

引言 INTRODUCTION

We have spent almost 10 months to complete our study on the book of Romans. I am sure most of you have become an expert of the book. We will do something different for the rest of the year. We will still celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas, even though we are in an unusual year. Besides those special Sundays, we will study a few parables Jesus told in the Gospels. Let us begin by asking a simple question: what is a parable? A parable is a fictional story to teach a lesson. Many of you, your children and perhaps grandchildren grew up listening to Aesop's fables. Aesop was actually a slave from Greece who lived in 600 B.C. His fables were passed down by oral tradition. Other tales that attributed to him were added even centuries later. Stories like "The Hare and the Tortoise," "The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing" and "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf" are well-known to us. So much so that some of those stories have become everyday idioms. We can use similar techniques to understand Aesop's fables and Jesus' parables. The key question to ask is: what is the lesson in the story? In Jesus' parables, He used settings that His direct audiences could identify with to explain deeper truth. We see elements like farmers and produces, shepherds and sheep, masters and slaves, etc. Some characters are related to the truth that Jesus intended to teach, while others are only supporting casts. It may be pointless to ask, for example, what does a tree or a rock in the story represent? We see some amusing explanations when Bible scholars tried to decode every detail. A main stream of understanding parables in church history is called allegorical interpretation. Some serious commentators imposed spiritual meanings into the stories. For instance, it was suggested that in the parable of the good Samaritan the victim stands for Adam, the thieves are the devil, the priest and the Levite who put a blind-eye to the victim are the Old Testament, the Samaritan who treated the injured man is Jesus, the inn represents the church and the inn-keeper is the apostle Paul. We get a good laugh for such interpretation. It was Augustine, an important figure in church history, who suggested that! The whole understanding seems to make sense. But we have to go back to the fundamental question: what lesson did Jesus mean to convey through the parable? Just like reading any Bible passage, we have to pay attention to the context. In other words, what happened before and after the story. Very likely, Jesus also gave us some hints in the parable.

解釋 EXPLANATION

With all that basic understanding, let us dive into the passage for today. Jesus begins in **verse 1** by saying: "For the kingdom of heaven is like..." Therefore, this parable is to illustrate something about the kingdom of heaven. There is actually a series of parables about heaven collected in Matthew chapter 13 and elsewhere in the gospels. Now let us look at the context. Why did Jesus tell the parable? In the previous chapter, a rich young man came to Jesus and asked what he had to do to obtain eternal life. This man knew the Law and He had observed it since childhood. Jesus challenged the man to sell everything he had and to follow Him. Upon hearing that, the man left with a sad face. He was unwilling to give up his wealth. Jesus' disciples were on the scene too. They wondered if the rich guy could not go to heaven because he would not let go of his money, then what they would get after forsaking everything to follow Jesus. It is a typical "what's in it for me" mentality. The Lord promised them that they would sit

beside Him in glory to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. Those who leave their families to follow Jesus will also receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. Jesus did not mean that we will get a hundred fathers or mothers after we became Christians. But we surely gain a lot of spiritual parents and siblings when we join a church. At the conclusion of the chapter, Jesus says in **19:30** – “But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.” Then Jesus told this parable to the disciples to illustrate what He meant by that statement. Jesus says almost the same thing after the parable. Look at **20:16**: “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” That is the moral of the story we need to comprehend. Some questions will pop up in our mind. “The first and the last in doing what?” “In what sense will the last be first, and vice versa?” We will gradually solve those unknowns.

The backdrop of the story was very familiar to Jesus’ audiences. A landlord went out to hire people to work in his vineyard. At that time, many people were day laborers. They would get together at a town square early in the morning to wait for potential employers. I saw an identical scene when I lived in Texas. Some Hispanic men gathered at a gas station. A contractor drove by to find suitable workers. He might pick four strong young guys to move things, or look for people with particular skills in construction work. Employees are only needed when there is work. In an agriculture society, more workers would be needed during harvesting seasons than other times of the year. But if a man could not find work on a certain day, then his family could go hungry that night. There was no such thing as job security and there was no trade union to fight for workers’ right. In the parable, the owner hired some workers early in the morning. People generally worked from sunrise to sundown then. We can assume that it was 6 am. He promised to pay them one denarius for one day of labor. That was the usual wage for a day laborer. So far so good. The boss had people to work for him and the men were happy to make a living. But the landlord did something unusual. He went out again four more times to recruit labors. Did he underestimate the number of people he needed? Was he dissatisfied with the workers he hired earlier? Jesus actually gave us some clues. In verse 3, Jesus says the landlord saw some people idling around at the third hour (or 9 am). Therefore, he asked the men to work for him. In verse 5, the owner went out again at the sixth (or noon) and ninth hour (or 3 pm) and did the same thing. The most surprising thing was that he called the last batch of workers at the eleventh hour (or 5 pm), meaning that they would only work for 1 hour. The employer hired more employees not because of his need, but their need. No work for the men would mean no food. He tried to gather as many workers as he could. Jesus used the hiring of workers to represent God’s invitation of sinners into His Kingdom. People whom Jesus calls to salvation will also become His followers and servants. In that regard, the workers in the parable symbolize redeemed people. Based on the parable, here it lies the first principle about God’s Kingdom:

Salvation is for sinners’ sake, not for God’s sake.

Let me elaborate. We are told in **2 Peter 3:9** that God does not “...want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” Jesus desires every person in the world to receive Him. Adam sinned and so do we. We deserve condemnation, but not salvation. God is under no obligation to save us. But He sent His Son to die for us because of His mercy and love. Jesus is like the landlord in the story who is in a search and rescue mission. He welcomes sinners to enter into His Kingdom. He does not want anyone to be left out. Do we share Jesus’ passion? One more

person being saved would mean one fewer sinner going to perish. May the Lord help us to see people with the perspective of the gospel. Pray for them and talk to them about Jesus.

The foreman called the workers to pay them wages at sunset. The parable comes to an interesting twist. The owner requested that the labors who came at 5 pm received their compensation first. They got one denarius. They must be surprised by great joy. They might have expected a fraction of that amount. Any money that could at least buy a meager portion of food was better than going home empty-handed. If people who only worked for 1 hour received a full pay, then what would the rest of the men get? Everyone received the same salary! Those who were hired earlier cried unfair. They went to the landlord to complain. The maddest people were those who worked the whole day. They reasoned that they deserved more. Listen to how the owner explained to the unhappy worker in **verses 13-15**: 13 ... 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' The owner reminded the man that both sides agreed on the wage upfront. He got what he had expected. The landlord would be unfair if he paid him anything less. Imagine this: there would not be any dispute if the foreman gave salary to the workers who labored the longest first. They would go home happily. But the owner deliberately let them see how much the 5 pm workers received. The first group was envious because they saw someone undeserved to receive the same treatment. They did not compare themselves with those who were not hired. From that we can derive the second principle about God's Kingdom:

Gratefulness comes when we realize that we deserve nothing from God.

God owes us nothing; but we owe Him everything. We should be thankful to God for giving us blessings like a job, family and good health. However, our thankfulness may turn into jealousy when we see others getting a bigger share. It happens on an occasion like class reunion. This person has become a manager of such and such company, that person owns his business and someone else even retires at 50's! You wonder why you are stuck in a humble job and a modest house. We have to be careful with that sentiment. Our discontentment may turn into distrust. We question if God treats us unfairly. There is only one thing we deserve if we truly want to fight for fairness – hell! When Jesus was hanging on the cross, there were also two criminals nailed to His two sides. One of them mocked Jesus for being unable to save Himself. The other prisoner scolded the first man, admitting that they got what they deserved. On the contrary, he clearly knew that Jesus did nothing wrong. This felon did not ask Jesus for fairness. Instead, he pleaded for mercy. **Luke 23:43** records: Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." That offender received salvation that he did not deserve. The lesson for us is this: do not compare with others, but look at ourselves from God's perspective. We can never be content if we use the world's standard of fairness to evaluate our life. Rather, we should give thanks to God for whatever He blesses us with. God has full right to deal with us the way He sees fit, just like how the landlord treated his workers. That brings up the third principle about God's Kingdom:

God is sovereign in giving us His blessings.

The landlord could use his money the way he wanted. God is sovereign over us too. He is the Lord of our life. We do our best at work and at home. We should trust that God will provide for our needs and watch over us in His sovereignty. He freely gives us blessings according to His will. That gives us peace and security. We do not have to worry even when layoff, health issue, accident and economic recession happen. We can get out of bed with joy and go to sleep at ease. We enjoy what God gives us with gratitude, whether we have more or less.

The landlord explained to the discontent worker that he was not only fair and sovereign, he was also generous. No one got less than he had expected, but many of them got more than anticipated. The owner chose to operate by grace and not by the norm. The people who were hired later in the day would think that the landlord was gracious enough to pick them. But he proved to be all the more gracious by giving the same wage to everyone, regardless of the amount of work they did. That leads to the fourth principle about God's Kingdom:

Grace is received, not earned.

By definition, grace is undeserved merit. One denarius was a fair-pay to the 6 am workers. They worked hard to earn that. But to the people hired later, the surprised wage was grace. That reminds me of what [Romans 4:4-5](#) say – 4 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. 5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. No one can ever present a resume to God in exchange for a pass to heaven. No education degree, contribution to the society or good work can earn God's grace. Jesus paid it all on the cross for us. As grace recipients, we should treat others with grace. Last December, a real estate company gave huge bonuses to all its 198 employees. The owner announced at an annual holiday party that he wanted to reward his subordinates for surpassing the company's business target for the year. On the average, each person received about \$50,000. The total amount was \$10 million. There was tear and joy. You may want to work for a generous boss like that. In fact, we all have a generous God who blesses us abundantly. We should be grace givers too. You do not need to give others a big check. Little gestures of kindness count too. These days many small businesses suffer loss in the pandemic. Some people intentionally left big tips when they ate at restaurants. Those stories inspired me. I would give a little extra when buying take-outs. My older son was surprised to see me even offer tip to workers who brought food to our car. I told him that I wanted to change the stereotype that the Chinese are stingy people. Therefore, I do that for the Lord and for my Chinese peers.

解釋 CONCLUSION

This parable illustrates that salvation grace is available to whoever waiting for Jesus to call them. The rich young ruler rejected God's grace because he loved his wealth more. What do "the first" and "the last" refer to? The first in prosperity may be the last person who looks for God's grace. In contrast, Jesus' disciples deserted everything to follow Jesus because they were attracted by His grace. Those who are last in the society may be the first people to embrace the gospel. The more undeserved we realize that we are the more thankful we will be to God. The first or the last does not matter to God, because He reprioritizes the ordering we set. Every person is a sinner and everyone needs His grace, though no one deserves it. There are still many people standing idly outside God's Kingdom. Are we willing to be sent by the Master to welcome those people?

引言 INTRODUCTION

我們用了將近 10 個月的時間來學習羅馬書。我相信你們大多數人已經成為這卷書的專家。在今年剩餘的時間裡，我們會一起來學別的經文。縱然我們度過了不尋常的一年，我們仍然會慶祝感恩節和聖誕節。除了那些特別主日之外，我們會來看耶穌在福音書中講的一些比喻。讓我們首先提出一個簡單的問題：什麼是比喻？比喻是一個虛構的故事，用以帶出一個教訓。我們中的許多人、你的孩子甚至孫子成長時都可能聽過伊索寓言。伊索實際上是在公元前 600 年生活在希臘的一個奴隸。他的寓言被口傳下來。甚至幾個世紀後，有其他故事被放在他的名字之下。像《龜兔賽跑》、《穿羊皮的狼》和《狼來了》都是家傳戶曉的故事。甚至於其中一些故事已成為日常用語。我們可以用類似的方式來理解伊索寓言和耶穌的比喻。我們要問的關鍵問題是：故事中的教訓是什麼？在耶穌的比喻中，祂使用當時聽眾熟悉的背景來解釋深奧的真理。我們看到諸如農夫和農作物、牧羊人和羊、主人和奴僕之類的角色。有些人物與耶穌要教導的真理有關，而另一些事物只是配角。例如，故事中的一棵樹或一塊石頭可能沒有特別的象徵含義。當聖經學者嘗試分析每一個細節時，我們會看到一些有趣的解釋。教會歷史上對比喻的理解的一個主流稱為靈意解經。一些嚴肅的解經家在故事中加上一些屬靈的含義。例如，有人認為在好撒瑪利亞人的比喻中，受害人代表亞當、盜賊是魔鬼、對受害者視而不見的祭師和利未人是舊約、治療傷者的撒瑪利亞人是耶穌、客店代表教會、客店的老闆是使徒保羅。我們可能覺得這種解釋是挺搞笑的。這是教會歷史上的重要人物奧古斯丁提出的！這種解釋看起來有他的道理。但是我們必須回到基本問題：耶穌在比喻中要傳達什麼教訓？就像讀任何的經文一樣，我們必須注意上下文。換句話說，故事前後發生了什麼事。耶穌很可能在比喻中也給了我們一些線索。

解釋 EXPLANATION

有了這些基本了解之後，我們就來看今天的經文。耶穌從第 1 節開始說：「**因為天國好像...**」因此，這個比喻是用來說明天國某方面的特質。在馬太福音第十三章和福音書的其他經文，實際上記載了一系列有關天國的比喻。現在讓我們看一下上下文。耶穌為什麼要講這個比喻？在上一章中，一個富有的年輕人來詢問耶穌，他要做什麼才能得到永生。這個人熟悉律法，他從小就遵守律法。耶穌挑戰這個人賣掉他所有的一切並跟隨耶穌。聽到這個要求後，那個人很憂愁地離開了。他不願放棄自己的財富。耶穌的門徒們當時在現場。他們想知道，那個少年人因為放不下自己的財富而不能上天堂，那麼他們放棄一切跟隨耶穌後會得到什麼。這是一種典型的「對我有什麼好處」的心態。主應許他們，他們在榮耀裡將坐在祂的旁邊，審判以色列的十二個支派。那些捨棄家人跟隨耶穌的人也將得到一百倍的收益，並會承受永生。耶穌並不是說我們成為基督徒後，將會得到一百個父親或母親。但是當我們加入教會時，我們的

確得到許多屬靈的父母和弟兄姐妹。在那一章的結尾，耶穌在 19:30 中說：「然而，有許多在前的，將要在後；在後的，將要在前。」然後耶穌把這個比喻告訴門徒，以說明那句話的意思。耶穌在講完比喻之後用幾乎相同的話來總結。看 20:16：「這樣，那在後的，將要在前；在前的，將要在後了。」這就是我們需要理解的比喻的寓意。一些問題會在我們腦海中浮現。「第一個和最後一個去做什麼事情？」「從什麼意義上說，最後的將是第一，第一的反而變成最後？」我們將逐步解答這些疑問。

耶穌的聽眾非常熟悉故事的背景。一位地主出去僱人進他的葡萄園工作。當時，很多人是臨時工。他們會在清晨聚集在城市的廣場，等待有需要的雇主。當我住在德克薩斯州時，我看到了一個相同的情景。一些西班牙裔的男人聚集在加油站。工頭開車來尋找合適的工人。比如他要找四個年輕的壯漢來搬東西，或尋找有特殊技能的建築工人。有工作時才會需要工人。在農業社會中，收割季節比一年中其他時間需要更多的工人。但是，如果一個人在當天找不到工作，那麼那天晚上一家人可能會餓肚子。當時沒有任何工作保障，也沒有工會為爭取工人的權益。在比喻中，家主在清早僱用了一些工人。當時人們通常從日出工作到日落。我們可以假設那是早上 6 點。他答應給工人一錢銀子作當天的工資。那是當時臨時工通常的收入。到現在為止一切都挺好。老闆有人為他工作，而工人也有生計糊口。但是家主做了一些不尋常的事情。他再四次外出招工。他是否低估了所需的人手？他是否對之前僱用的工人感到不滿意？耶穌實際上給了我們一些線索。耶穌在第 3 節說，主人看到有人在巳初（或上午 9 點）閒站。因此，他邀請那些人去為他工作。在第 5 節中，家主在午正（就是中午）和申初（或下午 3 點）再次出去做同樣的事情。最令人驚訝的是，他在酉初（或下午 5 點）去召集最後一批工人，這意味著他們只會工作一個小時。雇主多次僱人不是因為他的需要，而是為了工人的需要。對於工人來說，沒有工作就等於沒有晚餐。主人盡量招募更多的工人。耶穌用聘請工人來比喻神呼召罪人進入祂的國度。得救的人成為耶穌的跟隨者和僕人。因此，比喻中的工人象徵著被救贖的人。根據這個比喻，我們看到關於天國的第一個原則：

救恩是為了罪人的緣故，不是因為神的緣故。

讓我進一步說明。彼得後書 3:9 告訴我們：（神）不願有一人沉淪，乃願人人都悔改。耶穌希望世上的每個人都接受祂。亞當犯了罪，我們也犯罪了。我們應該受到審判，不應得到救贖。神沒有義務拯救我們。但由於祂的憐憫和愛，祂差遣祂的兒子為我們而死。耶穌就像故事中的家主一樣，正在執行尋找並拯救的任務。祂歡迎罪人進入祂的國。祂不希望任何人被排除在外。我們分享耶穌的熱情嗎？多一個人得救就等於少一個罪人滅亡。願主幫助我們從福音的角度去看待別人。為他們禱告並與他們談論耶穌。

結果工頭在日落時發工資給所有的工人。這個比喻在這裡有一個有趣的轉折。主人要求在 5 點鐘來的工人先領薪水。他們得到了一錢銀子。他們一定感到非常意外。他們可能原來只期望得到一點點錢。有任何零錢至少可以購買少量食物總比空手回家要

好。如果只工作一小時的人得到一整天的工資，那麼其餘的人會得到多少呢？每個人都得到相同的報酬！那些比較早來上班的人抱怨不公平。他們去找家主投訴。最生氣的人應該是那些辛苦了一整天的人。他們認為他們應該得到更多。主人在第 13 至 15 節向發怨言的工人解釋：13 …『朋友，我不虧負你，你與我講定的不是一錢銀子嗎？14 拿你的走吧！我給那後來的和給你一樣，這是我願意的。15 我的東西難道不可隨我的意思用嗎？因為我作好人，你就紅了眼嗎？』家主提醒那人，雙方都預先同意了工資。他得到了他所期望的。如果主人少給他的話，那才是不公平。想像一下：如果工頭先發工資給最早來做事的人，那可能便不會有任何爭議。他們會快樂地回家。但是家主故意讓他們看到 5 點來工作的人拿多少錢。第一批工人嫉妒，因為他們看到一些更不配的人得到相同的待遇。他們沒有將自己與未被雇用的人作比較。由此我們可以得出關於天國的第二個原則：

唯有當我們明白自己是多麼的不配時，我們才會向神感恩。

神不欠我們任何東西；但是我們卻欠祂一切。我們應該感謝神給我們像工作、家庭和健康等祝福。但是，當我們看到別人得到更多的好處時，我們的感恩可能會變成嫉妒。這樣的情況可能發生在舊同學聚會的場合。這人已成為某某公司的經理，那人擁有自己的生意，有人甚至在 50 多歲就退休！你懷疑自己為何被卡在不起眼的工作和簡陋的房子裡。我們必須小心這種不滿的情緒。我們的不滿可能會變成不信。我們質疑神是否不公平地對待我們。如果我們真的想要爭取公平的話，那我們只有一樣東西是該得的，就是地獄！耶穌掛在十字架上時，也有兩名強盜被釘在祂的兩旁。其中一位嘲笑耶穌無法拯救自己。另一名囚犯責罵第一個人，承認他們得到了應得的刑罰。相反，他清楚地知道耶穌是無辜的。那個罪犯並沒有向耶穌要求公平的待遇。相反，他懇求耶穌憐憫。路加福音 23:43 記載：耶穌對他說：「我實在告訴你，今日你要同我在樂園裡了。」那個罪犯得到了他不應該得到的救恩。對我們的教訓是：不要與別人比較，而要從神的角度來看自己。如果我們使用世界要求的公平標準來評估我們的生活，我們將永遠不會滿足。相反，我們應該感謝神賜予我們的一切。神以祂認為適合的方來對待我們，就像園主對待他的工人一樣。我們從這點可以看到關於天國的第三個原則：

神按照祂的主權賜予我們祝福。

家主按照他的意願使用他的金錢。同樣，神也對我們擁有主權。祂是我們生命的主宰。我們在工作 and 在家中忠於本份。我們相信神會供應我們一切的需要，並運用祂的主權來看顧我們。祂根據自己的旨意自由地賜給我們祝福。我們心中有了平安與保障。就算發生裁員、健康問題、意外或經濟衰退，我們也不必擔憂。我們可以喜樂地起床，放鬆地入睡。無論我們擁有的是多還是少，我們都能帶著感恩的心情享受神的祝福。

主人向不滿的工人解釋說，他不僅是公平和擁有主權，而且他還很慷慨。沒有人比他預期的少得，但是許多人卻比預期的得到更多。家主選擇以恩典而不是行規來做事。那些遲來的工人認為園主願意僱用他們已經是有恩惠的了。但他願意給每個人同等的工資，這更加證明他是滿有恩典的。這引出了關於天國的第四個原則：

恩典是接收的，而不是賺取的。

根據定義，恩典是不配得的祝福。一錢銀子對於早上 6 點來的工人是公平的報酬。那是他們靠勞力得來的。但是對於後來被雇用的人來說，意外驚喜的工資是恩典。這讓我想起了羅馬書 4:4-5 所說的：**4 做工的得工價，不算恩典，乃是該得的；5 惟有不做工的，只信稱罪人為義的神，他的信就算為義。**沒有任何人能用他的簡歷跟神換取天堂的通行證。教育程度、對社會的貢獻或善行都無法贏得神的恩典。耶穌在十字架上為我們付出了一切。作為恩典的接受者，我們也應該是恩典的施予者。去年 12 月，一家房地產公司發出巨額獎金給所有 198 名員工。老闆在一年一度的節日慶祝會上宣布，他要獎勵員工，因為公司超過了一年的業務目標。平均每個人獲得約五萬美元。總金額為一千萬美元。很多人都喜極而泣。你可能也希望為如此慷慨的老闆工作。實際上，我們所有人都有一位慷慨的神賜福我們。我們也應該學習傳遞神的祝福。你不需要給別人巨額的支票。小小的善意也很重要。如今，許多小企業在疫情中蒙受了損失。有些人去餐廳食飯時故意留下一大堆小費。這些故事啟發了我。購買外賣時，我會多給一點點小費。我的大兒子很驚訝地看到我甚至給送食物到我們車上的雇員小費。我告訴他，我想改變中國人是小器鬼的壞形象。因此，我這樣做是為了神和中國同胞的緣故。

解釋 CONCLUSION

這個比喻說明救恩是賜給任何等待耶穌呼召的人。那位富有的少年官拒絕了神的恩典，因為他更愛自己的財富。「在前」和「在後」到底指什麼？一些在財富上排第一的人可能是最後尋求神恩典的人。與之相比，耶穌的門徒捨棄一切跟隨主，因為他們被祂的恩典所吸引。那些在社會地位中處於最後的人可能是最早願意接受福音的人。當我們越意識到自己的不配，我們便越會向神感恩。我們是在前或是在後對神來說都無所謂，因為祂會重新排列我們設定的次序。每個人都是罪人，每個人都需要祂的恩典，儘管沒有人該得。今天仍然有許多人在神的國度之外閒站。我們願意被主人差派去邀請他們嗎？