



Good Shepherd
Sermon-Based Study Guide
Matthew 20:1-16 | July 12, 2026
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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we consider the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, found only in Matthew 20:1-16. Jesus tells a story about a man who owns a vineyard and hires day laborers to harvest his grapes. The story begins with a familiar scene, common not only in Jesus' day but also in our own. Those who work by the day can be found waiting to be hired in the marketplace or in our time, in a Home Depot parking lot.

The vineyard in Scripture commonly symbolizes:

God's people, whom He lovingly cultivates.

The Kingdom of God and His work in the world.

Spiritual fruitfulness—a life that reflects God's character.

Blessing, abundance, and peace when people live faithfully.

Judgment when God's people reject Him or fail to bear good fruit.

Taken together, the biblical image of a vineyard emphasizes God's care, His desire for a fruitful relationship with His people, and His expectation that His grace will result in lives marked by faithfulness and righteousness.

II. Connecting with One Another

Tell of a time you worked by the day and were paid at day's end, or of a time you hired a day worker. How did you feel as a worker? How did it feel to be one hiring?

III. Study the Text

Read Matthew 20:1-7

- The passage begins with the word, "For" linking it with what comes before it. How does this give us a hint about what the point of this parable might be? To whom was this parable first addressed?
- The work day began at 6:00 a.m. and concluded at 6:00 p.m. A typical twelve-hour day wage was enough to provide subsistence for a family, but not enough to save for the future. In the Lord's Prayer we pray for our daily bread. Have you ever lived where everything you earned was spent on necessities?



Read Matthew 20:8-16

- How might you feel if you were one of the first hired as you waited for your pay? How might you feel if you had worked only one hour and got paid for the whole day?
- What was the expectation of those hired first when they saw how much the last hired were paid? How did they react to receiving the agreed amount of a denarius? Was the landowner fair? Why or why not?
- What might be some of the reasons that Matthew includes this parable in his gospel while the other gospel writers do not?

IV. Application

- If this parable is about how God treats Long-timers and Newcomers, what is the message? Do you think there is a difference between how newcomers to the church are seen, compared to those who have been members for decades?
- What does this parable say about God? What does it say about how people respond to God?
- If the point of this parable is that God is building a "Beloved Community," what kind of community is it? In what ways are these characteristics visible here at Good Shepherd?

V. Digging Deeper

- The vineyard often represents God's covenant people or beloved community. Read these passages for further understanding of what this means: Isaiah 5:1-7, John 15:1-8, and Micah 4:4
- The phrase "God's beloved community" is not a biblical expression, but it is deeply rooted in biblical themes. It refers to the kind of human community God intends—a people who live in loving relationship with God, with one another, and with creation. It is a vision of justice, peace, reconciliation, and self-giving love.
- In the beloved community:
enemies are forgiven (Matthew 5:43–48),
the poor are honored (Luke 6:20–26),
the last become first (Matthew 20:1–16),
people serve rather than dominate (Mark 10:42–45).

VI. Prayer

Spend time in prayer together:

- Pray that we might receive the generous grace of God with gratitude and share it with others. Pray for guidance on how we can make Good Shepherd Church more like "God's Beloved Community."

