received a denarius.

#### **Vv. 13-15. The generous vineyard owner.**

The owner reminded the first hired that they had agreed to work for a denarius. The owner claimed the right to be generous with his own money.

#### **V. 16. Jesus summarises the parable.**

**The last will be first and the first will be last. God's rule will see a reversal of worldly values.** God's generosity far surpasses human ideas of fairness and reward for service.

**Parables are normally open-ended.** They teach a central point often to the advantage of some and to the opposite for others. This parable has parallels with the Prodigal Son, with like generosity and resentment. The prodigal Son was clearly aimed at the religious leaders who objected to Jesus' acceptance of tax collectors and sinners (Lk. 15:1-3). The conclusion of the parable emphasises that **God's 'rewards' are an expression of His grace, not based on the idea of rewarding service.**

**Our response.** It is easy to sympathise with the first workers but this is to place ourselves as opponents of God! God's mercy is beyond His children's capacity to understand. It is good news that God's grace is not based on merit, if so, who could be confident?

**Reflection/Response.** How do we rejoice in seeing God's grace at work when sinners repent? How does our faithfulness reflect God's grace? How do we celebrate the freedom of not needing to try to earn God's love?