

Session 8

GOD IS GENEROUS

Matthew 20:1-16

Memory Verse


“So the last will be first, and the first last.”

– MATTHEW 20:16, CSB



God is Generous

THEOLOGICAL THEME: The nature of God is best described by naming His attributes. In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, Christ gave His listeners a glimpse of God’s wisdom, sincerity, and generosity.

 Have you ever seen a rainbow in real life? What did you notice about it? What did it remind you of?

 What are some differences between a rainbow in real life and a rainbow that a child may draw on paper?

One of the most unique aspects of creation is the rainbow. This beautiful display of God’s creativity is a reminder of God’s promise to Noah to withhold His judgment and wrath against the sinfulness of man. Further, many see in the story of Noah and the rainbow a foreshadowing of the death of Christ because the “bow” is pointed upward toward heaven.

A rainbow also provides an apt illustration of God’s attributes. Many people have attempted to classify and categorize God’s attributes to make them easier to study. Some theologians have divided them into absolute and relative, natural and moral, and communicable and incommunicable. These may be helpful ways one initially begins to consider the nature of God. However, these categories do not express the important fact that God’s attributes blend together. They are consistent with one another and manifest together.

When a child draws a picture of a rainbow, they will begin with one color then add another and another until satisfied with the drawing. The colors of the rainbow are neatly separated and distinct into their respective tracks. Rainbows in the real world aren't constructed in this way.

When we look at a rainbow we do see distinct colors, but it would be a very difficult task to try to discern where one color begins and another ends. They blend together to make up the rainbow. In the same way, God's nature is one perfect whole made up of various attributes. We can no more clearly define the limits of one attribute of God than we could tell the border of one color from another in the rainbow.

William Plumer said, "[T]here is a blending of one divine perfection with another, yet the whole is one infinitely beautiful and perfect character. There is nothing in excess; there is nothing wanting. We do not separate the rays of the bow, though we distinguish between them. Neither do we separate, but merely distinguish between the attributes of God."¹

Session Summary

Parables are stories about everyday life that express spiritual truth. While we must be careful not to over-spiritualize parables by making them mean more than was intended, we should also seek to squeeze all the truth out of them to gain knowledge of God.

In this parable, Christ sought to give His disciples a picture of the kingdom of heaven. (See 20:1.) There are three primary elements in this parable: the master, the workers, and the vineyard. The focal point of the parable is the master. His character and actions are meant to mirror a spiritual reality, namely the character and actions of God the Father as He interacts with those on earth.

The parable is about the grace of God the Father. In it we see His wisdom, sincerity, and generosity.

1. The Wisdom of the Master (Matt. 20:1-7)

The text says that the master went out early in the morning to hire workers for the vineyard he owned. It was not uncommon for day laborers to gather each morning in a central, known location where those who needed such workers could go and hire them for the day. In fact, this practice is still common in many places across the world.

Clearly, the master had plans and purposes for his vineyard and he desired to use workers to accomplish his objectives.



What do these actions of the master teach us about God the Father?

The master arose early and sought out workers to labor in his vineyard. These actions were right and wise. They were honorable and helpful. His actions were completely appropriate and life giving to those around him. In a similar way, God the Father is infinitely wise. God orders all things to a right end. Furthermore, God the Father orders all things for His own glory.

In all of God's Word and works, His wisdom shines. Psalm 104:24 says, "How countless are your works, Lord! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures." It is folly to criticize the work of God's hands. Men often err and act foolishly in their interactions, business dealings, and emotions, but God does all things with perfect skill. His wisdom far exceeds the wisdom of man. In fact, the wisdom of man is foolishness next to God's wisdom.

There are many people who claim superior intelligence, who have attended important schools that say that there is no discernable wisdom of God in the natural realm and that there is no God at all. However, those who are in Christ pay no attention to these arguments. It is as though Christians are neck-deep in the churning ocean as these so-called intellects yell from the beach that there is no such thing as an ocean. Christians can hear the yelling, but the roar of the sea, the power of the current, and the engulfing waves are more convincing.

Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool says in his heart, 'There's no God.'" People's blindness in regard to the unsurpassed wisdom of God is one of the clearest proofs of a complete depravity.

? What does this master’s wisdom teach us about God’s wisdom concerning our entrance into the kingdom of heaven?

God’s wisdom is displayed in His redeeming work toward sinners. Notice the wisdom of the master to go and look for laborers. No one finds their way into the kingdom of God on their own. Just as the workers didn’t show up at the vineyard without being called, so people will be welcomed into God’s kingdom only if they are first called. God, in His wisdom, calls His people to Himself because the ungodly are unable to come on their own. They are spiritually dead and blinded to the reality and goodness of God. Furthermore, the masterpiece of God’s wisdom is the plan of redemption where Christ took on the sin of man and His righteousness was credited to sinners. In this way, God the Father was both just and the justifier. (See Rom. 3:26.)

? Application: How should the fact that God orders all things to a right end change the way we face moments of anxiety and worry?

2. The Sincerity of the Master (Matt. 20:8)

Jesus said, “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard told his foreman, ‘Call the workers and give them their pay, starting with the last and ending with the first’” (v. 8). The master made good on his agreement with the workers when he hired them. The text says, “After agreeing with the workers on one denarius, he sent them into his vineyard for the day” (v. 2).

Had the master not paid them at the end of the day, he would have been an unjust master. He would have been a liar, deceiver, and criminal. Some masters do behave in ways such as this. Some masters are insincere in their promises and deceptive in their dealings. But the master in Jesus’ parable was not so. Not only was he wise in his dealings, but he was also sincere in his promises.



How does God compare to the master in this parable?

God is the God of truth. His yes is yes, and His no is no. God can no more lie than He can die. He could not be farther from things like deception or insincerity. God is completely and continually sincere in all His invitations, warnings, and statements. Hebrews 6:18 says, “it is impossible for God to lie.” All that God has revealed in Word is true. All of His words are sincere.


Just as the master made good on his promise to pay the workers in his vineyard, God also fulfills the promises He has made. Whatever God has committed to do, He will certainly perform. As 2 Peter 3:9 says, “the Lord does not delay his promise.”



How has God fulfilled His promises to His people?

God’s faithful love reaches to heaven, His faithfulness to the clouds. (See Ps. 36:5.) God promised from the beginning that He would redeem His people through a Rescuer. This promise has been the hope of God’s people for generations. Has God made good on this promise? Yes! The hope of God’s people needs no firmer rock on which to rest than the certainty that God fulfills His promises. Indeed, God has fulfilled the promise that He made to put His Spirit in His people and replace their hearts of stone with hearts of flesh. (See Ezek. 36:26.)

God has kept His promise: “When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir” (Gal. 4:4-7). And the promise of Christ to the ungodly is this: “Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out” (John 6:37).


 Application: God is true to His Word and is sincere with regard to all of His promises, warnings, and commandments. How should this affect our view of the Bible? How should we relate to it?

3. The Generosity of the Master (Matt. 20:9-16)

 What was unique about the way that the master paid his workers? How did they respond?

Imagine the workers gathering around the master at the end of the day. Those who had been working all day were exhausted and ready to get home. They were looking forward to their pay. They must have been shocked when they saw that those who had only worked a fraction of the day receiving a full day's wages. They assumed that the master's generosity would be scaled up to compensate for the number of hours they worked. It wasn't. They also received a day's wages, which is exactly what they agreed to earlier that day. Those who received a full day's wage, even though they only worked part of a day, must have been overjoyed and grateful. The men who worked all day, however, were furious.

The master's response was direct: "Don't I have the right to do what I want with what is mine? Are you jealous because I'm generous" (v. 15)?

 How did the master's generosity parallel God the Father's generosity?

Generally speaking, God is generous, kind, merciful, patient, and loving. These qualities are known as God's benevolence. His good will toward His own is unfathomable. Because He is kind, He shows compassion to the afflicted, He is patient toward the rebel, and He offers grace and mercy to those who are guilty of sin. God is good to all.

Furthermore, the master's generosity toward the workers was unconditional. This is an important point in Christian doctrine and a right understanding of the gospel. Yes, the Bible does teach that there will be rewards in heaven and that we will be judged according to our deeds but this parable displays a truth about justification, not sanctification.

The wage given at the end of the day wasn't based on the men's performance but on the master's will. He gave each man a good gift because it was his to give and he desired to give it. Similarly, God grants salvation in Christ to people without respect to their merits. If salvation were merit-based, then all people would receive condemnation because the standard far exceeds any person's ability to meet it. Just as one may be able to jump four feet in the air while another may only be able to jump three feet when the objective is to reach the moon, neither comes remotely close and neither has reason to boast.



Application: Reflect on God's grace in your life. How have you received what you have not earned from Him? How should this lead us to respond to Him and to tell others about Him?

Conclusion

God's attributes are perfectly consistent one with another. It isn't only that God is wise, sincere, and generous. But God is wise in His generosity and sincere in His wisdom. God's perfections are a part of His essential nature and ought to be contemplated and adored by His people. The people of God worship God in both spirit and truth. As Christians grow in their knowledge of God, so does their reverence and love for Him. This results in increasing worship in both spirit and truth.

? Are you more likely to rely on God's wisdom or your own? What are the ways we daily rely on God's wisdom?

? How is God's generosity reflected in your life? Why are God's people called to reflect His generosity to others?

? How should God's generosity lead us to desire for others to know Him? How does this give evidence that we truly know Him?

CHRIST CONNECTION: The wisdom, sincerity, and benevolence of God are uniquely and fully expressed in the gospel message. God proved His wisdom in rightly ordering the way of salvation. God proved His sincerity by fulfilling His promises to send this Rescuer. Finally, God proved His generosity by exhibiting grace and mercy—beyond comprehension—toward His enemies.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Christians walk in wisdom, sincerity, and generosity as pilgrims in a strange land. God often uses these adornments of the gospel in the lives of His children to prepare their hearts to hear and receive the gospel.



FOR NEXT WEEK

God is Peace

Main Passages

- Hebrews 13:20-21

Session Outline

1. The God of Peace (Heb. 13:20-21)
2. Peace with God (Heb. 13:20)
3. Peace in Trial (Heb. 13:21)

Memorize

“So the last will be first, and the first last.”

- Matthew 20:16, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - Matthew 6:4-6
- Tuesday - Matthew 20:1-15
- Wednesday - Luke 6:38
- Thursday - Philippians 4:19
- Friday - 2 Corinthians 8:9
- Saturday - Ephesians 1:3

References

¹William S. Plumer, *Theology for the People: or, Biblical Doctrine, Plainly Stated* (New York, NY: American Tract Society, 1875).