

Jacob's Well

Lesson Title: Stories from the Savior—The Vineyard Workers



Key Concept: Jesus often spoke in parables, stories with both spiritual insights and practical applications. With the parable of the Vineyard Workers, he called his disciples away from self-centered bitterness and toward loving gratefulness.



Scriptures:

Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?
(Matthew 20:15 *New Living Translation*)

Context Scriptures: Matthew 19:23–20:16; Romans 3:23; James 5:13



Lesson Thoughts:

After Jesus finished talking with the rich young ruler, he commented on how hard it is for a rich person to enter God's kingdom. Peter, always incredibly subtle, said, "We've given up everything to follow you. What will we get?" (Matthew 19:27). Jesus responded kindly, affirming that rewards would come. But he also used the following parable to redirect Peter's focus.

A vineyard owner hired some workers in the morning, promising them a day's wage. Throughout the day, he hired more workers, promising them what was right for their work. He hired the last group only an hour before the day ended. When the day was over, the first group of workers he paid was the group who'd only worked an hour. The owner was generous, paying them a full day's wage. But when the earliest group came, they were angry at the owner for paying them the same amount. The owner rebuked them, reminding them he was allowed to be generous without owing them more.

Fairness is often considered ideal. Balance and equality in everything are how it should be, right? But fairness, though important, is often used as a mask for a deeper problem. When confronted with the idea of others getting more than we do, we bristle. We call it unfair and demand "our fair share." But fairness is not

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our real concern. We are bitter and envious. We don't care what's fair, as long as we're treated better.

Peter's focus was self-centered, looking for what he would get. Jesus met him where he was, but Jesus also used this parable to correct Peter's focus. When we serve God, who is generous, it's easy to turn inward, looking only at ourselves: what have we given up, and what will God give us? But Jesus calls us to more.

As we follow Christ, we must remember: no matter our sacrifice, we owe him more. This parable doesn't match reality for one simple reason. We are all workers hired late. God's grace has been extended to all. With this understanding, no bitterness is acceptable. Any resentment ignores God's gift to us. When we see others being blessed, we shouldn't whine, "Where's *my* part?" We should thank God for what he has given us. It is always more than we deserve. Then, to see others being blessed is cause for celebration. God has loved us, so let us be grateful!

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) What was wrong with Peter's question to Jesus?
- 2) How would you feel if you were one of the first workers hired in the parable?
How about if you were one of the last?
- 3) Is fairness really important? Why or why not?
- 4) Is God unfair? How? Is that a good or a bad thing?
- 5) How can we recognize and stop bitterness within ourselves when we see others being blessed?

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Notes and Reflections

- 1) What kind of example do you set when you are bitter? Who can see this example of bitterness and resentment in your life? How does it affect them?
- 2) How should we respond when we realize that—whether in our minds or our actions—we have been bitter? What should we do in thought, in prayer, and in action?
- 3) When you are confronted with others' immature thinking, whether in self-centeredness or in something else, how can you respond kindly while still guiding people to the truth? Consider how Jesus answered Peter's problematic question and his self-centered focus.

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Notes and Reflections, cont.