

Matthew 20:1-16

“If anyone deserves a place in heaven, it’s her...it’s him.” I am never surprised when I hear people say words like these...except when they come from the mouth of a Christian. Christians are the only people on earth who should never say or think such words. These words sum up every other religion out there. But they fly in the face of the Christian Faith. If these words were true; if there really is someone who deserves a place in heaven, then everything Jesus did has no value.

He tells a parable in Matthew 20 which gets to the heart of what we’re saying here. A master hires laborers early in the morning to go work in his vineyard. He goes out and hires more laborers at 9:00, at Noon, at 3:00, and again at 5:00. At 6:00 he calls them all in to receive their wages. He gives all of them the exact same wage.

Now be honest...if your boss did that, would everyone be okay with it? If he were to pay all workers the same whether they are full time, part time, or just show up for an hour a day, would there be any problems? any grumblings among the employees...specifically coming from the full time workers? Of course there would. It’s not being fair.

So this parable makes no sense. We may even sympathize with those laborers who were hired early in the morning. “I’m with you, brother!” we may be thinking to ourself, “You did bear the burden of the day. You did endure the scorching heat. You tell that master that he’s wrong! How dare he pay those one-hour workers the same as you twelve-hour workers!”

This is how we think. It’s how we operate. And we even have the Bible to back us up. In Galatians 6 it says, “*Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.*” If you put more time and effort into your work, you should reap a bigger harvest than those who put in less time and effort.

But here’s something that may surprise you. God is not an American. He’s not a capitalist. He does not play by the rules of the free-market society. The point is--God is not fair. If God was fair, He wouldn’t have promised that thief on the cross a place in Paradise. He would have let him reap the reward of his life of crime with a place in hell. If God was fair, He would have allowed Judas to come into heaven despite what he did. After all, Judas was a Christian for a much longer time than that thief. He only fell away toward the very end, and he certainly did more work for the Lord in his life than that thief did.

But do we really want God to be fair? If God was fair, He would not have laid upon Jesus the burden and scorching heat of our punishment. Was it fair that Jesus suffered hell for us? Of course not! We are the sinners, not Him. We are the guilty ones; He is the innocent Lamb of God. Is it fair for someone to do the time in prison for the crime of another? No, it’s not fair. But this is how God operates. He punished His Son for all of us. He made Jesus to bear the burden of sin and suffer the scorching heat of hell for all of us.

If we demand that God be fair; that we get the wage we deserve, then God would have to wipe His hands of us and separate Himself from us forever, because “*the wages of sin is death,*” says

the Bible. What you and I deserve, if God were to treat us fairly, is not a place in heaven, but a place in hell.

Those twelve-hour workers in the parable would not have grumbled had it not been that the one-hour workers came into the picture. Once they saw what little work they did for the same pay, it all went downhill from there.

That's our trouble as well. When we start comparing ourselves to others, problems erupt, grumblings begin, Satan takes over. As soon as we see how little others work, or give, compared to us, immediately we think that we deserve the wage God pays us. We talk about God's mercy. We rejoice in the cross of Jesus for us. But all that flies out the window when we compare ourselves with others. When we, who are the twelve-hour workers, look at the mercy God shows to the one-hour workers, suddenly we don't want a merciful God; we want a God who is fair.

That's what the devil wants...a God who is fair. He hates God's mercy. Satan wants us to get what we deserve. The workers in the parable sound like the devil as they grumble to the master. And the master calls them out on it: "*Do you look with an evil eye at my goodness?*" is how it reads in the Greek. This is how the devil looks at God--with an evil eye at His goodness. This is not the kind of eye we want, otherwise we, who are first, will be last.

The eye of God, fellow sinners, is on what Jesus did for you. The eye of God is on your baptism into Jesus. He refuses to give us what we deserve. He refuses to operate by the rules of fair play. God does not give us what we deserve because He gave it to Jesus. Jesus was punished; you are forgiven. Jesus suffered hell; you are given a place in heaven.

At the end of each day, and at the end of all your days, when it's time to collect your wage, you need not fear as you lay your head on your pillow, that God will visit His anger upon you. He visits you with peace and assurance. He forgives your sins. He gives you the wage Jesus earned for you. He gives you the promise and hope of eternal life.

"My thoughts are not your thoughts," He says through Isaiah, *"Neither are your ways My ways."* We may operate by the rules of fair play in our daily life. We reap what we sow. But God is a God of mercy. He is merciful to all. He is merciful to you. You reap what Jesus sowed. Jesus did not grumble that He bore your burden, sin, and punishment. He rejoiced to do this for you. Now you can rejoice that God is not fair toward you. That rather than giving you what you deserve, He gives you pardon for your sin, He gives you peace, He gives you heaven for Jesus' sake. Amen.