



Part 3 – The Gift of Eternal Life

Matthew 20:1-16

Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?

God is generous. We often acknowledge this in principle and appreciate its truth but practically speaking it can often frustrate us and cause us to be envious of the way

others have been blessed. We often mistake the economy of the world with the economy of God's kingdom where we can be fooled into thinking that our works somehow earn blessings from God and that he is in some way indebted to us because of our faithfulness. Most things in our world work like this because we live in a merit-based system. But it is wrong of us to project this on God. Jesus tells the parable of *Laborers in the Vineyard* precisely to disrupt any notion that our salvation has anything to do with how hard we've worked, how long we've obeyed, or how we've suffered and toiled for God. Rather, salvation is a completely free gift that God gives to rebellious sinners who have earned nothing except the just wrath of God. We need to be constantly reminded of this truth, as it is so easy to slip back into a works-based mentality. We need to be reminded over and over again that God's love for us is not based on our faithfulness (or lack thereof).

God's love for his people is based on grace and is given solely out of his generosity. When we complain that God is holding out on us or that God is being unjust, we forget what we have been saved from (judgment, eternal punishment) and what we have been saved to (eternal life).

God is not holding out on us. Rather, he did not spare even his own son so that we might inherit eternal life. What more can he give us? This helps reshape our perspective; a perspective of gratitude for God's generosity.

1. Eternal life is a gift (19:16-30)

- It cannot be earned (vv. 16-22)
 - The rich young ruler asked Jesus, "What must I do to have eternal life?"
 - It's interesting how Jesus responds. Elsewhere in John, when he was asked, "what must we do, to be doing the works God requires?" he answers, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." John 6:28-29
 - Jesus responds in a way that exposes the heart of the rich young ruler by telling him to obey the commandments (something that is impossible to do). "If you want to earn eternal life – be perfect."
 - Jesus makes it clear that this young man cannot earn his salvation. He cannot gain eternal life through his works. No matter how "good" he was, he was not perfect. Salvation is not something merited.
- It is impossible to gain without the grace of God (vv. 23-26)
 - v. 26 – the context here is about salvation. With man, it is impossible to be saved through our own efforts. We are not good enough, strong enough, faithful enough....anything enough to earn salvation.
 - But God, who is rich in mercy, has made it possible through the perfect life and atoning work of his son, Jesus Christ. Through faith in him we can have eternal life.

- This grace of God shows the backwards nature of the kingdom (vv. 27-30)
 - In the world's economy, riches, power, prestige, and influence are first in importance. But in God's economy it's the opposite. God delights in being generous to the undeserving. His gift of eternal life is not based on merit but on his free grace.

2. Eternal life is the gift (20:1-16)

- In the parable there are 5 groups of workers:
 - The workers who worked all day starting around 6 a.m.
 - The workers who started work at 9 a.m.
 - The workers who started around 12 p.m.
 - The workers who started around 3 p.m.
 - The workers who started around 5 p.m.
- When the owner had his foreman pay the workers at the end of the day he started with the last workers and worked his way to the all-day workers.
 - With each group being paid you see two things.
 - The workers are being treated generously. They are getting a full day's wage even if they didn't work all day.
 - Everyone was being paid the same regardless of how long they worked.
 - The group that had the most trouble with this was the first group. And out of this comes their complaint. "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 complaint had two facets – self-promotion and accusation. Both of these are very dangerous.
 - In self-promotion, we forget that we are unable to do anything that earns God's love and favor or makes God indebted to us.
 - In accusation, we attack the character of God and presume upon his generosity, forgetting that he in fact was generous to us in the first place.
 - It also belittles others presuming they should not have the same status as us.
 - Jesus responds with a gentle rebuke, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?"
 - Jesus reminds the disciples that the nature of God is to be generous. He gives gifts we don't deserve and he also withholds judgment that we do deserve.
 - God is not bound to give us all the same exact gifts in the same amounts. In fact, he is not obligated to give us anything. Whatever we have that is good is by God's grace.
 - Rather than trying to look to our efforts for validation of our worthiness and deservedness, we need to be reminded of the generosity of our God and appreciate the gift that he has given us in eternal life.
 - Rather than looking for what we think we are owed, we need to remember what we deserve is death and judgment. What we have been given is hope, new life, and eternity in a perfect world to come.