

**The Parable of “Unfair” Grace**

- When you hear J tell this prbl wrkrs/vnyrd, I think our first reaction prbly: “Man, really doesn’t seem fair! Some all day, others 1 hr; all same pay? I don’t think paying wrkrs fairly!” That’s bec every one us, from very early age, can recgnz unfairnss – at least when we’re trtd unfairly; we may turn blind eye when smone else trtd unfairly; but boy, if you slight me, wthhld from me what I desrv, my fair share, my equal portion, we’re going have prob. Just listen how little kids talk: toy long time; my turn, I want it. Why she more time on plygrnd? If I have eat veggies, why doesn’t he? If she gets candy, I should too – only fair! I once learned this parntng trick – let’s say 1 piece cake, 2 kids want; cut in half, give larger to sis. Tape measure, 1/16 in – want exactly equal. Adults do too! You know/recgnz that not fair if: smone else gets job you’re more qualfd for; raise/promo you desrv; you’re not trtd eqly simply bec your ethncty, gender, looks. And not like you wish any ill on anyone. But if smone gets smthng you think you desrv: not fair!
- That’s what makes this prbl so jarring! Hrvsttm; Indwnr needs wrkrs; back then mrktplc: unemploymnt office; goes there, finds wrkrs, start wrkng 6 morn. Typical work day, 12 hrs; so they’re wrkng until 6pm. And back then, didn’t think hrly rate pay (we); more: daily rate pay. And silv denarius pretty commn daily rate for field worker; so that’s what he agrees pay them. Well, as day goes on, needs more wrkrs; so goes back mrktplc at 9, noon, 3, even 5pm; hires more. Then 6 o’clock rolls around: closing time, time get paid. What happens? Guys that started at 5 get full denarius – which in/of self fine, so long as you adjust rate for everyone else accrdngly. But if you’re one guys started at 6am, hold out hand, get single denarius: I can undrstnd frstrtn! **Vs. 11b-12**. Not fair! For us, like smone w/less work exprnc than we, getting paid 12x what we’re paid, for substntly less work! Outrageous; not how we do things. In this wrld, more you wrk, more get paid. That’s what’s fair!
- But this isn’t prble re fairness, or hard wrk, or how pay wrkrs. Prbl re God’s grace. **Vs. 13b-15**. God’s genrsty: grace. Grace defind as God’s undsrvd love. So, not based on what we do, accmplsh, earn, merit, desrve. God doesn’t treat us on wage basis (where rewrd proptrnly to your work). Treats us grace basis, which from our perspctv doesn’t always look fair. That’s why, I think, this really: prbl “unfair” grace.
- In this prbl, God: landowner. Vinyrd: his kngdm/ch. Working in vinyrd: belvng in J, being Xian, living Xian life. And denarius: Gos (God’s gift of forgvns, salvtn, etrn life). And even though various wrkrs hired diff times/day, by end/story, really only 2 groups: those hired beg & end. And J wants you self-identfy w/1 those groups. If you put self in shoes those hired 1<sup>st</sup> thing morn, then you’ve probly been Xian entire life. E.g.: I became Xian when baptzd as baby at 2 wks old; grew up in Xian hshld; we went ch ev Sun. Out in vinyrd at 6 morn. Many you could say same thing! Went Luth grade school, hs, collg, Sem; been Pr over decade – wrkng hard out in vinyrd! And on my wrst days I’m temptd think I dsrv more from God for it. But even if you’ve been Xian whole life, workd in vinyrd whole life, that DOES NOT mean that you earn/merit/desrv God’s forgvns/grace any more than anyone else. Likewise, if you came faith later in life, even recently – and so from simply time perspctv you’ve suffrd, temptd, worshpd, worked less as Xian, bec came on board late in afrnn – that DOES NOT mean that you earn/merit/desrv God’s forgvns/grace any less than anyone else – which, in wage based wrld, seems comply upside down (of course if work longer should paid more!). But God’s grace is unfair, in that he does not deal w/us on wage basis but on grace basis. Grace, by defntn, is undsrvd. The denarius at end/day was undsrvd, whether started at 6 morn or 5 afrnn.
- Smthng neat haps in orig lang. Our transltn lists times way we say them: 9 morn, noon, 3 afrnn. But in Gk: 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> hr. When get to 5 afrnn, literly 11<sup>th</sup> hour. I think neat, bec today we use phrase 11<sup>th</sup> hr; comes right from this prbl; means: you did smthng very last sec, latest possible moment, right before too late – that’s 11<sup>th</sup> hour. Think re that in God’s kngdm; think re deathbed convrsn. Think re someone who wasted whole life in mrktplc sitting around, but at 11<sup>th</sup> hr, called into vinyrd, then die/hvn. You going begrudge that!? They’ve done next to nothing in God’s kngdm comprd what you’ve done, but still get denarius. Think thief on cross. Upset by that!? Or rejoice, that’s God’s grace is not fair?
- And realize?: whole concept/fairness only becomes issue when you compare self to others. Getting paid denarius for full day’s work was perfly fine, until you compared self others, who worked less, got same pay. Only then did it feel unfair. And so it is in life: our percptn of whether we trtd fairly is based on how others trtd – which, again, is way things work (and should!) in a wage-based wrld. But in the kngdm, God operates on basis of grace – which means you’ve got stop comprng self w/others. Just stop! Stop thinking:

you're better/holier than anyone else, or they're more sinful than you; you deserve more from God, and they less; your good deeds outweigh your sins, while someone else's sins put them at a lower level than you; that your years/work in the vineyard of God's kingdom contribute (even in the slightest) to the denarius you receive at the end of life.

- For that matter, don't miss this subtle little detail in the parable: only reason any of those workers are out in the vineyard in 1<sup>st</sup> place, the master sought them out. They didn't come knocking on his door, asking for a job; he went out to the marketplace to find them – like a shepherd searching for lost sheep. And if he hadn't, they'd have no work, income, denarius, food, security. So even his seeking them out to hire them is grace. Even in this parable re working, getting paid, simple fact that the master goes out, finds workers, brings them into his vineyard (pause, apply that to your life: God goes out into the unbelieving world, finds you, brings you into his kingdom) – that's all grace!
- Maybe instead of relating to the 6am crew, we should self-identify with the 5 o'clock folks. Maybe, instead of thinking we're something special for our 12 hours of bearing vs. 12c, maybe instead of comparing ourselves to others, maybe we should simply say: "TY, Lord! TY for calling me into your kingdom, letting me work in your vineyard. I know I don't deserve it; I'm no exceptional worker; I've wasted a lot of time sitting around the marketplace of unbelief/sin. So TY, Lord, for this grace; and TY for the denarius. TY, for baptizing me into your family, calling me your child. TY, Jesus, for trading places with me on the cross, bearing my much-deserved punishment. TY for promising me eternal life in heaven with you forever. I could never earn any of this. So TY for your grace."
- Here's how the Apostle Paul says it: **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast"** (Eph 2:8-9) – so that no one can say, "Hey, I've got 12 hours out in the vineyard, so I got some much-deserved pay coming my way!"
- It's only when we realize just how unfair God's grace really is that we can truly appreciate it. What we deserve is hell; that would be fair. Jesus dying on the cross in our place – that's unfair. God forgiving us, loving us, saving us, bringing us heaven, giving us denarius at the end of the day – that too, unfair. But it's grace, unfair grace.

### Matthew 20:1-16

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

<sup>3</sup> "About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. <sup>4</sup> He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' <sup>5</sup> So they went. "He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. <sup>6</sup> About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' <sup>7</sup> " 'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'

<sup>8</sup> "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'

<sup>9</sup> "The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> So when those who came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup> When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. <sup>12</sup> 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'

<sup>13</sup> "But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? <sup>14</sup> Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. <sup>15</sup> Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' <sup>16</sup> "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."