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Kids Bible Lesson: Parable of the Laborers/Vineyard Workers

(Matthew 19:23 – 20:16)

This lesson is based on Jesus’ parable of the laborers. It was his response when the disciples’ asked, “Who then can be saved?” and Peter’s question of what will be the reward for them since they left all to follow Jesus.

**Bible Story:** Jesus’ Parable of the Laborers
**Scripture:** [Matthew 19:23 – 20:16](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+19%3A23-20%3A16&version=NIV)
**Learning Objective(s):**

* Students will learn that salvation is a gift of God and cannot be earned.
* God rewards believers for faithful service to Him.

**Memory Verse:** [Ephesians 2:8-9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=ephesians%202:8-9&version=NIV) (NIV) “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-not by works, so that no one can boast.”
Bible Lesson Parable of the Laborers:

Let’s open our Bibles to Matthew 19:23.
When Jesus taught His disciples many times he used parables or stories to help them understand better.  Today we are going to be learning about one of the parables He taught His disciples.  Before Jesus began teaching the parable His disciples asked Him two questions.  The first question is found in verse 25. *Choose a volunteer to read verse 25.* The disciples are astonished because Jesus said that it was easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven.  To understand why the disciples were shocked about what Jesus said, we have to understand what they believed about rich people.  In those days people believed if you were rich you were blessed by God.  Since you were blessed by God that meant you were righteous and if you were righteous you would go to heaven.  Jesus wanted His disciples to know the truth about God and the way to go to heaven.  He needed them to know that what they believed about the rich was not God’s truth.  When Jesus said this the disciples wanted to know, if rich people couldn’t be saved, who could?  Jesus answered them by saying (volunteer read verse 26) ***“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”***  Remember our memory verse for today?  How can anyone be saved?  It is only a gift from God.  He can save the poorest of people and the richest of people, but it isn’t because of their poorness or riches that He saved them, it is because of His mercy and kindness. ([2 Timothy 1:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20timothy%201:9&version=NIV), [Titus 3:5](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=titus%203:5&version=NIV))

After hearing this Peter asked Jesus the second question before Jesus tells the parable of the laborers.  *Read verse 27.*  Peter wanted to know what would the reward be for he and the others because they left everything they had to follow Jesus.  Jesus said that they would be rewarded for leaving everything and following Him.

Jesus always had a purpose when He taught a parable and because of these two questions He wanted to help the disciples to understand that no one can earn God’s gift of salvation and He decides how to reward each of His servants.

Jesus begins to tell this parable (Matthew 20:1-16).  He said that God’s Kingdom is like a man who owned a vineyard.  A vineyard is a place where grapes are grown.  There is always plenty of work to do in a vineyard and the man who owned this vineyard needed to hire some workers. What do you think some of the work would be in a vineyard?  One day early in the morning around 6 a.m. he found a group of people who agreed to work for a denarius (in Bible times this was payment for one day’s work).  The group of workers went to the vineyard and began working. (If you have a teacher’s clock as a prop you can use it and move the hands for the times the landowner hires workers.)
Around 9 a.m. the owner went and saw other people standing in the marketplace and told them that if they went to work in his vineyard he would pay them fairly.  He didn’t tell them exactly what he would pay like he did the first group.  He just said he would pay them whatever is right.  This group of people agreed to work for the owner and started working in his vineyard at 9 a.m.

The landowner went back to the marketplace at noon time and found another group of people he asked to work for him.  They said yes and went off to work in his vineyard.
At 3 o’clock the landowner went back to the marketplace and hired another group of people to work in his vineyard and off they went to work for the landowner.
A typical work day went from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.  What the landowner did next was amazing because there was only one hour left to the workday.  He went back to the marketplace at 5 o’clock and saw a group of people just standing around.  He asked them, “Why have you been standing here all day doing nothing?”  They answered the man and said, “Because no one has hired us.”  The landowner told this group of workers that they could go to work in his vineyard.  Even though there was only one hour left to the work day they agreed to work.
As we think about the parable Jesus has told up to this point let’s use our imaginations and try to think about what it would have been like at the vineyard that day.  To help us understand let’s think of how we would feel.  Suppose you share a room with your brother/sister.  Your room is a disaster.  Clothes, books, toys and pieces of paper that you didn’t put in the trash are everywhere.  Your Mom says when you clean up your room you can go to your favorite restaurant and you can eat whatever you want on the menu.  You agree to clean up the room and start thinking about where you would like to eat and what you might order.  As you pick up your brother’s dirty clothes that never made it to the hamper you wonder why he’s not here helping you.  He is downstairs in the kitchen working on a school project that is due the next day.  You work hard for close to two hours to get the room cleaned up. When you are almost done your brother comes in to help finish.  It takes about 15 minutes and finally your room is in perfect order.
As we return to Jesus’ parable we will see how the workers who worked all day felt about the workers who came later.  Let’s look at verse 8.  At the end of the day the landowner called all of his workers together.  He told one of his men in charge to pay the workers.  He gave him instructions to pay the workers that began working at 5 o’clock first and pay the ones who began working at 6 o’clock in the morning last.
As all the workers are gathered together the man in charge of paying the workers called the group that began working at 5 o’clock first.  With everyone watching he hands each of them a denarius. Next the group that began at 3 o’clock comes and they each received a denarius.  The same happens for the group that started at noon and at 9 o’clock.  Finally the workers are standing there waiting to receive their payment.  Seeing that those who worked less than they did receive a denarius they figured that they would receive more money because they worked all day.  When they put out their hand and received a denarius they began to complain.  Let’s read verse 12 to find out what they said. They didn’t feel like the landowner was being fair.

The landowner responds by saying that he had been fair.  He gave these workers exactly what they had agreed upon before they started.  Because he was the landowner he had the right to give to each group of workers want he wanted to give.

Let’s return to our story about you cleaning up the room you share with your brother/sister.  When your mom comes in to inspect the room, she is pleased with the way your room looks.  She tells both you and your brother to get ready to leave so you can go out to eat for lunch.  When you get to the restaurant that you chose your mom tells both of you to choose anything you want from the menu.  How do you think you would have felt seeing your brother get the same reward as you received and he only worked fifteen minutes?  You may feel as though your brother doesn’t deserve to have the privilege to eat anything off the menu as you do because you did all the work. You may feel like what your mother is allowing your brother to do is not fair.
Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that God is fair in how He rewards each of His servants. Jesus ended the parable by saying (have volunteer read verse 16) “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”  Jesus knew that the disciples might be tempted to become prideful in their work for Him and they might feel like the laborers in the vineyard who worked all day.

The parable was to teach the disciples that God doesn’t treat those that have worked longer better than those who started later.  He sees them as equally important to the work in His Kingdom. Knowing this truth should keep all believers from being prideful in how long or how great they believe their work for God is.  Just as Jesus taught His disciples that salvation is a gift from God to anyone who accepts it, He also wanted them to know that each person who works in His kingdom will be rewarded in the way God chooses. Our salvation is a gift from God and we did nothing to earn it and that keeps us from bragging.  The same is true about our service for God.  Serving God is a gift and we need to serve Him faithfully not thinking that we are any more important than someone else who is serving God in a different way. No one earned their way to heaven and no one has the right to brag about how much or how long they have served God.  Each person’s work is valuable to God.

**Salvation Message/Closing:**
There are three words I want to close our story time with.

The first word is **CALL.**
God offers His Gift of Salvation to all people.  ([John 3:16](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john%203:16&version=NIV), [2 Peter 3:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20peter%203:9&version=NIV)) A way to picture this in our minds is to think of God calling men, women, boys and girls on the telephone (use a toy phone or real phone as a prop).  He has a message of Good News that His Son Jesus died on the cross for our sins, was buried and came back to life on the third day so we can be saved.  If someone is calling you or I on the phone we have a choice to pick up the phone and answer it don’t we?  We can stand there and look at the phone while it rings but never pick it up to find out who is calling and hear what they have to say.  It is the same with God’s call.  God loved the world and sent His Son so we could be saved.  But unless we answer His call and believe in Jesus by faith we can’t be saved.

The second word is **COMMISSIONED**.
To be commissioned is to be given a job to do.  When a person answers God’s call to be saved, He gives them a job to do. [Matthew 28:19-20](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%2028:19-20&version=NIV) Each person is created with abilities to do the work God has given them to do. [Ephesians 2:10](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%202:10&version=NIV) No one knows how long they will be on this earth before God calls them home to be with Him in Heaven.  Believers need to begin doing the work God has given them to do so others can be a part of His Kingdom.

The final word is **COMPENSATED**.
(The last two words are big words.  I tried to keep them words with the letter “c” to help us remember.) Compensated is another word for payment.  Believers will be rewarded by God for the work that they do for Him. [Revelation 22:12](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+22:12&version=NIV)

What “c” word do you need to ask God for help with this morning?  Have you answered the “call” to be a follower of Jesus?  Are you being obedient to God’s Commission?  Are you being obedient to serve God in your school, home and neighborhood so others can know how to be saved?  As you serve God are you working faithfully for Him doing the best that you can?  God sees your faithfulness and obedience and He will reward you one day.  One of the greatest rewards a believer can hear when they stand before God in heaven one day is to hear the words:  “Well done, good and faithful servant! ” [Matthew 25:21a](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+25:21&version=NIV) You are never too young to serve God faithfully.

Close in prayer.
**Review Questions:**

1. How is a person saved? (by faith)
2. What two questions did Jesus answer before He told the parable of the laborers? (Who can be saved? What will be our reward?)
3. What is a parable? (a story that Jesus told to help disciples understand God’s ways better)
4. What time did the landowner hire his first group of workers? (6 a.m.)
5. What did he agree to pay them? (a denarius)
6. What other times did the landowner hire workers? (9 a.m. noon, 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.)
7. What did he say he would pay them for their work?  (whatever is right)
8. In what order were the workers paid? (last to first)
9. Why did the workers hired first grumble? (they expected to be paid more because they worked longer)

**Craft:**



Have kids “stamp” the outline of a bunch of grapes with purple paint and a toilet paper roll—and have them write and put the scripture reference **—**

**God Gives Graciously—Matthew 20:1-16**