



Around the Word  
**Bible Study**  
 Epiphany, 2017

The Light of Christ  
 St. Matthew 20:1-16

**On Wages & Gifts:**

"Although they who entered first contributed more to the measure of the labour yet they did not contribute more to the measure of purpose; nay perhaps even more was due to the last in respect of this...For the cause of their later entrance was their later call to the work of the vineyard...The first did not believe or enter till they had agreed on their hire; but the others came forward to do the work without an agreement...And to the first, that which was given, was wages...to the last it was the free gift." (NPNF VII:366)

—St. Gregory Nazianzen

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**Introduction:** Exiled!

Coming down the mount of Transfiguration, we turn our faces towards Jerusalem and the cross with our Lord and Savior. We willingly place ourselves under the Lenten exile, removing our Alleluias and Glorias in order to teach that all of the history of salvation (the Bible) was Christ sacrificing Himself for His people.

**Opening: Psalm 18:1-15**

<sup>1</sup>I | love you,\*

O | LORD, my strength.

<sup>2</sup>**The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my de- | liverer,\***

**my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my | stronghold.**

<sup>3</sup>I call upon the LORD, who is worthy | to be praised,\*

and I am saved from my | enemies.

<sup>4</sup>**The cords of death en- | compassed me;\* the torrents of destruction as- | sailed me;**

<sup>5</sup>the cords of Sheol en- | tangled me;\* the snares of death con- | fronted me.

<sup>6</sup>**In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I | cried for help.\***

**From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him | reached his ears.**

<sup>7</sup>Then the earth | reeled and rocked;\*

the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was | angry.

<sup>8</sup>**Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire | from his mouth;\* glowing coals flamed | forth from him.**

<sup>9</sup>He bowed the heavens and | came down;\* thick darkness was un- | der his feet.

<sup>10</sup>**He rode on a cher- | ub and flew;\* he came swiftly on the wings | of the wind.**

<sup>11</sup>He made darkness his covering, his canopy a- | round him,\* thick clouds dark with | water.

<sup>12</sup>**Out of the brightness be- | fore him\* hailstones and coals of fire broke | through his clouds.**

<sup>13</sup>The LORD also thundered in the | heavens,\* and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and | coals of fire.

<sup>14</sup>**And he sent out his arrows and | scattered them;\* he flashed forth lightnings and | routed**

**them.**

<sup>15</sup>Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were | laid bare\*

at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of your | nostrils.

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son\* and to the Holy | Spirit; as it was in the be- | ginning,\* is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

**Read St. Matthew 20:1-16**

**v.1: "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.**

To understand the parables a little better, think of the "like" as "acts the same as". There is a little more emphasis in the Greek than the English reveals. So, what we are about to hear is how the Kingdom of heaven acts. How else are we told the Kingdom acts? See Matthew 13:31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52.

There is an interesting juxtaposition when looking at "master of a house". Here and elsewhere (cf. Matthew 13:27, 52, 21:33), when he is a good man. But St. Matthew also refers to him in the negative (cf. 10:25, 24:43). What conclusion may we draw about 24:43, especially in light of Luke 11:21 and John 12:31, 14:30, and 16:11? Is Jesus the ruler of this world and is He judged?

Where else do we hear of vineyards of note? See Genesis 9:20; Leviticus 19:10; Deuteronomy 6:10-12; Joshua 24:13; 1 Samuel 8:14-15; 1 Kings 21; Isaiah 5.

**v.2-5: 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.

Just think of this as a normal workday, divided up, with normal wage/work negotiations. Only this is not normal: God is negotiating with men and agreeing to their terms. Jesus is equating the workers with the master of the house. Where else do we hear of such God-power being handed over so glibly? See Genesis 1:26-29. Think also of Moses, Joshua, David, and Solomon. Any others you can think of? See John 20:22-23.

Part of what's known as "The great reversal", God makes Himself the servant and takes the lower position in dealing with man. Compare Genesis 15:17-18; Matthew 20:28.

**v.6-7: And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And 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.'**

The last hour of sunlight or the last hour of the world, all whom God will save will be saved.(cf. Revelation 7:9).

Jesus doesn't just give them work to do, He changes them into workers. Verse 3 calls them "un-workers". In Christ they are now different (cf. Ephesians 2:12-13, 17-18).

**v.8-10: 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.**

In other words, "Give them what they agreed to themselves". Why did Jesus begin with the last?

Why did those hired first believe they would receive more? See Matthew 3:9; Luke 18:9-14; John 8:33-59.

**v.11-12: 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**

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**the day and the scorching heat.'**

What famous grumblings should we immediately think of? See Exodus 15:24, 16:2, 7, 8, 17:3.

Can you make a significant connection between the Vineyard and the Promised Land? See Numbers 14:26-31; Joshua 24:13,

Does anyone else bear the burden of the day in the scorching heat, in a significant way? See Mark 15:25-34; Isaiah 53:4.

**v.13-15: 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?'**

There was judgment against the grumblers, but what is the promise to them? See Isaiah 29:22-24.



Friend, where are you? Compare Genesis 3:9.

Are we to rejoice in payment or in something else? See Romans 15:9.

St. Paul, though called last (1 Corinthians 15:8), labored harder than all (15:10), yet what did he receive for his exceptional efforts? See Romans 15:3.

**v.16: So the last will be first, and the first last.**

Also heard from Jesus in Matthew 19:30, is Jesus really talking about power and money or is He conveying another message? See Mark 9:35; 1 Corinthians 15:45; Revelation 1:17, 22:13.

**Closing: Salvation unto Us Has Come (LSB, 555)**

Art: *Painting of the parable*, by Jacob Willemszoon de Wet (mid-17th century).

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