



Normal Campus Sermon Study - 7.5.2026

Leader's Corner

Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

Main Idea: The Kingdom of God does not operate on merit, comparison, or scorekeeping—it operates on grace. When we begin measuring what we've done compared to others, we lose sight of the generosity of the Landowner who graciously invited us into His vineyard in the first place.

Main Passage: Matthew 20:1-16

Main Practice: Replace comparison with gratitude by celebrating God's generosity toward others while remembering that your greatest reward is knowing the Landowner and participating in His Kingdom.

Prayer and Praise

Opening Prayer:

Gracious Father,

Thank You for pursuing us long before we ever sought You. Thank You that Your Kingdom is built not on earning but on grace, not on comparison but on generosity. Today, expose the places where we keep score, where jealousy has stolen our joy, and where entitlement has clouded our gratitude.

Open our eyes to marvel again at Your kindness. Teach us to rejoice whenever Your grace reaches another person. Shape us into people who celebrate Your generosity rather than compare our blessings.

May Your Holy Spirit soften our hearts, deepen our gratitude, and draw us closer to Jesus, our generous Savior and faithful Landowner.

In His name we pray.

Amen.

Worship Suggestions:

- Gratitude
- Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me
- Goodness of God

Group Discussion

Think of a time when you thought, “That’s not fair!” Looking back, did your perspective eventually change? What happened?

Read Matthew 20:1–16 together.

1. What surprises or even bothers you about Jesus’ parable?

- Why do you think this story creates such a strong emotional response?
- What assumptions about fairness does it challenge?

2. Why do you think Jesus tells this story immediately after Peter asks, “What will we get?” (Matthew 19:27)

- What does Peter’s question reveal?
- In what ways can sincere followers of Jesus slowly begin thinking this way?

3. What do you notice about the landowner throughout the story?

- What actions reveal his character?
- Which qualities of God are emphasized?

(Pursuit... invitation... generosity... compassion... kindness.)

4. The early workers were content until they began comparing themselves to others.

Why is comparison so dangerous spiritually?

- How does comparison steal joy?
- When have you experienced this yourself?

5. Why is it significant that every worker received exactly what they needed rather than what they earned?

- What does this teach us about grace?
- How is God’s economy different from our world’s economy?

6. Which worker do you most naturally identify with today?

- The grateful 5 p.m. worker?
- The overlooked worker?
- The scorekeeping 6 a.m. worker?
- Why?

7. Where in your life are you keeping a scorecard with God—feeling like He owes you because of your service, sacrifice, or faithfulness? What might God be inviting you to release?

8. Whose blessing has recently stolen your joy? What would it look like to genuinely thank God for that person’s blessing instead? Why is gratitude such a powerful antidote to comparison?

9. Is there someone who came to faith later, struggled longer, or seems “less deserving,” yet has received grace you secretly resent?

- Why do we sometimes struggle celebrating God’s grace toward others?
- How does remembering our own story reshape our perspective?

10. Who are the “5 p.m. people” in your life—the people who assume it’s too late for God?

- Who comes to mind immediately?
- How could you intentionally invite them into the vineyard this month?

Read Matthew 20:17–19

Closing Reflection:

Why do you think Matthew intentionally places Jesus’ prediction of His death immediately after this parable?

How does the cross become the greatest evidence that God’s Kingdom is built on grace rather than merit?

Practice

As a Group:

This week, intentionally celebrate someone else's blessing.

Rather than comparing, send a note, make a phone call, or simply tell someone, "I'm genuinely thankful for what God is doing in your life."

Then pray together by name for one "5 p.m. person" each member hopes to invite closer to Jesus.

Individually:

Spend time with the Lord asking:

"Where have I been keeping score?"

Write down one comparison you've been carrying.

Next to it, write three specific ways God has already been overwhelmingly generous to you.

Finish by thanking Him for His grace—not because you've earned it, but because He is good.

Finally, identify one "5 p.m. person" and take one intentional step toward them this week through a conversation, invitation, meal, text, or prayer.

Further Study

Additional Scriptures:

- Ephesians — Saved by grace, not works.
- Romans — Christ died for us while we were still sinners.
- Luke — The father welcomes the prodigal with extravagant grace.
- Philippians — Reject selfish ambition and embrace Christ's humility.
- James — Envy and selfish ambition versus the wisdom from above.
- Romans — "Rejoice with those who rejoice."

Theological Reflection:

"Religion says, 'I obey; therefore God accepts me.' The gospel says, 'God accepts me in Christ; therefore I obey.'" — Tim Keller

"Envy is sorrow over another's good." — Thomas Aquinas

Leader Insight:

One of the beautiful tensions in this parable is that every worker receives the same denarius—but not because every worker contributed equally. They receive the same payment because the Landowner is equally generous. Grace is not the denial of justice; it is the overflow of God's goodness.

The deeper invitation for mature disciples is to move beyond merely being grateful that we've been invited into the vineyard and to become people who delight whenever someone else is invited too. The Kingdom is never diminished when another person receives grace. In fact, heaven rejoices every time another worker enters the vineyard. Our greatest reward has never been the paycheck—it has always been the privilege of knowing the Landowner and joining Him in His work.