

The End of the Beginning: Is It Too Late for Me?

5-Day Devotional

THE END
OF THE
BEGINNING

WHERE THE QUESTIONS BEGIN
SERIES FINALE

IS IT TOO
LATE FOR ME?

MATTHEW 19:27–20:16
(LUKE 23:43 AS ILLUSTRATION ONLY)

GRACE
MERCY
SECOND CHANCES
A FULL WAGE

1

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS...
OR TRACES OF DISCOURAGEMENT...

GOOGLE

NEWS

SOCIAL MEDIA

FRIENDS

THE BIBLE

- Reflections of your past keep coming back.
- You can't seem to find peace.
- Everywhere you look there are answers—Google, talking heads, friends, social media...
- But are they good answers?
- For centuries there is a book that gives real answers—the Bible.

"So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:11

2

PETER'S QUESTION

THE SETUP NOBODY NOTICES

?

"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"
Matthew 19:27

- Do I get more because I've done more?
- Angel wings? A gold crown?
- Honestly—I'll just be glad to get in the door.
- Jesus answers: "Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." Matthew 19:30

That exact line reappears in 20:16, bracketing the parable — the story is Jesus's actual answer to Peter's question.

3

THE VINEYARD PARABLE

MATTHEW 20:1–16

EARLY MORNING
(DAWN)

NINE
O'CLOCK

NOON

THREE
O'CLOCK

FIVE
O'CLOCK

SAME WAGE
A FULL DAY'S PAY



Workers hired at different times throughout the day — including the last hour.



Everyone received the same wage.



Those hired first were upset. The master's response: "I'm not being unfair to you. Are you upset because I'm generous?" Matthew 20:15

4

TO THOSE WHO FEEL LATE



- If you think you're too late — to faith, to belonging, to God's patience running out — you're not.
- The scandal of the parable is the whole point: the eleventh-hour worker gets the full wage.
- It's not a loophole. It's the point.
- Illustration: the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43) — "Today you will be with me in paradise."

It's never too late for his grace.

5

TO THE REST OF YOU



- Don't write the final chapter in someone else's story.
- Don't decide who's in and who's out.
- God is still working on people you've already made up your mind about.
- Some traditions teach graduated levels of reward. In Christianity, entry itself is grace, not a reward for performance. Rewards for faithful living are a separate layer that never determines whether you're in the room at all.

It's about how generous God is.

6

WHY THE REWARD WAS NEVER THE POINT



- Peter asked, "What's in it for us?" My honest answer: I'm just glad I got in.
- I want to spend whatever road is left helping other people find their way too.
- Once I get home, I'm out of a job. There are no preachers in heaven — nobody there needs to be shown the way anymore, because everyone will finally see clearly. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

7

THE FINAL ANSWER



- Every question this series asked, Jesus answered — need, belonging, goodness, and now, lateness.
- Hand off to the closing song. "The End of the Beginning" (David Phelps) — a story about someone who thought the story ended at the cross, and discovers three days later it didn't. Neither does yours.

1

Day 1: The Word That Never Returns Empty

Reading: Isaiah 55:10-11

*As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

Devotional: God does not speak idle words. When He sends His word into your life, it carries a promise — it will accomplish exactly what He intends. This means that every time you open Scripture searching for comfort, clarity, or courage, God has already guaranteed the outcome. You are not searching in vain. You are not too broken or too distracted for His word to reach you. The same God who designed rain to nourish the earth designed His word to nourish your soul. Come to it honestly, come to it hungry, and trust that what God sends out, He always brings home full.

Personal Reflection: What specific need are you bringing to God's word this week? Do you genuinely believe He has already promised to meet you there?

Practical Application: Before reading Scripture each day this week, pause and pray one sentence asking God to fulfill His promise to accomplish something specific in you through His word.

Day 2: The Generosity Behind the Invitation

Reading: Matthew 20:1-16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

“About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

“‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one

hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Devotional: Jesus tells the parable of the vineyard workers not to explain labor economics but to reveal the heart of God. The landowner goes out again and again throughout the day, at every hour, looking for more people to invite in. That is not the behavior of someone filling a quota. That is the behavior of someone who genuinely does not want anyone left standing idle in the marketplace. God's invitations are not rationed. They do not expire. Whether you have walked with Jesus for decades or are only now beginning to hear His voice clearly, the invitation extended to you is full, sincere, and without condition.

Personal Reflection: At what point in your life did you first genuinely hear and respond to God's invitation? What made you ready to receive it at that moment?

Practical Application: Think of one person in your life whom you have quietly decided is unlikely to ever come to faith. Commit to praying for them daily this week, trusting that God is still extending His invitation to them.

Day 3: Equal Grace, Unequal Expectation

Reading: Romans 3:21-24

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Devotional: Human nature insists on hierarchy. We want our effort measured, our sacrifice recognized, and our loyalty rewarded with something others do not receive. But Paul makes clear in Romans 3 that all people fall short and all people are justified the same way — through grace, as a gift. The workers who labored all day and the workers who labored one hour stood before the same landowner and received the same wage. Not because their effort was equal, but because the landowner's generosity was not tied to their effort at all. Grace is not a reward system. It is a rescue. And every person rescued stands on the same ground.

Personal Reflection: Have you ever felt that someone else's forgiveness or welcome into faith was somehow less deserved than your own? What does that reveal about how you understand grace?

Practical Application: Write down one area of your spiritual life where you have been keeping score — either of your own effort or someone else's. Surrender that scoreboard to God in prayer today.

Day 4: It Is Never Too Late

Reading: Luke 23:39-43

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Devotional: The criminal crucified alongside Jesus had no time left for good works, no opportunity to be baptized, no years of faithful service to offer. He had only a moment, a recognition of who Jesus was, and a simple, desperate request. And Jesus welcomed him completely. This is not a loophole in the system. This is the system. God's grace does not require a minimum number of years to become valid. It requires only a heart turned toward Jesus. If shame from your past has convinced you that the window has closed, the story of this man is God's direct answer to that lie. The window is open. It has always been open.

Personal Reflection: Is there something in your past that still makes you question whether you are truly and fully welcomed by God? What would it mean to let that question be settled once and for all?

Practical Application: Find a quiet moment today and speak aloud the specific thing you have carried as disqualifying. Then read Luke 23:43 again and receive it as God's personal answer to that burden.

Day 5: The Blessing of Walking With Jesus All Day

Reading: Psalm 16:5-11

*Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.*

*The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.*

*I will praise the Lord, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.*

*I keep my eyes always on the Lord.
With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*

*Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,
because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.*

*You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

Devotional: While grace is equal for all who receive it, there is a particular richness that belongs to those who walk with Jesus across an entire lifetime. Psalm 16 describes a life in which God is a constant portion, a steady boundary, a present counselor, and a source of deep and lasting joy. These are not things reserved for heaven alone. They are the inheritance of daily, sustained relationship with God. Those who come to faith early do not

receive more grace, but they do receive more time to experience the ways grace transforms a life from the inside out. The path of a long faith is its own profound gift. Walk it with gratitude.

Personal Reflection: What has your ongoing relationship with Jesus produced in you over time that you would not trade for anything? How has walking with Him shaped who you are?

Practical Application: Take ten minutes today to write down three specific ways your life has been shaped by your faith over time. Share at least one of them with someone this week as an act of testimony and gratitude.