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**THE GOSPEL OF JESUS**

## THAT'S NOT FAIR MATTHEW 20

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. A child's first word = No

1. And then there is that phrase we learn after a brother or a sister comes along – that's not fair!
  - a) He has more ice cream than me. Why does she get the last pop-tart? He got to pick the movie last time. Why does she get to stay up later than me? She's only 2 years older!
  - b) As soon as we had someone to compare ourselves to, we became acutely aware of when things were not equitable. We live in the same house, we have the same parents, we should have the same rules and the same portions.
2. That way of thinking follows us as we grow older – as an employee, as a husband or wife, as a friend – this horizontal perspective – constantly comparing what we have with what others have – why did they get the promotion? Why do I have to stay home with the kids again? How can they afford that kind of a car?
  - a) Don't get me wrong – there are legitimate injustices in the world, where the weak are oppressed and exploited – we should stand against those
  - b) What we are talking about here is the lens by which we view the world around us and the people in it
  - c) And more importantly the lens by which we view God
3. Keep this question in the back of your mind as we read this passage. What does God owe me?

#### B. The Rich Young Ruler

1. Jesus just had an encounter with a rich young ruler
2. This ruler came to Jesus asking how he may inherit eternal life and Jesus went through some of the Mosaic Laws – You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honor your father and mother, and love you neighbor as yourself
  - a) And the rich young ruler said, I have done all these things
  - b) "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." And the ruler walked away sad for he had many things.
3. Self-justification – there is always one more thing – it wasn't that this man was on the right path and he was just a few miles from making it home, He was on the wrong path all together, and Jesus was revealing that to Him.
4. With men, entering into the kingdom of God is impossible, but with God all things are possible
  - a) And that leads us to Peter's question

**Matt 19:27 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" 28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.**

- C. Peter had to be thinking to himself "I like the sound of that. Thrones and glory, judging the twelve tribes."
  - 1. "That's what we deserve! We have forsaken everything to follow Jesus." But before Peter gets too far ahead of himself Jesus tells another parable

## **II. THE PARABLE OF THE LABORERS**

**Matthew 20:1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, 4 and said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. 5 Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. 6 And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?' 7 They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.'**

- A. Jesus uses a very practical example for this parable. Harvest time demanded more laborers than the typical landowner had on staff so they would go into the marketplace and hire day laborers to help with the harvest
  - 1. A normal workday started at 6am and ended at 6pm.
  - 2. This landowner went early in the morning and offered some laborers a denarius for a day's work. That would have been a fair day's wage for skilled laborers, tradesmen. But for the unskilled laborer, they day laborer, this was a generous wage.
  - 3. Then he returned to the market at 9am and hired some more laborers, then again at 12pm, then at 3pm, and finally at 5pm, with 1 hour left in the workday.

**Matthew 20:8 "So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.' 9 And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. 10 But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. 11 And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, 12 saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.' 13 But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. 15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?' 16 So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen."**

- B. So when it comes time to receive their wages – the landowner calls the laborers over and begins to pay them beginning with the last crew he brought in
1. And to everyone’s surprise they are given a denarius! They had worked for one hour! In the coolest part of the day!
  2. Those who came first and worked through the heat of the day, they thought to themselves, “If he has been so generous with them, he will certainly be generous with us and give us more than he promised. I mean, that’s only fair right.”
  3. But, when it came time for them to collect their wage, it was also a denarius, nothing more, nothing less.
    - a) Their response – that’s not fair! Well they didn’t say that exactly. They grumbled, they complained, they murmured.
    - b) “These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.’
      - (1) Their gripe is understandable. Many of us would be saying the same thing if we found ourselves in that situation.
    - c) But Jesus will expose the true nature of our hearts in this parable. What we call fairness is often covetousness. What we call justice is actually jealousy. What we call equality is actually entitlement.
  4. This kind of perspective, this lens of comparison is robbing so many of us of true joy and contentment.
    - a) Not getting what we think we deserve. Having expectations of others that they simply cannot live up to.
    - b) What we think we deserve in our marriages, what we think we deserve at work, what we think we deserve as kids, what we think we deserve out of life, what we think we deserve from God
    - c) It wasn’t a coincidence that landowner paid the last laborers first. He wanted the 6am guys to see it, he wanted them to feel it. Obviously, this was just a parable, but Jesus has a way of causing us to relate to those early laborers
      - (1) The only way Jesus can work with the deficiencies in our own lives is when we see them as that. When we no longer hide behind fairness and justice and we admit we are just not content with what God has given us

C. A message for me

1. My parents tested positive for COVID so we all self-isolated for 14 days. Kids stayed home from school, we stayed home from work.
2. Praise God, my parents are doing well. We made it through, looking forward to Thanksgiving with family and friends. Well, a few days after quarantine I started running a fever, felt achy, headache, all the symptoms were there.
  - a) Discouraging to say the least. Same the day we had friends driving in from out of state to stay with us and celebrate Thanksgiving. They had to make other arrangements
  - b) On Thursday I was felling pretty down. Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays – food and family – but this year it was looking quite a bit different.
  - c) What’s the best thing to do when you’re feeling down – go on Facebook – what do you see on Facebook on Thanksgiving? Pictures of families enjoying their Thanksgiving meals together
  - d) Confession time – I was a little resentful – “Yeah, you eat the pumpkin pie and cranberry sauce, I hope it tastes as wonderful as it looks.”

3. And then I had to laugh at myself. I love these people. Thank God they get to enjoy such a special day with family.
  - a) What is this thing that exists within us that causes us to think this way?
  - b) More importantly, how should we be thinking? What is the better way?

### III. THE BETTER WAY

A. Jesus shows us the better way in this parable

1. And we find it in the three questions the landowner asks the early laborers
  - a) Did I not pay you exactly what I promised?
  - b) Is it not lawful for me to do what I want with my own things?
  - c) Is your eye evil because I am good?

B. The last question is the diagnosis of our problem

1. An evil eye – evil in Greek means sick or broken – unhealthy, not right
2. This horizontal perspective – constantly comparing our lives to others – wondering why we don't have what others have – it's a broken way of viewing things
3. What is it that any one of us deserves? What does God owe us? The answer is nothing. God owes us nothing
4. But what has He given us? In Romans 5 alone we know we have been given justification through faith, peace with God, access to God, the grace of God, the hope of the glory of God, perseverance, character, the love of God, and the Holy Spirit, and that's only in the first 5 verses
  - a) But those gifts were not cheap. Verse 6 tells us the price that was paid for all those things, "at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."
  - b) Ephesians 1 we learn we have been adopted into the family of God, we have redemption through the blood of Christ, forgiveness of sins, and a very high calling

C. Understanding that God is good, and His ways are always just. That is where we have to begin

1. That's why Jesus' first question to the rich young ruler was – "why do you call me good. Only one is good, and that is God." Until that man understood that Jesus was God in the flesh, and that God is truly good, all of the time, he would not be able to receive what Jesus had to say
2. Once we accept that it is our way of seeing things that is broken, that opens the door for Spirit of God to work

### IV. DID I NOT PAY YOU WHAT I PROMISED?

A. In verse 13 the landowner says 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?

1. The issue wasn't that they were paid a denarius, it was that men worked less hours and got the same pay
2. There was a different way they could have looked at things. "How cool is that? I'm really happy for them. What a generous landowner."
3. That is the lens of grace. Every blessing that God gives someone is act of grace. Not out of merit, not because we deserve it, but simply because God is gracious

- a) Instead of constantly comparing ourselves to others and complaining about what we don't have, what if we could just celebrate God's goodness and His grace in the lives of others?
- B. One of the accusations against the gospel that Jesus preached, the true gospel, salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone would have to have been "that's not fair!"
- 1. How would you feel if you were a Jew who had lived your entire life doing your best to live by the law to earn favor with God and this man comes along and teaches that you just need to believe in Him?
    - a) And prostitutes and tax collectors and Samaritans start coming to Him and He declares them forgiven of their sins, right with God
      - (1) That's not fair! I've earned this. I've worked for this!
  - 2. Remember, on the road to the cross, Jesus is undermining and exposing the false belief of self-justification. Salvation through good works.
    - a) ***Romans 9:14 NIV What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.***
  - 3. The same salvation that was made available to the apostles, and John the Baptist, and Stephen the martyr, was made available to the thief on the cross next to Jesus
    - a) Because salvation is not of works that any man may boast
    - b) Ezekiel 18 is all about salvation for the wicked. If the wicked man will turn from his sins he shall surely live.
    - c) Israel's response "Oh good, that's awesome! You are so gracious that you have made a way of salvation for a man who has lived a life of sin."
    - d) Unfortunately not - ***Ezekiel 18:25 "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair?"***
- C. Look at the second question the landowner asks "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?"
- 1. When we truly begin to accept this reality, it frees us from the bitterness and resentment that comes with unmet expectations
  - 2. God is in debt to no one. He doesn't owe us anything. And when we begin to view life through that lens – every good thing we receive is simply an act of God's grace
    - a) That kind of thinking can radically change the way we view loss. And I've seen people who lose a loved one and in the midst of the sorrow and pain they are grateful for the time that they shared with them
    - b) This is a far cry from the bitterness of "why did you take them from me???"
    - c) Two different lenses

## V. THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST

- A. Then Jesus closes the parable with this famous statement – "So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen."
- 1. The Kingdom of God is an upside-down Kingdom

2. What does that statement really mean? The last will be first because they know that they are last. When you come in last, you know you have lost.
  - a) In cross country I took 36<sup>th</sup> place – I was pretty sure I didn't win.
  - b) If you lost a race and you knew you lost it but someone leads you to the winners podium hands you the trophy and the bouquet of flowers, and a check it would be a little embarrassing, it would be humbling, you would know that you didn't deserve any of it
  - c) If you lost a race but you had convinced yourself you had won it – and stepped proudly up to that podium and grabbed those flowers and that trophy and that check – what a fool you would be when they informed you had not won at all
  - d) Parable of the feast, sitting in a place of honor and told to move
- B. We often live as if we have earned what God has given us and we deserve more. And we are offended when God seems to be doing too much for someone else
  1. That is the perfect recipe for a life a disappointment. That is an evil eye. We haven't earned anything.
  2. When we start to see things more clearly, through the lens of God's grace – life becomes one of wonder and amazement and gratitude.