**Year A – Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Matthew 20:1-16**

**October 8, 2017**

**Your Master Gives You Complete Grace**

1. **So Don’t Let Your Jealousy Master You**
2. **So Let His Generosity Be Your Master**

Introduction

It happened to me several years ago. I took my car into the shop because I heard a squealing from the wheel. Little did I know, however, that a several-hundred-dollar brake job was coming. And that’s where Satan really tried to get into my head and make me think, Lord, haven’t I served you faithfully? Haven’t I done everything in my power to spread your Word? Why can’t I just get this one break?

Maybe you’ve been there before. Maybe you have asked God, don’t I deserve a break? Haven’t I served you faithfully as your child? What is the deal, don’t you love me? Why are all the people around me getting rewarded, while I, as a lifelong Christian in the battle on this earth, seem to be ignored?

Today Jesus tells us that the last will be first and the first will be last. He tells us that he will turn our expectations completely upside down. But he will do it in a way in which his blessings far exceed anything our human minds can imagine. Far more than not ever having to have car difficulties, or hurt, or pain. He gives us his whole, complete, grace.

Setting the Scene

Today’s text comes from the teaching portion of Jesus’ ministry, and this is only a few days before he enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to suffer and die for the sins of the world. Peter had just said to him, “Lord, we have left everything to follow you! What will there be for us?”

Jesus tells Peter that those who leave everything for him will inherit eternal life. It will be completely worth their while. But he wants to combat Peter’s thoughts. Maybe Peter thinks he is better than others because of the things he has left for the Lord.

And Jesus turns his expectations completely upside-down by telling this parable. He wanted to explain how God’s thinking and actions produce results that are bitterly disappointing to anyone who is stuck in a purely human mindset. But they are overwhelmingly gratifying to anyone who simply lets God’s grace be his master.

Part 1: So Don’t Let Your Jealousy Master You

We begin in verse 1, “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.”

Here they make a fair agreement, and both sides agree. A denarius is for the day the same as what a Roman soldier makes. So they go out and pull weeds, harvest grapes, all in the hot Middle Eastern sun.

Skipping down to verse 10, “When those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. “These men 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.”

Not fair! How could he possibly do this and be a fair landowner? But isn’t the landowner the one who worked hard to have a huge, successful vineyard? Isn’t he the one who sought them out? Isn’t he the one who paid them a fair wage for the day, which they had all agreed upon?

But that’s what the servants don’t realize. They don’t realize that what would really be fair would be for him to harvest all his grapes himself and not care about hiring others. Not employ anyone else, but rather keep his business small and uncomplicated. After all, he probably made enough to feed his family without their help.

Now we might be thinking, yeah, what business do those servants have in complaining? But before we point fingers, let’s put ourselves in their shoes. We may be happy with our wages when we get them, but boy oh boy, would it be nice to be making six figures like our CEO’s, or popular music artists or professional athletes who make tens of millions of dollars simply for doing their hobbies!

And is it the same way in our lives, not just with monetary things but with all things? I go to church every Sunday, I care for my family and children even through the tough times. I am a model student at my school, as a retired person I try to give back as much to God as I can. I have worked through the heat of the day!

Now, Lord, I’m ready for my extra helping! You have promised me heaven as a reward, and the satisfaction on this earth of being a child of God. But look at those who aren’t as faithful as I in church attendance, or who aren’t as good of parents as I am, or who live their lives as if they don’t care about their God! What about them? Shouldn’t I get more of a reward? Where is my easy marriage, my perfect children, financial security, and all these things that, with God as my master, I should receive?

Transition

But what’s the truth? Our Lord God gave us the biggest break we could possibly receive. Let me tell you what it is. He saved you from the flames of hell, forever and ever. He gives you everlasting joy, happiness, and security in heaven, forever and ever. Nothing else truly matters when you have that, does it? Everything else we receive on this earth is, as they say, “gravy.” It’s all extra. The most wonderful gift we could have possibly received is ours free. Satan tries to tempt us to think that our lives as Christians should be easy too, and that our lives here are what really matters. But Satan is a liar.

And “easy” in Satan’s and the world’s terms is different from “easy” in God’s terms. Let me say it again. You are God’s own child because Jesus shed his blood for you. You will spend your eternal life in heaven because of Jesus. You won’t suffer hell forever. Now that is easy. Everything is done for you. You are under God’s protecting hand forever.

So let it be easy! Don’t make it hard! Rather than looking at what others have, their easy lives, look at the eternal life you have, and the ease of that! It’s only when we let our egos and our jealousy, our want for “fairness” blind us from what we really have, that we make it tough on ourselves! But God set you free so you wouldn’t have to worry about that! So rather than letting your jealousy and your greed master you, let God’s love, grace, and generosity be your master!

Part 2: So Let His Generosity Be Your Master

Let’s go back to the generosity of this master. In Verses 3 through 7 we see him going out at four other separate times during the day, hiring workers, and sending them into his vineyard to work. They all have the same ending time, however, and in verse 8 he even says to his foreman, “Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.”

So he wants all the workers to see that, regardless of the time or effort they have worked, everyone is receiving the same wage. He wants to turn their expectations upside-down. And, again, this results in the complaining from those who have worked all day.

But what does the owner say to them? I want us all to listen to this, because this is what God says to us when we complain about what we see as “fairness.” Verse 13, “But he answered one of them, “Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

The owner gave men the same pay regardless of work time. BUT HE GAVE THEM ALL THEY NEEDED FOR THAT DAY! And it was enough. And he wants them to rejoice that they get to eat that day.

Friends, your master gives you all you need for each and every day! He could have easily kept the doors of heaven closed for him to have his own safe home for eternity. But he created a world, a human race that he loved. He gave them all they needed in the world. Plants and animals for food, water, oxygen, all that they need for every single day!

But then man sinned and ruined it all. But God even had a solution for that. From the bottom of his broken heart, God promised a Savior! And even after that, he watched as his people broke his heart time and time again by following other gods, and then watched as his people Israel rejected that Savior once and for all and had him crucified. But God worked through their wickedness, and that Savior Jesus paid for the sins of all mankind on the cross. In full. Completely.

And then he watched again as man broke his heart time and time again for 2,000 years after Christ, all the way to 2017, today. Seeking their own selfish desires, being jealous of what others have and setting their sights on obtaining worldly, fleeting, comfort and security. But then he continued to shower them with grace. He forgave them time and time again. Man’s selfish actions and jealousy break his heart, but he continues to forgive and move on. And he continues to give them the denarius every single day. Providing for them, taking care of them, just as he said he would. And you and I are those people. Every single day he keeps us in his grace. He gives us all we need. And he will continue to do so, all the way to heaven.

Conclusion

I’d like to conclude today the same way Jesus concluded his parable. “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

We sure like to lift ourselves up sometimes, don’t we? And why do we do that? Because we are constantly struggling against our human natures, which want to convince us that we deserve more than what we have. The world tells us that people are generally good. Turn on any funeral service for a famous person, a prince, a politician, or whatever it may be, and you will hear nothing but praise for how “good” of a person this was.

But as “good” of people as we may think we are, we still fall woefully short of perfection. And our God sees us falling time and time again. And he looks at us and thinks, I’m going to help them.

All people are last, but I will make them first. I will give them the opportunity to have heaven for free. I will fly my believers to safety on my back. I will deliver them all the way to heaven. They are my own. I will free them from the world’s cares and give them all they need while they are in this world.

Yes, it is a constant struggle inside of us between the world’s cares and God’s grace. It is a constant struggle between wanting more glory, more power, more money, and being completely happy with being a child of God. But even as we struggle, your master is still by your side, giving you complete grace. So don’t let your jealousy master you, and let his generosity be your master. Trust him; he will give you more than enough. Amen.