

GRACE DEMONSTRATED

[Matthew 20:1-16](#)

This is quite an exceptional story; in terms of logic and fairness it is unsurpassed. It begins with a householder, or employer hiring workers to work in his vineyard taking them on a daily basis. He commences early in the morning, finds those who want work and agrees a daily wage. Three hours later he decides to hire more and again at the sixth and ninth hours by agreement he takes on more.

We are surprised to find that he decides to employ some at the eleventh hour who have been unable to find employment. "*You go also into the vineyard*" he commands. For those who started in the morning it would be a long tiring day in contrast to those who worked for only one hour.

Now the time has arrived for the payment of the wages. In my mind's eye I see them standing in line. He instructs the foreman to pay out the money beginning with those whom he had employed for the last hour. He pays them one denariis (translated a penny). Those who worked for the whole day, when they saw this expected to be paid more. But they too received just a penny. Naturally they were very upset and complained; "*These last have spent but one hour, and you have made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat*". In today's language they were protesting that it wasn't fair!

However the employer replied to the protesting spokesman "*Friend I do you no wrong, did you not agree with me for a penny? Take that which is yours and go your way; it is my will to give unto this last what I have given to you! Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own money?*" We have to accept on the basis of the contract that was made with each of the workers that they had no grounds for complaint, despite the apparent unfairness.

But look at it from the employers standpoint, What employer, in his right mind would pay the same for one hours work as for twelve? It makes no economic sense. What then is the point Jesus was making when he said this was 'like kingdom of Heaven'?

This is a marvellous illustration of GRACE! Grace is not based on economics! Simply put, grace is giving what is not deserved. Grace cannot be calculated like a days wages. The Scriptures tell us; *"That by grace we are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the GIFT OF GOD"* - Ephesians 2:8.

The last little phrase of the employer to the workers in verse 15 is important; to paraphrase it he said *"Are you envious because I am generous?"*. We like to think of ourselves as responsible workers and feel for the complaint of those who had toiled all day. But if we do, we miss the point; God dispenses gifts NOT wages! In the kingdom of God, none of us gets paid according to merit, for none of us comes close to God's requirement of righteousness. If paid on the basis of fairness we would all end up in hell!

It was C.S. Lewis who remarked 'to be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in us'. We live in a society which expects people to get what they deserve. But the Gospel of grace says, 'you have by faith got what you don't deserve'. The Apostle Paul called himself, 'the chief of sinners'. See him on his way to Damascus, *"breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, with letters in his pocket from the high priest, ...that if found any of the Way that he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem"* - Acts 9:1-2. Previously he had stood with the clothes of the murders of Stephen at his feet, as guilty as they were. He now lies blinded and prostrate on the road. Struck down by the very One he was persecuting. What do you think he deserved? Fairness cries out; "Punish him!" Grace responds, *".....he is a chosen vessel unto Me!"* - Acts 9:16. Until his dying day he never recovered from or fully understood the impact of grace! Over and over again in his letters he pours out his heart felt thoughts as he tries to get to grips with what John Newton called 'AMAZING GRACE'. Let us listen to him. *"For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: for peradventure for the good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his own love towards us that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God, much more we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also rejoice in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation"*

- Romans 5:7-11. And again *"This is a faithful saying, worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief (foremost) - 1 Timothy 1:15.* The reason, I believe, the Apostle never got over the truth of God's grace is because in the above statement he continues to use the present tense! "I AM chief".

In concluding we take up the words of Julia H. Johnston:

*Marvellous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,
There's where the blood of the Lamb was
spilt.*

*Marvellous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe,
You, who are longing to see His face,
Will you this moment His grace receive.*

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