

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

Grace Won't Seem Fair

Matthew 20:1-16

October 14th, 2018

Main Point

When God shows kindness and generosity to people, it's always an expression of grace. And there's something we need to understand about grace: Grace won't seem fair...and that's a good thing!

Getting Started

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What was the hardest job you ever had?

What was the oddest thing you ever did for pay?

Have you ever had a job you felt like you were paid too little for?

What about the opposite situation? Have you ever had a job you felt you were paid too much for?

We tend to live with an inflated sense of our rights as consumers, a trait that is flipped on its head in the kingdom of God. The snapshot of the kingdom of God we will look at today helps us see the nature of grace: Grace puts us in our place of need. Because we are all in great need, we should be glad God is gracious and grateful God is generous.

Observation

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Matthew 20 directly follows the story of the rich young ruler, who asked what a person must do to have eternal life. After Jesus detailed a series of commands that the young ruler said he had accomplished, Jesus had just one more call: "sell what you possess and give it to the poor." The rich young ruler left dismayed because of his wealth. The disciples, looking for commendation for their faithfulness, asked what they would receive. The parable addresses this very question.

Have a volunteer read Matthew 20:1-9.

Put yourself in the place of one of the workers hired early in the day. How would you have felt throughout the day as new workers continued to arrive?

How would you have felt at the end of the day?

Put yourself in the place of one hired at the close of the day. How would you have felt?

*Do you think we have an overinflated sense of the need for fairness in our culture?
Where do you see it?*

How might that impact our relationship with God? How about our relationship with others?

The first group of workers probably watched each group arrive, growing more surprised by the master's hiring patterns as the day progressed. They likely wondered what each group would receive as compensation for their work. The last workers to arrive, grateful for the work, must have seen the early workers as tired and burdened men who had served well all day.

Think about your own Christian life, particularly your work for the Kingdom. Which group of workers do you most identify with? Why?

Why is it important for us to see that the focus in this parable is on the employer, not the employees? What happens if our focus in the Kingdom is on each other and not on God?

How do you see the graciousness of the master in this parable?

How is that grace a snapshot of the God of the kingdom?

Though they worked different amounts of time, the one thing all these workers had in common was that the master did not have to hire any of them. Similarly, God isn't bound to invite anyone to be a part of His kingdom. He does so because He wants to. That invitation is purely out of grace, apart from whatever we think we deserve.

In what ways might we be tempted to think that we deserve to be a part of God's kingdom and work? What happens to our relationship with God and others when we do so?

What are some ways you might continually recall your complete dependence on God's grace?

Have a volunteer read Matthew 20:10-16.

The second lesson we learn from these verses is that we should be grateful God is generous. In what specific ways have you experienced the generosity of God this week?

*Why didn't the workers in this parable appreciate the generosity of their employer?
Where was their focus?*

*Why is it tempting to compare what we get from God with what someone else gets?
What happens when we do?*

What does jealousy and complaining reveal about our faith?

Instead of marveling at the generosity of the master, the workers were too busy looking at each other to notice. When we start coveting the gifts God gives to others, we start complaining. Instead of being grateful for what God has given us, we start grumbling about what God has given someone else. But when we put our focus on Him and are grateful for His generosity, we show that we truly believe we have a good God who does the right thing regardless of whether it might seem fair to us at the time. That's the nature of grace.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

When is a moment this past week when you have slipped into thinking that God owes you something? How are you going to remind yourself that God doesn't owe you anything?

When is a moment this week when you have tried to earn something from God? How are you going to make sure that the things you do this week aren't an attempt to get God to give you something?

How can we as a group help each other remember the nature of grace?

Prayer

Thank God for His grace. Ask Him to remind you of your great need for Him and to help you celebrate His grace in the way you relate to Him and to others.

Commentary

20:1-7. The kingdom of heaven is not like a man, but like the story that is being told. The master is implied to be Jesus, and the vineyard is implied as the kingdom.

Everything in the story starts out in a straightforward manner, master hires workers in the early morning and agrees to pay them one denarius, a typical daily wage. Around the third hour when the master noticed that others were idle in the market, he hired them and offered to pay what was just, implying that they would receive a proportionate pay to the hours they worked. At the sixth and ninth hours, the master

again hired more workers, with the same promise of just payment for work. The master again goes to the market at the eleventh hour and asks why workers are standing around. The master again invites them to go and work in the vineyard.

20:8-12. The custom was that workers would be paid in the evening. The master instructs the “foreman” to pay them beginning with the last and going to the first. The last were not just paid first but given payment for a full day of work, a denarius. The first group saw this and expected that they would receive more than the late groups, but when they were paid they only received a denarius. The complaint from the first workers is that the master had made the last “equal to us.” There was no difference between those working one hour and those who worked the whole day. From their point of view this was a great injustice.

20:13-16. The master responds to one of the complainers, addressing him as “friend.” The master’s answer has two arguments. First, because the master had held up to the original agreement, no real injustice had been done to the workers. Second, it was the desire of the master to treat the last ones as he had treated those who worked all day. The verbs “wish” and “give” in the second statement convey the idea of grace. The last did not deserve what they were given, but they received it based on the desire of the master of the vineyard. Jesus’ point is that the last will be shown grace and the first will receive their reward in time and in the justice of God.