

## **“THE PARABLE OF THE GENEROUS FARMER.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Matthew 19:30 – 20:16**

### **Introduction.**

“That’s not fair.” How many times do parents hear that battle cry? “Susie’s piece is bigger than mine.” “Johnny got to play on the Xbox longer than me.” “Why does he get to sit in the best seat?” “She got ten M&Ms and I only got nine.”

It’s exasperating. Parents love it when the kids are old enough that you can tell one to cut and the other gets to choose first. It’s a great way to find out how good a doctor your child will grow up to be when he divides the cake with the precision of a neurosurgeon.

But fairness in life isn’t often that easy to achieve. Kristi Nieuwendorp is hit by a drunk driver and spends the rest of her life in a wheel chair and the driver is fine. A divorced mom has to juggle two jobs and kids in a small apartment, while her ex bums around and doesn’t help financially. A baby is born with downs syndrome. A husband dies a month after retirement. A young girl is abused and is left dealing with emotional scars. One person deals with setbacks and failures, while another succeeds and has it easy. Some people are richer, skinner, taller, smarter, better looking, life’s just not fair.

Parents tell that to their kids all the time, but it starts to ring a bit hollow when it’s not cake we are talking about but real life.

And when life isn’t fair it can start to breed envy, jealousy, bitterness, anger, depression and a host of other diseases of the soul.

### **The Kingdom of Heaven is like ...**

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a building contractor named Jim Strengholt who was building a building. At six in the morning he found Len Honcoop and Eric Molendyk standing around looking for work so he offered them a hundred dollars each for a day’s work and they agreed.

At nine in the morning Mr. Strengholt came back and found Ken Haveman and Marv Heeringa standing watching and asked why they weren’t working. No one hired us they said so Mr. Strengholt told them to start working and he would pay

them fairly. At noon Mr. Strengholt found Rich Hoolsma and Bryan Ahlers standing around and later at three in the afternoon Tony Honcoop and Gerrit Polinder and he sent them to work on the building.

Finally, at five in the evening Mr. Strengholt came to check on the work and there stood Dan Houston and Robert Woodyard. "Why do you stand here idle all day?" he asked. Some people think pastors don't do anything all day right? So he sent Dan and Robert to join all the rest.

At quitting time Mr. Strengholt told his foreman Lew Denny to call all the workers into the job shack to pay them and told them to line up from last to first. Mr. Strengholt hands Dan and Robert each a hundred dollar bill, and then the same to Tony and Gerrit. By now Len and Eric are licking their chops just imagining how much more they will get. So you can understand how unhappy they were when all they got was a lousy hundred dollar bill when they worked all day. How unjust, how unfair. Aren't there labor laws or fair wage acts about this sort of thing?

But Mr. Strengholt says an agreement is an agreement. And besides who are you to complain about my generosity?

### **Matthew 20:1-7, The agreement.**

That's what parables are, earthly stories with heavenly meanings, glimpses of heaven here on earth. Jesus spent a lot of time telling us what the kingdom of heaven is like and what the king of heaven is like.

Jesus tells this parable to expose the thoughts of our hearts and to illustrate some of the great mysteries of heaven and of God's ways with us.

The manner in which God calls His children out of the world and into His kingdom and the way He shares His grace resembles a vineyard owner with a large vineyard who goes out at various hours of the day to hire laborers for his harvest and pays them all the same.

**First, God calls** His servants, His people, His children from out of the world. No one comes unless the Father calls them and they didn't come until they were called. Our sin and depravity are such, that unless the Lord first calls us and opens the eyes of our hearts to His grace, we will not come. That's the gift of grace.

**Second,** we should give thought to the various hours of God's grace. It can come at any hour and at every hour. Many of you here would be counted among the earliest laborers. You can't remember a time when you didn't know the Lord.

Count that as joy that your early years were not wasted in idleness as the parable says of those called late in the day.

*Parents*, be diligent in sharing the truth about Jesus with your children. Their moral conscience develops very early. Teach them early and often, when you rise up, when you go through your day and when you lie down. Pray for opportunities and seize every opportunity. Don't hesitate to bear witness confident that Jesus is at work drawing them to the Father.

And if you come to the gospel late, there is still kingdom work to be done. Don't remain in idleness, don't remain in evil, don't spend your days in neglect of the Lord, of His grace.

Do you think the one who comes at the last will laugh at all the poor fools who worked so hard all day? Or will he be sad he wasted so many of his days in idleness, sin and purposelessness? Will he realize that all that so called freedom was really a kind of slavery to lusts, passions, foolishness and missed joy?

And if you have been laboring for years, don't grow weary in well doing. Continue, labor on, don't quit now. Finish well, run the race to the end, by His grace and in His strength. Spend and be spent, wear yourself out for the Master. It's grace that He supplies us with work that we might not eat the bread of idleness.

Whatever hour you were called labor now that you might hear those most grace-filled words, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord."

### **Matthew 20:8-16, The accounting.**

#### *When evening came.*

When evening came and the day's labor was finished, we here the amazing, shocking part of the story. The man who promised the later workers he would be fair turns out to be extravagant. He's beyond kind, he's exceedingly generous. He doesn't deal with them according to their work, but according to his grace.

He knew that a man couldn't survive on less than a day's wages and he paid each one a day's wages whether they earned it or not. He didn't give them what they deserved, he gave them what they needed.

The news started to spread to the back of the line. If the guys at the front were getting one denarius for an hours work, then they must be getting twelve denarii.

If they were anything like you and me, they probably had that twelve denarii spent in their minds by the time they got to the pay master.

“What, one denarius, that’s not fair!” Those who had labored diligently all day long through the heat of the afternoon felt cheated. The landowner had to remind them that he had done them no wrong. He paid them exactly what they had agreed on. He was in fact completely fair.

Many of us here have had some experience as day laborers working in berry fields. Many of us can remember too well being all day in the sun or rain working in the dust or mud out in the rows. We would complain too if the person who one flat got the same as the one who picked twelve. It’s not fair.

The vineyard workers were like the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son. He had everything the father had, but was mad at the father’s generosity and kindness. The landowner gets to the heart of the matter when he asked, “Do you begrudge my generosity?”

A denarius was a day’s wages, it’s what a person needed to survive, it’s daily bread. The denarius represents eternal life, it’s what we need to survive in the next life.

Those who love and serve the Lord, whether long or short, receive the same reward, eternal life. What’s there to complain about? You want more than eternal life? That’s the highest and best reward.

We have a generous God and we have received a generous gift. Do we begrudge His gift or do we delight in His gift?

### **Application and Conclusion.**

#### ***What to do when life is unfair?***

***First***, don’t bring a ***consumer mentality*** to your relationship with God or each other.

Kingdom economics is different from worldly economics. Kingdom economics isn’t about equal pay for equal work, it’s about gifts undeserved. We are not hirelings, we are children of the Father who are dependent on His generous grace.

Let’s be clear about something. We deserve nothing. In fact we deserve worse than nothing, we deserve hell. He withholds the punishment we do deserve and He

gives the grace we don't deserve. It's always Amazing Grace. God always gives us better than we deserve.

Don't look at all you have done or how hard you have worked or how much you have sacrificed and think you deserve a bonus. It's always dangerous when any of us start to evaluate our own worth. All we have and are is from God, none of it's our own doing, so none of it's to our own credit and worth.

The cure for a consumer mentality and for spiritual pride and envy is a deeper awareness of grace.

**Second**, don't bring a **competitive spirit** to your relationship with God or each other. Beware of the danger of comparing yourself with others. It leads to two outcomes and both are bad. Either we will get proud and puffed up. Or we will get bitter and resentful, envious and covetous.

The laborers in the vineyard were fine until the others started showing up later. When the workers started looking at what others had received, they couldn't receive what they were given with joy.

When King Saul saw that David was being praised more than him for his victories, he lost sight of his victories and his heart grew hard and envious and jealous.

When I start wishing I could preach like John Piper and evangelize like Billy Graham and write like C.S. Lewis it's spiritually debilitating. Worse, its sin and it keeps me from being grateful and content with what I have received and it keeps me from faithfully using what I have for His glory.

Guard your eyes. Don't look and compare. Envy is like spiritual cataracts, it leads to spiritual blindness. You can't see the goodness of God toward you when your eyesight is full of the cataracts of jealousy and envy. Remove the cataracts of envy by being genuinely happy for what God has given to others and for what God has given to you.

Here is a thought experiment to test jealousy. That person that you compare yourself to, would you trade places with them? And not just their house for your house, but everything. Would you want their relationships, their fears, their troubles and trials? The rich or famous or successful person, would you trade for the struggles of their soul or those things in their life you have no knowledge of?

Kill the competitive and comparing spirit by focusing on the grace and generosity you have received.

**Third**, don't let a *complaining spirit* take root in your heart.

Grumbling and complaining and a critical spirit are an attack on the generosity and goodness and grace of God. Who are we to complain against the holy, righteous, perfect, good, almighty God?

Murmuring and griping is a terrible disease and it's contagious, it spreads to those around us.

God's grace is a humbling doctrine. It runs against our grain. Scripture never gives us any reason to boast or to exalt ourselves in the sight of God or man. Rather, Scripture breaks our pride and casts us down. We are weak and foolish and God chooses the weak and foolish things of the world to shame the powerful and wise.

We all have reason to worship God for His generous grace, none of us have any reason to complain about it. Be as delighted in all the grace others receive as you are in the grace you receive.

**Fourth**, trust your Master who owns everything, gives everything and knows what's best and good and right.

God doesn't give us all the same share in this life. But everything that He gives in circumstances, events, gifts, abilities, ups and downs, comes from a loving Father who causes all things to be for our own good.

Life isn't fair, but God is fair and God is good. Trust in Him completely and leave everything in His hands. He is truly good to all His children and He cares for you beyond anything you could ever imagine.

Jesus on the cross in the throes of the most agonizing pain ever experienced didn't envy the soldiers or the bystanders. He never once wished He had someone else's life. He trusted His Father and His Father's goodness. "Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit."

Rest assured that for all who love Him and obey Him, you will receive the generous gift of His grace in eternal life.

I love this parable because I love God's grace and this parable paints a picture of God's extravagant grace. That I, an undeserving sinner, should receive eternal life is cause for joy and worship, not comparing and complaining. Fix your eyes on Jesus and the joy that He has set before us in eternal life, and you will have the grace you need to deal with any seeming unfairness in our short life here.