

“Resentment Undone”

UNDONE Sermon Series | Week Two | Newbreak Church

April 18th, 2021

This week is about celebrating God’s grace generously given to us all. We live in a world where “hard work pays off.” But what about when God makes us equals? Why are we bothered by His grace instead of celebrating it? This message answers the question: What’s so amazing about grace?

For more insights relating to this week’s sermon, see <https://newbreak.church/blog/>. We post a new blog every Sunday which coincides with the sermon passage or theme from that day.

Start Here

- Were you able to get any rest during your Easter break? What was your highlight?
- While in school, did you ever participate in a group project? What was your experience like? Did you do most of the work or very little? How did you feel when all members of the group got the same grade despite a different amount of work?

Going Deeper Into the Message

Read: Matthew 19:27 - 20:16

What’s so amazing about grace?

Point 1 – Grace keeps no score.

(The words of the workers who were complaining) ‘These 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.’ (Matthew 12:12, NIV)

This is shocking. In this parable, the master of the vineyard **paid them all equally, regardless of some workers having worked longer and harder hours.** Notice that the first group of workers had already agreed to the denarius payment for a whole day. They agreed that this was fair pay....until it wasn't. As Christ-followers, our idea of grace changes depending on what we feel is justified and whether we are on the receiving end of the benefit or not.

When we keep score and dictate what grace should look like, we are devaluing others and devaluing grace.

But the truth is: God doesn't make contracts – He establishes covenants.

N.T. Wright says it well: "He [God] makes **covenants**, in which he promises us everything and asks of us everything in return. When he keeps his promises, he is not rewarding us for effort, but doing what comes naturally to his overflowingly generous nature."

On one hand, God asks nothing of us to earn grace. On the other hand, He asks us to give Him everything, to release everything to give Him our whole hearts and lives.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- Am I focused more on how grateful I am for the grace God has given me? Or am I more focused on the grace God has given someone else? How can I counter the envy and turn it toward thanksgiving?
- As N.T. Wright referenced above, God promises everything and asks everything in return. What is something that I'm struggling to give up to the Lord right now in my life?

What's so amazing about grace?

Point 2 – Grace holds no blame.

So 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.** (Matthew 20:10-11)

Instead of seeing how amazing the vineyard owner's generosity was, a few of the workers "grumbled against" him. In essence, they were comparing themselves with others and blaming God for being unfair. "God it's not fair. I've been working my whole

life and shouldn't I have more to show for it than this?" The complaint might be geared toward what we think we deserve in this life or in the life to come. Either way, by trying to equate grace with something that should be equivalent to what is deserved we miss the nature of grace as a freely given gift. And we especially ought to remember that God's grace is far more generous than any standard we could set for ourselves. But do we even see how generous he is?

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- How does grumbling against God impact my relationship with Him and with others? When do I find myself grumbling against God the most?
- When I grumble, do I ever lose sight of what God has given to me and promises to give to me in the future?

—ADDITIONAL INSIGHT—

HOW TO READ THE PARABLES OF JESUS

**This insight is an excerpt from the Newbreak blog post associated with this week.*

It is important to understand the parables of Jesus since Christ communicates many truths about the kingdom of God through them.

Here are four sequential steps to read and understand parables using our selected passage of the week [Matthew 20:1-16](#) (the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard) as a case study.

1) Identify the explicit or implicit question that sets the stage for the parable.

This requires recognizing the context of the parable. Like all other parables, this one does not come out of thin air. Jesus always had an intentional purpose with His parables. As you look at the context of Matthew 20, you will notice that the end of Matthew 19 has a key passage that paves the way for the parable's relevance to the situation.

Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" (Matthew 19:27, NIV)

That's what we need to identify! Peter's question in Matthew 19 sets the stage for Jesus to respond with a direct answer, but in parabolic form. In context, Peter's question (Matthew 19:27) is just after the "Rich young ruler" decided he did not want to part from his many possessions to follow Jesus (see [19:16-26](#)). After seeing this, Peter—probably realizing how much he and the other disciples had given up—asks Jesus, basically: "What more will we get since we have given up everything for you?" His question presumes an answer consistent with how the world sees things—through a merit-based system.

Peter assumes because the disciples gave up more than others, they would receive more in the end. It is a classic example of missing the point. And Jesus's parable in Matthew 20:1-16 answers Peter's question, giving a storied explanation of the meaning to the famous phrase: "The last will be first, and the first will be last" ([19:30](#); [20:16](#)). This leads us to the second step of parable reading...

2) Find the surprise.

Jesus's parables were intended to have a shock factor. If they don't surprise you, then you either are all-too-familiar with the text; or you struggle to see the connection between the ancient context and the modern significance. Pause where you are on this blog and read [Matthew 20:1-16](#) and try to find the "surprise" or "shock" for yourself. And remember to build on the context (see step 1 again). What did you find?

If we miss the shock of the parable, we miss the point.

This is not a parable about some who are "saved" and some who are not. There are other parables like that. In this parable, all the "workers of the vineyard" are members of God's kingdom, despite "what time of day" they were called to work the vineyard. That's not the shocking part. The complainers at the end did not complain that the master allowed more people to come to work the vineyard. Their complaint is that those who did *not* work as long of hours (quantity) and as difficult of hours (quality) were "made equal" in payment as them. That is the shocking thing!

Jesus was showing that our correlation between what we do and what we get is not how the economy of God's kingdom operates. We need to rewire our minds that our "reward" is not tied to our performance. There is no competition between fellow workers in God's kingdom. No wonder one commentator titles this parable: "The Parable of God's Economy of Equality." And this equality of reward and status in the kingdom of God is

scandalous to many of us who think our discipleship journey should conclude with a merit-based system.

3) Listen to the conclusion.

The conclusion wraps up the parable with either some exhortation, call to action, or summary statement. The conclusion, like the main point of the parable, usually is surprising too. Some of Jesus's parables have a very memorable (and sometimes sobering) conclusion. Take the ending of the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant ([Matthew 18:21-35](#)) for example:

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” (Matthew 18:35)

The conclusion to Matthew 20:1-16 ends similar to where it really started back in 19:30:

“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

In Christ, mountains of superiority are laid low and valleys of inferiority are raised high and the ground levels. The exalted are humbled and the humbled, exalted. Christ alone is supreme.

And now, the final step.

4) Summarize the big idea.

This is not technically a step to understanding the parable, but more of a takeaway. After taking it in, it is good to try to find some words that will sum up the message so that you can take it with you. There are many ways Matthew 20:1-16 could be summarized, here are just two:

→ Grace is scandalous because in the end, we all will receive an equal reward in God's kingdom.

→ New Testament scholar, Craig Blomberg, words it this way: “But all who are truly saved are equally precious in God's sight and equally rewarded with eternal happiness in the company of Christ and all the redeemed.”

The truth is God always acts with grace (it is His very nature). And so, He will pour out His grace on all, even when we think it is unfair to be treated with such equal grace.

We cannot confuse God's favor with "favoritism." Anyone who is found in God's grace (in His favor) are His favorites. God can genuinely call all His people His favorites.

What's so amazing about grace?

Point 3 – Grace is generous to everyone.

"But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one 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?**' "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." (Matthew 20:13-16)

As we have seen in this parable, God's economy of grace does not work like most forms of labor. When we "work" for the Lord we are not doing so to *earn anything*, much less to "*out-earn*" our fellow brother or sister. God wants us to see all of life through the lens of God's generous grace. This empowers us to live generously in light of His generous grace.

The point of this parable as Craig Evans points out, "is that God is generous (to a fault!) with all human beings and that those who respond to God's call sooner than others, and so labor for God longer and harder than do others, should not be envious of others who receive equal rewards."

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- Would you describe yourself as a generous person? How would you measure that? Have you ever considered God to be generous? If so, how would you measure God's generosity in your life?
- How can I give grace more generously in my life? What holds me back from being more generous with grace for myself and others?

—ADDITIONAL INSIGHT—

"In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is happier to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35)

When we serve others, Jesus serves us joy.

Why do good things if we all will get the same reward? It is a common question after reading Matthew 20:1-16. While many responses could be given, the most straightforward is simply that **the joy of Jesus comes with the lifestyle of Jesus**. The peace of God comes when we walk the path of God. All these things, the real “rewards” we actually seek—are bound up with the life God wants for us. In essence, the reward of living a godly life is organically tied to the work itself. That is why serving and loving others actually makes us feel more alive and fulfilled.

N.T. Wright says:

“It isn’t a matter of calculation, of doing a difficult job in order to be paid a wage. It is much more like working at a friendship, or a marriage, in order to enjoy the other person’s company more fully. It is more like practising golf in order that we can go out on the course and hit the ball in the right direction. It is more like learning German or Greek so that we can read some of the great poets and philosophers who wrote in those languages. The ‘reward’ is *organically connected to the activity*, not some kind of arbitrary pat on the back, otherwise unrelated to the work that has been done. And it is always far in abundance beyond any sense of direct or equivalent payment.”

What would be an example of this? Let’s say two people go on one of the trips for Give Clean Water to Fiji through Kingdom Builders. One person has been sacrificially giving to Kingdom Builders, while the other has not. There is a different kind of satisfaction that will exist for the person who has been giving to Kingdom Builders. They will see a village in Fiji receive sustainable, clean drinking water for the first time in part because of his or her giving. Being able to participate in the amazing things God is doing through Give Clean Water (reaching people with water and the gospel) leads someone to be able to say: “I was part of that!” This carries a unique gratification—it is a reward in and of itself.

God gives each of us exactly what we need in our time of need. His grace, joy, compassion, forgiveness, and love are perfectly distributed to what our soul needs. When you are tasting the joy of the Lord in your life, you aren’t looking around wondering if someone has more of it than you. Once we experience the completeness of God’s grace in our lives (His love, joy, peace, kindness), we experience wholeness at that moment. This is why David said in Psalm 23:1, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” Paul recognized this truth when he said in 2 Corinthians 12:9a, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

—SUMMARY—

God's grace is amazing, and we are always finding new ways in which it baffles us. In this case, Jesus's parable in Matthew 20:1-16 shows us that we are all equally loved and favored in the family of God.

So we are inspired to see grace is amazing because...

- 1) Grace keeps no score
- 2) Grace holds no blame
- 3) Grace is generous to everyone

—FINAL CHALLENGE QUESTIONS—

1. How are you going to think differently in light of what you have read, heard, and discussed this week?
2. What is one thing you are going to change in your life in light of the sermon?
3. BONUS: For those of you with kids or around kids: What is one truth from this message that you can share with your kids?