

Consideration: Free Will

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“Adrian and his brother survived a seriously mentally ill mother.”

From “Free Will” by Sam Harris, Free Press, 2012.¹

“The question of free will touches nearly everything we care about. Morality, law, politics, religion, public policy, intimate relationships, feelings of guilt and personal accomplishments—most of what is distinctly *human* about our lives seems to depend upon our viewing of another as autonomous persons, capable of free choice. [my paragraph break]

“If the scientific community were to declare free will an illusion, it would precipitate a culture war far more belligerent than the one that has been waged on the subject of evolution. [my paragraph break]

“Without free will, sinners and criminals would be nothing more than poorly calibrated clockwork, and any conception of justice that emphasized punishing them (rather than deterring, rehabilitation, or merely containing them) would appear utterly incongruous. [my paragraph break]

“And those of us who work hard and follow the rules would not “deserve” our success in any deep sense. [my paragraph break]

“It is not an accident that most people find these conclusions abhorrent. The stakes are high.”

¹ Notes (Wikipedia)

Samuel Benjamin Harris (born April 9, 1967) is an American [philosopher](#), [neuroscientist](#), author, and [podcast](#) host. His work touches on a wide range of topics, including [rationality](#), [religion](#), [ethics](#), [free will](#), [neuroscience](#), [meditation](#), [psychedelics](#), [philosophy of mind](#), [politics](#), [terrorism](#), and [artificial intelligence](#).

Harris says that the idea of [free will](#) "cannot be mapped on to any conceivable reality" and is incoherent.^[1] Harris writes in *Free Will* that neuroscience "reveals you to be a biochemical puppet."

Matthew 20:1-16 Workers in the Vineyard: “The Upside Down Value System”

²⁰ :1 “The kingdom of heaven is like the owner of an estate who went out at dawn to hire workers for the vineyard. ² After reaching an agreement with them for the usual daily wage, the owner sent them out to the vineyard.

³ “About mid-morning, the owner came out and saw others standing around the marketplace without work, ⁴ and said to them, ‘You go along to my vineyard and I will pay you whatever is fair.’ ⁵ At that they left.

“Around noon and again in the mid-afternoon, the owner came out and did the same. ⁶ Finally, going out late in the afternoon, the owner found still others standing around and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’

⁷ “ ‘No one has hired us,’ they replied.

“The owner said, ‘You go to my vineyard, too.’

⁸ “When evening came, the owner said to the overseer, ‘Call the workers and give them their pay, but begin with the last group and end with the first.’ ⁹When those hired late in the afternoon came up, they received a full day’s pay, ¹⁰ and when the first group appeared they assumed they would get more. Yet they all received the same daily wage.

¹¹ “Thereupon they complained to the owner, ¹² ‘This last group did only an hour’s work, but you’ve put them on the same basis as those who worked a full day in the scorching heat.’

¹³ “ ‘My friends,’ said the owner to those who voiced this complaint, ‘I do you no injustice. You agreed on the usual wage, didn’t you? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go home. I intend to give this worker who was hired last the same pay as you. ¹⁵ I’m free to do as I please with my money, aren’t I? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

¹⁶ “Thus the last will be first and the first will be last.”

Proverb:

Those who wish to sing, always find a song.

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No matter what:

1. Choose joy p. 176
2. Other

Compare a Parable you know or other biblical reference to this paragraph from p. 177:

“Intention is the most powerful ability that human beings have. We decide to be tender. We arrive at the clear intention to be tender, and it catapults us out of our default mode, which is self-absorption. You find this on planes. Everyone is battling to get their carry-on into the overhead compartments. They are knocking over folks to secure the spot. No fewer than three times, the flight attendant announces that folks should “step out of the aisle” and let others pass. Three times. People aren’t selfish. We aren’t sinful. We aren’t jerks. We are unshakably good. But sometimes we are simply self-absorbed, trapped in the small self. If you make your tender heart your highest priority, then you focus on the other. Try this on a plane. Joy ensues.”

What's the Point?

The Main Point of Parables From the Bible Project

Jesus' entire mission was to announce and inaugurate the Kin-dom of God as the climax of the covenant story between God and Israel. The arrival of God's Kin-dom both *confronted* the Israel of Jesus' day and *comforted* them after their long period of exile and oppression.

The parables are one among many ways that Jesus confronted Israel with his offer of the King-dom of God. This is why so many of Jesus' parables begin with the phrase "the Kin-dom of God can be likened to" or contain the phrase "the Kin-dom."

Meaning vs. Significance - From the Bible Project

The meaning of a parable is determined by Jesus' intention as far as we can discern it given the literary, historical, and cultural context provided by the Gospel authors. Jesus' meaning is focused on a specific historical moment: his inauguration of God's Kin-dom and his confrontation with Israel. The significance of a parable is about how specific aspects of the parable's meaning strike later readers as especially important and relevant.

Beyond the Original – Again from the Bible Project

We should pay attention to the original context of the parables, but this does not mean they do not have wisdom to offer us today. Take for example the prodigal son (Luke 15). Jesus is addressing Israel's religious leadership accusing him of unfaithfulness to God by including sinners, tax collectors, and outsiders into his "new covenant people." Jesus' response fits into his historical mission to Israel. However, Jesus' portrait of God can provide wisdom for later generations who deal with other socio-ethnic boundary lines. These boundaries can still prevent Jesus' followers from allowing God's grace to extend to others, and the message of the parable still rings true today.