11/15/26

Sermon Title: By Grace, Not by Merit

Preacher: Pastor Kim Soonbae

Scripture Passage: Matthew 20:1-16

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

20 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.

2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

3 "About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.

4 He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.'

5 So they went. "He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing.

6 About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?'

7 "'Because no one has hired us,' they answered.

"He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'

8 "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'

9 "The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius.

10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.

11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.

12 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'

[13]"But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?
[14]Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you.
[15]Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'
[16]"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Jesus gives the parable of the workers in the vineyard to Peter and the other disciples, who expect to receive a greater reward because they have left everything to follow Him.
Through this parable, Jesus teaches them that their privilege of serving in God's kingdom is itself a matter of grace.
He also declares that the first will be last, and the last will be first.

This is the parable of the workers in the vineyard.
The owner of the vineyard goes out early in the morning to hire day laborers.
In those days, day laborers would gather along the streets or at street corners early in the morning, waiting for an employer to hire them.
The owner agrees to pay the workers one denarius for a day's work and sends them into his vineyard.
He then goes out again at the third hour (9:00 a.m.), the sixth hour (12:00 noon), the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.), and the eleventh hour (5:00 p.m.).
Each time, he finds people standing idle in the marketplace and sends them into his vineyard as well.
20"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.
[2]He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.
[3]"About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.

[4]He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’
[5]So they went. “He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing.
[6]About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’
[7]“‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.
“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

Here, the vineyard represents the kingdom of heaven, the owner of the vineyard represents God, and the workers who received the invitation early in the morning and entered the vineyard represent the Jews, who were among the first to receive the invitation of the gospel.

The owner of the vineyard goes out not only early in the morning but also at the third hour (9:00 a.m.), the sixth hour (12:00 noon), the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.), and even at the eleventh hour (5:00 p.m.), when the workday is almost over and only one hour of work remains.

At each of these times, he goes to the marketplace, finds people standing around with nothing to do, promises to pay them what is fair, and sends them into his vineyard.

Why does he do this?

Is it because he is short of workers?

We find the answer in verses 3 and 7.

The owner sees people standing idle in the marketplace because they have been unable to find work, and he feels compassion for them.

He understands their desperate circumstances.

They may have had wives and children to support and elderly parents to care for. They desperately needed to work and earn wages, yet they had been unable to find an opportunity.

As a result, they had spent the entire day standing around without work and would eventually have had to return home empty-handed.

The good and compassionate owner feels sorry for them.
He takes pity on those who have been unable to find work and gives them an opportunity to work and earn money.
In other words, the owner of the vineyard knows their needs and extends his grace to meet those needs.

When evening comes, the owner settles accounts with the workers and pays their wages.
But the workers who had been hired first begin to grumble against him.
The owner does not pay the workers in the order in which they entered the vineyard.
Instead, he begins by paying those who arrived last.
Yet everyone, whether they came early or late, receives the same wage of one denarius.
Those who had entered the vineyard early in the morning had seen the workers who arrived later receive one denarius.
They naturally assumed that they would receive more, and they were pleased with that expectation.
But their hopes were shattered when they, too, received only one denarius.

[8]"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'
[9]"The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius.
[10]So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.
[11]When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.

[12]‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

The workers who had entered the vineyard first grumbled against the owner because they believed they deserved higher wages.
After all, they had worked longer and done more work than those who had arrived later.
But the owner insists that he has done nothing unjust.
He explains that he has paid them exactly what he had promised and, therefore, has done nothing wrong.
He then tells them, “Take what belongs to you and go.”
The owner makes it clear that it is his choice to give the same amount to the worker who arrived last as he has given to them.
[13]“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?
[14]Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you.
[15]Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

Whether they were hired first or later, all of them had been looking for work since early morning.
Even those who were hired at the very last hour needed wages to provide for their families.
The owner felt compassion for those who were still desperately searching for work as evening approached.
He brought them into his vineyard because he wanted to meet their needs.
It was a good and compassionate act for the owner to see people desperately searching for work so they could earn a living, to feel pity for those who had been

unable to find work even late in the day, and to keep going out to the marketplace to give those standing idle an opportunity to earn wages.
Out of consideration for their needs, he paid them a full day's wage.

The parable ends without giving us the response of the workers who complained. Instead, it moves directly into Jesus' concluding remarks.

Jesus once again repeats the teaching He had given to Peter and the other disciples, who expected a greater reward because they had left everything to follow Him.
16 "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Not only those who arrived late and worked the least, but also those who were hired early in the morning and worked many hours were recipients of the owner's grace.
They grumbled because they received the same wages as those who had arrived later and worked for only a short time.
But they, too, could have ended the day in despair and returned home without earning a living if the owner had not hired them.
They would have been in the same desperate situation as those who arrived later.

Through this parable, Jesus teaches His disciples that everyone, whether called early or late, is saved by God's grace.
Therefore, those who were called first and have served the Lord for a long time must not assume that they deserve greater rewards or have greater rights than those who were called later and have served for a shorter time.

Beloved members of Church of Godly Dreams,

Through the parable of the workers in the vineyard, Jesus teaches us that the kingdom of God is not entered through human merit or personal qualifications, but solely by the grace of God.
Entering the kingdom of God, that is, the kingdom of heaven, does not depend on any special qualifications or achievements on our part.
Rather, it is a gift given to those who believe God's calling and promise and respond to His grace.

The workers who entered the vineyard first thought that they deserved a greater reward than those who arrived later because they had worked longer.
They failed to recognize that the very opportunity to enter the vineyard and work was itself an act of the owner's grace.

The same is true of us.
When we first came to believe in Jesus, how long we have served the church, or how much work we have done does not qualify us to receive more of God's grace.
The very fact that God has called us and given us the opportunity to serve in His kingdom is already a tremendous blessing of grace.
Therefore, we must not compare ourselves with others and become resentful or envious.
Instead, we should rejoice in the grace others have received and give thanks for the grace God has bestowed upon us.

Furthermore, through this parable, Jesus shows us that God's grace goes beyond our human thoughts and standards.
God does not want anyone to be excluded or abandoned.
He is a gracious and compassionate God who continues to call people, even at the very last moment, and provides for their needs.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

All of us, whether we came to faith earlier or later, have been saved by the grace of God.
Without God's grace, no one in this world could ever be saved.

Since we have been saved not by our own deeds or merits but by God's grace, we must always remember the grace He has bestowed upon us and live our lives serving the Lord with gratitude and humility.
We must not become proud simply because we believed earlier than others.
We must not boast because we have worked harder or served longer.
Nor should we look down on or judge those who were called later.
Rather, we should have hearts generous enough to rejoice in the grace God extends to others, just as He has extended His grace to us.

May we always remember God's grace and faithfully follow the Lord to the very end, serving Him with grateful and humble hearts.
May this be true of each and every one of us, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.