

Matthew 20:1-16 – Our Generous God

We live in a world of entitlements. We have drunk deeply of the Kool-Aid of what we think are our rights, what we are owed. Watch all the lawyer commercials on TV. You are owed compensation. You are owed happiness. Others owe you respect for your opinions, no matter how screwy they are.

At the same time, we are not responsible even for our screw-ups. We are victims. Victims of a bad home, a poor school, a repressive society, of a prejudiced culture, of an inequitable marketplace, and an unjust world. The problem with this is that grace does not fit in this kind of world.

Your sinful hearts insist you deserve better than life has given you. You should be first in line, you should be paid more than you are, and you should not have to shoulder the full responsibility for anything. This is the complaint in Jesus's story. This is the scandal to our modern mind. God is not fair. We are not rewarded as we should and others get what they do not deserve. Sinful hearts cry out for justice.

We have heard since childhood that we are good, we are awesome, we are better and smarter and more deserving than others. Sin always plays the victim. You deserve a break and others do not deserve mercy. God is not fair.

But the Law of God says you deserve nothing. The Law of God insists that you belong not at the head of the line but at the end. The Law of God demands that the wages of sin is death, even for the little sins we do not think are all that bad. The Law of God says you are guilty and that justice means you should die. That is the voice of the Law to a people who think we are good.

Then, when you think that there is nothing left, when there is no hope, the surprise of grace enters in. God is not fair but He is more than fair. He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. God gives to the unworthy what they do not deserve, He kills His own righteous Son for the guilty, and He gives everlasting life to a people who deserve nothing.

The Law says you should get nothing but the Gospel says you get everything you don't deserve and nothing of what you do deserve. You get a Savior who loves you enough to suffer and die in your place on the cross. You get forgiveness for the sins you do knowingly and deliberately as well as the accidental ones. You get the life death cannot kill but that Christ died and rose to make possible. It is the best news ever.

But this grace still seems to rub us the wrong way. Grace is fine when it comes our way but grace is not so good when it comes to others not so deserving in our own minds. And so the question comes: Do you begrudge God His generosity? Do you receive with joy what God has given or do you despise His grace and insist you deserve more?

This is not a story about pagans and Christians but about Christians who know they deserve judgment and death and Christians who think they deserve reward and have earned a better life now and eternal life to come. This is not about saving the lost but about Christians who think it is a big sacrifice to give up their Sundays for church or who think it costs them a lot to try and be good and it is not fair for God to save the sinners who are rescued by His Word and Spirit without having given up as much as we have for the sake of the Kingdom.

This is a parable of warning. And it goes to the heart of the Gospel. You are saved by grace and not by works. Faith abandons your works and refuses to boast in them. Faith delights in being last because it means you are still in line when you should have been booted out a long time ago. Faith gladly exchanges all hopes of justice for the richness of mercy.

The truth is we credit ourselves with faith and call it a choice when only the Spirit can work faith in us. We still think of goodness as a sacrifice and figure we deserve something for even trying to be holy. We figure because we go to church, God owes us something. We begrudge God His generosity and we have turned salvation into a business transaction. The mercy of the Father, the love of the Son, and the power of the Spirit are gifts to you that you do not deserve.

Do not grumble because God is gracious to others. Rejoice because God is gracious to you. If you want proof of God's generosity look in the mirror. You are living proof of God's generosity.

Justice would require us to pay for our sins but Christ paid. Who is the one who bore the heat of the day and worked to pay the debt? It is not you; it is Jesus. And now you stand in line waiting upon the Lord to give you what

only Jesus earned. We are not entitled. We are the beneficiaries of what Christ earned and faith is trusting in the promise of the Master, the reward for those who deserve nothing. The last have already been made the first. And you are living proof of it all. Thanks be to God!