

Matthew 20:1-19

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Date: 05 November 2019

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[0 : 00] So if Jesus was going to vote in the general election, who would he vote for? Conservatives? Labour?

! The Brexit Party? The Greens? Or would he have his own party?! Do you think Jesus is more capitalist or socialist?

What do you think? In some ways, when Jesus talks, it feels like, doesn't it, he's got the sound of being a free trader, an entrepreneur, a businessman.

And Jesus is always concerned about people making wise investments. Don't store up your treasures on earth where moth and rust and recession can destroy, no, invest in heaven, he says. Why? Because great will be your reward. It's a dumb investment to invest here. The smart investment is to invest there. He's always talking about weighing up your options, carefully.

[1 : 11] And he's talking about paying up your profits, a man or a woman or a boy or a girl if they gain the whole world, and yet they lose their own soul. It's a bad, bad decision. So he speaks like an entrepreneur, a businessman.

And yet there are other sides of Jesus where he sounds a little bit more like a socialist. Where there's a strong thrust in his teaching on equality. That we're all in the same boat.

That we are all to be treated in the same way. Well today's parable, the story that Jesus gives us, it is a feel that it's a little bit more socialist than communist.

Socialist than capitalist. Now let's hear the story. It's a really straightforward one, isn't it? Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a landowner.

To a master of a vineyard. To a landlord, to a landowner who is basically paying the same amount to people who've worked different amounts in the day.

[2 : 13] So some people start working for this man at 6 o'clock in the morning. Others start working at 12 o'clock midday. Others at 3pm. Others at 5pm.

Some even at 5.30pm. And they all finish at 6pm regardless of when they started. And at the end of the day, they all get paid the same amount regardless of when they started.

And those who've worked longest, they are understandably a bit annoyed at the fact that they've worked for the same amount. At the fact that those who've put in an hour are getting paid exactly the same as those who've put in 11 hours.

Those who've worked longest are getting paid exactly the same as those who've worked for a very short time. But those who've worked longest are getting paid exactly what they were promised at the start of the day.

And so Jesus speaks now. And the point is obviously not how to order your kind of workers and employers and rights and payments.

[3 : 17] It's a parable. And so you are to draw a spiritual point from this story. And it's not, the point is not how you kind of negotiate with your employer as an employee.

No, it's about Christians who've been Christians for 50 years. And they've laboured long. And how they are to think about those who join and come late into the story.

But let's pick up where Jesus in this parable comments on those who started to despise those who are paid the same amount and yet work so little. So look at chapter 20 and verse 13.

He replied to one of them, Friends, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree at the start of the day with me for a denarius?

Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I chose to choose with what belongs to me?

[4 : 22] Or do you begrudge my generosity? So, three points this morning. Three aspects of the character of God that I think are undermined or assaulted.

The first point is this. Is God fair? Is God fair? When he allows those who've done so little and they've come so late to receive the full inheritance of the Christian.

The full inheritance the same as those who've worked so long and so hard. Is God fair? Is God just in treating us the same?

Even though the reality this morning is there. Some Christians have laboured longer and harder than others. And his answer to that is very, very clear. Look at verse 14. Friend, take what belongs to you and go.

No. I choose to give to this last worker as I gave to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?

[5 : 30] Now, you read that and even that answer sounds a little bit unfair. Let's say there's a teacher in school. And they decide, I'm out of school, in school, that they're going to give an A to all of the students.

And all of the students are getting an A regardless of effort, regardless of how often they've turned up, regardless of their work. They decide to give everyone in their class straight A's.

What do you think is the reaction to that teacher? Well, some of the children love it, don't they? You know, the lazy kids who've done nothing all year.

But those who've worked hard, how do they feel about that? They wanted to receive, don't they? And those who were in the class, they want to receive the reward of their labours. And they didn't like it.

So is God being just like that teacher? Were some of those kids' accusation against that teacher right? Was that teacher being unfair?

[6 : 39] Well, of course she was unfair. And she shouldn't have done it. Let me tell you why.

Because the teacher did not warn the students ahead of time, this is how it's going to work. And so basically, here are people who are working on one criteria, and then they discover halfway through the school term, that the rules have changed halfway through.

Am I being unfair? No, Jesus says. He says, remember what I promised you from the beginning. I'm not being unfair to you. Didn't I promise you right at the start of the day workers, that if you worked a full day for me, you'd get a tavorius?

That's exactly right, isn't it? God is not unfair. God is not unfair to you. He's not unfair to you who have been Christians for 20, 30, 40 years. Because at the end of the day, you will inherit exactly what the new Christian who dies will get is the same.

The Christian who gives his life to the Lord Jesus on his deathbed, receives exactly the same thing as the person who has been a Christian all their life. New life, everlasting life.

It would be unfair, wouldn't it, if God changed the rules halfway through the game? It would be unfair if God promised you eternal life, and decided for a trick to pull it back from you. That would be unfair.

[8 : 00] But at the end of the day, after 60 years of labor, in the end, you get paradise. And that is exactly what you were promised from the beginning. Now at that point, it's worth understanding this question, and it's this, knowing what it is exactly that God has promised, and what it isn't that God has promised.

So our assurance of God was John 3, 16, wasn't it? It doesn't say, That isn't the promise that you came to.

If that was the promise that you came to, many of us would have walked away from Jesus within two years, because we've either had poverty come our way, or sickness. No, the promise Jesus gives, that when you come to him, whenever you come to him as Lord, regardless of how long you've been a Christian, is that for God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Paradise. Heaven. Call it what you like. It's the same deal. And everyone gets it, from the moment they come to the Lord Jesus. And yet the temptation is so natural, to start to despise the fact, that if you've worked so hard and long for Jesus, to kind of despise those who've not laboured so long, or as hard.

And here's a parable, so firstly it's speaking to you, who've served long and hard, I'm hard. And I'd be sleeping, whichever church you've come from.

[9 : 46] Because the temptation is, to resent the fact that my labour, hasn't resulted in me getting, two heavens. Or three paradises.

God is not being unfair, there, he's giving you exactly what he's promised you. Life everlasting. It can't be thinking, a lot of us, perhaps not all of us, have contributed to this building, in which we're in.

And we've put in some serious money. Fantastic. And there are people, who will join our church, who are going to enjoy the full blessings, of this building, and yet they haven't put in a penny. And isn't that fantastic? Now of course we will ask them to contribute, because we've got a £900,000 loan on it. But there is a sense, isn't there, which people, ongoing, will inherit, inherit, the blessings, of those who've gone, long before.

And those who've long, worked long, and hard, and given, sacrificially. And the great joy of the Christian life, is that we get to serve, and they get to benefit.

[11:06] It's also worth keeping in mind, that in 1979, the people who sacrificed so much, so that that building could be bought, and the land could be bought. And so in the end, contribute anything anyway, it's all of grace, isn't it?

God is fair. God is just. The second point is, God is generous. God is generous.

And we need to make sure, that we don't despise the kindness of God. Look what he says. He says, Why are you envious? Do you begrudge, verse 15, my generosity?

Are you jealous, God says? Then I'm generous. And again, it's a word about not despising. The God, who gives to people, who come to him very late in the game, eternal life.

He gives eternal life, whether you've been a Christian for 50 years, or 50 seconds. You get the full spiritual blessings, the moment you come to the Lord Jesus.

[12:19] Now religious people, they don't like the kindness of God. And religious people like to focus on what they've done, how they deserve it.

And they like to focus on what others have not done, and how they don't deserve it. And at the end of the day, it is his generosity. I read this week, I read this week, about John Wayne.

John Wayne, the country western actor, the cowboy, he was always, played the same role it seems to me. He was a cowboy actor. And John Wayne lived his life, I don't know how he lived it, but he lived it without Christ.

But at the end of his life, apparently, he turned on his deathbed, and he became a Christian. I said this to another minister this week, I'm not sure I believe that.

And some people will think about John Wayne, well that's not fair. You work hard, you do the right thing, he lived the way he wants, any old way, and right at the end, he says, I'm sorry to Jesus, and he gets in.

[13:37] That's not fair. So what would Jesus say to you? Jesus would say to you, why are you envious, that I could be generous to a man like that?

A man who indulged in this world perhaps. I don't know his life, but he gets to indulge now in the age to come, doesn't he? And again, it's a word for us, that temptation.

If you, this morning, you have carried the weight of the kingdom harder than others. Some of you have given 10%, 15%, 20% of your income for years for the Lord's work.

And there are some of you that always, always put up your hand, when there's things to be done, who work hard, and consistently week in, week out. And you carry the load, literally.

Much more than others, and well done for that. Yet the temptation is to look on those, who just get in by the skin of their teeth. Or perhaps other Christians who don't work that hard.

[14:47] And this word of Jesus corrects two errors. Two errors. The error to resent them. And resent God's generosity to them. It's a big temptation.

You can almost hear it in the words of these people. They've worked the whole day in the parable. And they say to him, don't they? Verse 12, You've borne the burden of the day.

And the scorching heat. And there are those that you've, that have only worked one hour, and you've made them equal to us. How is that fair? You are giving to them exactly what you're giving to us.

And we've suffered harder. Worked longer. And it does not seem fair. And Jesus sounds more socialist at this point. Jesus is correcting two errors.

And I think it reminds you and I, that we need to really stop thinking that somehow in the Christian life, you get in by grace, but you stay in by works. That somehow it is your faithfulness that becomes the means by which God accepts you.

[16:02] It's very, very easy. You start the Christian life, hallelujah. Hallelujah. I've been saved. All my burdens have been taken away.

All my sins are forgiven. Yippee! Praise the Lord. And then you start to get into the groove of serving week in, week out, year in, year out, decade in, decade out.

And all of a sudden we've made a shift from thinking that we're in by grace to start thinking we're in by works and what we've done. But remember this morning, you are in by grace and you stay in by grace.

Thomas Hooker was a faithful and puritan preacher. Thomas Hooker was on his deathbed on his deathbed and after many, many years of living a long life of service to the Lord, one of his friends came to comfort him on his deathbed before he dies and says, Thomas, you are going to receive the reward of your labour.

Be encouraged. And quick as a flash, Thomas Hooker said, no I'm not. I'm going to receive mercy. Mercy, because Thomas Hooker understood you're in by grace and you stay in by grace.

[17:19] And no matter how faithful you've been with the Lord, you're in by grace and you stay in by grace. Let me tell you about a man I know, he's probably the greatest Christian I know if there's such a thing.

He's 93 years old, he's served the Lord since he was in his early twenties, steadfastly. He's made great sacrifices for the Kingdom of God. But when he comes to die, whichever day that is, he'll be in the Kingdom because of grace, not because of what he's done.

Do not despise the generosity of God. The second thing I use this parable starts to expose is our motives for service. Because you don't work hard to pick up two paradises and three kingdoms.

Three kingdoms. You don't work hard, so in the end, you'll pick up an extra eternal life, like in a computer game. And so why is it that you serve? I think that's really the question.

Why is it that those of you who've been serving, you've been doing it for years, for decades, well, I hope it's because of continual gratitude for the mercy of God. I hope it's because that you've worked out that God's way is the best way.

[18:44] I hope you've worked out that the reason you want to serve and give your best is because God gave you his best. I hope it's because you've worked out, which perhaps not every Christian works out, that your greatest joy is found in God's glory and giving yourself to Him.

And when you give yourself to Him, in serving Him and His people and His honour and His name, you will find that that is your greatest delight.

I think if anyone in the Bible had a right to complain, it was probably the Apostle Paul. I was reading 2 Corinthians chapter 11 this week and I was reminded of the kind of suffering that the Apostle Paul experienced.

He was one of the apostles, a follower of Christ, and he talks about how he unashamedly worked harder. He was imprisoned more frequently, he was flogged more severely, he was exposed to death again and again and again.

He says, five times I was beaten with the 39 lashes, the Roman punishment. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once, he says, I was stoned with rocks.

[20:09] Three times I was shipwrecked. For a day and a night in the open sea. All because of my loyalty to Jesus. He tells us, I've lived my life constantly on the move, in danger from bandits and my own countrymen.

I've laboured and I've toiled at my own expense. I've often gone without sleep, without food, without water. I've been cold, I've been naked, and above everything else, and this is the only thing I can relate with, I carry the worries of the church, he says.

The Apostle Paul, at the end of his life, in 2 Timothy chapter 4, 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 6, I fought the good fight, I finished the race, kept the faith.

Now there is stored up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day. And you say, good on you Paul, well done.

Man, that would be one big crown of righteousness, that you receive. You deserve it Paul. And then he says in the very next verse, and not only to me, but also to all who've longed for his appearing.

[21:22] That's us. That's those who've trusted in Christ. You, that alone to you, are getting the same crown of righteousness.

Do you see what he does there? He says, I stay faithful to the end. And I'm going to get that crown of righteousness, because God has promised it to me. And by the way, there's nothing special

about me, I'm going to share it with my brothers and sisters, who've also walked with Jesus, and love him, and trust him, and long for his appearing.

And so whether you've been doing it for 50 seconds, or 50 years, he does not despise the generosity of God. He's not envious towards those, who are going to receive what he is going to receive.

Even though, in his earthly life, he suffered much more, and he worked much harder. But at the end of the day, God has a right to do, with his plan of salvation, whatever he pleases.

And that's the third point. God is generous, God is fair, God is just, and God is sovereign. Listen to this in verse 14.

[22 : 37] Take what belongs to you, take your pay, and go. I choose to give this last worker, as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose, with what belongs to me?

Or do you begrudge my generosity? So the last will be first, first will be last. That's right, isn't it? Am I not allowed to do, what I choose, with what belongs to me? That's what these workers never quite understood.

The landowner in this parable, and God as the landowner of this universe, has the right to do what he pleases, in this universe. And yet, we have the audacity, and many of us do this, we fall into this trap, of thinking that somehow, we are wiser than God.

Somehow, we are fairer than God. Somehow, we are more loving than God. If I were God, I would have done it differently. But the bottom line is this, you are not God.

[23 : 59] And you would have done it differently. You would have done it differently. And you would have done it a lot worse. And God is saying, I have the right to do as I see fit.

And if I decide to hand out eternal life to whoever comes to my son, whenever they come to my son, that is my right. And if God wants to give to the apostle Paul, and to the serial killer, eternal life, because that man repented on his deathbed, before he was executed.

Then that man will be receiving the crown of righteousness that the apostle Paul is receiving. Do I have the right to do that? Do I have the right to do that? You might be listening to me and you might think, are there a thing called rewards in the Bible?

Oh, there is. Matthew's Gospel and Luke's Gospel talk about that. There are degrees in heaven. Like there are degrees in hell. Some will be beaten with more stripes than others.

Let's face it, any place in hell is bad. But the nature of hell is that some people have been punished more severely than others. The more you've had, the more you've known, the more you've turned your back on, the more cultively you are.

[25 : 20] And Jesus says, don't store your treasures on earth, store them in heaven, and great will be your reward. But whatever else it is, Jesus says in one of his parables, when he is handing out life and death, eternal life and eternal death, he says to those who are going to receive eternal life, come and enter your master's joy.

Whatever it is, it'll never be better than that. That you get to enjoy. The joy of pleasing your Father in heaven for all eternity. The joy of knowing that my Father is pleased with my obedient choices. Pick a family where there are two sons and they're going to receive an inheritance. And one works hard and the other is a total slacker. What is motivating the son that works hard? He's going to get the inheritance.

So why would he work hard for his dad? What is motivating him? His dad is motivating him. To please his dad is what gives the son joy.

To honor his dad, he's going to get the inheritance. Either way, the joy of pleasing your Father in heaven, there is no greater reward than that. And that will rebound for all eternity.

[26 : 37] I guess some of you are thinking, this is going to be asking for trouble, isn't it? Don't you think what you're preaching, come early, come late, doesn't matter how bad you are?

Don't people say that? I think you begin, you know a person has begun to understand the gospel when they start saying, well I may as well go and murder and rape and pillage and then just say sorry at the end of my life.

That's what you want. Live it up. Enjoy life. And then at the end I can say sorry to God and it won't be okay. People say, as they understand this message, they say, won't this delay people coming to Jesus?

Won't they all want to just do a John Wayne? Live any old life and then at the end with their last breath say, I'm sorry Jesus. Well, let me tell you in practice, that isn't what happens. The reality is,

we know that very, very few people at the end of their life say yes to Jesus.

In 18 years as a minister, I can't think of one. And I've sat on the deathbed of many people. And what John Wayne may or may not have done, and I can't be sure that he did what has been reported, it is very, very rare.

[28 : 05] So talk to a chaplain who works in a hospice if you want. Talk to a Christian chaplain and say to him and ask him, people are there because of their dying. Very few people give their lives to Jesus at the end of their lives.

Or argue there's less than there used to be. But you can talk to me about that after. And you might think, well no, in old age things will be clearer. They are not. They are not. They are not clearer than they are now.

And if you, if you are not clear now, the chances are, you probably won't be clear then. Because here's the thing, here's the thing about saying no to God.

You just get good at it. And you may think, I'll have the opportunity later. And theoretically you do. Theoretically you do.

But the reality is, if you keep saying no to God, you just get good at it. And do not take comfort that you are going to be in a badder position. You don't even know, you don't even know whether you will even be aware when it's your last breath.

[29 : 13] So many people die unexpectedly. But at the end of the day, do you know what is encouraging? It's such an encouraging thing, isn't it, to the journey you come lately.

It empowers each one of you who are Christians to look your non-Christian friend or colleague or neighbor or family member in the eye and say, you've got no idea. That if you decide to turn your life back to God, to Jesus Christ and to trust Him, to trust His death and His resurrection for the forgiveness of sins, you'll be accepted.

But you need to understand this. That you will get exactly what I've been promised for the last 26 years of my life.

And that is eternal life. Jesus doesn't say, let's try a probation period and see how you get on for the next five years. if you try hard over the next decades, maybe I'll get a little piece of heaven.

No, He says, the moment you say yes. The moment you say yes, is the moment you gain every spiritual blessing in Christ.

[30 : 28] And I think that ought to empower us. The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

It ought to empower you and I to share the gospel. It's so different, isn't it, from every other world religion. Every other religion you've got to try to build up this culture of good works. And maybe, just maybe, on judgment day, the scales will tip in your favor.

That is not Christianity. Christianity is saying, Jesus has done it all. All to Him I own. And what I need to do, is I need to humble myself, and take His hand to forgiveness.

And when I do that, all of the blessings of Christ, are mine straight away. And you may have lived, today, 20, 40, 50 years, and still not come to Christ.

I read of someone this week, who didn't wait 40, 50, 60, 70 years, not even 80 years, not 90 years, not even 100 years.

[31 : 42] She was 103, before she gave her life to Jesus. That is leaving it late, isn't it? And she's going to get, exactly what the apostle Paul got.

What Pauliney gets. What Alison Kelly gets. Look at verse 6. By the 11th hour, Jesus went out, and He found others standing, and He said to them, Why do you stand here, idle, all day?

Why do you stand here, doing nothing? It's quite an interesting way, of describing life. It's very shocking, isn't it?

Even in a waste of space. As far as the kingdom of God is concerned. As far as the kingdom of God is concerned, you've contributed nothing. You may well have been a loving husband, a loving mother, a loving wife, but as far as the kingdom of God, doing it for the king's sake, nothing.

And it's time to stop doing nothing. And get on board, for the kingdom, to serve this wonderful king, and enjoy him. And like I said, you don't have to turn your stripes.

[33 : 04] You just come in, simple repentance, and faith in Jesus, and you get to sit with Abraham, and Isaac, in the kingdom of God, in paradise. It's yours. Two people.

Two people. Let's think of them for a moment, as we finish. the apostle Peter. The apostle Peter was with Jesus, for three years. He had foot and mouth, and the seeds to be.

But generally speaking, Peter hung out with the Lord, and after Jesus had died, and risen and gone to heaven, he faithfully served Jesus. He was, he endured imprisonment, there was a whole lot of persecution.

if tradition is true, he ended up in Rome, crucified upside down. The guy served the Lord God, and his Saviour, for the bulk of his life. That is Peter. Let's think of the other guy, the thief on the cross. He's a man without a name, who lived a life clearly anti-God, and even on the cross, he was cursing Jesus, until he finally woke up to himself.

[34 : 06] And minutes perhaps, before he died, he realised exactly who Jesus was, and he says to Jesus, remember me when you enter into the kingdom. And what did Jesus say? Jesus said, today you will be with me in paradise.

And I'm telling you, the unnamed thief, and the apostle Peter, and Paul, are round the throne this morning, praising the Lord Jesus. And enjoying life everlasting.

And that is what makes Christianity so wonderful, and yet so offensive. So we who've been Christians 30 plus years, we want to join with God, and say to you this morning, if you've not taken the hand of the Saviour, why don't you do it?

Come and enjoy what the rest of us are enjoying, which is life everlasting. And sure, you might have spent every second of your life without God, but the moment you say, I do, the moment you take his hand, you will have everything we've been promised, will everlast in life.

What's holding you back? What's holding you back from taking the hand of the Saviour? Is it you're afraid? Is it that you're afraid to admit that you're not a Christian, but everyone thinks you are?

[35 : 24] Is it that you're afraid of the consequences of what it means to follow the Lord Jesus? The cost. Think of those words of Jesus. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and yet loses his own soul?

And this morning you are invited to share in what every other Christian has been promised. Everlasting life. And you don't have to wait to enjoy that promise. I don't really know who Kanye West is.

I did a radio interview with a Christian radio station the other day, and they asked me what my opinion was on Kanye West, and I'd say, I'm really sorry, I don't know who he is.

But Kanye West has released an album, which is all over the internet, I've not read it. It's called Jesus is Lord. And I just want to read you one tweet.

If you're not on Twitter, you should be a great source of helpful interaction on a whole host of things. But this preacher said this, I don't know Kanye West, I don't know Kanye West, but if he thinks for one second that calling on the name of Jesus will somehow forgive a lifetime of misogyny, blasphemy, profanity, and sexual immorality, he's absolutely right.

[36 : 40] Let's pray.