

1.

In the past, in rural areas, during the farmers' busiest season, people had to go door to door and ask for workers. If a farmer was planting rice seedlings, some people in the neighborhood would help with the work. In exchange, the farmer paid off his debt to them by helping them around the house or with other needs they may have. This was called an exchange of labor; 'pumasi'. Our ancestors made up for the lack of resources by helping each other through pumasi. Even now, I vividly recall watching the sight of about 10 adults bending down and planting rice in a large field. It would be a difficult task to plant rice over 1.5 acres without the teamwork of so many people. As a child, my only task was to hold rope while the others planted the rice, but it was amazing to see that vast rice field planted with green rice seedlings in a few hours. To make up for this hard labor, the farmer would provide a midmorning snack and makgeolli to the workers. Midmorning, between breakfast and lunch around 10, the farmer's wife would bring a large basin filled with delicious food and side dishes atop of her head. She'd lay a plastic mat on the edge of the rice field and the workers would eat and rest together. Workers would sip makgeolli while shouting "Kyaa~" in satisfaction. The greatest favor the farmer could provide the workers was a delicious midmorning meal.

Looking at the scripture, it seems that there was no such thing as 'pumasi' in Palestine during the time of Jesus. It seems that there was a lack of hands in the vineyard during the grape harvest season. The owner of the vineyard left early in the morning to find workers. He met some people and sent them to the vineyard with a promise to give them a denarius. One denarius was a day's wages for workers at the time, so it was a reasonable price. And hours passed. At 9 o'clock in the morning, the owner decided to go to the market to see if there were more workers. The Greek word translated market here is 'agora' (ἀγορά). In ancient Greece, the agora was a large square located in the center of a city. Markets were held here and political meetings were held. 9 o'clock in the scripture is 9 o'clock in the morning our time. In some Bibles, such as the Greek bible, it is translated as three o'clock. This is because it followed the Jewish reckoning of time. Jews considered the time when the sun went down, 6 o'clock(pm), as 0 o'clock and the beginning of the day. So, to change the Jewish time to the current time, we need to add 6 hours. Anyway, the owner goes out to the agora at 9:00 am and finds people standing idle. The owner tells them he would pay them a fair wage, and he sent them to work in the vineyard. The owner went out at 12:00 and 3:00 p.m. and found idle people to work. That wasn't his last time though. Soon after, the owner goes out to the agora again at 5:00 PM, right before the sun is about to set. He asks the people standing around. "Are you sitting around all day doing nothing?" The workers respond. "We're doing this because no one is hiring us for work."

In Korea, there used to be a place called the "labor market". People would head over there around 5:30 in the morning, and they would wait around to pick up jobs at construction sites. Hard working people flocked there every day. But there were also days when there was no work, and those people had to go home empty handed. Those days would be disappointing and crushing. If you are the breadwinner of your family, that situation is really embarrassing and may feel hopeless. Perhaps the people standing in the agora at 5 o'clock were lamenting their lives in such a mood all day long. The sun was setting in an hour, and it was impossible for them to find work and make money at that time. What kind of stupid person would hire them to work at that hour? But the owner of the vineyard hired them and gave them a chance to work, even though there were only a few hours remaining until evening.

Up to this point in the scripture, it is a reasonable story. However, soon after that, the story turns unreasonable when calculating the wages of the workers at the end of the workday. The owner instructs the steward to pay the wages in the order of those who came last, that is, those who arrived at 5:00 PM and those who arrived early in the morning last. The steward gave a denarius to those who came at 5:00 PM. The first people who

came early in the morning secretly looked forward to their wages. 'We did a lot more work, so we should get paid a lot more.' But what was the result? The same denarius was given to them. The workers who arrived early in the morning started complaining to the owner. "How can you treat us the same as those who only worked an hour? Isn't that too unfair when we've been working all day?" Then the master said to one of them. "Look, I am not treating you unfairly. Didn't you agree with me to work for a denarius? It is my will to give this man the same money. Take yours and go home."

2.

Even using today's common sense, we cannot explain the owner's behavior. What is the scripture trying to tell us? First, the scripture begins with the word 'is like(Greek-Homoia)' and tells us that it is a parable. "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard," hinting to us that we can understand the kingdom of heaven once we understand the heart and circumstances of the owner of the vineyard. And the last sentence, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last" serves to summarize this parable in one sentence. Therefore, in order to understand the text, we must first understand the mind of the owner, and then we must know what it means to change the order of those who were last and those who were first.

In the main text, 'the first' is called 'Protoi' (those who are ahead) in Greek, and 'those who came last' is 'Escatoi' (those who are last). However, 'Protoi' and 'Escatoi' also appear in chapter 19 verse 30, the last verse before chapter 20. "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first" (Matthew 19:30). Look at the order in which 'Protoi' become 'Escatoi' and 'Escatoi' become 'Protoi'. In Matthew 20:16, this order is reversed. Through a literary device that changes the order of sentences, it is to express the theme of this parable, the 'reversal of the order'. In the Bible, the theme is often expressed through these literary devices. The important thing to know is that the stories in front of today's scripture are connected to the main text.

In Matthew chapter 18, the subject of who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven comes up first. In Matthew 18:10, it talks about not despising the little ones, which is a theme that continues with the main text. Moving on to Matthew chapter 19, the story of Jesus crossing the Jordan River and going to Judea begins. Thus, Jesus started his journey to Jerusalem in earnest. Why was Jesus going to Jerusalem? He is heading there to suffer and bear the cross. At this time, Jesus' enemies, the Pharisees, begin to harass Jesus with many difficult questions. The character that appears with the Pharisees is a rich young man. As we well know, a rich young man lacks nothing. He is a person who believes that he lacks nothing in his personal wealth and his ability to keep the law.

What follows after today's scripture refers to the way Jesus went up to Jerusalem in earnest. On the road, the mother of Zebedae asks him to take good care of her sons. She asked that her sons be placed in the chief (Protoi) position. So, you can see that the story following today's scripture carries the motif of 'first place'.

The Pharisees and the rich young man appeared to understand the kingdom of God well. They were mistaken as if they could enter the kingdom of heaven first with their status, conditions, and conduct. 'Protoi', which means first-born, were people who thought they were superior in terms of social class, status, power, and economy. The 'Protoi' were the ones who thought it was their right to sit on the throne of heaven. But Jesus is saying that it can be reversed. 'Protoi' and 'Escatoi' can be reversed at any time. So what is the basis for reversing 'Protoi' and 'Escatoi'?

3.

To understand today's scripture and the rationale of how 'Protoi' and 'Escatoi' can be reversed, we need to understand a few concepts.

First, is the social and cultural values and concepts of the time. This is the value of 'reciprocity' that I have mentioned before in the parable of the 'unjust steward'. Reciprocity was said to have arisen against the backdrop of barter in tribal societies. If there is something to give, there must be something to receive. Reciprocity was done in such a way that when socially and economically wealthy people gave economic favors to the poor, the poor returned honor to them. In today's scripture, the workers in the vineyard were daily laborers.

They were people at the bottom of society at the time. Even a day's work was something they were grateful for. The owner who promised 'one denarius' while giving them work was a very merciful act. The reaction of the workers to this vineyard owner's conduct should be to thank and honor him. However, instead these workers complained to the owner, and those actions crossed the line and made no sense.

Second, to understand today's scripture we need to understand the reasoning of the vineyard owner's method of payment. This payment calculation completely ignores our common knowledge, that those who work the most or those who arrive to work earliest get paid the most. The important word we see used in this payment is the word "agree" written in verse 2 and 13. The Greek word is 'Symphoneo,' which is a combination of "syn," meaning "together," and "phone," meaning "voice." It means the owner's payment will be given as promised and that promise is determined according to the will of the owner. Through this promise of payment, we can think of the concept of 'covenant relationship'. The Jews were a nation that had a covenant relationship with God. For God's one-sided love and grace, the Israelites had to reveal covenantal faithfulness through their lives. The Jews were the first to enter into a covenant relationship with God. However, this covenant relationship could be overturned at any time. It was the covenant relationship that could be overturned by those who came later when they did not act faithfully in a covenantal way.

However, the key point to understanding this covenant relationship is to understand the heart of the owner. It is very important to grasp the meaning of verse 15 for a deep understanding of the scripture. "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" The word generous comes from the word "Agathos(ἀγαθός)," which means "good." It refers to the grace and favor bestowed by the vineyard owner. In the minds of those workers who came first, the owner's generosity is unreasonable. They cannot understand why the owner would be so generous to those who came later. These workers thought those late arrivals don't deserve a denarius, so why is the vineyard owner so generous? To these 'Protoi', the master says: "Are you envious because I am generous?" The Greek Bible says, "Don't your eyes hurt?" which is a way to say, "Your eyes are evil". So, if these workers had good intentions, they would be able to understand the owner's intention, but since they cannot read it, they have evil intentions. The master is uncomfortable with the rudeness of the 'Protoi' against his goodness. Because their intentions could not see their owner's intentions and could only focus on themselves. If those who came first had paid no attention to how much others received and only received what they deserved, there would have been no complaints.

4.

Now we can begin to understand today's scripture. The kingdom of heaven is like the mindset and circumstances of the vineyard owner. What is the mindset of the vineyard owner? His mindset is generous and full of grace. The owner is aware of those workers in need who are the head of their household and who take on the responsibility for providing for their families. He feels pity for those workers who are standing idle in the 'agora' lamenting their lack of work, and through his generous intentions provides them an opportunity to work in his vineyard. This is the mindset of God. It is the intention that every person in the world lives in the kingdom of God, which is expressed as the kingdom of heaven. We must understand the mindset of our Heavenly Father who wants no one to be left behind and for all to experience God's grace in his kingdom. God, the owner of the vineyard, longs for all people in the world to enjoy the peaceful and beautiful life that Adam

and Eve enjoyed in Eden, the vineyard that was created in the beginning. There is no one in this world who is excluded from this generous heart of God.

Just like the vineyard owner's mindset toward the 'agora', our minds must also look toward the world. We must look for those who are marginalized and are struggling in the world. Because the heart of our Lord opens towards such people. The Pharisees, the rich young man, and the Jewish people did not deeply understand God's good intentions. They believed that the covenant with God would not change, but the covenant could be changed at any time by the will of the owner. They did not know that those who did not understand the owner's heart could always be removed from the covenant relationship of grace.

Reflect upon yourself. Is your salvation already unshakable, such that you have nothing to worry about? Only when we connect with God's good intentions can we gain true peace. If, like the rich young man, we focus all our attention on fulfilling our own desires, our salvation can be overturned at any time. If you are filled with a sense of religious superiority and a sense of comparison that comes from religious practice like the Pharisees, it will be very difficult to get in touch with God's good intentions. What made me good enough to become a pastor? What made me stand out from other people to become an official? There is nothing to compare. Do not pay attention to those who have entered the vineyard with you. Rather, turn your eyes to those who groan and suffer outside the vineyard. Today's text can be God's word of warning to our 'Protoi', who are first and foremost. Adore the generosity of the owner of the vineyard and long to have that mindset. Don't be the ones who came first, whose mindset is focused only on how much they deserve. No matter how much you get, God has already given you enough. I read a book recently and it used the terms 'comparison cancer' or 'anxiety poison'. Comparison is like cancer inside us, and worry is like poison. There is no reason to compare your life to anyone else's. Live your life. Who cares what salary they have, what car they drive, how many square feet they live in, and how their children have grown up? Comparing ourselves to those who are ahead of us makes us unhappy. Rather, committing our mindset to those who are behind us, who come later than us, and taking care of them is the shortcut to happiness. The kingdom of heaven is like that. It is a kingdom where people become happy by taking care of those who come later, not those who come first. We must remember that the heart of the owner of the vineyard is not for those who come first, but for those who come last.

5.

A novel called <Inconvenient Convenience Store> became very popular in Korea. This novel is set in a small convenience store in Cheongpa-dong, Yongsan-gu, Seoul. Yeom Yeongsook, the main character of the novel, is an old woman in her early 70s who retired as a high school history teacher. She is also a Christian who has been working hard in her faith life in her local church. In the first half of her novel, she realizes that she has lost her wallet and pouch containing important items on the KTX train to Busan. And after a while, a call comes from an unfamiliar number in Seoul area code starting with 02. She is asked if she is Yeom Youngsook by her suspicious counterpart, who stutters, and she learns that he acquired her pouch at her Seoul station. She gets her wallet back through a homeless man in his early 50s named Dokgo, and Youngsook wants to repay him. She takes him to her own small convenience store, which she runs in Cheongpa-dong, to feed him with her lunch box. She then tells him to come have a lunch box whenever he's hungry. As the story flows, the man named Dokgo gets a night part-time job at Youngsook's convenience store. Afterwards, interesting stories unfold about how Youngsook's generosity, who helped out Dokgo, becomes a butterfly effect and has a good influence on many people.

It's a little bit of a spoiler, but Dokgo is actually a doctor in charge of surgery at a big plastic surgery clinic in Apgujeong Station. He describes in detail in the novel how a doctor can become homeless if his life is also ruined. Due to the nature of our church, there are many doctors, so I paid attention to Dokgo's behavior as a former doctor. He becomes alcoholic due to some traumatic event. And he loses all his memories. Through his part-time job at a convenience store, he begins to regain some memories. And he starts to have a good

influence on the lives of many people who come and go to the convenience store. The butterfly effect that began with the goodwill of Youngsook, who knew that he was a good person through his good deeds, was truly enormous. The story of people who have been pushed to the outside in society and find new hope through this uncomfortable convenience store is very moving.

While reading this novel, Yeom Yeongsook seemed like the owner of a vineyard. She was someone who could live well on her teacher's pension, but decided to make her job through her convenience store. She dared to run a convenience store with poor sales for people who are struggling to live on the job. However, many people gain new strength through that uncomfortable convenience store. Dokgo becomes another owner of a vineyard and begins to take care of the marginalized people who walk in and out of the convenience store. In fact, it is a heartwarming novel where many people find answers to their lives through Dokgo's interest and gain the courage to stand up again.

I wondered if the church should be like this inconvenient convenience store. The church must reach out to those who have lost all hope and are at risk of falling into hell. We need to tell them that they are valued and that their lives are worth living. We must convey the mindset of the vineyard owner to those outside who have given up at three or five in the afternoon, letting them know the vineyard door is still open and there is still hope. Like the inconvenient convenience store, there are many things that One Heart Church does not have. The education department is not properly equipped and the organization is sloppy. Even if our church is like an inconvenient convenience store with many shortcomings, if people come here to rest and have hope, what could be more precious than that? I hope you all live with the heart of the owner of the vineyard in your own place of life. I hope you will look out for those who are left behind in this society and take care of them warmly. Right before his Passion began, Jesus told the parable of the vineyard, which was a little uncomfortable for some, and showed them the way they should walk. May we also walk in the steps of our Lord and find a meaningful life in serving those who are the 'Escatoi' of the vineyard.