

The Parable of The Compassionate Land Owner - Peter Burton

- What simple stories can be shared about God's activity in our lives this past week/month?

Matt 20v1-16

Recapping the Parables series, we're not to look for "Straightforward, propositional statements." *"For Jesus, the meaning of God's kingdom is a radical mystery. ... Jesus did not use the parables to explain everything to people's satisfaction ... In other words, the parables are trying to upset people's existing ideas as well as provide them with new ones."* Robert Farrar Capon.

Are we ready for new ideas? Your Bible might be misleading you! The section headings are not in original text and "The parable of the workers in the vineyard" is misleading. It is about the Compassionate, Generous Land Owner. (Cf, The Prodigal Son is really about the Loving Father).

V1-2. A Denarius is a fair day's wage. Those in marketplace at 6am waiting for work were in the bottom economic strata. Hoping for work, they had no security, living hand to mouth. Cf Land Owner was wealthy.

V3-4. Unusual for Land Owner to return - a sign of compassion rather than poor business management?

V5. Further visits at noon and 3pm, not the normal way to do business.

V6-7. 5pm, the "11th hour" (KJV). Those waiting for work were the least capable, (maybe old and disabled, only able to do an hour's work), the "last" to be chosen.

V8-9. The Land Owner had Foremen, so why did he go? He chose to be involved and compassionate. Then for payment he flips the order and the "last" received a full day's pay first.

V10-12. The "first" expected more. We have innate sense of "fairness" in us (think children: "It's not fair").

V13-16. Land Owner's response. He destroys the workers' arguments: "I'm not unfair - I fulfilled my contract:" "I'm acting legally, I can use my money how I please;" "I'm moral - you're envious over my generosity." Jesus' famous phrase: "The last will be first, and the first will be last."

The Bible is also misleading due to chapter and verse positioning. This came from Geneva Bible in 1560. But, sometimes the break is in wrong place. (Cf, Paul's letters are letters!) Matt 19v16-22 is about the rich young ruler, then 19v23-30 is about rewards for discipleship and concludes with *"many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."* This motif is repeated 20v8b and 20v16. There is no break in the original story. "First being last and last being first" is a Kingdom principle.

Society has been based on birthright of first born inheriting and was taken for granted. First siblings, Cain and Abel, younger preferred; Isaac elevated over Ishmael; Jacob over Esau; King Saul's son, Jonathan gave way to David, who was the youngest son of a peasant farmer. BUT Jesus is the *"first born over all creation"* Col 1v15-19; He has the right but doesn't exercise it - Phil 2v6-11. Jesus is the first but becomes the least.

Jesus subverts priority, God is self-giving, love looks like Jesus. Getting ahead doesn't matter to God. Are we looking for "the podium"? Are we competitive?

In the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin the Men's Pole Vaulting was between 3 US men and 2 Japanese. An American got Gold but the two Japanese chose not to compete for Bronze and Silver. Their medals were shared and afterwards were cut in two and rejoined as silver/bronze and bronze/silver

<https://www.pebble.by/p/ZQLBi5iwiE8g/in-the-1936-olympics-two-japanese-pole-vaulters-s>

This was act of selflessness. Matt 23v12 *"For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."* What is unusual gets talked about!

The Land Owner became exasperated v14 "Take your pay and go!" Indeed, the first will be last.

For Reflection in Collective:

Peter closed posing 2 questions:

- In which areas of your life are you constantly "checking the podium" to see who is ahead?
- What radical, unexpected decision could you make in your life this week to demonstrate the Kingdom principle displayed in this parable?