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**Stories of the Master**

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~ **The Generous Landowner and the Greedy Workers** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read Matthew 20:1-28.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

**1. Read the text of the story.**

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Matthew 20:1-28 NASB	Matthew 20:1-28 NLT
<p>“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup>When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup>And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; <sup>4</sup>and to those he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ And so they went. <sup>5</sup>Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. <sup>6</sup>And about the eleventh <i>hour</i> he went out and found others standing <i>around</i>; and he <i>said</i> to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day long?’ <sup>7</sup>They <i>said</i> to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He <i>said</i> to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’</p> <p><sup>8</sup>“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard <i>said</i> to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last <i>group</i> to the first.’</p> <p><sup>9</sup>When those <i>hired</i> about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. <sup>10</sup>When those <i>hired</i> first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup>When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, <sup>12</sup>saying, ‘These last men have worked <i>only</i> one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.’ <sup>13</sup>But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? <sup>14</sup>Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. <sup>15</sup>Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?’ <sup>16</sup>So the last shall be first, and the first last.”</p> <p><sup>17</sup>As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the</p>	<p>“For the Kingdom of Heaven is like the landowner who went out early one morning to hire workers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup>He agreed to pay the normal daily wage and sent them out to work.</p> <p><sup>3</sup>“At nine o’clock in the morning he was passing through the marketplace and saw some people standing around doing nothing. <sup>4</sup>So he hired them, telling them he would pay them whatever was right at the end of the day. <sup>5</sup>So they went to work in the vineyard. At noon and again at three o’clock he did the same thing.</p> <p><sup>6</sup>“At five o’clock that afternoon he was in town again and saw some more people standing around. He asked them, ‘Why haven’t you been working today?’</p> <p><sup>7</sup>“They replied, ‘Because no one hired us.’</p> <p>“The landowner told them, ‘Then go out and join the others in my vineyard.’</p> <p><sup>8</sup>“That evening he told the foreman to call the workers in and pay them, beginning with the last workers first. <sup>9</sup>When those hired at five o’clock were paid, each received a full day’s wage. <sup>10</sup>When those hired first came to get their pay, they assumed they would receive more. But they, too, were paid a day’s wage. <sup>11</sup>When they received their pay, they protested to the owner, <sup>12</sup>‘Those people worked only one hour, and yet you’ve paid them just as much as you paid us who worked all day in the scorching heat.’</p> <p><sup>13</sup>“He answered one of them, ‘Friend, I haven’t been unfair! Didn’t you agree to work all day for the usual</p>

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twelve *disciples* aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, <sup>18</sup> “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, <sup>19</sup> and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify *Him*, and on the third day He will be raised up.”

<sup>20</sup> Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. <sup>21</sup> And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She \*said to Him, “Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.” <sup>22</sup> But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They \*said to Him, “We are able.” <sup>23</sup> He \*said to them, “My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.”

<sup>24</sup> And hearing *this*, the ten became indignant with the two brothers. <sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

wage? <sup>14</sup> Take your money and go. I wanted to pay this last worker the same as you. <sup>15</sup> Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money? Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?”

<sup>16</sup> “So those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last.”

<sup>17</sup> As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside privately and told them what was going to happen to him. <sup>18</sup> “Listen,” he said, “we’re going up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die. <sup>19</sup> Then they will hand him over to the Romans to be mocked, flogged with a whip, and crucified. But on the third day he will be raised from the dead.”

<sup>20</sup> Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectfully to ask a favor. <sup>21</sup> “What is your request?” he asked.

She replied, “In your Kingdom, please let my two sons sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left.”

<sup>22</sup> But Jesus answered by saying to them, “You don’t know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink?”

“Oh yes,” they replied, “we are able!”

<sup>23</sup> Jesus told them, “You will indeed drink from my bitter cup. But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. My Father has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen.”

<sup>24</sup> When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. <sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. <sup>26</sup> But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. <sup>28</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

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## 2. Discover key cultural and historical insights

From *A Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, by Bruce J. Malina, 100-102

1. On the domestic status ladder, day laborers were near the bottom and among the poorest.
2. They were usually landless – either sons who did not inherit or persons who had lost ancestral lands through debt and drifted into cities and villages looking for work
3. The men do not go looking for work. They still have some honor and they must be approached.
4. The evil eye
  - the eye was seen as the window of the soul
  - the eye was the conduit through which inner feelings could be projected onto the world
  - envy, greed, covetousness, jealousy come from the heart, emanate out of the eye and onto other people causing harm. “Diseases of the eye are more contagious to those exposed and more instantaneously so that other diseases, so penetrating and swift is the power of the eye to admit or communicate disease.” (Plutarch)
  - Thus, one wanted to avoid the glance of those who would project harm upon others through their eyes
  - Children were thought to be most vulnerable so they were often kept out of the public
  - Material goods and honor were subject to attack

Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes – Kenneth Bailey

1. The owner needs workers. It is either harvest time or the vines need pruning.
2. A corner of the village would be the place where workers assemble hoping for a job.
3. One denarius would be the standard wage.
4. He returns half way through the morning to find men still standing. Because they are standing they are alert and showing they are ready to work. He does not say how much he will pay, but will only give what is right. He must be respected for the workers agree to work without a wage being offered. They trust him.
5. It would be shocking for men to be standing at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. Perhaps they did not want to return home in humiliation.
6. It is amazing that the owner is the one walking to the village to hire. This would be unheard of and would be a job normally taken by the foreman.
7. The owner starts paying the 11<sup>th</sup> hour workers first. He could have avoided trouble by paying the all day workers first
8. “We want more.” This is not the cry of the underpaid but of the justly paid who do not appreciate grace. Grace is amazing for some and infuriating for others.

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**Answer these reflective questions.**

**Jesus began this parable by saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner.” In what ways does the landowner show the values of the kingdom of God?**

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**The landowner and his foreman would have been experts in knowing how many men to hire to get the work done. Why do you think the landowner kept going back into the village after he made the initial hire of men?**

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**Do you think it was right for the landowner to give the workers who worked only one hour the same amount of money that he gave those who worked all day? What is the lesson Jesus was trying to teach?**

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**Jesus finished the parable by saying, “The last will be first and the first will be last.” What did he mean by this and what lesson does it hold for us?**

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**Jesus told his disciples that whoever wishes to become great must become a servant and whoever wishes to be first must become the slave of all. What did Jesus mean by this? Does he want all of his people to be servants? Do you have the heart of a servant?**

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