

“MATTHEW 20:12”

(Matthew 20:12)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Text: Matthew 20:12

When [the workmen hired first] received [their wages], they began to grumble [saying], ‘You have made the men who were hired last equal to us...’

Prayer: Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Let me ask you a question. What do you focus on more: the things you have, or what you don't have?

Indeed, if you're like most people it's what we don't have that we focus on. A simple example: we are satisfied with the TV we have until something better comes along; then we hanker for that UHD TV so we can watch movies without ads. And it's not just new things that we hanker for; we can be selective with people too. The friends we have now are OK, but new friends can extend our horizons.

Now, wanting something newer or better isn't wrong in itself; the problem is our heart-attitude. You see, by focusing on what we don't have we not only become discontented, but also critical of others, even of God. So, instead of being content with our Father's goodness and generosity – His blessings – we begin to notice others and resent their wealth or higher status. Then our faith takes a hit, and we accuse God of not being fair.

Now, it's easy to blame our discontent on the attractive way the world presents things – but it's not their fault. They are only 'feeding' what is already in our heart. That seed of discontent was planted by Satan in Adam and Eve's heart by suggesting that God had withheld something from them. So, instead of being content with what they had been given – Paradise – our first parents felt cheated by God.

In their sinful self-interest Adam and Eve reached out and took what they believed was rightly theirs – and we have been following in their footsteps ever since. Take, for instance, the work-ers in the vineyard: at the beginning of the day they were all happy to have a job and looked forward to a day's pay. However, their joy evaporated when the landlord had the audacity to pay everyone – even those hired at the 11th hour – the same wage. One denarius.

Contentment turned to displeasure. All of a sudden a denarius isn't a fair day's pay. The owner of the vineyard is deemed to be unfair! And when our heavenly Father's blessings fall short of our expectations, do we also accuse Him of being mean and unfair?

Isaiah corrects our thinking when he writes: "***For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,***" declares the LORD (Isa 55:8). You see, my friends, the Lord doesn't operate by the rules of a law-based world which says: you get what you deserve, and you get what you earn. Instead, God operates on the basis of the Gospel – the way of gift and grace. It means that our Lord is not only gracious, but also generous with His gifts.

Sometimes, our Lord's gracious and generous ways causes us problems. Take, for example, a vile criminal who has done much evil. Just before dying he repents and confesses Jesus as Lord. Now, according to the parable, this criminal will get the same 'wages' as the faithfully Christian who has laboured a whole lifetime in the church. How about that!

What might our reaction be? Maybe something like: 'That's not fair!' or 'God is totally wrong!' To which Jesus would reply: 'Don't I have the right to do what I want with [with what belongs to me]? Or are you jealous of my generosity?' (v15) So what are we to do with such a good and generous God?

Walk away because we disagree with God's sense of fairness, or should we repent of our wrong 'heart-attitude'? You see, if as faithful Christians we deem others to be unworthy of God's gifts, logically, it must mean we deserve them. That God owes us.

But what does God owe us? If we look into the mirror of our souls, we are just as guilty before the Lord as that criminal. How come? Even though we confess our sin and receive Jesus' forgiveness, we continue to live the same old life. For instance, we continue to be self-centred, we are still proud, and our love for others is still wanting, etc.

So, what does God really owe us? Absolutely nothing. You see, when we plead: 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, a poor helpless sinner', we are not asking for what we deserve but for what we don't deserve. Indeed, we're asking Jesus for the gift of life, instead of being cast into eternal darkness.

By His innocent suffering and death on the cross our Lord unlocked the shackles of sin and death that bind us, and set us free. Without a doubt, Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath in our stead so you and I wouldn't get what we deserve, but what we don't deserve.

Now, the cup we are given to drink (especially when we celebrate HC again) isn't a cup of death, but a cup of life – a cup filled with the blood of the living Jesus. The blood of the One who is risen from the dead, having defeated sin and Satan, death and the grave. Indeed, Jesus came into this broken world so 'we might have life, and have it abundantly.' (Jn.10:10) That's why forgiveness can be compared to a deathbed conversion, for we rise from our deathbed of sin.

Now if Jesus has freely given us the gifts of forgive-ness; of adoption as sons and daughters in Baptism; and life eternal, what more can Jesus give than that? And since our mission as Jesus' followers is to help the lost sheep find their Good Shepherd, how can we not want anyone to receive His gifts – even at the 11th hour?

No, my friends, Jesus isn't withholding anything for in and through our Lord we have everything necessary for our salvation. Indeed, Christ invites everyone to come to Him and receive His gifts, freely. So come in good times, and in bad times... but come and live. **Amen.**

And the peace and love of God which passes all human understanding, keep our heart and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon by Pastor Ernie Kiss 20 September 2020