**Fair Wages**

Based on [Matthew 20:1-16](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt20.1-16)

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Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

Today’s parable has to do with the concept of fairness, especially when measured against the decision making of God. Today there is much talk about fairness referred to with the word equality, or the preferred term today: equity. Equality used to mean blind treatment of all people. Didn’t matter if you were rich or poor, black or white, male or female … treating people equally meant ignoring their individual status regarding only their generic status as a human being. Now Equality means equity, treating people differently according to their wealth, race, gender, etc. What used to be considered fair is now politically regarded as unfair.

In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, this is a good framework for understanding fairness. In particular, the difference between fairness in human terms...the definition of which seems to change with the times, versus fairness before God, which is as eternal and immutable as is He.

Human fairness is a fickle concept. Kids say to parents “It’s not fair, he got more than me”. A worker says to his boss, “I’ve been with the company twice as long and still get paid the same as him, it’s not fair. While the other worker says, “I work twice as hard and get paid the same...unfair!” Men are not gods, and so they are held to a standard of fairness that needs to be objective, measurable, justifiable. Human fairness says all wages and benefits should be distributed based on merit and need. Other ideas of fairness say disbursements should take into account things like race and gender and historical injustices.

This is all fine and good, except when confronted with the grace and blessing of our sovereign and merciful Lord. Human fairness, at best, can only approximate the fairness of God. We are accountable to a standard of fairness. God is accountable to no one. Who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Who can give him a gift that he might be repaid? For the world and everything in it is His. If he chooses to bless Jacob and curse Esau...what is that to you? Are you going to judge his decision, measure it in the balance and see if it is fair? God has nothing to prove, certainly not to ungrateful creatures who make such demands of Him.

This is a central feature of the parable. Is God fair? And to rightly understand the dilemma that the workers have in even posing this question, we need to consider the nature of it. The answer is contained in the question. “Is God fair?” It’s like asking “Is the circle round?” or “Is your father a man?” Is God fair? As sure as a circle is round.

But the workers think that they have caught God acting unfairly. Aha! A fair master pays the servants equally according to the amount of time they labour. This master doesn’t pay according to the amount of time, therefore the master is unfair. But wait right there. Who says that a fair master pays equally according to the hours worked? Maybe that’s true by human standards, but God is not held to any standards but Himself. He knows the heart of every man, he knows the circumstances and the fate of everyone. His calculations contain infinite variables unfathomable to the minds of men. The whole earth is his, and he knows every sparrow and numbers every hair on your head. And so, when challenges as to the wisdom of his wage distribution, the master responds, “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?”

Friends, the lesson we must remember each day is that we are not to judge God’s goodness by comparing what he gives to different people. This is the root of all covetousness, to look at what your neighbor has and consider yourself the victim of God’s unfair treatment.

But remember that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. No matter what you suffer in this life, whatever deprivation or loss, it is nothing compared to what you deserve, what I deserve, what everyone deserves. We deserve death and hell. We deserve to die in our sins. We all come before the Lord our God as beggars, not demanding as much or more than anyone else, but asking for the mercy and grace to survive the wrath to come in the day of the Lord.

On the last day, all scores will be settled, all wrongs righted. The person who worked in the vineyard all day long without faith, will receive the reward due his work. The one who worked only an hour in faith will receive the reward of faith...the salvation of their soul and eternal life in God’s heavenly mansion. This is made possible through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, who ransomed himself to set us free from the curse of the Law. God made him who knew no sin to be sin, that we might become the righteousness of God. This is a righteousness not through works done by us, but through faith in the working of Christ for us.

On the one hand, the workers think they deserve more than the others. The master says, “It’s my money, I get to decide what’s fair.” Then he adds this passive aggressive question...Or do you begrudge my generosity? Those who want a merciless God who judges by works not faith, think they will stand in the judgment. They think that God should be graceful to no one. But the heart of faith is not concerned about balancing accounts in their own minds. The heart of faith says, “I want a gracious God. I want a generous God. Not a miser. Not a stickler. Not a God who shines every penny and charges interest on loans. I want a God that, when he gives, his right hand does not know what his left hand is doing. Perhaps he appears a little sloppy in the distribution, a little wanton in his blessings. So be it.

It is a real thing, I have seen it especially as a parent. For example, certain of my children would be happier if none of them got ice cream, than if only one gets it. They are happier if no one gets anything than if one gets more than another. They have said as much. The mouth of babes. They are just being honest, speaking from the sinful nature of their hearts, that by nature we would rather the whole world suffer equally, than others receive more generosity from God than us. It is irrational, but it’s deeper than that, it is the original sin we’re born with.

But christ has crucified our flesh with it’s sinful desires, and has prepared us with the power to live in the obedience of faith. Let us not begrudge the generosity others have received, but united with one another, let us give glory to God in all things, for he has richly provided for all things, and it is our duty to give Him only thanks and praise.