



MATTHEW 20:1-16

# INDEBTED HEART

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# Scripture Passage

Matthew 20:1-16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they

thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

# Sermon

## Indebted Heart

Jesus said that the kingdom of God is like a landowner. Matthew 20:1 says, ***“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard.” (Matthew 20:1)***

Through this landowner, we can see the kingdom of God, Jesus said. What was he like? What was the distinct characteristic of the landowner?

### **The Landowner**

The first thing we notice about this landowner was that he was constantly searching from early in the morning. In the Bible when it says early in the morning, it means 6 o'clock in the morning. So he went out at 6 o'clock in the morning, and 9 o'clock, and 12, and 3 in the afternoon. Every 3 hours he went out. And he went out even at 5 o'clock in the evening. I wonder why he went out at 5 in the evening. There is only one hour left for people to work. This tells us about this owner - his searching was not just for himself, not just to use them. His searching was good for the labourers, it was for them. Not necessarily for himself.

We can see that clearly in verses 6 and 7. ***“And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, “Why are you standing here idle all day?” They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard.””*** (Matthew 20:6, 7) No one has hired us, that's the key.

## **The Kingdom of God**

The kingdom of God is a place where the unwelcomed are welcomed, the unrecognized are recognized, and the rejected are accepted. That’s what the kingdom of God is like. People who have experienced this already tasted the kingdom of God. It is something that people who have everything, people who have money, power, and fame, will not be able to experience. In the kingdom of God, people feel welcomed, no matter who they may be. No matter how weak and how sinful, how vulnerable they may be, they are all welcomed. That’s what the kingdom of God is like. That’s why in the kingdom of God, people live with this indebted heart.

Everyone in the Kingdom of god, they live with this indebted heart. They feel that they don’t deserve what they have. They don't deserve what they receive.

The place where everyone lives with this indebted heart – That's what the kingdom of God is like. There's no one who has this entitlement attitude. Living with an indebted heart does not mean that you are under a burden or pressure that you have to pay the debt. Living with an indebted heart doesn't mean that you live in the shadow of shame and guilt because of the debt. Indebted feeling is the feeling of "Why am I loved? Why am I so cared for?" Who am I that God is mindful of me? That kind of feeling - that's what the indebted heart is like.

We experience the warmth and loving care and deep within us, we have this tremendous gratitude. I am nobody and yet people treat me like I am somebody. That's what we experience in the kingdom of God. When I hear St. Paul's confession, I believe that he lived in the kingdom of God. ***"Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but***

***the grace of God that is with me."* (I Corinthians**

**15:7-10)** Can you see the indebted heart? Can you see the brokenness? Can you see the gratitude?

I believe that he lived in the kingdom of God. This landowner provided a wonderful place for the workers. That place was not just a place where they worked – that place was a place where they felt welcomed. They experienced love and grace. They experienced the new opportunity of life. They felt useful, needed, wanted and valued. It was not just a place to work, it was a place where you feel really good about yourself.

That was what Jesus did. Jesus' life was like a metaphor. A metaphor of what the kingdom of God is like. He spent time with those who were rejected, alienated and gave them hope for the new life and a new opportunity. He restored their dignity. They felt loved for the first time. "Nobody hired us." How does that feel? It's not a good feeling. They all felt loved for the first time. Always, they received from society judgment, discrimination, cold shoulder. They're used to receiving that kind of treatment and yet Jesus came. How beautiful, how valuable, how precious you are. Jesus made them feel

that. Most people might have followed Jesus because they saw miracles. "Wow this is great! He is wonderful! His teachings are great!" So, they just followed hoping, "Can we see another kind of miracle?" But I think there were some people who followed because they felt this love and acceptance from Jesus. Because they experienced the kingdom of God, they followed Jesus.

When Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "I would stay at your house tonight." Nobody said it until then. And as soon as he heard that, he felt so welcomed, he gave up all his possessions. When Mary experienced love from Jesus, she broke her most precious perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet. They both experienced the kingdom of God, that's why they followed Jesus. When the disciples experienced the kingdom of God, they gave up their lives.

The kingdom of God is hidden to those who think they can handle their lives well on their own, who don't need anybody's help. "I can take care of myself" the kingdom of God is hidden from those who think like that. The kingdom of God is revealed to those who desperately need God's help. My friends, the kingdom of God is not something that we can create for ourselves.



The kingdom of God is a gift to all of us. It is to get a new opportunity to start again even though we have failed. That's why there is joy, there is gratitude. People who experienced the kingdom of God live with joy and gratitude because it's a gift. They all have this indebted heart.

## **A Sign of Grace**

The fact that they were able to work at the vineyard was by the grace of the landowner. And the fact that they received a full day's wage, on top of that, was also the grace that they received. To them, 1 denarion was not a wage, it was a gift. It was a sign of grace.

Our life is not a wage but a gift. If you understand that, your life will be brightened up. It is not a gift just to receive, it is also a gift to share with others. Like what Zacchaeus did and what Mary did. They shared. The beautiful thing that they experienced, they shared with other people. When you receive the grace, you want to share it. That's the nature of what grace is like. When you receive grace, you don't want to hold it just for yourself you want to share it – that's what grace is. When you live with the indebted heart, you want to share the good things that you have, not to pay off the

debt, but to share the joy with thankfulness.

You all have received life as a gift. Enjoy it, and be happy. That's what you do – when you receive a gift, enjoy it and be happy. You ought to be happy. When you are down, depressed... When you feel that nothing goes well in your life... When you feel sad and lonely, when you feel that nobody really cares about you, God comes to you and knocks at your door. When God does that, open the door. Then he will come in.

This is what Revelation says: ***"Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me."*** (Revelation 3:20) But unfortunately, in today's story there were people who were not that happy in the vineyard. They grumbled against the owner. This is what they said, ***"When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner..."*** (Matthew 20:9-11) They grumbled.

When I went to Madagascar, I had to go to this place where no car could go in, so I had to take a boat to enter into that area. That was one of our missions, we had a church there and our mission project there. So we went through about 2-3 hours. I saw people in that river, it was a huge river. They came and they dived - I thought they were playing and I thought "What are they doing? They're enjoying themselves?" But no, they were digging sand. On the shore, there was no more sand because they dug already, so they went kind of in the middle and pulled up sand and put it into their canoes. And once the canoe was filled, they go to the shore, dump it, and go back out again. They do that all day, and sell the sand to the construction company.

And then I went along and I saw kind of a mountain with the rocks, and there were people who are cutting the stone. They do that all day - in the heat, all day. Both these people, they received \$2 a day. And when they receive it, on the way home, they buy some rice, and little vegetables, and then feed the whole family. They don't have savings, they live day by day. If they don't receive that wage, then the whole family starves.

The one denarion was like that. That landowner gave 1

denarion each, because they needed it. Not to discriminate people. Not to stir up competitive attitude. But because they needed it, he gave 1 denarion.

## **Do Not Let Greed Take Over**

But people who came early grumbled against the owner. In the beginning, they considered their work in the vineyard as a gift. But in the end, they thought of their life as a wage. Greed took over. You know when greed takes over you, it's interesting, you never feel abundant. You always feel that you don't have enough. That's what greed does to you. When you don't have greed, all of a sudden, even if you don't have much, you feel so abundant. You have enough! But once greed takes over, you feel that you don't have enough, all the time, even though you have more. That's what greed does. Only grumbling. In the greedy heart, there is no thankfulness, there is no gratitude, there is no indebted feeling. Only grumbling.

St. Paul didn't do that. Hear again what he said. ***"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."***  
**(1 Corinthians 15:10)**

## **Share the Joy with Others**

Let down your greed. Let down your grumbling. Be thankful, be joyful, and be happy. All you have is God's gift. Your children are God's gift. Your family is God's gift. Your friends around you who care about you is God's gift. And the abundance that you enjoy everyday is God's gift. Be thankful, live with an indebted heart and be happy. And share the joy with others.