The Bible and Bread: Interpreting Scripture

Week 3 Fall 2025

Depth Bible Study

using the

Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard

Mathew 20:1-16

Depth Bible Study

Like Peeling the Layers of an Onion:

the closer you get to the center, the more you are personally involved. In fact, you can end up in tears!

Teaching the Bible to Adults and Youth by Dick Murray,
Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1987, 1993, pp. 35-39

Depth Bible study seeks to move from the informational level of Bible study to a confrontational level, where the individual feels personally involved. It aims for the use of both objective information and subjective opinion. The ultimate goal is always to get to the heart of the matter - God and yourself.

A **parable** is, literally, something "**cast alongside**" something else.

Jesus' parables were stories that were "cast alongside" a truth in order to illustrate that truth.

A common description of a parable is that it is **an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.**

https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-a-parable.html

Matthew 20:1-16

The Parable of The Laborers in the Vineyard | Depth Bible Study | Layer 1

1. Read this parable as if for the first time, looking for new insights, particular problems, or questions you have not thought of before.

Your insights are personal and not arguable. Put on “freshener glasses” and search for new personal insights.

Matthew 20:1-16 (NRSVUE) ~ *The Laborers in the Vineyard*

20 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his
vineyard. 2 After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3
When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, 4 and he said to them,
‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. 5 When he went out again
about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. 6 And about five o’clock he went out and found others
standing around, and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ 7 They said to him, ‘Because
no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ 8 When evening came, the owner of
the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then
going to the first.’ 9 When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received a denarius. 10 Now
when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. 11
And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12 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.’ 13
But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?
14 Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15 Am I not allowed
to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’[a] 16 So the last
will be first, and the first will be last.”[b]

Footnotes

a. 20.15 Gk is your eye evil because I am good?

b. 20.16 Other ancient authorities add for many are called, but few are chosen

The Evil Eye in Jewish Tradition

Traditionhttps://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fblog.judaicawebstore.com%2Fevil-eye-in-jewish-tradition%2F&psig=AOvVaw29n5uPonrWEaZNAFWTdPOp&ust=1758990042469000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CBkQjhxqFwoTCIjH_uvq908DFQAAAAAdAAAAABAL

Matthew 20:1-16

The Parable of The Laborers in the Vineyard | Depth Bible Study | Layer 2

2. What do you think Jesus intended to convey when he told this parable?

What did this parable likely mean to its first hearers?

Matthew 20:1-16

The Parable of The Laborers in the Vineyard | Depth Bible Study | Layer 3

3. In view of our situation in the 21st century, what does this passage say to us?

What elements are the same or different in the situation then and now?

What does this mean for the church in contrast to Jews in Jesus' time?

Matthew 20:1-16

The Parable of The Laborers in the Vineyard | Depth Bible Study | Layer 4

4. What is the meaning of the passage for you?

How do you feel about what it says or implies?

If I took this passage seriously, would I have to make changes in my life?

Matthew 20:1-16

The Parable of The Laborers in the Vineyard | Depth Bible Study | Commentary

In regard to Matthew 20: 1-16, most commentators stress that Jesus is speaking of God and the kingdom of heaven.

He is not speaking of labor relations, even in his own day, much less in ours.

Jesus is telling the parable to Jews in a Jewish setting.

Jesus is speaking about righteousness, which Jews believed came from adherence to God's law. Jesus says this is not the criterion for the kingdom of heaven - God's grace is a gift - not earned, but given.

God bestows grace wherever God wills, which may appear to be unfair to those who have carefully kept the law.

Matthew 20:1-16 The Parable of The Laborers in the Vineyard | Depth Bible Study | Commentary

Kingdom of heaven (Greek: Βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) is a phrase used only in the Gospel of Matthew.

It is generally seen as equivalent to the phrase "kingdom of God" (Greek: βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ) in the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke.

Thought to be the main content of Jesus' preaching in the Gospel of Matthew, the "kingdom of heaven" described "a process, a course of events, whereby God begins to govern or to act as king or Lord, an action, therefore, by which God manifests... being-God in the world..."

Schillebeeckx, Edward (1983) [1974]. Jesus: An Experiment in Christology. London: Fount Paperbacks. pp. 140–141. ISBN 0-00-626586-3

The Bible and Bread: Interpreting Scripture

Week 4 Fall 2025

3 Questions

Read the passage with an open mind, heart, and spirit. After the first reading, you will be asked a question to consider as you read the passage a second time. After the second reading you will be asked a question to consider as you read the passage a third time. After the third reading you will be asked a question to consider as you read the passage a fourth time.

***John 3:16-21** (NRSVUE)

16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

* **John 3:16-21**

3 Questions |1 of 3

1. What does this passage say about God?

* **John 3:16-21**

3 Questions |2 of 3

2. What does this passage say about humanity?

* **John 3:16-21**

3 Questions |3 of 3

3. What does this passage say about the relationship between God and humanity?