



**The Parables of Jesus**  
**Parables about Discipleship, Part 2**  
**The Parable of The Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)**  
**The Parables of the Tower Builder and Warring King (Luke 14:28-32)**

I do not agree with everything Dietrich Bonhoeffer has written, of course, but he did say some profound things for which the church should give ear. In his book, "The Cost of Discipleship," he says, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." When Jesus calls men he calls them to leave what they have and to leave what they are doing and to follow him. Following Jesus is a wonderful giving up of all our own self-efforts and clinging to Him and to His promises. It is that irony of ironies that for him who wants to "gain it all" it is required of him to lose it. For those who strive and strive and strive to gain it here, they end up losing it. Jesus says in Matthew 16:25, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

We often emphasize, and well we should, the wonderful, matchless, grace of the Lord. We highlight and stress in our ministry the reality and truth of justification by grace, through faith. We are very careful to distinguish law and gospel and desire the people of Trinity Grace Church to rest and bask in the grace of the Lord Jesus. And yet we rejoice, not only in the power of God that saves one from their sin, but the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer who strengthens one to live in a manner worthy of their calling. The Scripture everywhere calls believers to live in such a way. The Scripture calls men and women to "follow Jesus."

A disciple is a student. A disciple is a pupil. He or she is one who follows another. Jesus said in John 13:35, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." In other words, Jesus is simply saying, "everyone will know that you follow me,

that you are my students, if you love one another." If one were truly a disciple, how would that person not follow his teacher? Discipleship then, is that process whereby we continue to learn and put into practice that which we learn. It is the life of following Jesus.

Again, this is the subject of these parables in this study. In this lesson we cover two (or three depending on how you look at it) more parables about discipleship: The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard and The Parables of the Tower Builder and the Warring King.

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Read Matthew 20:1-16) begins with, "For the kingdom of heaven is like..." So again, we have the context of the kingdom of heaven. This just as easily could have been placed in our Kingdom Parables section but there is much more of a clear emphasis on what a disciple is in the midst of the kingdom, how a disciple is to think of himself in that kingdom, and how to live in that kingdom, so that it fits nicely here in discipleship as well.

This is another double indirect narrative parable; in short, it is a long metaphor. It is not a particularly difficult parable to work through in the sense that the correspondences are fairly easily understood. Even the climax reached in verse 15 concerning the statement from the master of the house is very straightforward, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" Of course, the answer to that question should be, "Yes, the master has the right to do what he wants to do." And moreover, Jesus gives the final reality in verse 16, "So the last will be first, and the first last." Both of those things are fairly easily understood and yet the question then

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becomes, “what does this have to do with the kingdom of heaven?” Is this parable directing our eyes to the sovereign choice and freedom of the master of the house or is Jesus teaching his disciples that there is no room for boasting in the kingdom of heaven because “the last will be first and the first will be last?” I don’t think we have to, nor do I think we should, choose between the two of these things.

For after all, one’s theology drives one’s practice. As you have probably heard before, “orthodoxy” (right thinking) precedes “orthopraxy” (right living). This truth is played out before our very eyes here in this parable. There are many who argue that this parable is about the grace of God. This master of the house is gracious to those who only began their work at the eleventh hour. These who began so late got the same amount as those who began early in the morning. It is said that this shows the extreme generosity of the Lord. And yet, it must be admitted that grace, specifically speaking, is absent in this parable. True, some got paid a very high wage for working a short period of time, but they still worked for the wage. His generosity, yes, but not grace. As Paul says in Romans 4:4, “Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.”

Therefore, this parable is not *directly* about the wonderful grace of God. However, it is about the sovereign freedom of the master of the house. And by correspondence, it is about the sovereign freedom of God. Of course, His freedom and His grace are related but this parable emphasizes His sovereign freedom. He has the right, as the master, to choose what to do with those things that belong to Him. This is reality. Paul says it this way in Romans 9:20, “Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?” Of course, Paul is speaking specifically here about God’s sovereign freedom in His grace.

He says in verse 15 of that same chapter, “For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’” Here is a truth of which many need to be reminded – God is God; He can do as He pleases. The sovereignty of God is so difficult for some not because it is unclear in the Scripture. No, it is difficult because the clay doesn’t like to be told that the potter can do what He wants. The clay wants sovereignty over the potter. But the truth of the Scripture is that God can do as He pleases with His creatures. As the master of the house says in verse 15, “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?”

And this reality moves us toward the purpose of the parable. This parable is book-ended by the phrase, “The last will be first and the first last.” Jesus says it after explaining the difficulty of the rich man of entering the kingdom of heaven and of saying to Peter, who had said he had left everything to follow Jesus, “you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.” That’s the first bookend. And the second is at the conclusion of the parable. And then after the parable, Matthew tells the story of the mother of the sons of Zebedee coming to Jesus and asking if her sons can sit next to Him, one on his left and one on his right.

This is not for this mother to decide; it’s not even for her to ask, this is up to the Father’s discretion, as Jesus says. He says in verse 26, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.” Again, the last first, the first last, the greatest is the servant. Again, getting back to the purpose of the parable – the reality of the sovereign freedom of God to do what He

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pleases leaves men with no room for boasting. It leaves men with no room for envy. It leaves no room for those living in the kingdom of God to be arrogant or to believe that they are superior to any others within the kingdom of heaven. While it doesn't speak specifically of the grace of God, it still does remove all thinking of some that they might somehow be more worthy than others to be in the kingdom of God. After all, it's up to the God of that kingdom. He has true freedom to do what He pleases.

Isn't it easy for us to fall prey to this trap and temptation? Is it a temptation to be jealous of those who seemingly have done whatever they have wanted in this life? It's as if they sowed their wild oats here on this earth and lived for the sake of self - pleasing only the flesh and then God saves them late in life. Then they have "the best of both worlds" we think. Do you sometimes think, "I should get more of the kingdom than they!" It was the master's generosity that any of the workers in the kingdom receive anything. He is the one who went and sought them out. He paid those who started earlier the amount to which they had agreed. Did he not have the right to pay others the same?

On the part of those who "had borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat" (Matthew 20:12), there was a real sense of injustice. They believed they had been wronged because the others who only worked one hour received the same pay. This injustice was based on their own disadvantage not a real injustice. In other words, they were paid an acceptable wage; the others, however, were paid an extravagant wage. Those who had worked only one hour were at a real advantage; yet advantage or disadvantage isn't the same as justice or injustice.

In fact, the proper response should be a grateful acknowledgement of being paid a day's wage - not a jealousy that others received the same. As far as kingdom living, the point of the parable is that for the members of the kingdom, jealousy has no place. There should be no displeasure at

someone's success but members of the kingdom should rejoice when others rejoice. Klyne Snodgrass resolves the tension of the application of this parable like this: "The parable assures that no one will get less than promised or be treated unfairly and that many will get much more than they deserve." Of course, truth be told, we all get more than we deserve!

The other parable or set of two parables with The Tower Builder and The Warring King (Read Luke 14:28-32) are interrogative parables both beginning with a question - a question whose answer is an obvious, "No one!" But this parable too, comes in the context of the cost of discipleship. As Luke has recorded it, Jesus had just finished saying to the crowds that "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). Even as God has justified us by a radical gospel, He also calls us to a radical discipleship.

These two parables are very similar and make their point, again, by asking a question. The first is this, "For which of you desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it" (Luke 14:28). And the second is like it, "What king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand" (Luke 14:31). The obvious answer to both of those questions is a simple, "No one would do either of these things." In fact it would be foolish to do either of those things. In the first parable here, the themes of shame and honor are used to drive home the point. In this culture, honor was a driving force in much of their way of life. Notice verse 29, "...is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him." This is interesting because counting the cost of discipleship, counting the cost of following Jesus is important

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enough to Jesus himself that He uses this urgent language, this language of honor and shame, to bring his hearers to action. Jesus asks them to actually consider what they might be doing. He asks them to consider the consequences of following Him.

This is so different than much of the call of the church today. Jesus, himself, would probably not pass Evangelism 101. Much of the church landscape today is far more concerned with getting people to make a “decision for Jesus” as if that decision is the test of genuine faith. Not much emphasis, if any, is put on the reality of the costs of discipleship. And for those that do give ear to this, often it is approached in a very western way. That is to say, for many, to count the cost of discipleship is to ask the question, “can I do this?” Certainly this is appropriate as Jesus is the one who is asking us to do this, right? Of course, but many answer as if “we” or “I” can do it. The question in verse 28 is to consider whether one “has enough to complete it.” We are to view following Christ in that way. We are to ask ourselves the question, “can I give what it takes to follow Jesus.” And yet, notice what that really is. It is not simply “enough” out of what we have to give. Verse 33 says, “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce ***ALL*** he has cannot be my disciple.” Good gravy! That’s a high cost. That’s a high calling. Jesus is asking for everything! Remember, this is a radical calling. He is, indeed, asking for everything.

Jesus is calling His followers to give up all they have and cling solely and wholly to Him. He must come before everything. Whether it’s father or mother or brother or sister, or yes, even one’s own life, Jesus comes first. This is the cost of following Him. It really is quite marvelous. It is profoundly ironic. You give up everything, which is really nothing, to gain everything, which is really everything. You gain everything by acknowledging you have nothing.

Part of this “renouncing” is renouncing those things that function as idols in our lives. As I stated earlier, Jesus

comes before everything. He is first in all things. To follow Jesus we must renounce all forms of those things on which we rest for our justification. Our position in life – can you give that up? The family from which we come – can you give that up? Your own performance – can you give that up? Your own perceived righteousness – can you give that up?

Let’s repeat, “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33).

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