

AM I BEING UNFAIR TO YOU?

Bible Study on the Workers in the Vineyard

(Mt 20:1-16)

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World Day of Prayer 2017: The Philippines



Introductory Remark:

This Bible Study was held at the YPray?-Conference of the WDP-Committee of England, Wales and Northern Ireland at Northampton, 30th of April 2016. It is the main text of the World Day of Prayer-Service for 2017, written by women from the Philippines. I especially want to thank the WDP-Committee of England, Wales and Northern Ireland for the invitation. It was a great experience.

This text represents the Bible Study as it was held in Northampton. The participatory dimensions of the bible study are shown by indicating when persons are to come up and take a role, where to sing the song etc.. These directions are still there in order to enable people to repeat the presentation.

I also thank Ottmar Fuchs and Joachim Kügler who added information to this text and who discussed it with me during the preparation. I really thank especially Eileen King and Helga Hiller who not only also discussed with me the text, but corrected the English text.

German: A comprehensive Bible Study on the Workers in the Vineyard is published in German by Joachim Kügler and myself. It is available:

Ulrike Bechmann/Joachim Kügler: Gerechtigkeit mit offenen Augen. Das Gleichnis von den Arbeitern im Weinberg, Stuttgart 2016,

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www.bibelwerk.de;*

Songs: *I also thank Siegfried Macht who allowed that his songs are translated and printed. These songs are available in his Workbook:*

Siegfried Macht: Kleine Leute - große Töne. Strube Verlag, München, (Incl Audio CD with some Playbacks), 15,- €; Address: Siegfried.macht@gmx.de <http://siegfriedmacht.de/>

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Mt 19:27-20:1-16, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Mt Then Peter said in reply,
19,27 “See, we have left everything and followed you.
What then will we have?”
28 Jesus said to them,
“Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on
his glorious throne,
you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones,
judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or
mother or children or lands, for my names sake,
will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.
30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first

Mt

20:1a For the kingdom of heaven is like ...
b ... a landowner who went out early in the morning
c to hire labourers for his vineyard.

2a After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage (denarus),
b he sent them into his vineyard.

3a When he went out about the third hour,
b he saw others standing idle in the market-place;
c and he said to them,

4ba “You also go into the vineyard,
b and I will pay you whatever is right.”

5a So they went.
b When he went out again about the sixth hour and about the ninth hour,
c he did the same.

6a And about the eleventh hour he went out
b and found others standing around;
c and he said to them,
d “Why are you standing here idle all day?”

7a They said to him,
b “Because no one has hired us.”
c He said to them,
d “You also go into the vineyard.”

8 When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager,
“Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and
then going to the first.”

9 When those hired about the eleventh hour came,
each of them received the usual daily wage (denarus).

10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but
each of them also received the usual daily wage (denarus).

11 And when they received it,
they grumbled against the landowner,
saying,

12 These last worked only one hour,
and you have made them equal to us
who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.”

13 But he replied to one of them,

“Friend, I am doing you no wrong;
did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage (denarus)?

14 Take what belongs to you and go;

I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.

15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?
Or are you envious (or is your eye evil) because I am generous?”

16 So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’

The only changes to the text of the NRSV are: the first hour etc.... instead of the time (nine o'clock etc.)

1. The Last and the First (Mt 19:30/20:16): How the Parable is Framed Between Jesus' Perspectives on First and Last

The beginning of the parable obviously is Mt 20:1, "*For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner...*". But first let us have a look at the end. Which is the last sentence?

Is it 20:16 (the last and the first),
or 20:15, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose ...?"

Consider that V.16 indicates that the parable is part of the wider context of the gospel and refers in a double way to the story. In one way it refers to the parable that seems to tell what the saying conveys. But it mainly refers to Mt 19:30, where the text differs slightly by turning around the last and the first. "But *many* who are first will be last, and the last first". The saying stems from Mk 10:31; Mathew knew the gospel of Mark and used it as one of his sources. It is the last line of the story of the rich young man who does not leave everything to follow Jesus. The two slightly different statements are framing the parable — before it begins and at the end. It indicates the decision of the redactor Matthew, where to embed the parable (the parable is only in Matthew's Gospel) into the whole of his gospel. It is important to keep this in mind because then one can avoid the trap to identify too easily V.16 with the main message of the story. And one can avoid the understanding of the phrase as a punishment. In the story the first are not punished being the last, but they get justice! The frame refers to the questions of the disciples (Mt 19:27ff.) and the central message of the story stands on its own.

2. The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Mt 20:1-15)

Verse by verse, going along the text

*“For the kingdom of heaven is **like** ...” (V.1a)*

The first verse of the parable sets up a comparison: *is like!* This indicates that the following parable has a second meaning added to the apparent meaning of the story. Important for this parable is the very beginning: *“For the kingdom of heaven is **like** ...”* This “is like” is not easy to understand and many theories were elaborated. But in whatever way the story is seen, there is one trap that has to be avoided. When it says: *“is like”*, this does not mean “is” or “*is the same as*”. The trap is to identify the landowner directly with God. This is not the case. The challenge is: What in this story is *like* the kingdom of heaven and not what in the story is heaven, or what is God, or who are the workers. Caution: Being open minded to this difference is important!

Consideration: What are Parables?

Why are the parables in the gospels so intriguing? They seem to be simple stories that everybody can understand. Mark Twain’s quote hits the nail on the head: “It ain’t those parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand”. The parables are stories that are not told in order to give an answer to questions or problems. They are told in a way that draws the readers into the story. Going through the parable of the workers in the vineyard there are lots of hints. Especially that the ending is open; the question at the end is directed to the reader: What do you think? What do you make out of this story? In what way is the kingdom of heaven like this story? Parables want to provoke, to initiate thinking! And very often it is an open process that is provoking you to search out what do you really think. What you really think

depends on the standing point of the reader, the culture, the identification with figures in the story, one's own value system – there are more than one answer and more possible interpretations.. A core responsibility of Christian communities is to discuss the parables and interpret them in their context. Living according to them is and was always the challenge.

We are ready now to start the parable and to see in the beginning that it is told from the perspective of a narrator.

(Narrator: Comes to the foreground, is addressed: “You know a lot ...”)

The very first sentence of the story of any text is very meaningful and here also we have an artfully arranged sentence. Think of a stage and the curtain opens: What and whom do you see? And how is the stage set?

This narrator knows more than the figures in the story. And he knows a lot about the art of narrative. *He also knows:* How to put emphasis on certain facts, how to highlight certain sentences, how to mark the turn in the story, how to use space and time. What is said is important, but also what is left out. The narrator doesn't find it important for the readers to know more than is necessary.

First scene: V.1b-2: At the market-place (1st hour)

“... a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for one denar, he sent them into his vineyard.”

Two sentences only and a full long plot is told. The first sentence of any story is important. It sets the theme, the space, and the figures and marks a beginning that has to come to an end.

How is the first scene told? The text skips a lot: It skips the place where the landowner comes from, and no repeating the discussion about the wage. It doesn't say what kind of work they are hired for: are the workers going for the harvest or for the preparation of the vineyard. But what is not skipped is the time: early in the morning.

What about time? Time is important and we will see that time is ongoing through the text. Take note what time it is: it is the early morning and here not only the day but also the working day starts. Now starts a timeline that structures the parable and gives it a certain rhythm (cf. later).

Who are the figures? We have a landowner. The Greek word *oikodespote* is used here and means a master of a household. Later on the landowner is named differently. Looking closely at the text they agree – but he, the landowner, comes to an agreement with the labourers. In fact he is the subject and not the labourers. Nothing is said about the way the labourers agree.

What about space? What do we see at the beginning? It is a place where workers are standing for being hired. Spot on! This place is the focus – later we will find out that it is the market-place.

The place of recruit is probably at a public venue, market, or pub. Those who are known to the vineyard master will probably be called from their homes or via word of mouth. The other figures are the workers. They are standing and they are hired. And they are sent to the vineyard. The only mention of a space is the vineyard, but that is far away from the scene. The light doesn't fall on the vineyard yet. Thinking once again of a stage, the workers just leave the stage and are not seen anymore.

And the landowner, where does he come from? Is it from his house or from the vineyard? "He goes out" – where from is not important. The narrator indicates here that the vineyard is important, even if it does not seem relevant.

Consideration Social Background of Day-Labourers in Palestine

In Palestine in the 1st A.D. the economy was in crisis. Rome was in charge of the country and there was oppression. The context is an agriculture based economy with many deprived people. Many peasants had lost their land. Mounting debts and increased taxation had generated a patron-and-client society of unequal relationships with the estate owners assuming the role of patrons. The high taxes of the Romans and the local taxes, added to the oppression in the daily life. Many peasants with only a small piece of land even lost it to landowners and became their client. In such a relationship the client's well being is determined by the closeness of rapport that he/she maintains with the patron.

The landless labourers in the story of the parable do not belong even to this dependent group; they have no such relationship to a landowner. They were outside of any assured protection and regular work opportunity. Even on rare occasions when they find work to do they are more vulnerable to being deprived of their basic wages. In fact the workers are milling around the marketplace

waiting for an opportunity to work in the vineyards. Some of them are already former laborers in the vineyard, however when there is a good harvest, more laborers are needed. So people wait in the marketplace hoping that this day, they will have some work and earn something to take home to feed their family. The labourers called for this purpose are hired hands for a certain period of time. They are not permanent workers.

Denar:

The wage for the day is one Denar (*denarius*), as is said in Greek. The translation here adds that this is the usual daily wage. This is an interpretation of the Greek where just the Denar is given. How much a Denar was worth in terms of subsistence is not easy to reconstruct. The usual interpretation sees one Denar as a usual daily wage for workers on the market. It is enough to buy 10-12 loafs of bread. And the Palestinian bread is the small round pita. Usual wage – this is the minimum and not enough for a family. Women and children will have to work also in order to find enough to eat.

Second scene: V.3-5a: At the market-place (3rd hour)

When he went out about nine o'clock (about the third hour), he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them,

(DANCE and SONG: Nobody who wants us ...; first verse those in the "market"- second verse those in the vineyard)

First the narrator starts repeating the first scene (*landowner goes out, he sees workers*) and again he is mentioning the hour. But then comes something new. For the first time the market-place is mentioned. Seeing the workers in the market-place the landowner directs his speech to them and the narrator lets us hear him talk: *"You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right."* He sends them to the vineyard like the others.

The workers are standing "idle" says the English translation of the Greek word "*argos*".

In the Greek language *argos* has a double meaning: It can mean *idle* in the sense of being lazy; but it also can mean *idle* as inactive in a neutral sense, as out-of-work. This double meaning also tries to play with the hearer: How do they judge the workers on the market? How do you hear it? (*Time to think or talk a bit*).

"Whatever is right": The theme of justice is taken up for the first time. Having in V.1 a *denarus* as wage for a day here the relation is open. The story plays with the reader because automatically they will combine the wage and "what is just". The reader's own perception of justice related to a wage for work is activated and the parable nourishes the expectations. Sure there will be less than one *denar*. This is the art of the narrator: To arouse strong expectations and to bring in the reader with his/her values.

Consideration: Justice in the Bible (background information)

Justice is a term that encloses a wide range of understandings: law, ethics, politics, religion, nature. In the deepest sense it is the basic order for the whole creation. God and human beings act according to justice if it conforms to the order of the whole created world. What is justice? The answer expresses one's understanding of the world. Justice binds people together and connects God, human beings, and nature. But justice does not exist on its own but needs to be erected and sustained. God is the first who guarantees justice. Therefore the poor people are the first who are addressed by God's releasing justice. In times of urgent needs the hope for God's judgement was growing. In Jesus' teaching the kingdom of God (or kingdom of heavens in Matthew, *basileia*) is yet there: the hungry are fed, the poor get enough and so on. Matthew's concept of *basileia* is written in the beatitudes (Mt 5-7), justice is a gift of God that cannot be achieved by human beings alone. *Basileia* is something to hope for and disciples of Jesus are those who do justice in the sense of the *basileia*. This is a higher justice, not only based on what has to be, but orientated on God's perfection. Only if all people are getting their rights, their needs then justice is done.

Space: The workers are standing on the market place.

Space is also important for the interpretation of a text. The parable names only two spaces. The emphasis lies in the first part of the parable on the market place even if it is mentioned explicitly only once (V.3). V.3 also has the first real dialogue; different hints are marking this verse as an important one. Here the workers are waiting for someone to hire them. It may be the assumed knowledge that the market is the place where workers are hired for a day.

The market place is the space for being hired or standing around. The market place is the important space of the first scene. The landowner comes out – where from is not said. One imagines his home in the first hour, but the same term is

used for the other hours. It is not said and this means that the story puts no emphasis on it. He is just going out (*ekselton*). Several times the same word together with the hour as the only variation sets a certain kind of monotony and structure.

Time: The rhythm of the day

Space and time are important for storytelling. What time period is told in the story? The parable talks about one working day. The whole story is arranged according to a timeline in various steps of three hours. In Palestine at that time a day had twelve hours and twelve hours the night. Summer or winter, sunset is nearly at the same hour, there is more or less one hour difference. At six or at seven it is dark and there is no twilight.

The day of the landowner starts at six o'clock in the morning. And each time he went out to hire new workers, three hours have elapsed. The translations have the time, saying "nine o'clock", "twelve o'clock etc. But for the structure of the text the Greek text provides the rhythm: at the third hour, at the sixth hour, at the ninth hour. Repeating "hour" and only changing the number raises expectations: The 12th hour will be decisive.

Third scene: V.5: At the market-place (6th and 9th hour)

When he went out again about the sixth hour and about the ninth hour, he did the same.

(DANCE and SONG: Nobody who wants us ... First verse those in the “market”- second verse those in the vineyard)

What a short sentence covering six hours of the day and two times hiring workers from the market-place. The text just repeats and summarizes what happened. It fills up the story and accumulates expectations.

But the text takes a shift: the text is the shortest part for the longest time of the day. And this makes it a structuring verse of the text. It marks the end of the “normal” hiring. Three hours three times – the next scene shortens the interval into two hours.

Fourth scene: V. 6-7 At the market-place (11th hour)

*6 And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around;
and he said to them,*

“Why are you standing here idle all day?”

They said to him,

“Because no one has hired us”

He said to them,

“You also go into the vineyard.”

*(DANCE and SONG: Nobody who wants us ... First verse in the “market”-
second verse e in the vineyard)*

The fourth scene starts after two hours, at the 11th hour. It breaks the three-hour-rhythm of the hiring of workers. It is not really necessary for the central point (*clou*) of the whole story. If those workers coming at the 9th hour would have been the first to get the wages and also had one Denar the same effect would have been possible: Astonishment and protest from the workers of the first hour. The eleventh hour points the expectations and the message of the story: How much will they get?

Consideration: The Eleventh Hour

But interestingly the twelfth hour is not mentioned, but the eleventh hour. It breaks the rhythm and puts an emphasis on it. It puts an exclamation mark on this verse. In the Greek text the sentence begins with the eleventh hour, also a break in the composition of the previous verses. Something new begins. The eleventh hour is not like the others. It marks the shortest time for work that is left and it marks the workers in the verse where the eleventh hour is used again: In V.9 the workers are the first to get the *denar*, the wage that was agreed with

the workers of the first hour. And from then on the parable skips the rhythm of the hours and sticks to the dialogues at the end of the day. Time is no longer important. The second part begins where time of the narrative and the time of reading or hearing the narrative are the same. A dialogue begins and it lasts as long as everybody speaks. It is a way to involve the reader/hearer into the story. They talk but we follow the arguments and hear them as if we are part of the scene – and everybody has to decide which arguments to follow.

The importance of this hour is emphasized by the long dialogue that the landowner begins with the workers. Up to now the workers have not spoken one word. Only the landlord commanded them to go to the vineyard. Even within the narration in V.1 the landlord is subject of the agreement. Now he asked the workers about their situation, why are they standing here all day? It is a strange question, being a landowner and using these workers for his vineyard he certainly knows. If no one gives them work, they can't do anything and are not able to earn money.

Like in V.3: “standing idle” says the English version for *argos*. Standing and not being hired. No move was possible, no work to do. No money to earn.

During the Bible study little by little the participants change the place from the market-place to the vineyard. Now, everybody is in the vineyard.

DANCE and SONG: Nobody who wants us ... (Lied: Niemand will uns haben ...)

(Second verse in the vineyard, all are there)

Second Part

Fifth Scene: V.8-15: In the Vineyard (after 12 hours)

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, “Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.” (V.8)

The marker for changing the scene is the new location. The narrator turns down the light that he had put on the market-place and now brings the vineyard in full light. Everybody is there: The landowner, a newly introduced manager, and all the workers that were hired during the day.

What a difference to the verses before. Now the plot comes to a halt and an elaborate narration takes over. The dialogues bring the readers into the story, listening to the arguments; and taking sides, for sure. The time of the story and the real time are the same: 1:1. Reading the dialogue in the parable needs the same time as carrying on the dialogue in real time.

From landowner to kyrios (V.8)

The Greek word is *oikodespote*, meaning the master (*despots*) of the house (*oikos*) was used in V.1. Afterwards the text only talks of “he” or “him”. Now he is introduced anew and it is a different word: *kyrios tou ampelonos*, “Owner of the vineyard” is the English translation and it signals the difference. But it hides the importance of this name: *kyrios*. *Kyrios* is one of the titles for *Jesus*, but here the parable compares the story with of the *kingdom of heaven*, not with *Jesus*.

The *kyrios* directs a speech to his manager; he is not paying the workers himself. The reference to the frame of the parable is given: *beginning with the last and then going to the first*. He is not explaining why he starts with those who came

last. But the narrator knows: The setting is necessary, otherwise no conflict would arise. The workers of the first hour wouldn't know about the equal payment. And it refers to the frame and the dictum of Mt 19:30 to the disciples.

When those hired about five o'clock (about the eleventh hour) came, each of them received the denarius. (V.9)

Now the parable concentrates on the main difference: The workers of the first and the last hour. The other workers are not even mentioned again. One has to assume that he "did the same" as he did the same in the morning hiring them.

This payment is the first reference to "what is just" in V.3. The *denarius* was the agreement with the workers of the first hour and all others got the information: "I will pay you whatever is right." Nobody had asked: How much is it? This is the time where "what is right" is explained: It is a daily wage.

So the obvious conclusion is: This is a landowner who knows that people who do not even earn the daily wage have no chance of living. They are not able to buy even the daily bread that is needed. He knows of the need of the poor people and is generous enough to give them the minimum, even when they come late. He must have this in mind at the time when he was hiring them. He wanted to enable them to get what they need for a living, at least that day.

Up to now the parable still leaves a chance to agree even if there is a different thinking about wage and time in the background. OK, the last ones get one denarius because they need it. It is the grace of the landowner to take this as a minimum. But if the logic of the market functions than the others must get more. And exactly this is what the others think. The parable skips all the others and tells about the workers of the first hour.

And interestingly no reaction is told from the workers of the last hour. No thank you, no surprise, no relief to have enough money for the day, no astonishment, no question: why? They receive – and this is it. The same is true for the others, who are not even mentioned again. If the story would focus on them this part would be elaborate. But the total lack of reaction is a signal that the story is not interested in the last ones or in gratitude. It is interested in the reaction of the first ones who now are the last.

10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the denarus. (V.10)

Exactly this is the logic of the market. More work, more payment. If one hour is one *denarus*, how much must twelve hours of work be? Maybe they didn't expect the wage this high, but more than the daily wage. They would have some money for a bit more, a few more days with no worry about if they are hired or not; some more food for the children.

11 And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying,
Receiving is an important word that is repeated several times in these verses.

- V.9: The workers of the last hour received denar
- V.10: They thought to receive more
- V.11: Receiving the denar and grumbling

Everybody received! And everybody received the same.

But the workers of the first hour thwart their receiving (3x).

- They think different about what they receive
- They receive
- Receiving they grumble

The emphasis of the story lies on **how the ones of the first hour receive** – in the literal sense of the parable it is the wage of the workers, in the broader sense for the gospel and the answer to the disciples and their question: What will we earn? We left everything (19:27).

To grumble reminds one of Israel's grumbling in the desert against Moses, Aaron and God: "You brought us here and now we will die". Several times such stories are told. In the combination of receiving *and* grumbling lies the contradiction.

These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” (V.12)

Now the grumbling becomes explicit. The arguments of the workers are clear. One hour against a day’s work. And this day’s work is underlined by “burden” and “scorching heat”. But interestingly they don’t say: You payed them the same like us, they say:

“You have made them equal to us”.

For me this phrase goes beyond the problem the same wage for the workers. It is a problem of those who work more or are longer in one place, in one movement, in one institution, and they want to receive the appropriate wage (or merit) that marks the difference to the others. What is just? What is right? This question arises to its full height. The problem is not that the workers of the last hour got the *denarius*, probably fine with them, but that they didn’t get more money in comparison to them. They received, yes, but they are made equal – this is the problem.

Two direct speeches of workers mark the conflict

Two times the parable let workers speak directly: The last one first (V.7) and the first ones last (V.12). All others are quiet. Their talking emphasizes the main confrontation, being first and getting last. The last ones are the first to speak: “No one hired us”. And the first ones say: *These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.*

The focus is different and makes clear the different problems. The last ones have the problem that is not in their hands. “No one hired us”: There is no chance to be one of the first. Fear, anxiety, and feeling hopeless up to the 11th hour! There is no chance at all, no chance of work, no chance of breadwinning, no chance to do

something. They are the last ones and they have no chance. Someone has to do something, to hire them, and then they would get a chance to be like the first ones. The landowner gave them the chance and they are now like the first one. They earn what they need for a day.

But this is exactly the problem of the first ones. They were hired from the beginning, luckily, but it meant to work more: To stand the scorching heat, to work hard, to be exhausted by work. Is this worth the same as standing on the market the whole day? Not in the logic of market-place, but in the vineyard! Two contradicting value systems come to the foreground.

In the market only the physical work is paid. There is no place for the difference if someone has a chance to work or not. There is no consideration of the need of someone. There is no room to consider the problem of dayworkers. There is no consideration if the system of hiring persons only for a day is unjust and disastrous for the people. The market functions only according to the need of landowners, but not according to the need of the workers. Those who hire dictate the rules, those who hire dictate the prize, and those who hire decide whether it is sustenance or starvation. If they don't need their work they are left alone. The landowner wouldn't pay anything. But the workers still need someone to hire them.

Those who were lucky enough to be hired follow the system of the market. It would put them not only first in the morning but also first according to the payment.

What follows is a long monologue of the landowner to one of the first ones and it is directed also to all others. Here lies the key of the story. The dialogue stops the clock, stops time and puts the argument of the landowner into the center.

But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the denarus? (V.13)

The landowner replies to one of them: “Friend”. This individual approach to one worker now offers the reader to feel addressed here if he feels with the workers of the first hour and agrees with him. Indeed ...

V.13-15:

(A) - Friend- - I am doing you no wrong;

- did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage (denarus)?

- Take what belongs to you - and go;

(B) - I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.

- Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? (V.15)

- Or are you envious (or is your eye evil) because I am generous?”

“Friend” (*etaire*): three times someone is addressed like this in the gospel of Matthew. It is not a too friendly address, a commander of troops would address his soldiers, and in the gospel there is some distance between those who are addressed like this.

Two times there are three sentences with a parallel structure.

A: “I” (did no wrong to you) – rhetorical Question (Denar?) – Order (take/go):

The focus lies on the worker

The first sentence says something about the landowner, then a rhetorical question tries to get his acceptance, and then an order follows.

B: “I” (choose to give) – rhetorical Question (sovereignty) – Question addressing the worker *and* the reader.

The focus lies on the landowner

The difference to A lies in the last sentence: It is not an order, but a real question that finds no answer in the text. It has to be answered by the reader.

This last monologue's speech of the landowner is the highlight and the arc of the parable aims to this end. The focus lies totally on the landowner and his position. He argues (A) first with one worker of the first hour, then (B) more generally. His speech has a double direction: The direction to the worker in the narrative, but also to those who read or hear the parable.

Questions end the story and therefore it is an open ending. The questions are not answered by the worker and the "you" can be everybody: "Is *your* eye evil because I'm generous"?

The arguments of the landowner mark a difference in the value system: What is just depends on what "justice" is related to. In the logic of the market justice is related to being paid according to how long you worked.

In the vineyard (or in the kingdom of heaven) justice is related to what people need to survive and to have their daily bread – at least! The landowner refers to his sovereignty and his ability to do what he wants. And this means that he acts according to a different value system.

"You made them equal to us": But:

THEY ≠ WE (say the workers of the first hour)

THEY = YOU (says the landowner)

In what respect do they make this statement?

Is your eye evil because I'm generous? (V.15)

What the landowner tells is: There is justice to the first ones. Nothing is taken from them away. But it is not only justice that is needed for the others; it is grace, goodness, generosity because of the situation they live in.

Justice and mercy re bound together and not a contradiction. The first ones get justice because justice fills their needs. The last ones get justice + mercy or generosity, because only this fills their needs. It corresponds with the notion of God in the Bible. God is both: Just and merciful and both is necessary and not contradictory.

Excursus; The Evil Eye (Background information)

The parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-15) contains one of numerous biblical references to the Evil Eye. Belief in the Evil Eye, its expression of envy, and its destructive power pervaded the ancient world of the Circum-Mediterranean. The frequent references to the Evil Eye in the Bible—modern translations and commentaries notwithstanding-indicate the extent to which the biblical communities also shared this belief. The need to make order out of chaos is basic to human beings. The people had to understand the world in which they lived. The eye played a critical role in shaping their perspective, explaining many imponderables. The evil eye inflicted punishment on the wicked, while the good eye helped people. This clarifies the cultural script latent in the Evil Eye parable of Matthew and other sayings in the gospel, for example the saying (Mk 9:47 parallel Mt 18:19) “And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell” The thesis advanced is that Matt 20:1-15 is a

parable in which a typical Evil Eye accusation is employed to denounce envy as incompatible with life in the kingdom of heaven and detrimental to the community's well-being.

How one sees the body is cultural; in the Bible it is very different from today. “Body” – there is no Hebrew word for body as a whole, it is a web of the different parts of the body. Eyes are very important; they are thought to be active. The understanding was that eyes transmit what persons think, wish, and want, good or bad things (up to the 17th/18th century AD). “Seeing” was coming from inside to the outside, therefore persons with bad thoughts were seen as persons with an evil eye. Many amulets in different forms were used as a protection, an eye, later on a hand. They are in use even today.

Envy is the motive that lies behind the saying of the “evil eye”. The “evil eye” or envy is a form of bondage and vice in contrast to the kingdom of God (cf. Mk 6:22f; Lk 11:34ff). Envy is seen as very disastrous for the society. The parable talks about the workers of the first hour. And in their value system the last ones should also be the last in wage. Envy is to believe, that one got a raw deal. It may be real; it may be in one’s imagination without any basis. The attitude of feeling inferior and disadvantaged is based on a comparison and the question is: What is the reference? And what is the basis? Is it possible to accept that others get some good? That the landowner is good to others? This clarifies the cultural script latent in the Evil Eye parable of Matthew; Mt 19:8: *“And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.”* The thesis advanced is that Matt 20:1-15 is a parable in which a typical Evil Eye accusation is employed to denounce envy as incompatible with life in the kingdom of heaven and detrimental to the community's well-being.

Summary: Market versus vineyard: different value-systems

The parable of the workers in the vineyard names only two spaces: The market place is the important space of the first scene. Here the workers are hired by the landowner.

The other space is the vineyard and it is mentioned several times. It is especially also mentioned in the first part – but not as a location where things happen, but as a location to be sent to. Only the hired workers are able to go into the vineyard. But slowly and surely everybody on the market place leaves it and is sent to the vineyard and from V.8 on the scene is taken in the vineyard.

Why a vineyard and not an olive grove?

The choice may be deliberate because the vineyard is a highly symbolic place in Israel's traditions. In Jes 5 the vineyard stands as a metaphor for Israel, also in Ps 80 and in Song of Songs (1:6) as a metaphor for a woman. Vineyard has a double significance: the real vineyard and a metaphor for a different place. Mt 20 uses it as a metaphor for the "kingdom of heaven" and reading the story the reader has to decide if he/she takes it literally as a vineyard or if it stands for the "kingdom of heaven".

Market and vineyard are two spaces with different or contrary logics of wages because of different values. In the market place the wage is given according to the time a worker is hired. This logic is in the mind of the workers of the first hour ("they thought they would receive more", V.10). And it is very probable in the mind of the hearers of the parable, in the mind of the disciples and in the mind of the readers today. This is related to the understanding of what is just or right: "I will pay you whatever is right." (V.3).

Different value systems of what is "justice" and "good": Values in the market or values in the "kingdom of heavens", the *basileia*.

“You made them equal to us”: But:

THEY \neq WE (say the workers of the first hour)

THEY = YOU (says the landowner)

In what respect do they make this statement?

Market	Vineyard
We are not They (We \neq They)	You are like they: You = They
Evil Eye = Envy	„I’m gracious“
Justice - which value system?	Justice and Grace: Which value structure

Song/round: Come, come, there is work for all

3. Short Outline of the Bible Study (Mt 20)

Room preparation

- The room is divided in half using a cloth—making one space marked as “market” and the other “vineyard” (for example M and V; by symbols). During the Bible Study some papers are put into the two spaces in order to make clear that they have different values, s. at the end).
- All are sitting in one space
- Scarves or other ways of marking the participants as workers of the first, third etc. hour

Text: All participants have the text

Music: Dance: Nobody who wants us ... / Come, come, there is work for all

The Bible Study

Mt 19:30-20:16

1. The Last and the First Mt 19:30-20:16

- Last and first as framing the parable in Matthew

2. The Parable Mt 20: verse by verse

V.1a: the comparison: Kingdom of heaven is like.....

What is a parable? (Invitation to think, not answer)

First part: V.1-7

V.1b-2: First scene

Narrator: Modes of telling a story

V.3-4.5a: Second scene: Main themes

Emphasis through the first direct speech

Time: The rhythm of the day

Space: The Market-place and the social setting of the parable

What is justice? What Justice in the Bible

V.5: Third scene: At the market-place (6th and 9th hour)

Shortest text covers most of the day. End of the rhythm of three hours.

V. 6-7: Fourth scene: At the market-place (11th hour)

The eleventh hour

Second part: V.8-15:

V.8:

Structure of the parable: The second part

From landowner to kyrios

V.9

What is right/just?

V.10-11

Receiving

Receiving and grumbling

V.12

Protest of the workers

“You have made them equal to us”

V.13-15: Monologue of the landowner

A: Three sentences, focus on worker

B: Three sentences, focus on the landowner

V.15:

Mind the trap: The landowner is not God!

The Evil Eye and Envy

3. Summary

Market versus vineyard: different value-systems

Marking the two systems with keywords

Market	Vineyard
We are not They (We ≠ They)	You are like they: You = They
Wage	merit
Evil Eye = Envy	„I'm gracious“
Justice - which value system?	Justice and Grace: Which value structure

Structure of the text:

1. Narration (V.1-2)
2. Monologue with the workers (V.3-4)
3. Narration (V.5)
4. Dialogue with the workers (V.6-7) –
5. Narration (5.) together with monologue, dialogue, and monologue (V.8-15)

4. Songs

NIEMAND WILL UNS HABEN TEXT UND MUSIK: SIEGFRIED MACHT

1. *C* *G7* *G7* *C*
 1. Nie-mand will uns ha-ben, kei-ner stellt uns ein.

2. *C* *G7* *G7* *C*
 Heu-te muss ich hun-ger'n, mor-gen dur-stig sein.

C *G7* *G7* *C*
 Nie-mand will uns ha-ben, kei-ner stellt uns ein.

C *G7* *G7* *C*
 Heu-te muss ich hun-ger'n, mor-gen dur-stig sein.

No one there who wants us,
 No one gives us work,
 Today I will be hungry,
 Tomorrow there is thirst.

There is one, who wants us,
 One who gives us work,
 Nobody is hungry,
 Nobody feels thirst.

KOMMT, KOMMT, ARBEIT IST GENUG TEXT UND MUSIK: SIEGFRIED MACHT

1. *C* *G7* *G7*
a7 *d7* *G7*
 1. Kommt, kommt, Ar-beit ist ge-

2. *C* *G7* *G7*
a7 *d7* *G7*
 nug ge-nug für al-le da.

1. Come, come, there is work for all, and work for all is there.
2. Come, come, we need all your help, and every person counts.
3. Come, come, here you have enough, see what our God provides.

German texts and music: Siegfried Macht; English text: Ulrike Bechmann