

Matthew 20:1-19 - Manuscript - Grace

Pastoral Prayer:

- Church - Beltway Park - Foster 325
- School Year, Teachers, Students
- Psalm 19 Better than the drippings of the honeycomb

Intro: In school I had a teacher who when any of his students said, "That's not fair," would assign a punishment. The punishment was to write the phrase, "Life is not fair, I will get over it" 1000 times. That's alot, I can tell you from experience. But friends, we don't want fair. We have been working through the last couple of chapters in Matthew and calling it a Re-education in Kingdom Values. Part of the reason we need to be re-educated is because we fail to understand the Kingdom, or more so, fail to understand the King of the Kingdom. Too often we consider ourselves to be the standard and thus find the Kingdom to be odd and peculiar. The Kingdom, its economy, its standards, its culture, and its King all seem foreign to us. Yet, it is the opposite. We are the foreigners. Everything is backwards from what we would expect. And today, we get a hint at the fundamental reason why; grace.

Main Idea: In the Kingdom, God is free to give costly grace.

The Generous Master and Immense Grace (v. 1-16)

As we work through this parable, let's try to wrap our minds around the logistical elements so that we can see the emphasis. Jesus describes a master, or landowner, who starts looking for workers for his vineyard. He goes out first thing in the morning and finds a few and comes to terms on a reasonable arrangement. They work for a day, he pays them for day. Nothing shocking so far.

Unsatisfied with the number of workers, though, he goes looking for more at about nine o'clock (the third hour). Lo and behold, he finds them. And verse 4 is when the story starts to develop its intrigue. The landowner says that "whatever is right I will give you." Again at noon, three, and five o'clock he goes out and finds yet more workers. He then asks them, "why are you being a bunch of layabouts?" "No has hired us," is the their response. Fair enough. So the master sends them to the vineyard as well. So nothing too crazy so far, if only a bit odd. At most, it might seem a strange to continually hire workers throughout the day, but if there is such a plentiful harvest, then maybe it's possible never to have enough harvesters.

But the conflict in the story escalates when it comes time for payment. He calls his workers in via his foreman and instructs him to begin making the necessary payments. Surprisingly, he is told to pay the last hired, first. And even more amazing is the wage he chooses to give. A denarius. A full day's wage, for one hour of work. Shocked, but excited the workers hired at the beginning of the day change their expectations. You can almost seeing them nudging each other in the ribs. The one who is about to fall asleep as he is leaning on his shovel perks up and starts to pay close attention. "Yo, he is paying them a denarius, how much more do you think he is going to pay us?" The accountant amongst them does the math in his head, "At least 10-12 times more then them."

But then those hired at three o'clock get their denarius, and the same with the other groups. As the foreman closes in on the original group, their expectations have plummeted. So much so, that when the first group receives their wage, they immediately begin grumbling and take their complaint to the landowner.

"How come, these fellas get paid as though they worked the whole day, when they just worked an hour. We were here all day, worked throughout the day, and even had to deal with the scorching heat for goodness sakes. What gives?" But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' (Matthew 20:13-15 ESV)" The literal phrase here is, "is your eye evil because I am good."

And then Jesus rewords and restates what he said at the end of chapter 19. "So the last will be first, and the first last." Clearly not operating with the same mindset as Jesus, the workers hired early in the day find their downfall by the expectation of a greater wage. They are weighing everything on a scale, but it is their own scale. "You have them equal to us," they say.

Imagine a kitchen scale, and you need to get a particular amount of flour. So you fill a bowl with your flour and place it on the scale. Do you know how much flour you have? No. Why? You have failed to account for the weight of the bowl. You have to tare the scale with the bowl before adding your flour so you can see the accurate amount.

These men, in their entitlement, have set the tare on their scales to themselves. They have made themselves the standard by which payments should be measured. And what does this do? It makes what was once an agreeable wage at the beginning of the day seem like mere scraps by the end. But see, it is the choices of the landowner that causes the conflict. He could have paid them the other way around. He could have, and would have been right to pay an hourly wage that is prorated to the amount of work done. But he chooses not to. Jesus is making the stark differences conspicuous. We have seen time and time again how Jesus is seeking to increase the contrast between the world and the Kingdom.

The Generosity of God

Many have called this the Parable of the Vineyard Workers; when it is probably more appropriate to call it the Parable of the Generous Landowner. We, like these workers, assume that we have some position of authority to demand certain things of the King. Yet it is the King, who is sovereign. It is the King who invites people into his vineyard. It is the King who has the right to dictate the agreement and issue payment as he wishes. It is the King who will give, "whatever is right." In verse 4, the landowner decides, "whatever is right". Which means he will keep his end of deal, and do with his own as he wishes. "Friend", he says, "I am doing you no wrong." In other words, "I'm doing right by you." He is upholding his word. But then he adds to it, "I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you." In this way he is shown to be gracious. He is not issuing payment fairly, but graciously. God is just, or he does what is good and right, but the bible makes no claim about God being fair, at least not in the way that we would count fair. Fairness in our minds is

everyone getting what they deserve. But in our pride and entitlement, we cry foul and we call for fairness.

"Do you really want nothing but totally effective, instantaneous justice? Then go to hell." (Carson, How Long, O Lord, 161)

What my teacher should have assigned was the phrase, "Life is not fair, and that is a good thing." And why is it that in Kingdom the first will be last, and the last first? In other words, why is the Kingdom not built on fairness? Because the generous King doesn't use the scales of man, but the scales of grace. This is who he is, his very nature. Look at verses 14-15. This language echoes of language used on Mt. Sinai. Remember when when Moses is with God on the mount and asks God to show him his glory. When Moses asks God, "Who are you?" What is your nature? This is what he says.

Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. (Exodus 33:18-19 ESV)

The glory of God is the revelation of God. The glory of God is the nature of God seen rightly. And here, when asked to reveal his nature, God tells Moses, that his nature is to be gracious and merciful to those whom he chooses. This is who God is. And therefore, this is who Jesus is. He is the gracious master who gives to his workers as he pleases. He is free to be generous as He chooses, in other words, His sovereign grace is his glory. He gives not on the basis of merit, effort, or status. He gives by grace. John picks up on this same idea in his gospel.

For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (John 1:16 ESV)

Out of the overflow of the nature of the Son, we receive grace. And He dispenses of His grace with such profound generosity that the order of the world is tossed upside down. But the glory is not just in his freedom to give out grace, but the in the costliness of that grace.

The First Last (v. 17-19)

"So the last will be first, and the first last." (Matthew 20:16 ESV) This same language book ends this section but also provides the transition to the next section.

We move then to the third prediction that Jesus makes about the coming days and his impending death. And this is the most descriptive of them all. Not only is he going to be killed, but he comes back to talking about that whole cross thing. Remember back in chapter 16:24. You can imagine some of the disciples start to squirm, thinking, "I thought that whole cross things was figurative." However, no announcement of crucifixion is so terrible as to throw an ignorant disciple or even their mom off their agenda, as we will see next week.

So why here? Why does Jesus announce his death, and even the kind of death immediately after this parable. What he says in verse 15 and verse 28 that I think are the key. Jesus, as the sovereign King, is free. He has no obligations apart from those that he himself installs. He is free to do what he desires with what he has.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." (John 10:18 ESV)
Jesus is the first made last.

...Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8 ESV)

And by this work, Jesus accomplished justification for the one would would have faith in Christ. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:17-19 ESV)

This is the wage of the Kingdom. To become a citizen and a worker of this Kingdom is to receive the wage of this Kingdom. By grace, we are given right standing before God. Justification before God. All who come in faith. And in so doing, God shows his glory through his grace. He demonstrates exactly who he is in his free and generous outpouring of grace. Grace to those who were first, and grace to those who were last. Grace to the Jew and now to the Gentiles. Grace to the Apostles and now to the church. Grace to Peter who would end up dying for Christ, and grace to the thief who would die next to Christ. And this is how the parable is laid out. No one comes into the vineyard without an invitation. We will see in a few weeks, no one joins the wedding without an invitation. And even the invitation is grace. All of grace from the first to last. Unmerited, unearned, and even unsolicited. Free grace.

Application

Christians:

Beware Entitlement which has Pride for Its Root

Don't let pride rob you of the joy of grace. Do you find yourself cold to the thought of grace? Does the mention of God's grace towards sinners fail to move any ounce of emotion or affection in your heart? Does this grace of God strike you as marvelous, infinite, matchless? Are you in awe of God's grace to you? If not, then maybe pride is skewing your scales. Pride robs you of your enjoyment of God's grace. It becomes a term within the church's vernacular and not an earth shattering reality. We all are guilty of being like the first hired hands. Entitled to the point that begrudge our generous

master. And this happens when we don't see things rightly. Remember that the man is said to have an evil eye. This the same language that Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:22-23). What we behold, what we see, shapes our hearts. Pride distorts reality. The default bent of our heart is to think too highly of ourselves, and thus we downplay grace.

"Pride takes many forms and shapes and encompasses the heart like the layers of an onion- when you pull off one layer, there is another underneath. Therefore, we need to have the greatest watch imaginable over our hearts with respect to this matter and to cry most earnestly to the great searcher of hearts for His help. He who trusts his own heart is a fool. Since spiritual pride in its own nature is secretive, it cannot be well discerned by immediate intuition of the thing itself. It is best identified by its fruits and effects." - Jonathan Edwards

<https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2001/jonathan-edwards-on-spiritual-pride/> - 8/11/22

We wake up every morning and orient our days and thus our lives to ourselves and our standards. This is what pride does, it considers self to be the standard and then weighs everything else accordingly. But as we have already noted, those scales are skewed.

On one hand, pride considers self too highly. In this passage we see it revealed as entitlement, "I deserved more." Here is the temptation, to demand more than God has promised. Do you find yourself wondering why God has withheld something from you? "Why won't God relieve my pain, I've been praying for relief?" "Why hasn't God allowed us to have more children, we have been trying for so long?" "Why did God take my job away, I was giving regularly?" Pride will make you see God as stingy and withholding. To be sure, there is a wage. The worker was an owed a wage. But only because of the promise of the landowner. We cannot go beyond the promises of God to make demands of God.

But watch out, pride doesn't always show up as hubris. No, it is far too insidious and subtle for that. Sometimes pride is revealed in our self-pity or low self-esteem, "I should be better than this, or I should have more than this." This is just pride looked at from another angle. Same song different verse. When we wallow in low self-esteem or self-pity, we are looking to ourselves to have some quality that is worthy of esteem and praise from others. We build our own scales and play the comparison game. We either place a picturesque version of ourselves on one side; a form of ourselves as we would like to be. Or, we place someone else and wonder why we don't measure up. This is the person who is always asking, why I am, as one author put it, "not smart enough, attractive enough, competent enough, gifted enough, organized enough, educated enough, successful enough, rich enough, or prominent enough." - Jon Bloom

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/lay-aside-the-weight-of-low-self-image> - 8/13/22

Friends, you know what the bible calls this? Idolatry. To gauge the value of our lives and the providence that orchestrates it by any other measure than God's word, is to craft idols of our own design. We are not better than these men, even in the church. Looking down the line at what God is giving in his grace to others and wondering why we didn't get the same. And some of the chief evidence that this is what sin does, is the multi-billion dollar industry of social media which is built on the premise status and achievement. We either spend all of our time comparing ourselves to others or curating a literal picturesque profile of ourselves to display to the world; and wondering

all the while why we have self-image issues. Every time you open your phone you are reminded that you don't work out enough, you aren't a good enough mom, you should probably have more invested by now, there is a book you haven't read, or a podcast you haven't listened to. The pride in your heart wants so bad to measure up to the world. It is against Christ by which all humanity will be judged. So even in your self-pity, your pride has blinded you to the fact that you are much worse than you think. When we lose sight of this, we lose sight of the grace of God.

So stop looking to yourself, and look to Christ. Look to who he shows himself to be in this parable. With each invitation and then with each payment, the generosity of the landowner is revealed. The landowner does not become more generous with each man who is added to his workforce; he has already decided to give what he declares to be right. It isn't the generosity of the God growing, it is the perception of man that grows. This is how it works. God doesn't change over time, our understanding of him changes. So don't grow angry when someone else receives a measure of grace that you wanted. Don't grumble when your coworkers get the promotion and not you. Don't wallow in self-pity when you think your friend's life is put together and yours is not. Don't grow bitter when the ministry of another person or even another church seems to be growing and yours appears small.

Instead, live like you were hired at the 11th hour. It will not do in the Kingdom to compare yourself to other workers. We cannot rightly weigh God's grace to each of us in comparison to others.

Instead, we weigh God's grace to us on his scales. Consider yourself as least, and undeserving of the grace of God. Because that is exactly who and what you are. Because if you don't, you will be tempted to undervalue the grace and generosity of God. Just as the workers undervalue the denarius, so the disciples are tempted to undervalue the grace of God towards them. This is at the heart of Peter's question and what prompts this parable. Look at 19:27. Peter wants to make sure he cashes in on his investment. Peter, James, John, their mom, and all the rest of the disciples want to forget about this whole crucifixion nonsense. But it is that very reality that is the true cure to their issue of pride, and ours as well.

It is in the humiliation of Christ where all pride goes to die. But it is in the glorification of Christ that the wage of the Kingdom receives its value. For it is in this announcement of his death and resurrection that Jesus announces what grace really looks like. Jesus gets what we deserve, and we get what Jesus deserves.

Don't rebuff the grace extended to you. Jesus warns that he will not hold his hand forever. And we as the Christian church echo the call of Christ. To come, receive his gift of grace. Just as we see with Moses, who asks to see God's glory. God tells him it is too much.

Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. (Exodus 33:18-22 ESV)