

Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt – Matt 20:1-6 – 18th Sunday after Pentecost – Oct 8th, 2017

Who are the people that you sympathize with in Jesus' parable for today? Who do you sympathize with? The people who worked all day, right! They started working at 6 in the morning and stopped at 6 at night. Have you ever done manual labor, outdoors in the sun, for twelve hours? It's really hard work. And then other people come in for the last hour of the day, at 5 pm. Work for one hour and then get paid the same as the people who worked all day! We can sympathize with the people who worked all day. I would have complained. Maybe you would have too. But the landowner explains to the people who worked all day. He says, "I didn't cheat you. I paid you the full amount we agreed on. And it's a fair wage. I just want to be generous to these people. Can't I do what I want with my own money?" The landowner is right. He didn't cheat anybody. But why do we still find ourselves sympathizing with the those who worked all day? It's because we think according to the logic of this world. And Jesus brings us a message about another world. Jesus says **"this is what the kingdom of heaven is like."** What Jesus teaches us today about the kingdom of heaven is that **God gives on the basis of need not on the basis of merit.**

The landowner goes out early in the morning, about 6 am, to hire people to work in his vineyard. And he agrees to pay them a denarius, which was absolutely a fair wage. A denarius was an amount of money and it was the normal wage for a day of labor. The landowner goes out again about nine am. And that's not strange. He just needed more workers. But from here on out the story gets progressively more strange. He goes out again at noon to hire more workers. Now the work day ends at 6. And you think OK, from half a day of work, the vineyard owner will get some benefit from their labor, but the benefit the vineyard owner gets from their labor is starting to diminish, right? He goes again at 3 pm to hire more workers and that's strange. How much benefit is the vineyard owner really going to get from three hours of work? And he goes out again at 5 to hire more workers! But again how much benefit is the vineyard owner really going to get from one hour of work? And you start to realize that as it gets progressively later in the day the vineyard owner isn't going out to benefit himself. He's going out to benefit them.

You see the people in Palestine at that time were generally very poor and if you didn't get your denarius for the day, then you very well might not eat that night. And so even at 5pm, where it's going to be of very little benefit for him, the vineyard owner says, "Come work in my vineyard."

Add to that this point: When I was growing up, I always assumed that the people who were still in the marketplace at 5 o'clock were there because they were lazy. But the vineyard owner actually asks them why they are still there and they say, "We're still here because no one has hired us." Imagine you're a vineyard owner and you need some workers to work in your vineyard and you go into the marketplace at 6 am and you see some strong, able-bodied people and then you also see some obviously weak, crippled-people who don't have the strength to do much of anything. Who are you going to hire? You're going to hire the strong, able-bodied people! And the people who are left in the market place at 5 o'clock are going those who are too weak to work. So it's very possible that these people hadn't been hired all day because they were too weak. And the vineyard owner says, "Come work in my vineyard." But at the end of the day, he pays them not according to the work that they've done, not according to their merit, but

according to their need. He gives them a full day's wage so they and their family can have something to eat tonight.

And up to this point, no one has any problem with that. Everyone thinks the landowner is very generous. Even the people who worked all day have no problem with the people who worked only one hour getting a denarius, as long as they get more. You see we're all ok with grace as long as I get more. Because I earned more. Because I deserve more. But then we're no longer thinking in terms of grace. We're thinking in terms of merit.

Now you can't run a business this way. If the landowner went out the next morning to hire workers for his vineyard there would be nobody in the marketplace until 5 o'clock. Jesus is making a spiritual point. What's the spiritual point? There might be people who lived a terrible life but then repented towards the end of their life, and they get the same heaven that I do. Even though I've served Jesus all my life and it's been hard, I had to carry my cross. The person who truly repents and is converted at the eleventh hour gets same glory I do.

And if I'm upset by that, then I've forgotten that the glory of heaven is a gift to me too. The statement that I want God to give me what I've earned and deserved is a very dangerous statement. If God gives me what I've earned and deserved then he'll say, "Depart from me you who are cursed into the fire prepared for the devil and all his evil angels." That's what I deserve. But he hasn't said that to me. He's said, "Come work in my vineyard." He's dealt with me and you on the basis of need. Not on the basis of merit.

But then why work? Why not sit around the marketplace all day until 5 o'clock? Why work hard to follow the commandments? Why work hard to deny our sinful desires and live a righteous life? Why weary yourself in countless volunteer hours for church? If it's all of grace, and if someone might come in at 11th hour and get the same heaven and the same glory as you, then why work hard? Because you love the landowner.

Because the landowner came and found me when I was in the marketplace wondering if my family and I were going to eat that night. He came and found me and said come work for me, you and your family will eat tonight. The landowner sent his Son to die for me so that I could be in heaven! I love the landowner. I'm loyal to Him and I want to work for Him. And when he gives to other people the same denarius he gives me I'm no longer jealous. I say, "Look how generous the land owner is. I love him so much." And now you're thinking in terms of the kingdom of heaven. Amen.