

Read: Matthew 20:1-16

God Doesn't Give as We Deserve

Matthew 20:13-16

“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.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“That’s not fair!” Have you ever said those words? Maybe you were on a team and the referee made a call that you didn’t agree with. Maybe Mom or Dad asked you to help with a task while your brother or sister got to go out and play.

We might think fair means that everyone gets the same. If someone in the family gets ice cream for dessert, you will likely get ice cream as well. If the rules in a game apply to one team, they should apply to both teams. That’s fair.

When we think about fair in that way, it can make Jesus’ story of the workers in the vineyard seem a bit confusing. A landowner hired a number of people to work for him. As he hired each one, he agreed to pay them a denarius (a Roman coin) for a full day’s work. Did you see what happened at the end of the day? Whether someone worked all day, a half-day, or just the last hour or so, they all got paid the same—one denarius. If you were one of the workers hired first that worked the entire day, your first reaction would likely be the same—“That’s not fair!” But is that really true? When the landowner hired the first workers, he agreed to pay them a denarius, and he kept his promise. That’s fair. It was up to the landowner what he would pay each person hired later. He was generous to every person who worked for him, no matter when they started.

Jesus is teaching us something about God’s grace and love for all people. His grace is not decided by how much we’ve done to earn it. To earn his grace, we would need to be perfect! If God was being fair by those standards, we wouldn’t deserve any of his grace, his forgiveness, his love. God gives us his grace and forgiveness as a gift. Why? He does it because he loves us so much. He is an amazingly generous God. He sent Jesus to take all the consequences we deserved. While it doesn’t seem fair that Jesus would take our punishment, it was God’s loving plan for you and for all people.

Rules in a game should be fair. God punishing us for all that we do wrong would be fair. Thank God he treats us according to his grace! God generously loves you and me so dearly that Jesus took care of all of our sins. Live each day knowing we are loved and forgiven by him.

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for Younger Children

- What does it mean to be *fair*?
- It seems fair that if you did something wrong, you should take the consequence. Why would Jesus pay for all your sins and for the sins of the whole world when he never did anything wrong?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- Explain how the owner of the vineyard paid each worker fairly even though they worked different amounts of time.
- How does this explain what God does for each of us?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Today's message is about fairness. If you reflect on all the things you do and know God expects us to be perfect, what would be fair?
- How does knowing that God doesn't treat us in a way that's fair, but rather in a way that's grounded in his love, change how you think about how you treat others?

Closing Prayer:

Merciful Father, thank you for not treating us in a way that we deserve but always treating us with your love and forgiveness. Help us to show that same love and forgiveness to our friends and family. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Hymn: CW 391:1,3 – God Loved the World So that He Gave

God loved the world so that he gave
His only Son the lost to save
That all who would in him believe
Should ever lasting life receive.

God would not have the sinner die—
His Son with saving grace is nigh.
His Spirit in the Word does teach
How we the blessed goal may reach.