



## NG Study Guide: Matt. 20:1-16 “The Kingdom and God’s Rewards” [3.26.17]

### Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. **Leader note:** Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.

### The Study

Following Jesus’ encounter with the rich young ruler, Peter asked how Jesus’ disciples would be rewarded for their sacrifices to follow Him [Matt. 19:27]. Jesus promised eternal life and hundredfold eternal reward. The Parable of the Vineyard Workers amplifies the teaching on eternal life and rewards [Matt. 20:1-16]. **The main idea of the parable is: receive Christ and serve God knowing you will be rewarded justly, generously and graciously.** Before considering the reasons to serve Jesus let’s briefly summarize the parable.

**The workers were hired for a fair wage [1-7]:** A parable is an earthly story that helps us to understand a spiritual truth about Christ’s kingdom [1]. Jesus is presumed to be the vineyard owner, and the laborers who agree to work in His harvest are presumed to be His. The grape harvest took place in August, and farmers hired day laborers to bring in the crops before the latter rains came. The workday would begin at sunrise [1] and end at sunset. The first laborers agreed to work for a denarius [2] the typical day’s wage for a soldier or worker. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> hour (9:00 a.m.), noon, three and five p.m. additional workers were hired and offered a fair wage [3-7].

**The workers were rewarded fairly, generously and graciously [8-16]:** At the end of the day the workers were paid starting with those that were hired last [8]. Those who worked only one hour received a full day’s wage [9]. The later workers were rewarded for willingness to work for the vineyard owner, and trust in the master. Imagine their joy as their pay exceeded their expectations. Those who worked all day saw that the guys who worked one hour got a full day’s pay. The full day workers expected to get more, but were paid the denarius they were promised [10]. They complained that it wasn’t fair since they had worked all day [11-12]. The master calls the complainers “friend” as a gentle rebuke, and then reminds them that he did no wrong. They were paid the amount that they agreed to [13]. If the master chooses to be generous and gracious in his rewards it is not wrong [14-15]. The complaining workers were jealous of the generous reward the master gave the others (an “evil eye” is a reference re jealousy) [15]. We will likely be surprised by the rewards in heaven. Some that seemed to be the least will receive the greatest rewards (“So the last will be first, and the first last”)[16]. Also the failure to serve or habitual wrong attitude may indicate that we are not His workers (“For many are called, but few chosen”) [16].

### Reason #1 Jesus rewards fairly:

In the Parable of the Vineyard Workers, the master of the vineyard hired workers and promised a fair reward to each of the workers. To the first group there was an agreed upon wage, and for the remaining groups, the master promised, “Whatever is right I will give you.” Jesus always does what is right or just.

Nevertheless, one may object that it doesn’t seem fair that Jesus would only reward those works that are done after receiving Him as King and done with the right motive. Undoubtedly, unbelievers can engage in abundant charitable, kind, merciful, and altruistic works. God rewards works done that are motivated by love for God and a desire to glorify Him and advance His kingdom. Thus only works done after salvation

will earn eternal rewards [1Cor. 3:8-15]. In a similar sense, it is fair that if I go to the personnel department of an employer with a great benefits package and ask for the benefits they would deny me benefits if I don't work for them.

***Q1. How is it fair that only works done after salvation and with a right motive are rewarded?***

**Reason #2 Jesus rewards generously:**

In the Parable of the Vineyard Workers, the master provides rewards that are extremely generous. One would expect to toil for about twelve hours to receive a denarius. Yet the master provides abundant rewards to those who worked a fraction of the day. Jesus is generous and desires to bless His workers.

Use your God-given opportunities and gifts to serve Him by serving others. In the Parable of the Minas [Lu. 19:11-27] each worker receives the same measure – one mina (a mina represents about 3 months wage). The idea that each receives the same portion is consistent with the idea that each of us has 24 hours per day to serve God in whatever He has called us to. Serve God in every realm: personal, marriage, family, career, calling, and community. Be sensitive to when, where and how God is calling you to serve Him in each of these realms and do so with joy. Knowing that Jesus rewards generously should motivate us to serve the Lord with gladness [Ps. 100:2].

In the Parable of the Talents [Mt. 25:14-30] the king's servants are given different measures (e.g. 5,2,1). A "talent" was the largest dry measurement in the Roman system weighing about 75 pounds, but the term is now commonly used to refer to gifts or abilities because of this parable. Those that used their gifts were praised, "Well done good and faithful" were rewarded generously and invited to enter the joy of their Lord.

Jesus has gifted you uniquely so that you can advance His Kingdom. As you discover those gifts use them in the home, church, marketplace, and community. Every time you do, with the right motive, you are earning rewards that the world can never match. Jesus promised a hundredfold return. A hundred percent would simply double the return, but a hundredfold represents a hundred times return. The world's return is unlikely to last a few years or generations, but the Lord's rewards are enjoyed through eternity.

***Q2. How have you become more aware that God is giving you opportunities to serve Him by serving others in every realm of life [personal, marriage, family, career, calling, and community]?***

***Q3. How does the promise of God's rewards motivate your service to Christ in your church and community?***

**Reason #3 Jesus rewards graciously:**

Some view the Parable of the Vineyard Workers as relating to salvation. The later workers were rewarded for willingness to work for the vineyard owner, and trust in the master. In essence, it was impossible to do enough in one hour to deserve a full day's wage. They were rewarded as a result of the Master's grace. Similarly, it is impossible to earn our salvation it is God's gracious gift through faith in Jesus [Matt. 19:26-26, Eph. 2:8-9]. In the parable, the day is a picture of a lifetime. The idea is that as long as you're alive it is not too late to receive Christ, His salvation, and eternal life. Consider the thief on the cross [Lu. 23:34]. Similarly it is never too early since you can experience Christ, and begin to earn rewards as soon as you do. Today would be a great day to receive Christ. You can trust His salvation and generous rewards.

***Q4. How does your understanding of God's grace in your salvation motivate your service to Christ?***

### **Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:**

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

**Pray and ask God to give you opportunities to serve Him by serving others this week and see what God does in response.**

### **Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:**

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

### **Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:**

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

### **Leader Notes:**

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. Feel free to use an icebreaker question or activity** to get to know one another better.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
  - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.