

Unfairly Blessed

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Matthew 20:1-16 "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.' 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."

There was a man, who for all we can tell spent his life, in contempt of God, and His word. He lived as he wanted and did as he liked. He had no regard for God and apparently no regard for the government, or for his fellow man, he took what he wanted because he wanted it, and who cares how it affected other people. He was caught and imprisoned for his crimes and sentenced to death. As his sentence was being carried out, He turned admitted that He deserved nothing from the Lord, pleaded for mercy, he received it and the scriptures tells us specifically that he was welcomed into paradise that very day.

I am talking of course about the thief on the cross. But what is our reaction to this story? Certainly, we know that we ought to rejoice that the Lord forgave him and welcomed Him into heaven, and probably we do, at least somewhat. Yet what are some of the reasons that we might think the thief is ***unfairly blessed?***

For is there not also in our hearts some degree of contempt, some thoughts of, "well if he made it into heaven, surely, I will as well after all look how much longer I have been a Christian, how much better my life has been than his." Do we not on some level consider him less of a Christian than we consider ourselves? Thus, holding him in contempt.

Perhaps, besides contempt, or else in its place, we envy the man, perhaps there is a small voice inside us saying, "Don't worry about holding fast to Christ right now, why should I strive to be faithful my whole

life when this man just slipped in, in the last few hours. That's the way to go I will wait and live my life now and slip in at the last minute."

Besides contempt and envy, this story might cause us anger at God, at the apparent injustice of God. After all, why should a criminal, a thief, a selfish law breaker enter the kingdom of God, when "innocent" children who have hardly had opportunity to do anything wrong are kept out? Why should a thief enter when our neighbors, who are so caring and loving and law abiding, are kept out?

It is really these exact same thoughts that the workers in the vineyard, those who started early in the morning, bring before their master in this parable that Jesus has laid before us. Contempt for these workers who barely got in an hour of work, envy that they only had to work so short a time, and anger at what they thought to be the injustice of the Lord.

We might not feel contempt, envy or anger at the thief on the cross or at the workers in the vineyard. But there are probably people in our life whom we do feel contempt, envy or anger for. People who make us think that God is being unfair. Why should they get all of that and I get nothing? WE consider them unfairly blessed. I deserve more.

Jesus reminds us in our parable today that his blessings are unfair, but not evil. His blessings are unfair because he has given us more than we deserve not less.

The Love of the Father

I've said it before, but it bears repeating, when you read Jesus' parable keep an eye out for the absurd, for those things that would never happen in real life. There you will find a picture of the depth of God's love and mercy. Because God's love is absurd. It is beyond anything that we can even comprehend.

So also, in this parable. Paying people who work for one hour the same as those who work the whole day is absurd. Many of you I'm sure hire workers. Are you going to pay them a full days' wage when they only work an hour?

But that is the grace and love of our Father that He doesn't give us what we deserve, but instead in his grace He gives and He gives liberally. Notice how the whole parable shows us a man who is far more concerned about the people than about making a profit. His motivation is his desire to help out these people not his own property. This is seen not only in how he pays them, but in the fact that he goes out at the 11th hour. What is anyone going to accomplish in one hour?

But the master doesn't care. He has compassion on these men and wishes to help. Just as our Father has compassion on us, poor sinners that we are, and wants to show us with his grace.

When we see such grace and love we should rejoice. That father is not going to punish us for our sins but instead He sent His Son to die in our place. He has unfairly blessed us, seeking us out even in the 11th hour, to bring us into his kingdom.

The Evil Workers

Unfortunately however, instead of rejoicing there are those who are annoyed by our Father's grace.

How very foolish this was. Here they were working hard all day, they see night coming on, they know they have only a short time left, the Lord brings in help, he brings in people to aid them in that task and instead of being thankful, that they were able to harvest more they complain that they also received the same wage.

It is amazing how quickly we become envious not just of those who have more as we see it, but even of those to whom the Lord gives the same thing. There is the story of the man who was first in his little town to own a car, and ohh how much he loved and paraded it around town, but then another man bought a car. And the first was furiously jealous. As if his car was any less of a joy to ride in just because another had one as well.

What sinful, spiteful, selfish people we are, that our reaction to the Father's abundant grace is to get angry. When the Father has already given us more than we deserve, our reaction is to demand more.

Just like the early morning workers we also want to believe that we are better, and because we are better we deserve more. We forget that we have already unfairly received more than we deserve.

The First Shall be Last

But what does Jesus say? "The first shall be last and the last first." We ought to remember that God has unfairly blessed us and instead of demanding more rejoice in what he has given.

Those who think that God owes them something are those who think they ought to be first. They are not first, but they think they should be first. They come before God demanding what they think is fair. They come demanding justice and God gives what they ask for. He gives them justice. Others know the truth, they know they are nothing before God and come to Him admitting that they are nothing. They demand nothing from God, knowing they deserve nothing, but trusting solely in His grace, and such people receive grace for grace.

But in the parable, we are reminded that God gives to those who, not on the outside only, but in their hearts acknowledge that they are nothing before Him and instead of clamoring and demanding what they believe is their due, they trust to the grace and love of our Savior. Trust in God's grace and you will receive unfair abundant riches. Demand what is fair and you will receive what you deserve.

For we know the riches of His grace, he who did not spare His own son but freely gave him up for us all.

AMEN

THE PEACE OF GOD THAT SURPASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING WILL KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS.