

## **Carol Elsasser – 20 September 2020**

I have to be totally honest and say that my heart sank when I saw the passage I had been allocated to talk about! This particular parable has always been one that has puzzled me and my reaction has always been – “but that’s not fair!”.

So I set about digging around on the internet to research what others had said about it and now ..I think I finally get it ....so I will try to share with you what I learnt.

### **It is all about God’s grace and how God’s grace never runs out.**

The Pharisees and Jewish leaders of Jesus’s time knew that the people of Israel were God’s chosen people. They also knew that God had promised to Abraham in Genesis 22 v18 that **all nations** of the world would be blessed through his offspring – but thought that they – the Jews – would get a special inheritance – after all they had followed all God’s rules and laws closely and so all the other nations were therefore less deserving and shouldn’t get as rich a reward as them. They assumed that God would value them more.

In this parable - God is represented as the vineyard owner and the first group of workers hired first thing in the morning represent the Jews. The owner was more than generous with them, offering to pay them one denarius each at the end of the day’s work and they readily agreed to be contracted for this amount. In fact this was actually the daily wage of a Roman soldier and so a very generous pay for a vineyard worker.

The owner kept going back to the marketplace throughout the course of the day – four times in total - collecting those who no one else wanted or who had not put themselves forward for work. He gave them all a purpose and an opportunity to work for him. In the same way God is always available – anytime is right in God’s eyes. God invites anyone into his kingdom and no-one is excluded. God actively looks for us in the same way that the owner went again and again searching for more workers.

With these additional workers the amount they would be paid at the end of the day was no longer mentioned but the owner said he will pay them “whatever is right”.

At the end of the day the owner paid first those he had hired last – in fact these last workers had only been there an hour – and he paid them - one denarius. The first group of workers who had toiled all day long therefore were expecting that their payment would be larger. They started grumbling when they saw that they had only received the same – despite the fact that this was the amount that they had willingly agreed to work for. No contracts had been broken!

The owner’s decision to pay all the workers the same was in fact an act of mercy – not an injustice.

The workers should have focused on the positives, they had received -as agreed at the outset - more than a fair day's wage for their work instead of focusing on the apparent unfairness of the situation. As they had not been taken advantage of.

In the same way nothing has been taken away from God's promise to the people of Israel by opening up the kingdom to everyone. No one should be jealous and focus on what they believe they deserve in comparison to others. We should all instead focus on the generosity of God and enjoy the fact that God is so vast that He can extend that same generosity to everyone. His grace has no bounds.

If we start judging others thinking they are being overpaid, as the workers did, we are questioning the owner – or God himself!

God can give his grace to anyone he chooses. In God's eyes there is no difference between a lifelong Christian and a person who becomes a Christian on his or her deathbed. Remember the thief on the cross next to Jesus!

The last line – the first will be last and the last first – illustrates just this - that no matter how long or how hard a believer works during their lifetime, the reward of eternal life will be the same given to everyone – an eternity in heaven in the presence of God the Father and Jesus. The ultimate reward of eternal life is given as a gift by God to all who believe and is not dependent on one's status or standing.

The workers could not accept that the owner had the right to do what he wanted with his money and pay the latecomers the same as them. It made no economic sense to them – but this is exactly what Jesus was demonstrating - Grace is not calculated like wages.

What the early workers missed was that it is a privilege to serve a God who is so kind and unselfish.

We should rejoice when others come to faith, he is faithful to us and how he rewards others should be of no consequence to us, nor should it affect our approach to him.

The parable highlights that the kingdom of God is like a vineyard full of workers, each hired by the owner to work in a specific role for a specific time. We must be willing to enter the vineyard and work and endure to the end of the workday, however long that might be for each of us. Do not quit, do not lose heart, all will receive the promised reward - a place in God's eternal kingdom as God's grace doesn't run out.

Amen