

The compassionate master

Jesus' Parables

No. 1

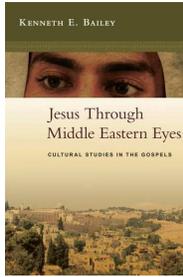
Matthew 20:1-16

Parable of the what?



- Workers are most populous element, but don't do anything unexpected
- Vineyard is merely the context
- The owner is the one who is surprising, and is the focus

Parable structure



For the kingdom of heaven is like	
1.A householder 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.	AGREEMENT Made
2.And going out about the third hour he saw others standing unemployed in the market place; and to them he said, "You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right just I will give you. So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour, and the ninth hour he did the same.	I GIVE Justice
3.And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, "Why do you stand here unemployed all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You go into the vineyard too."	ELEVENTH Hour
4.And when evening came, the lord of the vineyard said to his steward, "Call the laborers and pay them—the wage, beginning with the last, up to the first!"	THE Wage
5.And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour each of them received a denarius.	ELEVENTH Hour
6.Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder, 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?"	WHERE IS Justice?
7.But he replied to one of them, "Master, I am doing you no injustice; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you, and leave. I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or is your eye evil because I am good?" So the last will be first, and the first last.	AGREEMENT Kept

Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 336.

- Uses classical seven stanzas in a ring
- Bailey calls this *prophetic rhetorical template* because of its ubiquity and age (>1000yrs) at Jesus' time

“Ring” structure

For the kingdom of heaven is like

1. A *householder* 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.

2. And going out about the *third hour*
he saw others standing unemployed in the market place,
and to them he said,
“You go into the vineyard too,
and whatever it is right just I will give you.”
So they went.
Going out again about the *sixth hour*,
and the *ninth hour* he did the same.

3. And about the *eleventh hour* he went out
and found others standing,
and he said to them,
“Why do you stand here unemployed all day?”
They said to him,
“Because no one has hired us.”
He said to them,
“You go into the vineyard too.”

4. And when evening came,
the *lord of the vineyard* said to his *steward*,
“Call the laborers and pay them—the wage,
beginning with the last, up to the first!”

5. And when those came who were hired about the *eleventh hour*
each of them received a *denarius*.

6. Now when the *first* came,
they thought they would receive more;
but each of them also received a *denarius*.
And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder, 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?”

7. But he replied to one of them,
“Master, I am doing you no injustice;
did you not agree with me for a *denarius*?
Take what belongs to you, and leave.
I choose to give to this last as I give to you.
Am I not allowed to do what I choose
with what belongs to me?
Or is your eye evil
because I am good?”
So the last will be first, and the first last.

AGREEMENT
Made

I GIVE
Justice

ELEVENTH
Hour

THE
Wage

ELEVENTH
Hour

WHERE IS
Justice?

AGREEMENT
Kept

Ring within ring

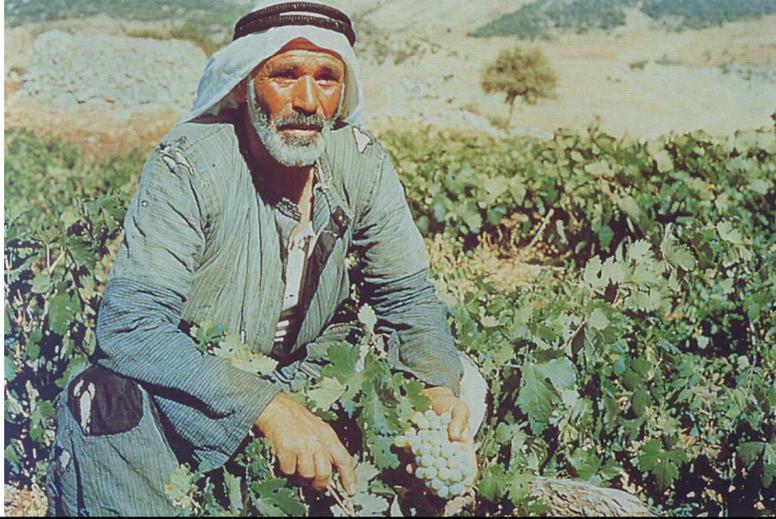
7. But he replied to one of them,
"Mister, I am doing you *no injustice*;
did you not agree with me for a denarius?
Take *what belongs to you*, and leave.

I choose to give to this last
as I give to you.
Am I not allowed to do what I
choose
with *what belongs to me*?
Or is your eye evil
because I am good?"
So the last will be first, and the first last.

AGREEMENT

Kept

Parable context



- Vinyard needed extra workers at pruning or harvest
- Always extra workers hanging around in certain squares outside town—these workers only received money if they got work
- Steward would usually judge work required and visit square first thing to hire needed men
- One denarius is a fair day's wage
- Workers will wait for work because they need the money
- A handout would be humiliating, work (even short work) is better
- Itinerant workers would work hard to ensure hire next day

Parable's surprises



- The master hires the workers when he has a steward!
- The master hires workers throughout the day—why? No explanation given.
Possible explanations:
 - Bad judgement
 - Unexpected urgency of work
 - He cares for the unemployed (most likely given his generosity at the end)
- Subsequent workers are offered “justice,” not a day’s wage
- Final workers not offered anything!
- Big surprise: there is a steward (where was he before?)
- Second surprise: everyone gets “the wage”—this conflicts with the universal ethic (shared across all cultures) of “equal pay for equal work,” i.e. our value is in our productivity
- Third surprise: owner insists that the last hires get paid first
- Parable ends with owner’s speech, leaving unresolved whether the first workers are satisfied (and thus forcing us to resolve that question for ourselves)

Parable's theology

Ethics

- Work has value (but not necessarily proportionate)
- Compassion on those less fortunate is righteous

Theology

- Complainers could be pharisees or disciples
 - Whichever, the lesson is: obey God, but don't dictate how he should treat others
- Jesus is like the owner, who hired the workers himself
 - God came to us in Jesus, and showed us costly, generous compassion
- God's generosity short-circuits our ideas of fairness
- God doesn't respect our ideas of priority

Break time!

DIY Parable

Take the theology and build your own using a contemporary context

Parable context?

Context must:

- Communicate value of work vs. God's value of people
- Communicate value of compassion
- Communicate God's "upside-down" view of the world

Context should:

- Allow room for surprise of grace (everyone gets equal pay)
- Allow room for surprise of God's compassion (going to the job market)
- Allow debate over world's view of "justice" vs. God's grace

Parable's story

Should have:

- Surprise
- Symmetry & simplicity
- Shared metaphors
- Setup for judgement

Must communicate:

- God's extreme compassion
- Surprising grace vs. worldly "justice"
- God's different priorities
- Value of work
- Value of human beings