



## Reflection on Matthew 20:1-16

In the preceding chapter a **rich young man** comes to Jesus and asks how he can have **eternal life**. Firstly Jesus tells him to obey the commandments – upon clarification the man says that he keeps all of these laws but goes on to ask **'what do I still lack?'** Jesus tells him to go and **sell all** his possessions and **give the money to the poor**. We don't know if he follows this advice – we're told that he goes away grieving for he has many possessions.

Jesus then says that it is easier for a **camel to go through the eye of a needle** than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God – the disciples are astounded by this teaching but Jesus assures them that **for God all things are possible**. Then Peter says **'we've left everything to follow you – what will we have?'**

Jesus tells them that they will receive a hundredfold for everything that they have given up for his sake. However, he then says **'But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first'** before telling the parable in today's reading.



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Here is a song by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend which reflects the teaching of that chapter:



A rich young man came to ask of Christ,  
"Good teacher, will you tell me,  
What must I do for eternal life?  
I've kept your laws completely."  
"Sell all you have, give to the poor,  
Then heaven's treasure shall be yours."  
How hard for those who are rich on earth  
To gain the wealth of heaven.

O teach me Lord to walk this road,  
The road of simple living;  
To be content with what I own  
And generous in giving.  
And when I cling to what I have  
Please wrest it quickly from my grasp;  
I'd rather lose all the things of earth  
To gain the things of heaven.

Many of us may find ourselves **identifying with the labourers hired first** and find ourselves feeling very sorry for them. We don't know what to make of the landowner's question: **'Are you envious because I am generous?'**

Human nature is such that, **ever since we were about nine months old**, we've been holding tightly to what is ours and taking a sneaky or open look at what others have to make sure that they haven't got more than us, or something that we want, or **something that they don't deserve**.

There's an American show about family life – in one clip a young girl is having a very vocal argument with her father because **her sister got something and she didn't**. He tries telling that that is just the way things are and that there will be other occasions when she gets something and her sister doesn't.

She won't be pacified so he stops what he is doing, crouches down to her height so that he can look her in the eye and says: **'The only time you look in your neighbour's bowl is to make sure that they have enough. You don't look in your neighbour's bowl to see if you have as much as them.'**

He muddles up that last line and it doesn't come out right, so he gives in and gives her some chocolate.

But there is a **wisdom here that seems to resonate with today's story** – and with God's kingdom where the last will be first and the first last.

**Can we only look in our neighbours bowl to make sure they have enough?**



## Going deeper

What do you make of the labourers' statement: **'you made them equal to us'**?

Some commentators interpret this parable differently and find the landowner's actions **exploitative**. They think that **he is undermining the one thing that the workers are able to offer**, that is the value of their labour. What do you think?

Are there links between the teaching of this parable and **contemporary news stories**, like Gary Lineker **taking a pay cut** or Angela Rayner's demand that **care workers be paid the real living wage**?