

**The Parables of the Workers in the Vineyard and of the Talents**

Passages: Mt 20:1–16; Mt 25:14–30

*Memory Verse*

“His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’” (Matthew 25:23)

<b>Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]</b>	<b>Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]</b>	<b>Good Work [Behavior]</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. For by grace, we are saved through faith, and that not of ourselves.</li><li>2. God can punish us if we do not put our God-given talents to work.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. God is faithful.</li><li>2. God rewards.</li><li>3. God is a fair judge.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. We must strive to finish God’s work together, no matter when we begin the work.</li><li>2. We must put our talents to use to help God and multiply them.</li></ol>

*Overview*

**Events and Spiritual Teachings**

- A. The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Mt 20:1–16)
- B. The Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14–30)

**Life Application**

1. By grace, we are given the opportunity to work in His vineyard.
2. We must accept with gratitude all that God offers to us.
3. One day, Jesus Christ will return, and His reward is with Him for those who have been chosen to labor in God’s work.

**Memory Verse**

**Conclusion:** Be zealous for God’s work until the day our Lord returns.

**A. The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Mt 20:1–16)**

Notes:

- Denarius (v. 9): the usual daily wage; Roman soldiers received one denarius a day as wages
- Third hour = 9:00 am
- Sixth hour = 12:00 pm
- Ninth hour = 3:00 pm
- Eleventh hour = 5:00 pm

Each parable that Jesus shared revealed a truth or several truths of the kingdom of God. More importantly, each parable teaches us how to have a relationship with Him. In Matthew 19:27, Peter asked Jesus what reward would be given to those who had given up everything to follow Him. He said, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” Jesus answered the question by sharing the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Let us read Matthew 20:1–16.

A landowner leaves early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. After some time, the landowner realizes that he needs more workers to finish the work. So, he hires another group and tells them, “Whatever is right I will give you.” He hires more workers around noon, 3 pm, and again around 5 pm, which is towards the end of the day. Altogether, the landowner hires five groups of workers, hiring the last group just one hour before the end of the day.

Finally, when all the hard work is done, the landowner gathers them to pay them. Each worker, even those hired at the end of the day, receives a full day’s wages. Those hired at the beginning of the day become upset, as they believe they deserve more wages for working longer hours. Their anger against the landowner spills forth and they complain, “These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day” (Mt 20:12). In his defense, the landowner replies:

*Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’ So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.*

(Mt 20:13–16)

**Understanding the Parable**

Let us discuss the following questions:

**1. How is this parable contrary to common sense and expectations?**

Common sense tells us that whoever works more should be paid more.

**2. What does the paying of wages represent? Explain your reason.**

The paying of wages represents the bestowing of the grace of God. Although in the parable, the laborers seemed to have earned the wages, the fact that everyone received the same amount tells us that the wages were not earned. These unemployed laborers were promised the wages simply for agreeing to work in the vineyard, regardless of how much effort they put in.

**3. What does this parable teach us about the nature of salvation and about God?**

Even if we work hard for the Lord, we cannot claim any merit for our salvation because we have received it as a free gift (Eph 2:8–9; Rom 3:27–28; Tit 3:4–5). From this parable, we learn about the abundant grace of God. He does not show favoritism in the giving of grace (Acts 10:34). But this is not

to suggest that it makes no difference how diligently we work for God; the Bible teaches that each person will be rewarded according to his labor (1 Cor 3:8; 15:58).

4. **According to the Lord's own words, what is the teaching of the parable?**

"So the last will be first, and the first last" (Mt 20:16).

5. **Who are the last that will be first?**

Either the new believers in Christ, or the repentant sinners who receive God's grace and forgiveness in "the eleventh hour." In verses 4 and 7, we see that the laborers trusted that the landowner would do for them whatever was right. Likewise, believers who humbly accept and trust in God's grace become first in the kingdom (*BSG: Matthew, 7.1: 2a*).<sup>1</sup>

6. **Who are the first that will be last?**

These are the ones who seem to have preeminence in the religious community, but perhaps because they have exalted themselves to be first and have taken God's grace for granted, they risk becoming the least in God's eyes. Some even reject the kingdom because of their pride in their early conversion or the amount of work that they have done for the church over the years (*BSG: Matthew, 7.1: 2b*).<sup>2</sup>

7. **Why did the landowner decide to pay all the workers the same amount of wages? What does it mean spiritually?**

His decision to pay all the workers was an act of mercy, not injustice. This act teaches us about God, whose grace and mercy are abundant upon those who have been chosen. In the matter of salvation, we are all sinful and "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). We cannot obtain God's salvation through our own deeds. His grace and mercy are freely given to us. It does not matter when God calls us, whether it is early or late in our lives; His grace and salvation are His and His alone.

8. **What is the meaning in verse 16: "So the last will be first, and the first last"?**

Our Lord teaches us that the Lord does not show partiality in giving grace to the believers; the reward of having eternal life will be given to all. The thief crucified on the cross with Jesus (Lk 23:39–43) did not perform any services for the Lord, but he received the same reward of spending eternity with Jesus Christ.

### Life Application

The wages in the parable represent the grace of God. In the matter of salvation, we are all sinful and "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Workers such as those in the parable received pay each day for their manual labor. But if they were not hired, they would not receive payment. They would go home empty-handed, and perhaps be forced to tell their family that there was no money for food that day. As the hours ticked by, the workers lingered, waiting anxiously for an opportunity. When the last hour came, they likely were completely out of hope. Their devastation made these workers appreciate the owner's actions all the more. They could do nothing about their lack of work, but the owner came and gave it to them. Likewise, we cannot obtain God's salvation through our own deeds. His grace and mercy are freely given to us. It does not matter whether God calls us early or late in life. His grace and salvation are His to give freely.

1. We are given the opportunity to work in His vineyard by grace.
2. All the workers agreed to work for the wages determined by the landowner. Likewise, when God offers us His mercy and grace, we cannot look for fairness. We should not attempt to negotiate with God. Whatever He offers to us, we should accept with gratitude.

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<sup>1</sup> TJC Department of Literary Ministry, *Bible Study Guide: Matthew*, (Malaysia: True Jesus Church, 2012) [http://bsg.tjc.org/tjc\\_bsg\\_lesson/matthew-28/](http://bsg.tjc.org/tjc_bsg_lesson/matthew-28/), 7.1: 2a.

<sup>2</sup> *Bible Study Guide: Matthew*, [http://bsg.tjc.org/tjc\\_bsg\\_lesson/matthew-28/](http://bsg.tjc.org/tjc_bsg_lesson/matthew-28/), 7.1: 2b.

3. One day, Jesus Christ will return, and He will reward those who have been chosen to labor in God’s work. Do not compare your reward with others by saying, “I have worked harder and I have worked longer, so I should get a greater reward.”

**B. The Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14–30)**

Before we go into the spiritual teachings of this parable, let us examine the elements:

Element	Meaning
Man	Jesus Christ
The far country	Heaven
The servants	All the people whom God has called
The lord’s return	Jesus Christ’s second coming
Talent	A substantial amount of money in the culture of that day. In today’s terms, it refers to the gifts and abilities that God has given us.

**Understanding the Parable**

The conclusion in Matthew, chapter 24, is the backdrop to the parable of the talents in Matthew, chapter 25. After explaining the terrible things to come at the end of this age, Jesus instructed His followers to prepare themselves for His coming, where He would judge His servants according to their actions during His absence (Mt 24:45–51).

A man traveling to a far country calls three of his servants and gives each one five talents, two talents and one talent, respectively. The word “talent” in Greek refers to a sum of money. When the man returns from his trip, the servant who received five talents tells him that he has doubled the amount. The one who received two talents shares the same announcement. Immediately, the man praises them by saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Mt 25:21).

Now, the third servant had not done what the other two had done. Afraid, he went and hid his talent in the ground. Upon learning this, the man becomes angry. He calls the third servant “wicked and lazy,” telling him that he should have put the money in the bank and let it earn interest. He takes the talent from the servant and gives it to the one who has ten talents, then casts “the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 25:30).

**Life Application**

God gives each of His children a physical body, talents and gifts, and opportunities. These are all valuable, and He expects good stewardship that will lead to a return on what He has given. He is interested in what we do with our talents, but He is also fair because He does not require from us what we have not received. We must put our talents to use to multiply them and help in God’s work. This physical life is a preparation for the coming kingdom of God. Therefore, how we live and how we use the talents, abilities, and opportunities that we have been given is crucial.

1. God expects us to have a measurable increase in our lives in regard to what He has given us. We only live once. We have to do something for God. In the parable, one servant gained tenfold and another fivefold. They were diligent and faithful servants who worked hard and saw an increase. As a result, the servants were given the authority to rule over many things because they had been faithful over a few things. They were likely filled with joy when the master rewarded them (Mt 25:23).

2. Laziness and fear are not valid excuses for avoiding service to God. He judges each individual by what we do with what He has given to us.
3. God, who has given us life, expects us to grow spiritually. He wants us to live each day with a goal and a purpose. He has given us the opportunity to do His work, and all works are important in God's eyes. Not everyone can preach powerfully, sing beautifully, heal the sick, or comfort the weak. We all have different talents, but God values each of us as long as we serve one another wholeheartedly. Our lives become meaningful when we work for the Lord. We may start with few talents, but as long as we develop them, we can accomplish great works for the kingdom of God. At the end of our lives, we will stand before Him to give an account of what we have done with what our Lord Jesus Christ has given us. We must not allow ourselves to become the lazy, fearful, and unprofitable servant, who was eventually cast into the outer darkness (Mt 25:30).

### Discussion

- When God calls us to be in His kingdom, we must use the talents God has given us to serve Him and the church. What talents are we currently using to serve Him?
- As we serve Him, are we allowing Him to mold and shape us into something useful for His glory and His kingdom?
- Are we allowing the power of the Holy Spirit to help us use the talents that God has given us? This transforming power elevates our life to be something meaningful, just as He has intended.

### Check for Understanding

1. **Why did the landowner decide to pay all the workers the same amount of wages? What does it mean spiritually?** His decision to pay all the workers was an act of mercy, not injustice. This act teaches us about God, whose grace and mercy are abundant upon those who have been chosen. In the matter of salvation, we are all sinful and "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). We cannot obtain God's salvation through our own deeds. His grace and mercy are freely given to us.
2. **In the Parable of the Talents, on what basis were the servants rewarded or punished? What does this teach us?** God expects us to give our best according to what we have received (2 Cor 8:12). So, we should each fulfill our responsibilities faithfully and diligently.
3. **What can learn about our service to God from Matthew 25:29?** If we do not put our God-given talents to work, we may eventually lose these talents and come under the punishment
4. **How does this parable show the fairness and grace of God?** God is fair because He does not require from us what we have not received. He is gracious because He considers us worthy and has entrusted to us talents of great value. In the parable, the faithful servants were given the authority to rule over many things because they had been faithful over a few things. Likewise, the reward we receive from God will be much greater than our efforts deserve (*BSG: Matthew, 7.5*).<sup>3</sup>

### Memory Verse

"His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'" (Matthew 25:23)

### Meaning

When examining the parable of the talents, we can see that the two diligent servants are rewarded different amounts, but the lord praises both for their hard work. This verse teaches that we are to use

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<sup>3</sup> Bible Study Guide: Matthew, [http://bsg.tjc.org/tjc\\_bsg\\_lesson/matthew-34/](http://bsg.tjc.org/tjc_bsg_lesson/matthew-34/), 7.5: 9.

whatever talents we have been given to the best of our ability for God's glory. Whatever our talents may be, by using them for God, we will be called a "good and faithful servant." God will also make us ruler over many things. With joy, we will enter the kingdom of heaven. God holds each individual responsible for how we use our gifts and opportunities. All of our work for the Lord has eternal rewards and eternal consequences.

### *Conclusion*

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Like in the parable of the workers in the vineyard, we must all strive to do God's work together, no matter when or how we have been called. The talents that we apply to God's work – the way we use what God has given us – will have consequences. In the parable of the talents, when the man returned, he judged the servants based on their faithfulness, and he rewarded or punished them according to what they had done. This is exactly what the Bible tells us that Christ will do: He will judge every person by his or her works according to the law of God (Rev 20:12–13). This parable has a deeper message than simply being faithful with what we have been given. Our Lord will return one day and establish a new kingdom; this is the greatest motivation for being zealous for the Lord's work.

## Lesson 4 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What are the consequences for using or not using the gifts God has given us?  
*If we use them, we will be blessed and rewarded as good and faithful servants, but if we do not, then we will be punished.*
2. What does it mean that “the last will be first, and the first last”?  
*God does not show partiality when giving salvation. All will receive the same reward of salvation. For example, the robber who was crucified with Jesus had only a few moments with Him, but nonetheless received the same reward as His disciples who spent a lifetime following Him.*
3. What do the wages in the parable of the workers in the vineyard represent? What does this teach us about our salvation?  
*The wages represent the grace of God. This teaches us that our salvation cannot be earned by our own deeds, for all men fall short of the glory of God. We have been given salvation by His grace, and His grace alone.*
4. How does God want us to use our talents?  
*He wants us to develop them by serving Him more and thus accomplish great works for the kingdom of God. Then, at the end, we can stand before God and give an account of how we used and increased the talents that we were given by the Lord.*
5. The faithful servants produced different results, but both were praised. What does this teach us about our own gifts in comparison to the gifts of others?  
*All of us have different gifts, but they are all valued and equal in God’s eyes.*
6. How can you personally become a diligent and faithful servant?  
*Personal answers.*