



Jesus Teaches the Parable of the Laborers

Matthew 20:1–16



LESSON GOAL

Students will rejoice when God demonstrates His sovereign grace.

BIBLE TRUTHS

- The landowner hired workers and paid them all the same amount.
- The men who worked the longest complained.
- God chooses who He will save and bless.

KEY VERSE

“Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?”

—Matthew 20:15

APPLICATION

- Understand that no one deserves salvation.
- Never be jealous of God’s grace.
- Remember that God is sovereign over who He saves and rewards.

NEXT WEEK

Jesus’ Triumphal Entry
Matthew 21:1–11

Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group

4

Teacher Planning Sheet

PREPARE

Objectives/Truths to cover this week

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Personal Application

As a result of my study in this passage, God wants me to...

- _____
- _____
- _____

Three ways students need to apply this passage are...

- _____
- _____
- _____

Materials Needed:

POINT

Choose from various ideas to point students to the coming Bible lesson.

- _____
- _____

PROCLAIM

Choose from various ideas to proclaim the Bible lesson.

Presentation Ideas

- _____
- _____

Praise/Music Ideas

- _____
- _____
- _____

PRACTICE

Choose ideas to help review and apply today's lesson.

- _____
- _____

PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul... you shall teach them to your children.” —Deuteronomy 11:18–19

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here that will aid you in understanding the Scripture.

Bible Background

Introduction

Unlike the rich young ruler who had been unwilling to sell all and follow Christ, the disciples had given up all to follow Jesus. Following Jesus’ encounter with the ruler, Peter asked Jesus what the reward would be for those who had left everything to follow Him (Matt. 19:27). Jesus promised His disciples that they would “sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (19:28). Jesus went on to teach that all “who ha[d] left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (19:29). Although the disciples would receive special rewards, anyone who counted the cost and followed Christ would receive not only salvation but many other blessings which accompany salvation as well.

After proclaiming that all who followed Him would be blessed, Jesus challenged the disciples’ thinking about rewards. He said, “But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (19:30). The disciples were expecting greater rewards because they had followed Jesus the longest. Without contradicting His earlier statement that the disciples would receive special privileges when He returned to reign on earth, Jesus revealed that everyone who followed would receive salvation, whether they came first or last. Ultimately, the order of coming to Christ, the amount of work done for Christ, or the time spent serving Christ would not add to or take away from one’s receiving eternal life. As Jesus had previously said, eternal life was not based on man’s efforts, for whom salvation is impossible, but only on God’s grace, with whom all things are possible (19:26). Jesus told a parable to His disciples to illustrate that God’s salvation is only possible because of God’s grace and not dependent upon man’s efforts.

The Landowner Hires (Matt. 20:1–7)

The parable of the laborers reveals what the kingdom of heaven is like (Matt. 20:1). The kingdom of heaven refers to the reign of God in the lives of men. Until Jesus returns to reign physically on earth, He reigns in the hearts of those who submit to His lordship. The rich young ruler had wanted to enter the kingdom of heaven but was unwilling to pay the price of following Jesus (Matt. 19:23–24). Jesus’ parable is not about those who are outside of the kingdom of heaven but those who are inside it.

Jesus’ parable began with a “landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard” (Matt. 20:1). The exact work the landowner needed done is not mentioned and could have included everything from building a vineyard to harvesting grapes. Men who had no other work to do would assemble in the marketplace and hire themselves out as temporary help. Although the time is not mentioned, the Jewish workday began around 6:00 a.m. After arranging with the

workers that he would pay them a denarius for a day's work, the landowner sent the men to work in his vineyard. (A denarius was a good wage for a day's work.)

The landowner went back to the marketplace four more times that day: at 9:00 a.m. ("the third hour" 20:3), 12:00 p.m. ("the sixth hour" 20:5), 3:00 p.m. ("the ninth hour" 20:5), and 5:00 p.m. ("the eleventh hour" 20:6). Each time, the landowner sent men to work in his vineyard and promised them, "Whatever is right I will give you" (20:4). Unlike the first laborers, the men hired later in the day did not know the amount the landowner would pay them. When the landowner went to the marketplace the last time, he was surprised to see men who had not been hired all day (20:6). Even though there was only one more hour of work left (20:12), the landowner still promised to pay the men whatever was right (20:7).

The Landowner Pays (Matt. 20:8–12)

When evening came, the landowner told his steward to pay the laborers, starting with those who had worked the least first and ending with those who had worked the longest (Matt. 20:8). Those who worked for only an hour received a denarius, a whole day's wage (20:9)! When those who had worked the full twelve hours "received each a denarius," they were disappointed because they "supposed that they would receive more" (20:10). They complained against the landowner, saying, "These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day" (20:11–12). The laborers had been happy to do the work for one denarius until they compared themselves to those who had done one-twelfth of the work and had received the same wage. The laborers thought that the landowner was unjust for paying them at the rate he had promised when he had paid the other workers at a higher rate. They were upset that the landowner had "made them equal" (20:12) with those who had come at the end.

The Landowner Rebukes (Matt. 20:13–16)

Turning to one of those who complained, the landowner defended his actions. He first defended his paying of one denarius to the full-day workers. The landowner had done exactly what he had said he would do. He had done the men no wrong (Matt. 20:13). The landowner next defended his right to pay whatever he wished (20:14). The landowner rhetorically asked, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?" (20:15). The worker could neither complain that he had been paid too little or that the landowner had paid the other workers too much. The landowner was both faithful to his promise and sovereign over his money.

The complaining worker's problem was not the landowner but his own heart. The landowner asked, "Or is your eye evil because I am good?" (Matt. 20:15). The worker's eye was full of jealousy and envy, not because an injustice was done but because good was done to someone else instead of him. The worker did not resent that the landowner had been good but that the landowner had not demonstrated the same rate of goodness to him.

Conclusion

Jesus' conclusion to the parable paralleled his introduction. Jesus again said, "So the last will be first, and the first last" (Matt. 20:16). When those who had worked for twelve hours saw how gracious the landowner had been, they felt they deserved more because they had worked longer. They did not think it fair that the last workers were paid the same rate when they had worked twelve times longer. The landowner's equal pay greatly irritated them because it placed both the first workers and the last workers on equal footing. When they compared themselves

to the other workers, they felt that they had nothing to show for their hard work. They foolishly reasoned that they would have been better off wasting the day in the marketplace instead of working.

Jesus taught this parable to the disciples to warn them against wanting to be on a different footing than other followers of Christ. The landowner is a picture of God, who has the right to reward salvation to whomever He wishes. He can give the same salvation to the person saved for forty years as to the one who is saved for four. Nobody deserves to be chosen by God to be His servant. To be offended that another saint receives the same salvation is to be offended that God is both gracious and sovereign. The focus must not be on how much one has worked, nor on how much others are paid, but only on how the believer deserves nothing but hell and has received everything in Christ. The parable is a stunning rebuke to let God be both gracious and sovereign, to be content with serving Him, and to rejoice with however God reveals His character in rewarding others.

POINT TO THE TRUTH

*“Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth.”
—Psalm 78:1*

This section includes questions to review last week’s lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week’s lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



Review Questions

Who came to ask Jesus a question?

A rich young ruler.

What did the rich young ruler ask Christ?

He asked how to be saved.

What did Jesus tell him?

Jesus said that he must obey the commandments.

What did the man say?

He said that he had kept all the commandments.

What did Jesus tell him to do?

Jesus told him to sell all his possessions.

Was the rich man willing to do this?

No. He loved his wealth more than he wanted salvation.



Difficult Concepts

Denarius: Build the comparison between a denarius and a dollar bill. Bring a dollar bill into class. Ask the children what it is that you are holding. Ask them how many dollar bills someone is paid for working a whole day. Tell them how many dollar bills an entry-level worker makes in your city for a full day’s work. Explain that when Jesus was alive they did not use dollar bills but they used denarii to buy things. In Jesus’ day, one denarius equaled a full day’s wage.

Landowner: A landowner was a person like a farmer. A farmer has both a house and a farm. A landowner had both his house and the land that he would grow things on. He made his living by growing things.

Laborer: A laborer is someone who did not go to the same job each day. He worked at each place for only one day. A laborer never knew where he was going to work or if he would find a job that day. He would go the market, the place where people were selling things, and wait until somebody hired him to come and work for them.

Wage: When people work, they receive money for the work they do. The money that they are paid for working is their wage.

Parable: Jesus often told parables to the people. A parable is a special way of teaching truth. A parable is a story or a word picture that explains a truth. Sometimes people did not understand what truth Jesus was teaching about with the parable and he had to explain it to them.



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The First Last and the Last First

As the children come into class, give them different jobs to do. Plan both jobs that will take a long time for the students who arrive early and jobs that will take less time for those who arrive later. Ideally, all the students will end their jobs around the same time. Bring each of the children forward and give them a small treat as a thank-you for their work. Some children may be upset that they all receive the same treat even though some of them worked much longer than others. During your lesson, you will be able to use this pre-lesson exercise to help the students understand why the laborers who worked all day were indignant that they received the same wage as those who worked for one hour.



Gathering the Scatter

Jesus told the parable of the laborers to show us what is “fair” when it comes to salvation. Before teaching the lesson, scatter some colored papers around the room and ask the children to go around the room and collect as many as they can. Explain that the ones who get more than five pieces of paper will get a cookie. After giving them some time, call them together and sort them into three groups: those having more than 10 pieces of paper, those having five to 10 and those having less than five. Give all those having more than 10 pieces of paper two cookies. Then ask them how many cookies the middle group should get? Is it fair if you give them each two as well? Ask the second group how many the last group should get? The first two groups already got more than they deserved, why would they not want the last group to get the same as them? What would be the most fair? Jesus told a parable which will help us decide.

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

“Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.” —Psalm 78:4

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students’ understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use alongside the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done right from the Bible.

Bible Lesson

The disciples had given up everything to follow Jesus: they had left the comfort of their homes, their jobs, and their family and friends. Jesus had just told the rich, young ruler that he must be willing to sell all of his things to go to heaven. The disciples wondered what their reward would be for giving up everything for Jesus. Peter asked, “See, we have left all and followed You, therefore what shall we have?” (19:27).

Jesus told them that they would have a place of authority in heaven, but He told them to be careful about thinking about their rewards, or wanting a better place in heaven than other people. He told a parable to explain to them that in heaven, everyone would equally receive the greatest reward of all: salvation and eternal life with God. It would not matter how much a person had given up or how long they had been a Christian; everyone would receive the same reward of salvation because God is gracious to all. Jesus told a parable about a landowner to illustrate this truth.

In Jesus’ parable a landowner needed to hire some people to work in his vineyard. He went to the marketplace first thing in the morning and found some people looking for work. He agreed to pay them a denarius (a good day’s wages) for their work. Around 9am, he went back to the marketplace and found more people looking for work, and he told them that whatever was the right amount of pay for their work, he would give them. He went out again at noon and 3pm and found more workers, and offered them the same thing. Finally, at 5pm, one hour before it was time to quit working, the landowner hired one last group to work for the last hour of the workday. He gave them the same offer as the others, a right amount of pay for their work.

At the end of the workday, the landowner had his steward pay the laborers, but he had the men that he hired last be the first in line to get their money. He paid the men who had worked only one hour a denarius. He continued to pay the other workers, and he paid those who had worked half or part of the day a denarius as well. The workers in the back of the line who had been working all day long thought that they would receive more than the others because they had worked much longer. When they got to the front of the line, though, they too were given a denarius, just like all the others. They complained to the landowner, saying that it wasn’t fair that they had worked all day long in the hot sun and only got paid the same amount as the others had been paid. The landowner told them that he had done no wrong to them, because they had agreed at the beginning of the day that they would receive one day’s pay for their work which was what they had actually been given. Then he said, “Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?” (20:15)

The workers were angry because they had not received more than had been promised to them. The landowner had not been unfair to the workers he had hired first thing in the morning, rather he had been generous to those he had hired later in the day by giving them the same as everyone else. He had the right to be generous with his own money, but the workers were jealous.

Jesus told this parable to the disciples so that they would see that in the end, everyone who is a Christian, no matter how long they were a Christian, would equally receive the reward of salvation when they died and went to heaven. There is nothing unfair about God's graciousness. Jesus wanted the disciples to realize that God is gracious and can do what He wants because He is God. Rather than worrying about what special reward they might receive, believers are to be thankful that God has blessed them with salvation.



Lesson Questions

What kind of lesson did Jesus teach in today's lesson?
Jesus taught a parable.

What did the landowner do?
The landowner hired men to work in his vineyard.

What did the landowner say he would pay the first group?
He said that he would pay them a denarius.

How many times did the landowner go out and hire laborers to work in the vineyard?
He went out five times.

What happened at the end of the day?
The landowner paid the servants for their work.

What did the landowner pay everyone?
The landowner paid all the workers a denarius no matter how long they worked.

Presentation Ideas



A Beka Book® Flash-A-Cards®

Use appropriate A Beka Book® Flash-A-Cards® with the lesson.



Betty Lukens Flannel Graph

Use appropriate flannel graph pieces with the lesson.



Equal Rewards

In today's lesson, Jesus ends the parable by telling His disciples that the last will be first and the first will be last. What Jesus wanted His disciples to understand was that He sees all who respond obediently to His call of repentance as being equal. To explain this concept to the students, have each of them compete in a predetermined challenge of your choice. Based on your own circumstances, this may entail running a race, holding a heavy object, or even standing on one foot. As your challenge presents a winner, have all of the class congratulate the winner with a prize (i.e. first prize ribbon, special snack for the day, or even a special priv-

ilege during the class, etc.). Once you have congratulated the winner, then proceed to give the rest of the class the same reward for obeying the rules and participating in today's challenge. As you pass out the reward, explain to the class how in today's lessons each of the laborers that the landowner hired received the same pay, regardless of who had worked the longest or hardest. In the landowner's eyes, all the laborers were equally rewarded and welcomed into his vineyard.



It Isn't Fair

Introduce the children to the parable of the laborers by telling them a modern day parable with puppets or in the form of a skit. Tell them of two brothers who had failed to tidy their room as they should have. Their mother instructs the older brother to tidy up the room. Then, when he is almost finished, have the second brother come in and help him finish up. Mom is so pleased with the tidy room that she gives the older brother a special toy. He subsequently shows this to his younger brother, explaining that he had worked hard all day on the room and had been rewarded with this toy. The younger brother immediately gets excited because he had also helped tidy the room and so expects a toy. But, the older brother does not think he should get anything. He had only helped for a few minutes, it would not be fair if he got the same reward. What do the children think, should both brothers get the same reward or not? In today's lesson Jesus taught that those who are saved later in life will receive the same reward of salvation as those who faithfully served God much of their lives.



A Day's Wages

As you begin telling the parable of the laborers draw a vertical timeline on the board which shows the number of hours in the day. Tape a man on the bottom and then tell them of the first group of laborers who started working early in the morning. Then tape another man further up the time line to represent those who came later in the day. Lastly, tape a man near the top. Explain to the children that if you work eight hours you have earned one denarius' wages. Have the children count with you how many hours the first man worked. How much should he be paid? Jesus said that he was paid what he earned—a denarius. Then count with them how many hours the second group worked. How much did the land owner pay this group? Finally count the last group and explain that they too were paid a denarius. Now, if you had worked hard all day long, would you be happy that these other men, who had only worked a short time, got paid the same as you? Use this to explain to the children that if God allows us to be with Him in heaven, He has given us much more than we deserve and we should want everyone else to receive the same blessing.



Phew, This Is Hard Work

Younger children may not immediately relate to the hard work of the laborers especially since they still spend much of their day playing. Midway through your lesson, stop and ask the children to think of some things which are really hard work for them or which they do not enjoy doing. Do they ever get a reward for doing a job for mom or dad? What is their favorite reward? How would they feel if, after having worked hard on something, their parents gave both them and their sibling the same reward even though their sibling had just been playing the whole time? Has this ever happened to them? Continue with the parable, making the connection to God's blessing of salvation which we could never have earned.

Praise and Worship

Father, I Adore You

Make Me a Servant

Purify My Heart

PRACTICE THE TRUTH

“That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.” —Psalm 78:7

Choose ideas from this section that review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



“Equal Ring”

Materials: copies of “Equal Ring” craft pages, binder rings, scissors, hole-punch, crayons

Directions: Cut out the cards and punch a hole in the top left corner of each card. Color the people and attach them to a binder ring. While looking through the pictures and reading the words, talk about how everyone on the ring is equal, and the first moves to the last, and the last moves to be the first page.



God’s Grace Clock

Materials: copies of “God’s Sovereign Grace” craft page, brads, scissors, crayons

Directions: Give each child a craft page and have them color the people and the arrows. Next, have them cut off the bottom portion of the page along the black line and then cut out the arrows. Finally, attach the arrows with a brad to the center of the clock. Talk to the students about God’s sovereignty in salvation.



“God Saves Early and Later”

Materials: copies of “God Saves Early and Later” craft pages on cardstock, scissors, glue, crayons

Directions: Give each child one base sheet (with arc pre-cut), one sun, and a strip of paper one inch wide and eight and a half inches long (Use the strips provided or make your own from a blank piece of cardstock). Have students attach the bar behind the base sheet with a brad so that the top comes forward through the curve. Then have them glue the sun to the top of the bar so that it covers the paragraphs when it moves from side to side.

Coloring Pages

Give each child a copy of the coloring pages at the back of the lesson. He or she can color the pages in class or take them home to color.

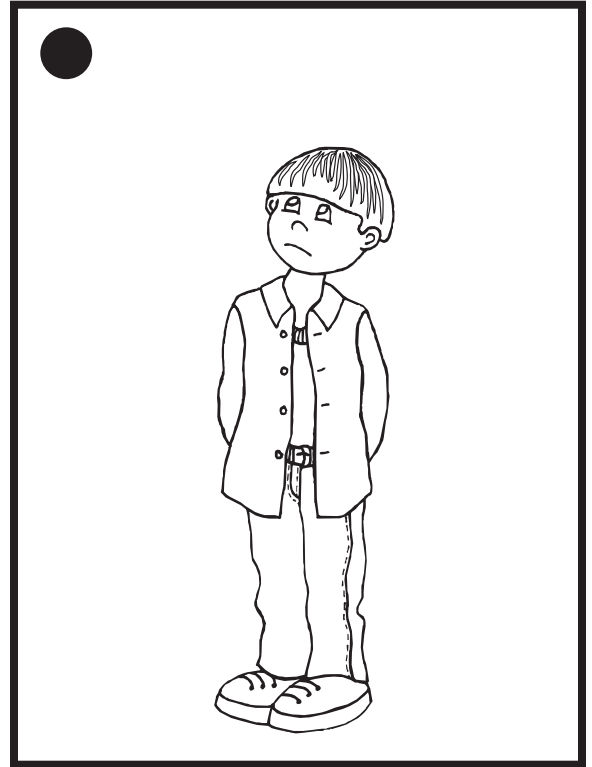
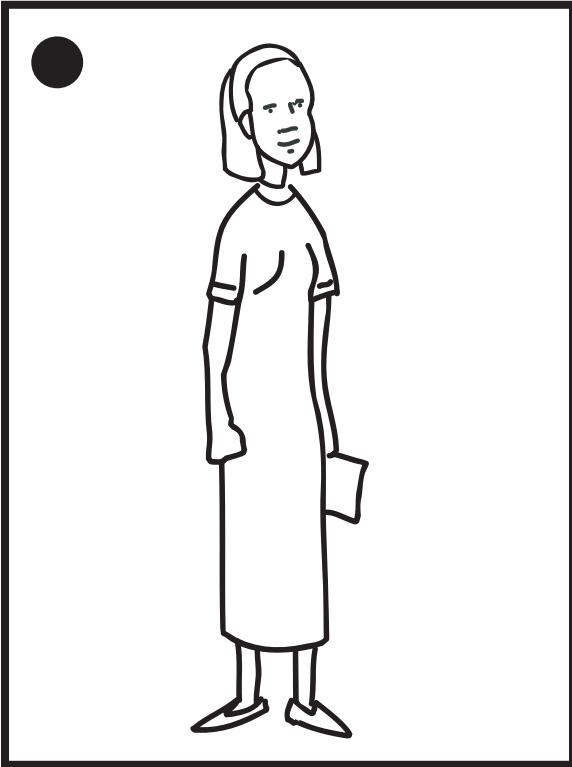


MEMORY VERSE

“So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”

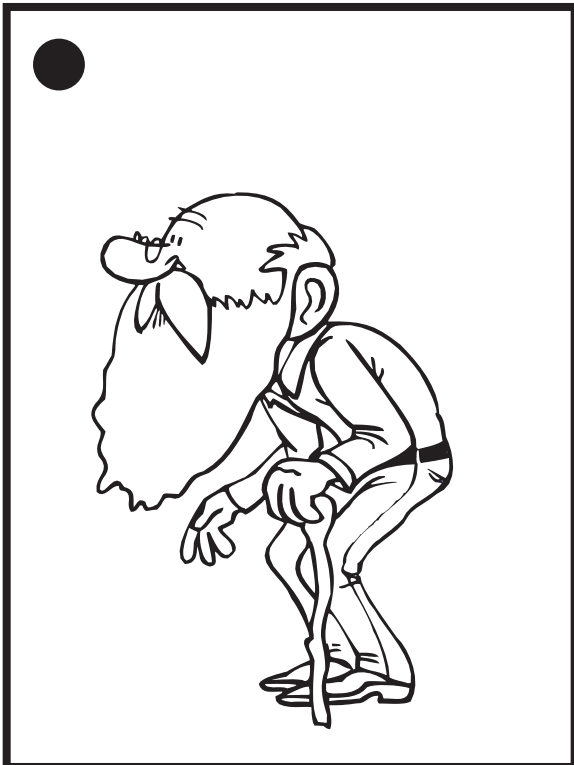
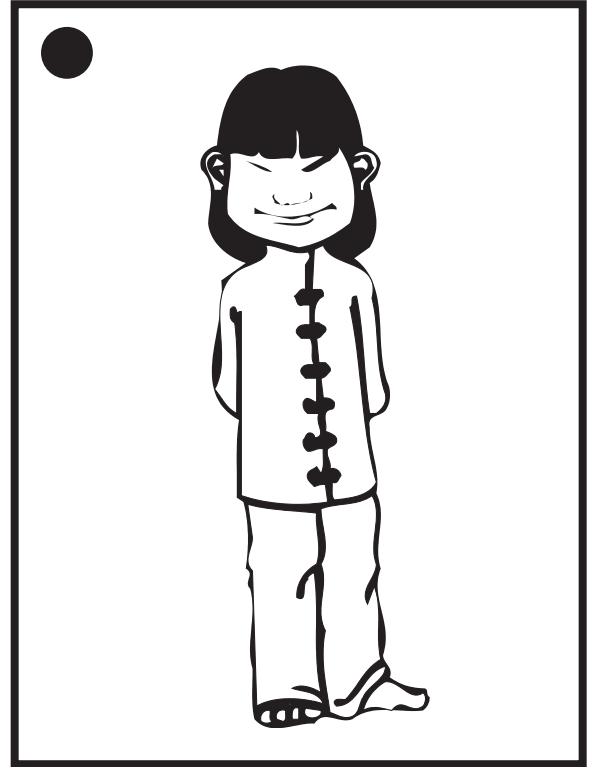
—Matthew 20:16

Equal Ring



“Thus the last shall be first, and the first last.”
—*Matthew 20:16*

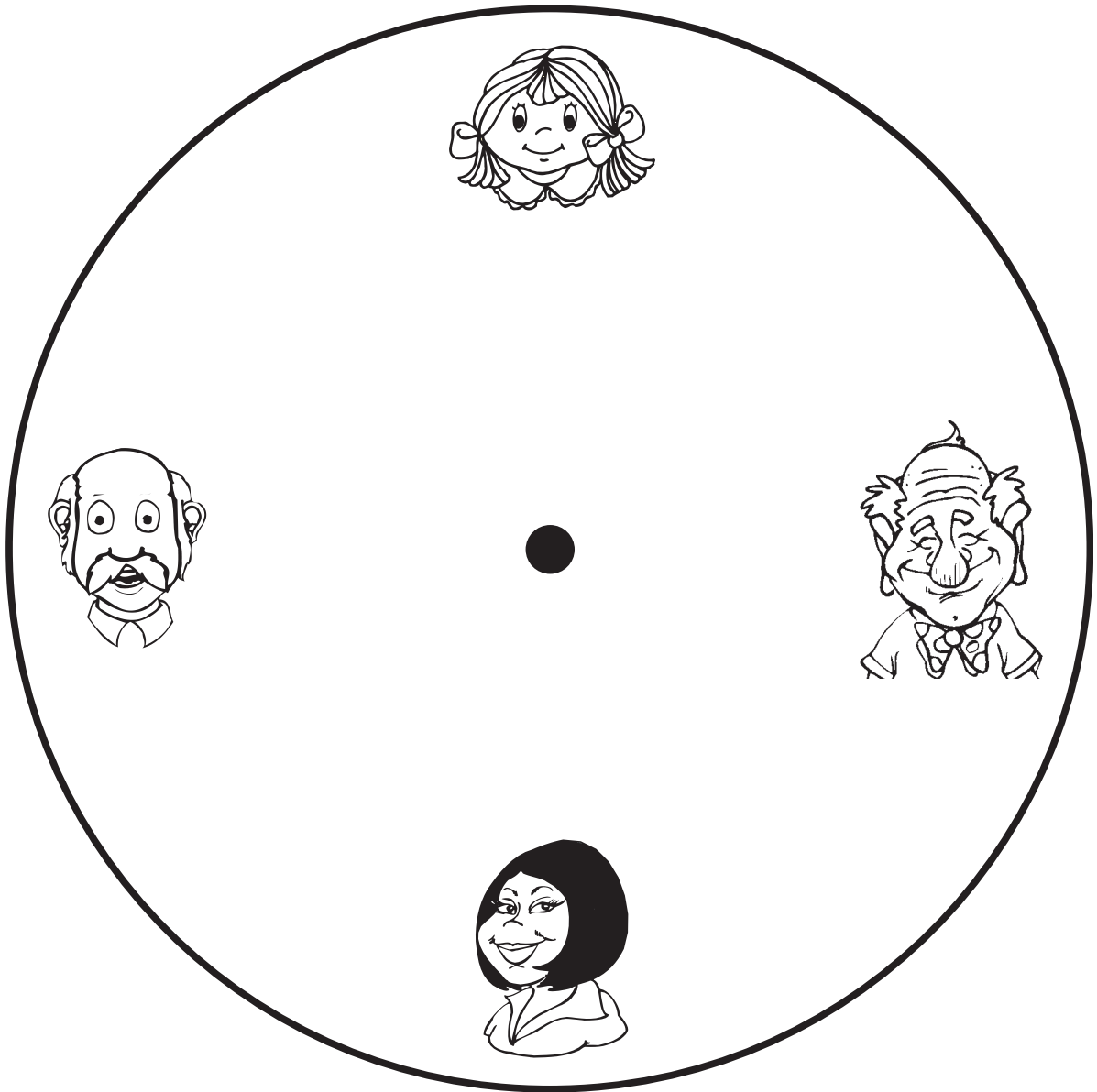
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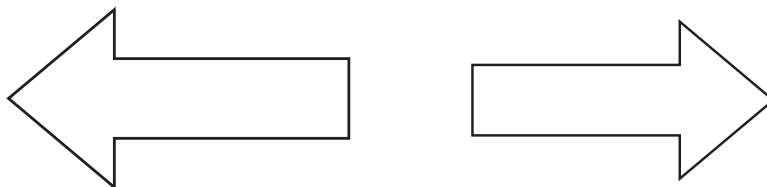
Everyone who comes to Christ is given the same salvation by God.

God's Sovereign Grace

God saves whoever He wants...



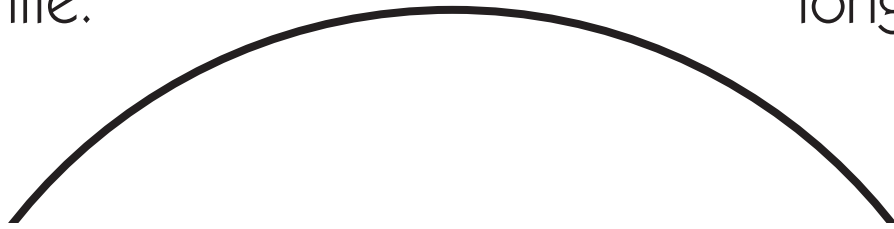
whenever He wants!
Remember the Parable of the Laborers
in Matthew 20:1-16.



God Saves Early and Later

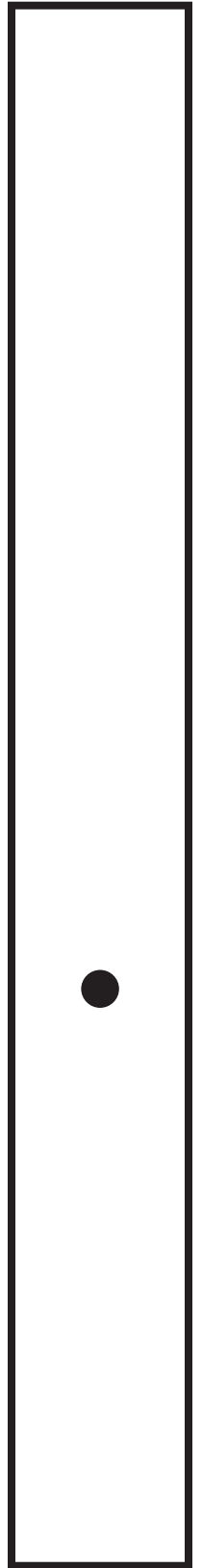
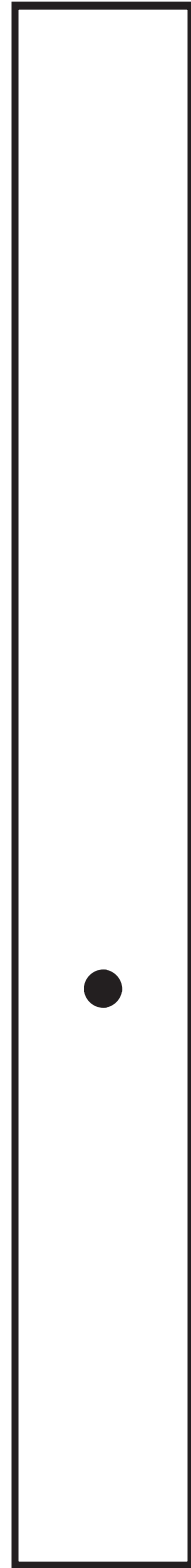
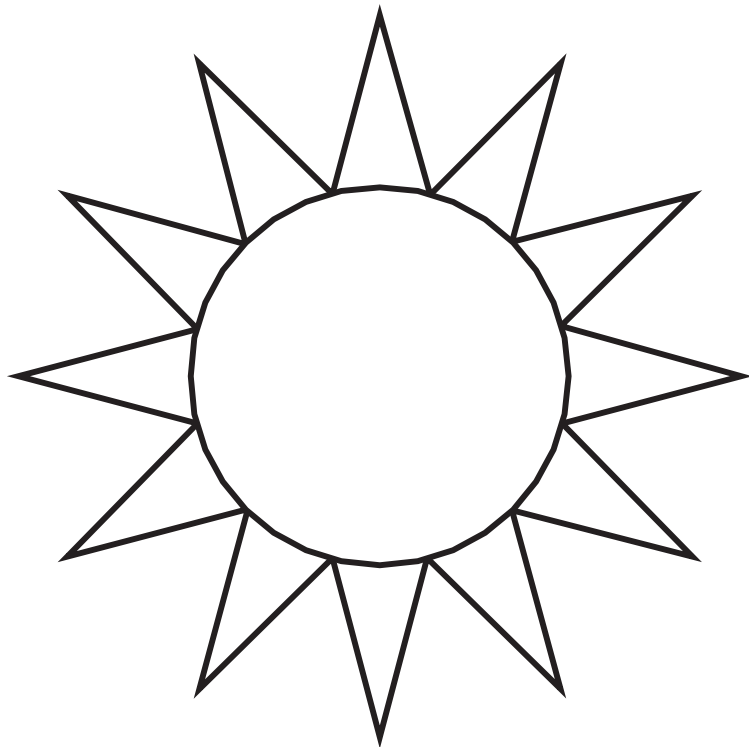
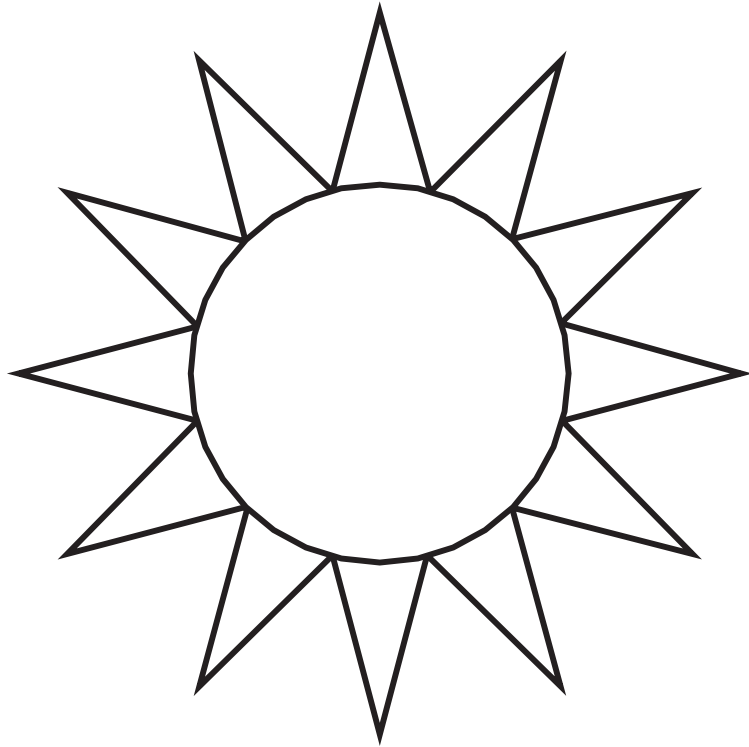
When God saves people later, they can still serve Him a little while.

When God saves people early, they can serve Him a long time.



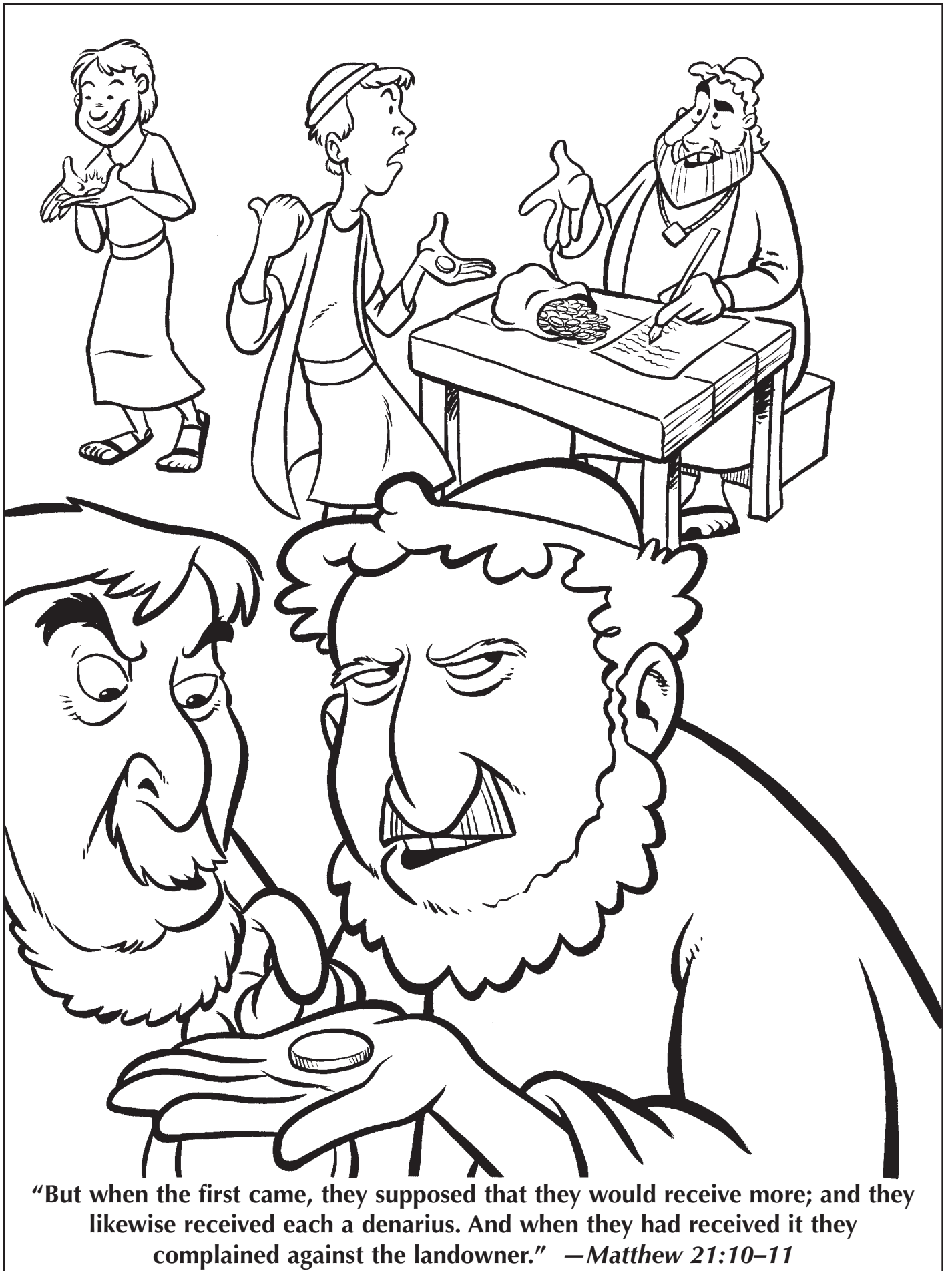
Rejoice whenever anyone is saved!
Remember the parable of the laborers
in Matthew 20:1–16.

God Saves Early and Later





“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agrees with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them out into his vineyard.” —Matthew 20:1-2



“But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it they complained against the landowner.” —Matthew 21:10–11

