

Do You Begrudge My Generosity?

Matthew 20:1-16

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

You know what, I think it is very easy to identify with those who have “borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” If I had worked twelve hours and received the same pay as those who had worked only an hour, I might also be a bit peeved. How is this right? Is the master of the house a socialist? Is Jesus advocating socialism here, an equity of wages for all those who have jobs? Should the burger flipper at McDowell’s make the same as the creator and owner of Widget Industries International, a multi-billion dollar corporation employing several thousand?

Your 10 year old son plays on the local youth 4th grade tournament basketball team. At a Saturday tournament, they do not lose a single game. In fact, not a single game was even close. At the end of the day, the tournament organizers make the announcement that there will be no 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place awards. Every member of every team will receive the same small “participant” trophy, for they want to affirm all the youth, they want to build all the self-esteem of every participant.

So, who would be a little miffed about that situation? Who would complain? Who would tell the coach, “Don’t go back to that tournament next year.”

So we come to this text, Jesus telling a parable about a master of a house who owns a vineyard. We heard Jesus’ parable and it creates a problem in our mind – we do not like what this is saying.

But the problem is with us, not with Jesus, and not with the parable. We start with this simple problem – we think it is talking about money – we think it has to do with wages. This parable addresses three of our gods, three of the loves of our flesh: self, money, and possessions.

To truly understand this parable, we have to understand the context. To understand the context, we need to read what took place earlier in the day which led to this conversation. We need to back up to the 19th chapter of Matthew to understand the situation Jesus is addressing.

And someone came to Jesus [Him] and said, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?”¹⁷ And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is *only* One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”¹⁸ Then he said to Him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS;¹⁹ HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”²⁰ The young man *said to Him, “All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?”²¹ Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”²² But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

Did you see what took place? This young man is very self-righteous. He thinks he is a good Jew, and believes that he has kept the Law. Of course, he sees the keeping of the Torah only as an outward action of **NOT** violating the aforementioned specific rules. However, it quickly becomes evident that He does not trust God above all things, and he does not want to use his money in the interest of helping others.

He does not trust God enough to sell everything and let God take care of him while at the same time helping those who have not. This is a man whose riches mean everything to him.

²³ And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”²⁴ Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”²⁵ When the disciples heard *this*, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can

be saved?"²⁶ And looking at *them* Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Jesus' commentary on the event is that salvation is hard, while he is talking about the rich, He is talking about all those who have a love of riches, who trust in belonging more than they trust in God. So who can be saved? Can even the disciples be saved, they wonder?

Salvation is possible only with God, not with men. There is some more discussion, Peter again asking foolish questions because he thinks that he and the disciples are better – they have left everything to follow Jesus. So, just before Jesus tells the parable in our text, He says, "But many who are first will be last; and the last, first."

Who are the first that shall be last? Many who see themselves as righteous – many who see themselves as true Christians – many who see themselves as better than others in the sight of God, will find themselves last on the last day, if even that.

In Galatians, Paul informs us we are to look after ourselves. By daily contrition and repentance, and then trusting in Christ, we can have our confidence in God's graciousness, and not in ourselves – and we do not look at others.

Dear friends in Christ, this parable is not Jesus trying to teach us about social justice. This parable in fact has nothing to do with real money. It has everything to do with our attitude toward our neighbor, God's attitude toward all those whom He gathers into His kingdom of grace.

Who are the ones who only worked one hour of the day? Who are those who worked the whole twelve hours?

I was baptized here at _____ Lutheran Church, I was confirmed here, I have served on different boards, sung in the choir, taught Sunday School, and countless other things here. You mean to tell me that Alouisious Athelstein gets to go to the same heaven I am going to, and he was only a Christian for six months. He even did jail time for vehicular manslaughter when he killed two people in that one family when he had that accident while drunk.

Instead of looking at who the workers are, how about we start at another place in the parable. First there is the master of the house, God. He promises a denarius to the workers he sends out into His vineyard – He promises eternal life, He promises salvation to those whom He sends out in the vineyard.

The vineyard is whatever station in life we are in. We are to be doing the tasks God gives us in our many and varied vocations. We do these things because they are God's tasks for us as husbands, wives, parents, children, students, employers, employees, citizens, neighbors, and other vocations. We do these things, for they are what we are to do as God's children.

But that denarius is God's gift to us – eternal life is God's gift to us. It is not what we have earned by our life in the world. It is a gift of God. Whether we have been a Christian all our life, or whether we have come to faith in our dying hour, it is by God's grace.

If we begin to think we have earned something by our life, and that somehow we deserve God's gracious gifts to us, we have a problem.

All that we have is a gift of God's incredible grace, and eternal life being the greatest of those gifts. Nothing I could do, could earn the gift of forgiveness and life, but it is a gracious gift to me.

God asks, “Do you begrudge my generosity?” I sent my own Son into the world, and He took on your flesh, your sins, your death. He gives His life to purchase forgiveness for your selfishness, your arrogance, your self-righteousness.

God asks, “Do you begrudge my generosity?” My Son’s suffering and death paid also for your sins and the sins of Alouisious Athelstein.

God asks, “Do you begrudge my generosity?” This absolution you hear removes your sin, and you stand before me holy and righteous.

God asks, “Do you begrudge my generosity?” This holy water cleanses of sin, robes you in the righteousness of my beloved Son, and you are mine.

God asks, “Do you begrudge my generosity?” As you eat of the holy flesh of my Son, and drink deeply of His precious blood shed for you, you are forgiven, made holy and righteous – eternal life is my gift to you.

God says, “My generosity is my gift to you, take what is yours, go and rejoice in it, be glad unto eternal life.”
Amen.