

Title: What's Fair

Text: Matthew 20:1-16

In your families, have you ever heard a voice plead: "It isn't fair"? This happened in our family. We gave each of our children an allowance. When the youngest suddenly realized that his older brother received the largest allowance, he said: "It isn't fair."

That is why I choice this parable, the parable of the vineyard, for our study this morning. Did you notice that the people who worked all day received just as much money as the people who worked only a short time in the afternoon? I am sure that we can all understand the feelings of those who worked through the long, hot day. Often <sup>in Life</sup> ~~at work~~, there are situations that we neither desire nor create. Something happens, and we feel: "It isn't fair."

Because we have all had this experience in our families, at school, at play, and at work, I would like to consider verse 15: "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with that belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?"

Look at this parable directly. Ever since Jesus told it, this has been one of the most difficult parables to understand. The difficulty is not in the story itself. The difficulty is that what we see in it depends a great deal on what is bothering us when we read it. Even as the ocean changes color according to the light from the sky, so this parable depends on the light in which it is seen.

To understand this parable, we have to recognize that it is a challenge. It is a challenge to every type of person: to those of you in school, to you parents, to grandparents. And it is a challenge to those of you who no longer have any families - and who - on a day like this, would say: "It isn't fair that I have to live alone."

This parable challenges our feelings by telling us that what is fair is not what is important. It is what helps that makes the difference. It is what helps that is important.

Jesus told this story about a wealthy man. He had the power to do anything he wanted. He could help: but the men grumbled at the way in which he helped. Many years ago, the late Herbert Hoover worked in China. He was criticized by some Americans as being unfair, for he did not pay the wages that he would have paid in America. Yet, Mr Hoover had a problem. He had to pay a wage that would help not only the workers but also the business economy of the land. He may have misjudged the issue. That is not the point. The point is that the question he had to answer - the really important question - was not: "What is fair?" More important was the ~~right~~ question: "What will help the total economy?"

In like manner, the concern of the man in this parable was not just fairness but also helpfulness. This man found a group with no sense of purpose. He helped. He found a group with nothing to do. He helped. He found a group at the end of the day still without prospect of wages. And he helped.

Let a family in its living and a church in its being remember that our mission in life is determined not by what is fair, but by what others need and what we can do to help. That is the Gospel. That is why the house-holder in the parable said: "Do you begrudge my generosity - my helping?"

Let us look at the nature of this challenge.

① First, this is a challenge to Christians.

We are accustomed to having Jesus tell his parable in response to the Pharisees or against the Scribes. We are so in the habit of thinking that Jesus is criticizing everybody else that we miss the point: here, Jesus is challenging us. We know this because his reply is given to Peter. Just before this parable, Jesus had said: (Vs 23 of Chapter 19) "It is harder for a rich man to get into heaven than for a camel to go through a needle's eye."

Peter then said in/ verse 27: "Lord, we have given up everything - riches and all - what shall we have?" In other words, Peter was asking: "Lord, what's in it for us?" He was like the person who says: "I'm humble, and proud of it. What do I get?" Jesus replied: // "Nothing more is in it for you than for anyone else. The man who comes late is just as important <sup>in the Kingdom of God</sup> as you who have come first."

A. This PARABLE POINTS US TO THE COMFORT OF GOD. This parable means that no matter when a person accepts Christ, in the first years of youth, in the strength of the midday, or when the shadows are lengthening, he is equally dear and precious to God. The Jewish Rabbis had a saying, "Some enter the kingdom in an hour; others hardly enter it in a lifetime." In the picture of the holy city in "The Revelation" there are twelve gates. There are gates on the East which is the direction of the dawn, and // whereby a man may enter in the glad morning of his days; there are gates on the West which is the direction of the setting sun, and where a man may enter in his old age. But, no matter when a man comes to Christ, he is equally dear to him. We are all equal before God. The Christian basis for action is not what is fair to the oldest or youngest in the community, but what helps all. When change takes place, when a new baby is born into the family, when more attention is paid to another than to us, when someone gets a good break, and we say, "it is not fair," Jesus replies to us: "Do you begrudge my generosity?"

*Christians*

B THIS PARABLE POINTS UP TO THE GRACE OF GOD. We cannot earn what God gives us; we cannot deserve God's grace; we cannot put God in our debt; what God gives to us is given out of the goodness of His heart, out of His grace; what God gives is not pay, but a gift; not a reward, but a grace.

2. This parable is also a challenge to the business mentality that dominates our lives. Sense the mood in Peter's question: "Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What shall we have?" By asking, "What's in it for me?" Peter was asking the kind of question you get in the market place./// What is the gain? Where is the profit?

Unless you are very different from me, your first reaction to this parable is one of unfairness. If I were a young rookie being signed to the <sup>*Braves*</sup> ~~Dodgers~~ for \$50,000 <sup>*a year*</sup> even before I threw a ball, I would feel great. However, if I were "Willy Hayes who had been loyal to the organization for many years and <sup>*then was*</sup> ~~was~~ suddenly dropped, I would feel it was unfair.

There is a religious basis for our understanding, too. The Talmud, a Jewish writing, also tells <sup>*in*</sup> ~~this~~ parable <sup>*very similar to our parable*</sup> in a way different from Jesus. According to that story, a king hired many workers. One workman did his task so well that, after two hours, the king took him aside and walked with him in the garden. At the end of the day, this man received the same wages as those who worked the whole time. They complained. The king replied: "He has done more ~~in~~ those two hours than you in the whole day."

On the basis of production and incentive bonuses, we can all understand. Yet, Jesus is saying that the church and heaven are not to be thought of as a business community but as a political community - as a kingdom. When you become a citizen of God's Kingdom, your one vote carries as much weight as that of a man who has been voting for twenty years. This parable challenges our business mentality. The challenge is to be concerned not so much with what is fair as with what will help people. ~~The parable~~

The parable challenges us to discover what it is to be equal in the fellowship of God and not to begrudge God's generosity to others.

*Most Important Lesson*

3. THIS PARABLE IS ALSO A CHALLENGE TO COMMITMENT AND SERVICE.

The master in this parable is God. And he is calling men to work for him. God is calling you to accept him as Savior: "Believe on the name of Jesus and you will be saved."

a. JESUS IS CALLING US TO LEAVE ALL SIN.

When a group of archaeologists dug into the ruins of ancient Babylon, they found that every brick had upon it the stamp of the king. But upon one brick they found the print of a dog's foot. Evidently a dog had stepped upon the brick while it was still soft and his footprint now covered the king's stamp. God has his stamp upon each of us, but often we allow sin to cover the image of the Lord. We want others to see Jesus in us but, His image is often marred by our sin.

In the sixth chapter of Proverbs God mentions 7 things that he hates: (1) "A PROUD LOOK." Some people are proud of their money, their position, their education, and some are even proud of their religion. God despises such an attitude. The Pharisee in the Temple stood where everyone could see him and he prayed, "Lord, I thank you that I am not as other men." We have too many people like that today. God is never pleased with such an attitude.

(2) "A LYING TONGUE." What damage a lying tongue can do. Some people have become so saturated with the lying habit that they lie when the truth would be easier to tell and would benefit them much more.

(3) "HANDS THAT BILD INNOCENT BLOOD." Of course murder is a sin and ~~not~~ none of you have committed murder. But we are guilty when we do things that make the hearts of others bleed with grief.

(4) "WICKED IMAGINATIONS." This is where sin starts. Only two people can dwell in you at one time, you and God, or you and Satan. Let God dwell in you and from your imaginations will come good and noble deeds and deeper faith. Let Satan dwell in your heart and wicked things will come from your life including doubts about God's reality.

(5) "BELT SWIFT IN RUNNING TO HISBIEF." Often we crawl to help others, but we run when we have a chance to speak evil of another.

(6) "A FALSE REPRESS THAT STEALTHY LIES." We hear a bit of gossip about someone. We don't bother to check on it, but we get Someone's reputation under our feet and we grind it to pieces. When we hear something that would hurt someone, we ought to ask God the question, "Should I repeat this to someone else?" And I am sure you know what his answer would be.

(7) "HE THAT <sup>Sows</sup> ~~Sows~~ DISCORD AMONG BRETHREN." This is wickedness in the highest degree. How often have we seen the sweet fellowship in a church <sup>broken</sup> broken up by one whose delight was to promote discord. Some people just can't stand for peace and harmony to reign. Their greatest joy is found in stirring up strife. These people never do anything useful. They are to concerned about self to be concerned about serving God.

Sin of any kind is displeasing to God. Every sin is a slap in the Lord's face, every sin crucifies him afresh. God calls on you to get rid of the sin in your life. Why not say today, "Lord, I am sorry that I have sinned against you. Forgive me and help me to live so that others will see your image in me.2

B. IN THIS PARABLE JESUS IS CALLING US TO DEEPER FAITHFULNESS AND SERVICE.

We hurt ourselves and others when we are not faithful. A young teen-age girl found Christ years ago under my ministry. Some years later I met this girl. She was married and had a couple of children. But she was now living outside of the church and away from God. Her husband was not a Christian. I believe that if the wife had been living a faithful, consistent Christian life, the husband would have felt the need of becoming a Christian. Yes, we hurt ourselves and others when we fail to live for Christ.

But we help others when we are faithful. Two men were talking together one day when another man passed by. One of the men said, "That man's life led me to Christ." Every person has an influence. A Christian influence is a helpful thing.

A young Jewish girl accepted Jesus Christ as her personal Saviour. Her family did everything in their power to influence her to give up her new-found faith. They took her on a trip to Europe, they offered her anything she wanted if she would only deny Christ. But she remained faithful and radiant in her love for Christ. Finally her parents gave a dinner in her honor and invited all of their friends. Her father stood at the head of the table and said to the guests, "We have invited you here for a special reason. Our daughter has chosen to follow the Christ. Tonight she must make her final decision. She must give up Jesus or leave our house forever."

The stunned girl said nothing for a moment. Then <sup>she</sup> went over to the piano and played and sang, "Jesus, I my cross have taken, all to leave and follow thee." After that she went to her room, changed her dress, packed her clothes, and left her parents' home forever. She was willing to make a supreme sacrifice to follow Jesus. Are we willing to pay that kind of price?

DO WE MEAN WHAT WE SING?

Rev. William Harrison...

WE SING: "SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER" and are content with a half minute a day-

WE SING: "ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS" and we wait until we we are begged to do service for our Lord-

WE SING: "THERE SHALL BE SHOWERS OF BLESSINGS" but we do not attend when it is raining-

WE SING: "Blest be the tie that binds" but let the least thing sever it-

WE SING: "Serve the Lord with gladness" and we gripe about all we have to do for Him-

WE SING: "WE'RE MARCHING TO ZION" but we fail to march with regularity to Church School or Church-

WE SING: "I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY" and never mention it to anyone at all-

WE SING: "CAST THY BURDEN ON THE LORD" and then worry our ourselves sick over little things that never happen anyway-

WE SING: "THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD FOR JESUS" and never invite our next door neighbors to church-

WE SING: "ALL FOR JESUS, ALL FOR HIM" and give as little support as we think we can get away with-

WE SING: "O DAY OF REST AND GLADNESS" and wear ourselves out travelling, cutting grass, playing golf, or painting etc on Sunday.

In the midst of the unfair, even as Christ gave His life for all, let us give ourselves to the service of Christ. The ~~///~~ master is calling for those to come and serve him. This can be your day of decision. The day you commit your life to Christ. The day you tear all sin out of your life and live faithfully for Jesus. Will you do it?

April 30 FBC Parkville