

Grace

Session 8 • Matthew 20:1-16



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Parables of Jesus*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Matthew Time Line*) and **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Interpreting Parables*).

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 65. Stress the sentence “We always want what we think we deserve” by re-reading it.

ASK: Why do you think we perceive life as being continually unfair? (p. 65)

CONTEXT: Point out **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Parables of Jesus*). Introduce this lesson by explaining that Jesus often used parables to help people grasp spiritual truths. Summarize the following from **Understand the Context** to highlight the events leading up to this study:

- “The parable in Matthew 20:1-16 is the capstone of the larger section of teaching found in 19:16–20:16. This sequence of events and teachings began with the inquiry of the rich young ruler. It continued with a discussion between Jesus and the disciples concerning the rewards of following Jesus. To illustrate the truths concerning eternal life and eternal rewards, Jesus shared the parable that begins chapter 20. What is

profound about this section is the reversal of all that might be expected from a human perspective. . . . The people of Jesus’s day expected the rich would be treated differently than the poor. The disciples were surprised at Jesus’s teaching about the impossibility of the rich entering the kingdom of heaven. Jesus turned all these expectations on their ear.” (p. 65)

TRANSITION: *Last week, we learned that no one gets to heaven based on their position or possessions. Today’s passage emphasizes God’s goodness and grace as He offers salvation to all.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

SHARE: Explain that today’s passage is about a kingdom, God’s eternal kingdom. Hand out copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Matthew Time Line*). Encourage adults to list all the kingdoms that had ruled the promised land since the exile in 586 BC.

SAY: *The Jews had been subject to many kingdoms in their history. In Jesus’s day, the Romans were in charge. But God’s kingdom would be nothing like those.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 20:1-7 aloud as the group considers the details of Jesus’s parable.

DISCUSS: Pass out copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Interpreting Parables*). Lead a brief discussion on how the principles in the article can be applied to this parable.

ASK: What is the significance of the detail about the landowner and workers agreeing on the amount of pay? (p. 67)

ENLIGHTEN: Walk through each of the times the landowner hired a new group of workers. Relate this insight into the landowner's actions and motives:

- **(20:3-7)** The landowner was filled with compassion for these laborers who desperately needed to work each day. It wasn't so much that more workers were required. Instead, this was a benevolent landowner giving to these workers what they desperately needed. He promised to give them whatever is right.

HIGHLIGHT: Affirm that the landowner promised to give each group what was right. Share that since the landowner represents God, we can trust Him to always do what is right in every situation.

READ: Instruct adults to read Matthew 20:8-12 silently, considering the tone of the workers.

EXPLAIN: *Jesus's parable reached a turning point in these verses. Everyone received a denarius, but those who had been out for twelve hours felt shortchanged by the landowner.*

ASK: Do you think what each worker received was fair? Why or why not? (p. 67)

ENGAGE: Summarize the following context to highlight the tensions felt by the other workers.

- “No mention was made by Jesus of those hired at three, noon, or nine o'clock. Instead, He skipped to the climactic portion of the story and spoke of the initial hired laborers. They assumed they would receive more. They were expecting ‘fair’ treatment, since they had worked more. . . . But they, too, received a denarius. Incensed, they demanded equality.” (p. 70, Day 4)

SHARE: Remind adults that the landowner symbolizes God. So, the story reflects how some might complain about God's fairness, even when it comes to including people into His kingdom.

ASK: How do people today question God's fairness? How do some view His just nature? (p. 67)

REFLECT: Enlist a volunteer to read the Key Doctrine (p. 67). Give adults a few moments of silence to reflect on areas where they might be tempted to think God is unfair—and how they should respond to those feelings.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 20:13-16 aloud as adults focus on the landowner's response to the angry workers.

ASK: Were the all-day workers justified in their complaints about their wages? Why or why not? (p. 67)

RECAP: Highlight the legal and moral arguments to provide more background:

- **(20:15)** The landowner pointed out, “I’m doing you no wrong.” That’s because he had paid these workers the amount they had agreed on in verse 2. The owner’s rhetorical question, “Didn’t you agree with me on a denarius?” expected a “yes” answer. The workers had agreed to that amount, and the owner had paid that amount. There was no injustice. The landowner also pointed out that this was a matter of generosity, not a matter of legal obligation. As the owner of the vineyard and the one who hired the workers, he could do as he pleased with his money. The workers could not question either the owner’s legal obligations or his moral rights.

ASK: What does this parable teach us about comparing ourselves to others? (p. 67)

EXPLAIN: *In sharing the parable, Jesus emphasized that entrance into the kingdom of God is an act of His mercy and grace. We cannot earn it, and we don’t deserve it. The Master provides freely for those who are willing to accept His offer. We have no right to take His grace for granted or to question who He demonstrates that mercy toward.*

REFLECT: Write the application statement for these verses on the board: *We should never cease to be amazed by God’s grace.* Encourage adults to spend a few moments silently reflecting on God’s grace in their lives and confessing ways they have lost their awe for what He has done for them.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week’s Bible passage:

- We can trust God to always do what is right.
- We should be thankful God gives us more than we deserve.
- We should never cease to be amazed by God’s grace.

REVIEW: Read the statements aloud, stressing “can” and “should” in each one. At the end of each statement, encourage adults to suggest practical ways they can apply these principles to their lives each day. Point out the **Apply the Text** question on page 67. Urge adults to adopt some of these ideas for living out God’s grace and generosity before the world.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking God to help adults contemplate God’s love and blessings in their lives. As adults leave, challenge them to share with at least one person this week how God has been gracious to them.

AFTER THE SESSION

During the week, send the group a text or email, urging them to reflect on God’s grace regularly. Remind them to share His grace with someone who needs to know about it this week. If you personally experience a moment when life seems unfair, reflect on the truths of this week’s focal passage. Be prepared to share that intentional mindset change with the group.