



## HEY, THAT'S NOT FAIR! MATTHEW 20:1-16

Intro: Matt Kuchar and the caddy (David Ortiz) Our story is very similar!

And there's this master whose vineyard need to be harvested Jewish workday was 6am-6pm so he goes out early and finds some workers down at the market place and agrees to pay them a denarius which is one day's wage for the common laborer and they agree and he sends them into his vineyard. He goes back at 9am and finds some more and tells them that he'll pay them what's fair and he sends them in. He goes back at 12, 3, and 5, for more workers. All of this is a setup for a much deeper point Jesus is making.

And the point of the parable begins to come into focus in vs. 8. The owner tells the manager to bring the people in and pay them. And the workers who were hired at 5 o'clock go first and get a denarius. If you'll remember that's what the guys who've been working for 12 hours agreed to work for. And they see these guys who are barely sweating get a denarius and they think "Oh baby, we're gonna get so much more" but they get the same thing and they're upset and they complain—"C'mon man we worked so much harder and longer this isn't right" and the master says, **"13 But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you.'**

Now isn't there something that bothers us? And we read the text and we understand the logic of it—he paid them what they agreed on—but deep down we *feel* something that just rubs us the wrong way. Now let me offer you a Bible reading tip, whenever you study the text and you see Jesus say something you don't like and it creates some sort of negative feeling in you, it's an excellent teaching moment. When that happens, what Jesus said or did is always right and your negative response is always wrong. That's what we're going to try to do today and in the process, we'll learn about God, about ourselves, and how that knowledge points us to Christ and a life lived for his glory. **Pray.**

**God is always just and gives us far better than we deserve.**

When they grumble, the first thing the master does is tell one of them v13, **"Friend I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?"** And their unspoken answer is "Yes but I saw what you gave the other guy—and this isn't fair. Yes, you've given me everything you said you would give me, but I deserve more." I think one of the reasons Jesus' story is off putting to us is because there is a part of us that identifies with their complaint. Think about it, when you read this story, do we identify with the guys who get paid the same for one hour leave blown away with the grace they've received? Or do we more easily identify with the folks who feel like they got the short straw and other people are better off?

This story truly played out for me when Josh. Moving day I was writing this sermon and after everything was moved, I showed up and moved one thing and ate the same lunch as everyone else. And I thought it was great. Why are we tempted to take a different attitude when it comes to this story? No one reads this

story and it happy for the 1hr workers. Even feel sorry for the people who worked 12—this looks like my life! I think one of the main reasons is that we have a distorted view of what we deserve. We live in a culture of entitlement that constantly tells us that everyone is fundamentally good and that we deserve everything we want. We deserve health, and wealth, and comfort, and great friends and a great marriage and if you don't have any of those things, then you haven't been given your due.

And the only problem with that is it's not true. And until you really understand this God's grace will never be amazing to you and we'll always feel like we have the kind of life we deserve. The reason grace is so amazing is because we actually deserve something very very different—this isn't hellfire and brimstone Eph. 2:3 “objects of wrath” Rom 3. Friends if God would have chosen not to save anyone, he would be perfectly just in doing so—he would have only given everyone what they deserve.

Which means this: The good news of the gospel is NOT that everyone gets what they deserve. Understood biblically, that would not good news but bad news. The good news of the gospel is that you don't have to get what you deserve, because someone else did. And when we trust Christ every moment we exist in relationship with him is far better than we deserve regardless of what our financial, health, or social status is. Don't deserve it. Job. Child. Spouse. Health. Disposable income to eat out or go on a vacation. Job: “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Us: “The Lord gives and he better not take away because I deserve it.” Father give us hearts of gratitude for receiving immeasurably more than we could ever ask or imagine in Christ. **God is always just and gives us far better than we deserve...**

### **God's grace is a gift, not a payment.**

Now this guy makes 5 trips to the market to hire people and during his fourth trip the workers he hires say something that very important to our understanding of the parable Read with me in vs. 6 “6 And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ 7 They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’”

I don't know if you ever got picked last for kickball, but I've got to imagine that's how these guys felt. We don't know the specifics, but these guys had been out there in the market with everyone else for 11 hours and no one had hired them. Maybe they didn't look strong, or trustworthy, or smelled funny but the point here is that the Master hires the least desirable people—the people that no one else wants—at a time of day that no one else would hire. And not only does he bring the least desirable into his vineyard, they receive the same reward as everyone else—and in this parable that reward is eternal life.

Now there are two ways to think about a reward—as a gift or a payment. And there is a crucial distinction between the two. A payment is something somebody owes you for the work they've done. A gift is something that isn't owed to you at all and it's given to you apart from perhaps even despite what you've done. And the question you and I need to ask when it come to this parable is, is the reward here a gift or a payment. And initially we're led to believe that the reward is a payment—the Master giving him a fair compensation for his work. But the twist comes when it's time to settle up, and rather than giving the 1 hour workers 1/12 of what the 12 hour workers get, the Master pays everyone the same. “If you're watching this you're saying, ‘it doesn't look like what he's paying them is really connected to their effort.’” And it's here that we realize that the reward isn't a compensation for services rendered, it's a gift of grace that is totally unconnected to how long or hard they worked. Don't forget, the reward here is eternal life—it's a gift.

And I don't know if you're checking out Christianity for the first time today, but there is the idea in our culture that Christianity is believing in God and working hard to be a good person and please him. And

salvation is a payment for effort for God. But that's the lie this parable explodes. The whole point of the master paying the same amount for different hours worked, is to show that God's gift of eternal life has nothing to do with how hard or long you worked because no amount of effort could ever earn his reward. It's not payment for how much you've done, it's a free gift despite everything you've done.

Because it is completely unearned and there is no limit to the scope of God's grace. He saves strong people with marketable skills who get picked first for kickball and weak people with few skills that get picked last. He saved John Baptist before he took his first breath and saved the thief on the cross right before he took his last. He saves people trying to run from God by being bad and he saves people trying to work themselves to God by being good. God doesn't save people who earn it. He saves people who know and admit they never could and stop trying. And instead trust in the work of Christ to make them right with God.

### **God's extravagant generosity should lead us to rejoicing, not resentment.**

Crucial to the parable is the idea that the 12hour workers see what the 1hour workers get paid. If all of this would have happened in private none of this would have been a big deal. The 12hour workers would have been happy. They only become dissatisfied with what the master has given them when they look around and see what the master has given to others.

Comparison robs them of their joy and keeps them from celebrating God's grace in their lives and in the lives of those around them. This is what pride does. Pride wants to be ahead of and better than others. C.S. Lewis is so convicting here: "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest."

Well that's exactly what's at the center of the 12hr workers discontent. In fact in vs 12 tells us their main complaint and it's not that the master hasn't kept this end of the deal, but because, "these last worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us." They aren't mad about his fairness to them, but his generosity to the others. And the Master says something to them that cuts at the core of the problem, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" Literally the Greek here says, "Is your eye evil because of my generosity?" In other words, are you mad simply because I showed grace to someone else didn't that deserve it either? And the truth for many of us is, "Yes." Like we're fine celebrating God's grace in other people's lives as long as it's not something we really wanted; as long as it doesn't help them catch up to us or pass us.

If you don't believe me, look no further than Facebook and Instagram, a factory for discontentment—body, money, house, family—I have a mediocre life. And this forces us to ask the question: How will you celebrate God's grace when He gives someone else the thing you wanted? Someone else gets the scholarship? Someone else gets the promotion? Someone else goes into remission? Can you celebrate God's grace in someone else's life? Or do you only see God's grace as beautiful when it's directed to you? And I think the only way is to fully embrace what Jesus says in vs 16.

Vs 16 "So the last will be first, and the first last." Now you know this is important because if you look back to the last vs of chapter 19 vs 30 says, "But many who are first will be last, and the last first." The parable of the workers in the vineyard is framed on both sides with this statement. So what does it mean? You back up one more verse and you get an answer, "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or

sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.” “Many who are first will be last, and the last first.” So the people who part with wealth, family, and status for Christ's sake are last in this life, but first in eternity. Those who live for wealth, family, and status and they're own name are first in this life, but they're last in eternity—if they even truly loved Jesus more than the world.

Jesus is challenging our categories for what winning in life looks like. He's showing what success looks like from heaven's perspective and heads up it's not the world's definition of success. You live to come in first now, you'll come in last then. This is even more clear when you consider the two examples Jesus uses a few verses earlier in vss 13-22. You've got a group of children and rich young ruler. Children are weak, needy, and were considered by many—certainly the disciples—to be a nuisance. The ruler was successful, was very moral, and had incredible status. Which is the best candidate to inherit the kingdom? By all worldly measures the best candidate would be the ruler, but he walked away from Jesus because he could leave his own kingdom and Jesus looks at the weak, penniless, needy children says, 14 “to such belong the kingdom of heaven.” Because the last will be first, and the first will be last.

And so the parable of the workers is framed with this crucial insight. There are so many things in front of your to love—parents and children and career—and you may even die for some of those things, but you cannot afford to live for them. God has saved you by his grace and promised you his kingdom. And the promise that you will inherit the kingdom *then*, it what frees you from living for your own kingdom *now*. The fact that you know going to inherit *everything*, empowers you to live for only *one thing*—one glorious soul satisfying infinitely precious thing.

And now we have answer to the question, “How can I celebrate when God gives someone else something I that I want?” It's because no amount of gifts can compare with the fact that the gift giver has personally given himself to me—and because I have *that* I'm free to celebrate when he gives lesser gifts to others.

Your friend calls and says he won 1 million dollars. Maybe you're jealous. But imagine the day before, you learned that someone left you 100 trillion dollars in a bank account. Now imagine your friend calls and tells you he just won 1 million dollars. Could you be happy for him? Absolutely, because what you have is so superior that his fortune isn't at all a threat to your joy. This is what we have in Christ a treasure that is so infinitely superior to anything else, that no one's blessing is a threat to our joy. You got a promotion—I have Christ! He's the treasure!

Some people ask, “Why not just wait until the very last second?” You don't get to work alongside the master!