

Matthew 20:1-16 **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.' 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."

Life isn't fair; Be Glad!

I am pretty sure every one of you has at sometime complained that something isn't fair. In fact, I would be willing to bet that you have said it more than once. Perhaps someone responded with the proverbial "life isn't fair". I know my parents said it to me and I have said it to my girls when they have complained about something being unfair. How did it make you feel to know that life isn't fair? Did it make you feel better when

someone else got the job you deserved because they had better connections to know that life isn't fair? Would it make you feel better to know life isn't fair if you got lung cancer, never having smoked a day in your life while your neighbor has smoked for 40 years and is as fit as a fiddle? Or for my girls, does it make it more bearable when I ask you to clean up a mess you didn't make, to know that life is just that way, not fair. You will often end up cleaning up someone else's mess. It doesn't really make things better but it is practical. Life isn't fair. There is no use grumbling about it because that is just the way it is.

Well Jesus in our text wants us to change our natural attitude. Through these words He changes our attitude so that we don't say life isn't fair with resignation and a stiff upper lip, but with joy. Life isn't fair! Be glad about it.

The people the landowner hired first in the parable thought that the landowner was being unfair. Was he? Certainly according to the earthly way of thinking? Those last laborers had done really nothing, they had not toiled all day and under a burning sun. They

had only labored for one hour. They had been idling about the whole rest of the day. It wasn't really fair that they get paid the same. But here is the thing. Jesus, with this parable, is trying to change our very way of thinking from an earthly way of thinking to a Gospel way of thinking.

Remember two weeks ago the disciples arguing about what position of power they should have in God's kingdom and Jesus showing them that faith doesn't think like that all. Faith like that little child Jesus put before them is humble and un-presumptuous. It doesn't think what place it deserves in the Kingdom of heaven because it knows it deserves no place in the kingdom of heaven but humbly rejoices to have a place because of Jesus. The disciples still haven't learned that lesson. Right before this parable Peter says " Lord we have given up all to follow you what will be our reward in heaven". The disciples still did not get it and neither do we whenever we get down about life not being fair, life not treating us the way we think we deserve to be treated. So Jesus shows us in this parable, He through the Gospel, changes our very attitude from

being upset and disheartened that life isn't fair, to rejoicing that life isn't fair.

Let's make the comparison from the parable to real life. Image someone like the dying thief who spent their whole miserable life sinning and sinning wildly and unrestrainedly. Making life for others terrible. He steals and hurts. Perhaps he has even killed. And lets say for most of his life he got away with it and benefitted from it. Whatever he wanted, he took. He had everything his heart desired. He lived luxuriously off of other's hard work by stealing it. Yet in the last hour of his life, he by the Gospel becomes a believer and goes to heaven. Are you jealous of him? Jealous that his whole life he got to do whatever he wanted? Jealous that because of his sin he lived a luxurious life? Jealous that he didn't have to suffer during the heat of the day. He didn't have to be mocked and persecuted and scorned for being a Christian because until the last hour of his life, because he wasn't one while you were a Christian your whole life and were frequently mocked and persecuted and scorned? Are you jealous

that he didn't struggle against sin like you did your whole life, fighting against your body of death as Paul calls it, because he until the last hour of his life did whatever sinful impulse he had? Are you jealous that despite your years giving of your hard earned money as an offering to the Lord you both get the same reward while that thief gave nothing?

That is exactly how our sinful nature thinks and that is precisely the attitude that Jesus in the last couple chapters of Matthew has been trying to change in us. Faith doesn't think that way. It is our sinful nature that thinks that way. Faith doesn't look upon giving our hard earned money as an offering to the Lord as a chore. Our sinful nature does. Faith doesn't look upon suffering under the heat of persecution for our faith as a chore. Our sinful nature does. Faith doesn't look upon indulging in every sinful desire we have as a good thing that should be envious others do and we don't. But you know what faith does see as unfair? That anyone gets heaven. They doesn't see it as unfair that they get heaven as well as us. They see it as unfair that either of us get

heaven.

Really changes your whole way of thinking about things doesn't it? The Gospel does that. When we know by the work of the Spirit, just how unfairly God has treated me, that God has been merciful, God has been gracious to me a sinner, giving me heaven when I deserve hell, then suddenly life being full of unfair things becomes a joyful thing, because they are a continual reminder of just how unfair God has been to me and you.

How unfair? Very unfair. Have you ever heard of Timothy Evans? He was hung for murdering his daughter and wife in 1949 in London. There was no real evidence against him and he maintained his innocence but he was railroaded and hung till dead. It was later found that his neighbor, John Chrisite, was a serial killer who had killed many women including Timothy's daughter and wife. Can you imagine how awful and unfair that would be? To have your wife and daughter murdered and you not just be charged with their deaths but hung till death for them when you were innocent.

What Jesus suffered so that God could forgive your sin and take you to heaven was even more unfair than that. Timothy Evans died physically once for something he didn't do yet like every man there were many sins that Timothy had done and while he didn't deserve to die for the murders of his wife and daughter he did deserve death and he did deserve hell. He deserved no place by God's side. Jesus suffered one physical death and an eternity of spiritual death for all the sins the world had done but He hadn't.

While our sinful nature, like those hired in the first hour, might think it unfair that God give the same reward to those who are Christians their whole life and to those who are Christians only for the last hour, faith doesn't; Because faith knows that what would be fair is for us to be up there on the cross being sentenced and sent to Hell by God the Father. But faith sees and rejoices that Jesus took the sin and the punishment instead of me.

No matter how much you are persecuted for faith, no matter how much of your hard earned money you give to the Lord. No matter how well you succeeded in struggling against your sinful

nature and not giving into sin you don't deserve heaven, because of what Jesus did, being punished in your place, you get heaven anyway.

Oh how that changes our attitude to one of rejoicing and joy. When life is unfair, which it often is, the Gospel reminds us the greatest injustice is that we aren't going to hell for what we have done and so we can shrug misfortune off as if it were nothing more than a warm summer rain. Even if we wrongly executed for the murder of a wife and daughter and the murderer went free, which make no mistake would be terrible, and yet the glorious injustice that Jesus would take upon Himself the sin of the world to redeem the world even swallows that horror up in joy. For that injustice would only be temporary for the believer. The glorious injustice that we by the grace of God do not get what we deserve for our sins, because Jesus willingly took it in our stead is forever. Life isn't fair! Be glad about it.

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