

Parables of Luke – part 10

Matthew 20:1-15 – Is Grace fair?? We hear a lot about fairness these days; rights, reparations, fair wages, fairness of the rich compared to the poor, fairness with regards to race, etc.

--Is grace fair? No, most definitely not, and we need to be so thankful it isn't!

--This issue of fairness is fleshed out for us by this parable in which a land owner (God) refuses to pay His workers fairly based on the work that they had done.

1. Background and context.

--None of Jesus' parables were told in a vacuum and this one is no different. We won't feel the full weight of Jesus' words until we understand the context.

--**Matt. 19:16-29**

--Jesus turns their attention back to what needed their main focus first (before there can be any discussion about rewards, we have to understand how tremendous the grace of God and the gift of eternal life is.)

--The question posed by the disciples means they understand themselves to be among these that were called out first. They had paid some of the biggest prices for the kingdom.

2. Is Grace Fair?

--Our parable is bracketed by this proverb: 19:30 and 20:15 – a proverb or maxim.

--Proverbs are often similar to a riddle; this one is more of riddle than most: follow the thinking: a group is first but they receive the equivalent of those who came last and the last receive the equivalent of those who come first. But now the first have been put last which moves them to the first position, but those who were last but then put first would then be moved to the last position, then the cycle repeats itself over and over again endlessly.

--Sort of like a revolving door at large hotel; those going in become those going out and those going out become those going in—one revolution into it and they are all the same.

--Think of it as a race with many runners, some start off first and others start off last, but they all cross the finish line in a dead heat—so, the last ones become among the first ones and the first ones become among the last ones.

--It's a convoluted way to say "everybody will be treated the same at some level."

--This is a story of salvation and the grace that brought that salvation to us; its not about earthly things but is based on a salvation economy.

3. The Harvest season.

--Harvest season is often used as an illustration of our salvation and entering into eternity: **Matt. 13:24-30; Rev. 14**

--In most cases, we are the ones being harvested, but in this case, **we** are harvesters.

--The picture that is given to us in this parable is one of the fall grape harvest, when a land owner would need practically every hand he could find to get the grapes off the vines and into processing.

Israel is an ideal place to grow grapes, you have a very predictable rainy season, a very long dry season and a very clear-cut time of harvest.

--Grapes ripened practically simultaneously throughout the land, so workers were a premium for the big push to get the grapes out of vineyards.

--Every able-bodied person would show up for this, it may be only time you made any money all year.

--Day laborers would gather at the marketplace in whatever community was closest with hopes of being hired.

--**V. 1** – takes place before 6 am, the typical work day was 12 hours from 6 to 6.

--Denarius – This was a day’s pay for a Roman soldier, it was considered a respectable living-wage.

--Typically, a day laborer would only receive a fraction of that for his unskilled labor.

--Day laborers were in no position to negotiate because if they didn’t work, they didn’t eat—competition was fierce.

--The fact that this first crew heartily agrees to the terms tells us that this was a deal—a full denarius was exceptional pay for such work.

--This was a more than fair wage for 12 hours of work, in fact it would have been considered quite generous.

3rd hour crew = 9 am are not even given a promise of a wage but only “what is right”

--From here on you get the impression that the owner does not need the workers as much as they need him—in fact he probably hired all the workers he needed to get the job done back at 6am.

--The owner knows that if these guys don’t work that they probably won’t eat either.

--6th hour = 12pm.

--9th hour = 3pm

--11th hour = 5 pm! They only work one hour, but it was better than making absolutely nothing all day long

--Up until this point, this would not have been an unfamiliar scene to those listening to Jesus, but from here on is where they would have been taken aback.

4. Pay time.

--Notice: they are all paid at the end of the day, this was the standard for day laborers.

--The order that he pays them wouldn’t have been so unusual except for the fact that the one-hour workers receive a full denarius for their work.

--We are now intersected with our proverb: the last ones are the first ones to get paid.

--You can imagine that, seeing this, the first workers who were hired began to salivate a bit! “let’s see, one hour gets one denarius, and we worked 12 hours—12 denarii?!!”

--Those that worked the full 12 hours – receive a full denarius as well, seems unfair doesn’t it??

--Was the owner being unfair? They got what they agreed to and that was a more than fair price for a days work—in fact it was a generous price that they should never expect to see again anywhere else.

--**But they are sore about it**: He wasn’t unfair with them, he was just generous with the rest.

--They had lost sight of the owner’s kindness to them because he was the same kind to the seemingly less deserving.

--But they weren’t deserving of their pay either!!

--The end result is that they all end up the same—it’s a dead heat type of proverb.

--The point of the proverb is the utter equality that there will be in the kingdom.

5. Application

--The Owner = God, He already owns it all, He doesn’t have to plant or harvest, He is set for all eternity.

--The Owner has made his life harder by just having fields and needing them to be worked and harvested.

--He doesn’t need the income, but the laborers need the pay.

--God is motivated by our need and not His own.

1. Salvation is not earned – it is gift that is given purely by God’s sovereign will.

--The main point of parable is that God gives the same abundant grace to whoever comes to Him.

--The laborers came into the work of kingdom strictly because of the Owner's sovereign choice—He went and found them—

--You didn't find Jesus, He found you!

2. Our salvation is utterly equal – We are all saved to uttermost: [Heb. 7:24-25](#)

--We all receive the whole thing: [Rom. 8:17](#)

--We all are blessed with the same spiritual blessings in Christ: [Eph. 1:4-7](#)

--We are all going live in the same house: [Jn. 14:1-5](#)

--We are all the Bride and all have the Same Bride-Groom

--We all are unworthy of all of it—the least sinner and greatest sinner are the same, the longest worker and the shortest worker are equally unworthy of Gods generosity.

--The thing that will overwhelm us there is our sheer unworthiness and God's complete grace toward us.

3. God establishes the terms of our salvation – the workers came in on the gracious terms of the landowner.

4. God calls those who are needy – not the self-sufficient.

5. God keeps His promises – God never gives less than He promises and He often gives far more. [Eph. 3:20](#)

6. All who came into the owner's vineyard worked – Work doesn't save us, but those who are saved work! You will be known by what you do.

7. A sense of humility is the right attitude – a sense of unworthiness is the only right way to think.

--Every day we aren't in Hell is a good day, but that He will give us the kingdom is mind blowing!!