

Master of the House

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[0 : 00] For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

And going out about the third hour, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace. And to them, he said, you go into the vineyard, too. And whatever is right, I will give you.

So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour, he went out and found others standing. He said to them, why do you stand here idle all day?

They said to him, because no one has hired us. He said to them, you go into the vineyard, too. And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last up to the first.

And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius.

[1 : 06] And on receiving it, they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, these last only worked one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. But he replied to one of them, friend, I am doing you no wrong.

Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?

Or do you begrudge my generosity? So the last will be first, and the first last. Thank you. Let's pray. Father, we are grateful to receive your word this morning.

And we would ask, as you have allowed us to sing together, that you would show us Christ in your word. We ask that our attention would be turned to Jesus, to your kingdom, to the salvation that you so generously provide.

That we would remember your good gifts. We're grateful this morning for the good gifts of a place to gather, for voices to use, to sing to you, for instruments, and for some equipment to help us be able to hear one another.

[2 : 29] We're grateful for your word. We're grateful for these dear friends to gather with. We're grateful, blessed Holy Spirit, that you are here with us, among us, in us.

We are eager to hear what you have to say to us from your word. So would you please speak, O Lord, as we come and sit under the preaching of your word.

We ask this for your glory and for our good. In the good, strong name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. You can turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 20.

Matthew chapter 20. The moment we compare ourselves with others, happiness often turns to envy.

You were content with your house, weren't you? Until you saw the one that your college friend just bought on social media.

[3 : 42] Your job felt meaningful until a colleague got the promotion that you thought was going to be yours. And now you find yourself scrolling through all kinds of opportunities on Indeed.

Your spouse was enough until someone else caught your attention. Your lunch was just fine until you looked over and saw what that other student was eating and you wanted what they had.

Your car was reliable until your neighbor pulls into his driveway with a brand new big black truck.

Your car was a man. Suddenly, what you first received with gratitude, or at least let's say with contentment, now feels small, undesirable, unacceptable, unfair.

However, as the old saying goes, comparison is the thief of joy. And something like this is what happens in the parable that Kara read for us this morning.

[5 : 03] The workers all receive a paycheck. Everybody gets paid. But instead of receiving it with gratitude or celebrating their employer's generosity, comparison steals their joy.

And envy fills their hearts. And grumbling comes out of their mouths. It seems that Jesus tells this parable directly to his disciples.

And perhaps it's his way of answering a question that Peter asks just before this. In Matthew 19, after Jesus explains how hard it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God, the disciples are shook.

And they say, well, then who can be saved? See, here's the problem. In their minds, wealth was either a ticket into God's kingdom, or it was the proof that you were already there.

What are they to make of this? Peter wants to clarify. And so he speaks up in verse 27. He asks, what about us? This is Matthew 19, 27.

[6 : 33] What about us? We've left everything for you. We've left families, and we've left houses. We've left properties. We've left jobs.

What's going to happen to us? In response, Jesus promises his disciples an astonishing reward. And then he clarifies his reward. Sorry, clarifies this promise with a proverb. And then he illustrates his proverb with a parable. Are you ready?

Look at Matthew chapter 19 and verse 28. Jesus said to them, here's his promise. Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my namesake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

[7 : 52] Astonishing promise. Here's the clarifying proverb. But many who are first will be last and the last first.

For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. Now, for the disciples, the beginning of this story would have seemed very normal.

But to us, it sounds a little unusual. And I think this is why. Most of us work for a salary. We expect to get paid a set amount every month, regardless of how many hours we work.

And even those of us who work hourly expect that as long as we keep showing up and doing the job, we will continue to be paid that hourly wage.

[9 : 01] The laborers in Jesus' story were in a different position. These are day laborers. They are desperately poor.

They are living on the very bleeding edge of destitution. They worked one day at a time. No guarantee for tomorrow.

They worked one day at a time. And at the end of the day, they received a day's wage. God's law actually requires this. This is Deuteronomy 24, verse 14.

You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns.

You shall give him his wages on the same day before the sun sets. For he is poor and he counts on it.

[10 : 06] One day's work before you leave, you get paid for that day. Now you may feel like your household lives paycheck to paycheck.

We feel that sometimes, don't we? But for these laborers, that was literally true. They really are living paycheck to paycheck.

The money that they get for working at the end of the day is just enough to see them through to the next evening. So the master goes out early, finds laborers, agrees to pay them for a day's worth of work and sends them into the vineyard.

So far, so good. Jesus' parable matches their experience of life. It upholds God's law. One day of work equals one day of pay. But as we have come to expect, Jesus adds an unexpected twist.

The master of the house hires additional laborers throughout the day. Look at verse three.

[11 : 21] And going out about the third hour, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace. And to them, he said, you go into the vineyard too.

And whatever is right, I will give it. I will give you. So they went. Going again, about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.

Now, most of us work between eight and 12 hours a day. And when Jesus told this story, that was true as well. Their day, their work day, started at 6 a.m.

and ended at 6 p.m. So the third hour would be three hours after starting time. So when you see that in the Bible, the third hour, they're talking about nine o'clock.

And when you see the sixth hour, you're talking about noon. You're halfway through your 12-hour day. And then the ninth hour would be 3 p.m.

[12 : 31] What's happening here? More laborers are hired, but they are each working less of the day.

And then, in order to make his hearers really think, Jesus escalates this tension one more time. The master apparently needs more laborers.

Perhaps it is harvest time. And he knows the rain is coming. And he's got to get the crop in. So he goes one more time into the market and he finds some who didn't get hired to work at all day, for the whole day.

They've been standing around for 11 hours waiting for someone to hire them. Verse 6. And about the 11th hour, if you're doing the math, it's 5 p.m.

and they get done at 6. About the 11th hour, he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, Why do you stand here idle all day?

[13 : 44] And they said to him, Because no one has hired us. He said to them, You go into the vineyard too.

Now, those who were hired first, if you look back at the first couple of verses, it seems as though there is some sort of a negotiation that they do with the master.

One day's work for one day of pay. Those that are hired at 9 and noon and 3 p.m., they didn't seem to settle on any exact terms, but the master does say, I will pay you whatever is right.

But notice with this last group, there's no mention of pay at all. They're only going to work for one hour. He just says to them, You go into the vineyard and work.

Now, if you were this master and it was quitting time, what would you do? I'd pay the workers in the order they were hired.

[15 : 05] That would be the simplest way to do it, right? That way, those who get hired first get the amount that they agreed to. And those who were hired throughout the day, they get what is right.

And those who were hired at 5 p.m. and who only worked one day, they would get whatever is left over. That's how I would do it. That's not how Jesus tells the story.

Look at verse number 8 and notice the detail that Jesus adds to the story here. And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last up to the first.

In other words, they're all standing around and they're all going to see that those who start latest, the last, what they got.

Everybody's going to know what those who worked less and less and less all the way up to those who worked the whole day. Verse 9. And when those hired about the 11th hour came, each of them received a denarius.

[16 : 28] They all got paid for the whole day. Now, when those hired first came, verse 10, they thought they would receive more.

but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it, they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.

at High Point Networks, at the end of every year, employees get a generous profit-sharing check. And the way it works is that they set the amount that each employee is going to get, and then if you worked the whole year, you get that amount. If you work less than the whole year, you get a proportion of that amount.

That makes sense, doesn't it? That's how we would do it. More work means more pay. The laborers who were hired first agreed with the master for one day's wage.

[17 : 54] They were content with that until they looked around and compared themselves to others. verse 10.

When they saw that the last workers received a full day's wage, suddenly they thought they were going to get more. Listen to how the master responds in verse 13.

But he replied to one of them, friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?

Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you.

Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?

[19 : 08] That last phrase, do you begrudge my generosity? This is an idiom in Jewish culture. It literally says this, is your I evil because I am good.

Now, English has the concept of an evil eye, but when we think of an evil eye culturally for us, it's kind of a superstitious thing, like casting a curse or something like that.

But for the first hearers, they would understand this idea of an evil eye. It meant envy and stinginess, a bad attitude about another's prosperity.

This becomes more clear in texts like Matthew chapter 6, where Jesus describes the good eye and the evil eye in connection with earthly treasure.

And we also find it in Deuteronomy chapter 15. This is what we read there. Take care, lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother and you give him nothing and he cried to the Lord against you and you be guilty of sin.

[20 : 33] So an evil eye culturally has this idea of closed fist ed stinginess. Well, a good eye means open handed generosity.

So when the master asks, is your eye evil because I am good? He's essentially saying, are you envious because I am generous?

But notice this also. The master doesn't merely make this contrast. He calls himself generous. generous. And that word connects us back into Matthew 19.

There Jesus says this, there is only one who is good, generous. And who is that?

It's God. Matthew wants us to connect these dots. When the master says, I am generous, Jesus is subtly pointing us to the goodness of God himself.

[21 : 50] And God's goodness always shows up in gracious generosity. And grace shouldn't make us grumble.

It ought to make us grateful. faithful. Here's the problem. Those who were hired first have a self-centered sense of what fairness means.

Remember, these day laborers are living paycheck to paycheck. What will happen if those who are hired at the 11th hour don't get paid for a whole day's work?

They won't have enough to support their family for the next day. They won't have enough to survive.

Rather than grumbling about the master, these laborers who were hired first should have been shocked at his generosity and his care for these laborers who only gave him one hour of the day.

But here he is, so generously providing for them to make sure that they get through to the next day. Jesus restates the proverb that he started with in verse 16.

[23 : 20] So the last will be first and the first last. first. Now, I've understood this little proverb as saying the person who is at the back of the line will get to go to the front of the line, and the person who is at the front of the line will have to go to the back of the line.

first. But these words, first and last, they're plural. You would read it like the last people will be first people, and the first people will be like the last people.

This is not about individuals trading spots. First and last are categories, groups of people. What is Jesus saying here? Jesus says that our categories of first and last, of greatest and least, of those who we deem deserving and undeserving, these categories, they don't hold up in God's kingdom.

These categories that we have of status and rank and superiority and wealth and seniority and privilege, these are not the way God's kingdom operates.

It's like Jesus says, not in my kingdom. In my kingdom, God's justice means he never wrongs anyone.

[25 : 01] The full day laborers got exactly what they agreed to. In my kingdom, God's grace ensures that he always gives more than anyone deserves.

Like those one-hour workers who received a full day's wage. In God's kingdom, human categories that we hold on to, that we think are so important, these categories collapse under divine graciousness.

God's kingdom does not operate on earth's economics. Here, seniority is honored.

Here, the very best are consistently celebrated. Here, the hardest workers get the greatest reward. Lord, but no one deserves God's kingdom.

No one earns their place. We all enter by grace, through faith, at the cross of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. I love how Paul writes about this idea in 2 Corinthians 8, and I think this beautiful text shines so brightly in the light of this parable.

[26 : 24] This is what Paul says, 2 Corinthians 8, and verse 9, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

grace and the generosity of the master of the house points us to God's generosity in Christ.

His goodness turns our expectations upside down. His grace humbles all of our pride, and his generosity ought to free us from comparison that leads to envy.

Grace shouldn't make us grumble. grateful. It ought to make us grateful. When you see someone more spiritually gifted than you are, be thankful for God's good gifts.

Pray for them that their ministry flourishes. when another believer serves in a way that's very different from how you serve, and maybe it even makes you a little uncomfortable, and you wonder, do I have a place?

[27 : 57] Is there anything for me to do? I see that person serving, and I just don't know how I fit in. I wonder if instead of thinking that way, we might learn to celebrate the diversity of the body, and we might remember to be ordinarily faithful to God's call on our own lives.

When a coworker gets the promotion that you thought was going to be yours, thank God for providing for their family, and remember that you've been blessed to bless others.

When the church that generously shares this worship space with us, puts up a big old sign over the door, and I want to grumble and wonder about what is this going to do?

How is anybody going to find us? Are people going to be confused when they show up? What if instead I'm thankful that God is blessing them instead of being worried about people finding us?

When your neighbor moves out and upgrades, remember that God is faithfully providing all that you need. When someone is better than you, in the gym, in the home, on the stage, in the workplace, just go ahead and be humble about it.

[29 : 34] Encourage them, and keep trusting that God always does what is right. When your life seems unusually difficult, and suffering seems like the rule rather than the exception, please don't begrudge God's blessings on someone else, and don't stop believing that his grace is sufficient for you.

Parables are stories Jesus told to make people think. They challenge our assumptions, they shake up our expectations, they press us to consider what we truly believe about God and his kingdom and his call on our lives.

So let's stop comparing what God gives, whether it is prosperity or whether it is suffering. Let's remember that his justice wrongs no one, and that his grace is always so much more than we deserve.

Instead of living with an evil eye that envies, let's live with a good eye that celebrates his generosity and follows his example so that we give generously with open hands and grateful hearts. Let anyone who has ears to hear listen. Let's pray. Father, we're grateful again to receive your word.

[31 : 30] Holy Spirit, where you have shown the light of your word on some portion of our heart that we would prefer to keep in the dark, would you please grant repentance and help us to repent.

Thank you for the forgiveness that you have already granted to me today for my foolish thinking coming in here this morning so concerned about something that was hanging over the door.

Thank you for how this parable, this story that Jesus told, corrects my thinking. Would you please do a work in our hearts?

cause us to be grateful for your generous goodness and cause us to reflect it to others.

Help us not to be grumblers, but those who are full of gratitude for all of your good gifts. we ask this father because we want to align our lives with your kingdom right now.

[32 : 47] We believe that your kingdom has come in our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. So we choose to align the way that we behave with the values of your kingdom now.

Would you please help us to continue to think about this particular parable, to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's work on our hearts.

Grant us greater faith in you, greater confidence in your kindness, greater hope in your promises.
We ask this good father in Jesus name.
Amen.