

God is not fair!

Text: Matthew 20:1-16 for 10/08/2017 by Pastor Bolwerk

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ "About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' ⁵ So they went. "He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' ⁷ "Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' ⁸ "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' ⁹ "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' ¹³ "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶ "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

How do you determine if something is fair? To some people fair means getting what you deserve, but how does someone determine what you deserve? To other people fair means that everyone gets exactly the same thing, like when young children participate in a sporting event and, no matter who wins, everyone gets a trophy so that no one feels bad. Yet to others that is not fair at all. Think of the workers in Jesus' parable. Those who were hired at the beginning of the day did not think it was fair that everyone received the same pay. They had done most of the work and felt that it would only be fair if they received more pay! But then how much more pay would have been fair for them to receive?

Now, we need to keep in mind that as Jesus speaks his parable he is teaching us something about his heavenly Father. The land owner in the parable represents God the Father. What is important in the parable is not who the land owner hires, but when a person is hired and how much they are paid. This land owner is continually bringing people into his employment. Yet, no matter how long a person is employed by the landowner the pay that all the employees receive is exactly the same.

But when the workers finally receive their pay those who were hired first thought land owner was not being fair. They complained that they did most of the work, yet the people hired at the end of the day received the same pay as everyone else. They say to the land owner, **"These men who were hired last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day."** "Not fair," they say, "because we worked harder and longer than the rest!"

That complaint creeps into our lives of faith too, doesn't it? Some person we know who has lived a horribly sinful life comes to faith in Jesus as their Savior. Then that person dies

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shortly after they confess their faith. We know that this person has received eternal life. Jesus said, **“whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** But as we continue to struggle through our life of faith in this world we complain, “God, you’re not being fair! We came to faith as a child and have spent our whole lives trying to be good Christians and live our lives for you. Then, this person who has lived a horrible life, breaking your laws and living in sin, that person becomes a believer at the end of their life and ends up in heaven! While they were “standing around” their whole life doing nothing but sinning, we were working, trying to keep your laws and spread your word. How come they get “paid” the same as us, even though they did so little in their life of faith! Perhaps a little self-righteousness on our part.

In our frustration we are tempted to say, “God is not fair!” And if we said that we would be correct. God is not fair. If God were to be absolutely fair he would have to damn each and every one of us to hell because each and every one of us has sinned against him. If God were truly fair we would never set one foot in heaven. Christ makes it clear, sin is not just the outward action of breaking God’s law, sin also reveals itself in the words we speak and the thoughts that we think. It’s everything in our lives that desecrates the holy law of God. It is the things that happen in our hearts and minds: the jealousy, the selfishness, the envy, and the hatred. Yes, if God were fair he would pay us exactly what we have earned. Scripture says, **“The wages of sin is death,”** eternal death. That is what we should be paid for our sin, eternal separation from God and his perfect love.

But thankfully God is not fair. Instead of paying us what we really deserve, God the Father paid the wage we earned to his Son instead. God’s Son, Jesus, gave up the treasures and pleasures of heaven to come into this world and step into our place. Jesus stepped between us and God’s holy wrath. Jesus took to himself the sins of this entire world, and in doing so he took on himself the full payment for all sins. It was Christ who faced the hellish torment of being separated from the love of God the Father. That was our hell he suffered. That is what we deserved. Yet, that is what happened on the cross. By Jesus sacrificial death he took the payment of God’s wrath, and in his glorious resurrection he not only won for us forgiveness, but he freely offers to us the righteousness of his perfect life. Jesus gives us the perfection that we need to enter heaven. Our Lord Jesus laid down his life so that we could inherit the gift of eternal life.

No, God is not fair, because that which we deserved – an eternity in hell – that we did not get, and that which we did not deserve – a perfect life in heaven – that is what we have received.

The reason God is not fair, is because God is incomprehensibly gracious. Jesus brings that out in his parable when the land owner says, **“Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”**

We see God’s generosity in all of the promises that he has made to us throughout his Scriptures. God graciously promised to send a descendent of Eve who would crush the head of Satan and destroy his power over our lives. God promised to send his suffering servant on

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whom the Lord would lay our sins, so that by his wounds we would be healed. And to those who have faith in Christ, God continues to hold out the promise that, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”** Scripture promises again and again that **“the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** We did not deserve any of this, yet God, in his generosity, freely offers these things to everyone.

As God has been gracious to us, so he wants us, his believers, to be gracious to others. So, how can we be graciously “unfair” to others? We can start by thinking of people in our lives whom we may feel do not deserve God’s generosity. God was “unfair” in blessing us with forgiveness even though we didn’t deserve it. Who might we feel does not deserve forgiveness? Do you have a boss who is harsh? Do you have a teacher who seems to always be grouchy? Do you have coworkers who seem like they are always out to get someone in trouble? You could be graciously “unfair” to them by treating them nice, and being patient to them. And you can take that even further by doing nice things for them without letting them know who did it. You could secretly pay for their lunch, or leave them a note of gratitude. You could be kind to them even in the face of their harsh words or actions.

But if we really want to be graciously “unfair” to others, we can share with others what God has done for us. God has made us spiritually alive through faith in Jesus, a faith that the Holy Spirit started in us through the gospel. We have forgiveness, peace, and eternal life because God graciously created that faith in us through his word. That means, we can be gracious toward others by sharing with them that same life giving gospel.

God wants us to share Jesus with all people, even with those we may feel are not worthy to have eternal life. We all probably know people like that: people whose sins we find offensive, or even repulsive. Remember, that is how our sin looked to God the Father, yet he did not hesitate to send his Son to pay for all of our disgusting sins. In fact, **“Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous”** (1 Peter 3:18). So if we think it doesn’t seem fair to share the holy, perfect Jesus with a disgusting sinner we have to keep in mind that we use to be those disgusting sinners. It was purely by God’s grace that we were given faith and brought into God’s family.

This is why we speak the truth in love, because we know what God has done for us. We speak God’s word of life. Then we pray for those who don’t know Christ, that God’s word may change their hearts and move them to trust in Jesus as their Savior from sin. We can do even more! We can provide for the ministry of the Church so that the word of God may continue to be proclaimed among us, and so that it may continue to be proclaimed around the world. We can use what God has blessed us with to be graciously “unfair” in sharing the gospel with anyone, and everyone, whom God puts into our lives.

God is not fair. He graciously provides the people of this world something they have never deserved: the promises of forgiveness, life, and the glories of a heavenly home. May we see God’s unfairness for what it truly is: generosity. In kindness and love, God the Father generously provided the Savior we needed. In love, Jesus sacrificed his perfect life to pay for our sins. In love, the Holy Spirit created a living faith in our hearts. In kindness and love God made us alive, and then he made us spiritually alive. May God’s generous loving kindness give

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us the strength we need to endure the unfairness of this world as we look forward to the “unfair” perfection we will enjoy in heaven. Amen.