

our relationship with one another and our Lord. In the parable, the landowner reminded the workers that their agreement of one denarius for a day's work was met. What the landowner paid the others had nothing to do with their agreement. When we compare ourselves to others around us, envy creeps into our lives and rips away our focus from the goodness of God and places it squarely on our own greed. "What did she do to deserve her good looks?" "What did he do to deserve that promotion?" "What did they do to deserve a house like that?" "Why can't I have what he has?" Envy slips into our lives and begins to take control of our thoughts and attitudes. Our envious thoughts and attitudes are then conveyed through our actions toward one another, putting barriers that cause separation and brokenness in relationships. Ultimately, the barriers get in the way of our relationship with God. We desire the things we do not have and miss out on the blessings that are already being bestowed upon us.

The counselors of Florence asked Leonardo da Vinci, then Italy's most celebrated artist, to submit sketches for the decorations of the grand hall at Florence. Meanwhile, one of the counselors had heard of a young and little-known artist who had done good work, Michelangelo, and asked him to submit sketches also.

The sketches of Leonardo were superb, in keeping with his genius, but when the counselors saw the sketches of Michelangelo there was

a spontaneous expression of wonder and enthusiasm. News of this reached Leonardo. Due to his envy and jealousy of the new star artist, he was never able to get over the eclipse of his fame by Michelangelo. He spent the remaining years of his life with gloom and sorrow.<sup>4</sup> You can bet that envy and jealousy will ultimately destroy our lives and our relationship with the Lord.

So the question isn't fair or foul? It doesn't matter who has more or who has less. We shouldn't judge life on fairness concerning God's blessings for people who acknowledge him. God's economics and sense of fairness doesn't compute in our human minds. God's willingness to give his only Son to make a way for us to the Kingdom of Heaven wasn't based on fairness. Our path to the Kingdom of Heaven was created by Christ's faithfulness to hang on the cross and suffer the consequences of our sins. Our only response should be faithfulness in following Christ and living the life God has called each of us to live, a life worthy of the cross. ✠

<sup>1</sup>Weber, S. K. (2000). *Vol. 1: Matthew*. Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (318). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>2</sup>Weber, S. K. (2000). *Vol. 1: Matthew*. Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (319). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>3</sup>Weber, S. K. (2000). *Vol. 1: Matthew*. Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (319-320). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>4</sup>Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations: A treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers*. Garland TX: Bible Communications. -



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# The Trinity Pulpit

## Summer Short Stories

### Fair or Foul?

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Put yourself in their shoes! Work is scarce so you get up early to get in line with the hopes of getting picked up as a day laborer. You wake up at 5am, pour yourself a large cup of coffee and drag yourself down to the parking lot where some construction companies come by to pick up a few extra hands for the day. Since you were one of the first to arrive you are picked up by a company and promised \$70 for a day's work. You are shown your task for the day and you begin work at the early hour of 6am.

By 9am, you notice a few more workers arrive because there was so much to be done on the job site. They join your group and together, you toil under the hot sun. By noon, while you are taking a lunch break, you notice a few more laborers show up on the job site. They jump in and work alongside those that came in the second wave of workers. By 3pm, you are tired and worn out. You've been working for nine hours already and the sun was getting the best of you. However, you know you have to finish out the day to receive

the promised wage so you keep pushing yourself. Your shirt is soaked with sweat and filthy from working on the work site all day long. By that time, you see the truck roll through the work site and you notice a few more workers jump out and lend a helping hand. You are thankful for the extra hands and the injection of energy from the new workers, but you find it somewhat curious.

The day is just about over now. By 5pm, you're spent and your body is telling you that you can't go on. However, you know the deal you made at the beginning of the day so you push yourself to the limit. At that moment, you notice something strange. The same truck that brought you to the work site at 6am comes by once again and let's off a few more workers. There's only one more hour of work before quitting time and here comes new workers. You find it strange, but you don't ask questions. You just want to get through the next hour!

At 6pm the foreman comes and tells everyone to stop working and get in line in reverse order of the number of hours worked. Those that came at 5pm received their payment of \$70. They were obviously elated since they

just earned \$70 for just one hour of work. The group that came at 3pm was next in line and they also received \$70. All of those workers also seemed to be happy with their compensation for only 3 hours of work. By that time, you were starting to think to yourself that things are looking good and that your hard day's work may pay more than you expected. You start to figure in your head which bill you were going to pay off with the extra money.

The group that came at noon also received \$70 for their work. They didn't seem to be as happy as the previous workers but they were still satisfied since they worked only a half day. The next group that arrived at 9am also received \$70 from the foreman. They grumbled underneath their breath about how it was unfair that they were only paid \$70, while those that worked fewer hours were paid the same amount. By this time, you were starting to get worked up and hoping that it would be different for your group. Surely your group would be paid more since you were first. You deserved more! You step up to the front of the line and the foreman, matter of factly, hands out \$70 to each worker. When the foreman hands you the \$70, your blood begins to boil and you just can't hold it in. "This isn't fair! How come those that only worked one hour got paid the same amount as I did for working 12 hours? How is that fair?"

Wouldn't you say the same thing? I would. I would be irate! I would demand justice! It isn't fair!

Most of us already know that life isn't fair. Some people seem to get all the breaks while oth-

ers suffer through difficult times all too often. If you analyze it, it just doesn't seem fair, does it?

This parable is the last of three parables Jesus used to answer questions about the Kingdom of Heaven. In chapter 19, we find the questions, "Is it lawful?" and "What must I do?" concerning the Kingdom of Heaven. The Pharisees and the Rich Young Ruler wanted answers that focused on their ability to earn their right to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. However, Jesus clearly pointed out that the Kingdom of Heaven was not based on the merit system. If it was, the Kingdom of Heaven would be a lonely place. God's version of math is based on love that is covered by grace. The parable of the workers in the vineyard isn't based on what we earn by our righteous acts; rather it is based on God's undeniable goodness. In the parable, Jesus was teaching something about the kingdom of heaven—the way things work under the rule of the Messiah-King. The last shall be first and first shall be last. It isn't the way the world functions and it throws our world upside down.

In the parable, Christ introduced the main characters: the landowner (representing God) and the hired laborers (representing believers). The landowner needed people to plant, tend, and harvest his crops.<sup>1</sup> However, the workers fell victim to the problem of expectations that were higher than reality. They, like so many of us today, had developed a sense of **comparison** and **entitlement**. So they grumbled to the landowner. The full-day workers perhaps looked down on the one-hour workers because they had been passed over as unworthy in the early hiring.<sup>2</sup>

The writer of a commentary put it this way. "*Jesus revealed here the way we as humans think*

*about what is fair and just. When we see rewards handed out in heaven, we are sure to be in for some surprises. Some of the people and ministries that we have deemed insignificant will be celebrated, while many of the more prominent people and their ministries will receive little recognition. It is not Jesus' purpose here to explain the criteria he uses for such decisions, but only to warn us against false assumptions and expectations.*

*Jesus made the point that heaven's rewards are based upon: God's standards and our faithfulness to our calling in both attitude and action. There will be no negotiating or technicalities to consider.*

*Christians must avoid using other people as a yardstick for comparison. Only Christ himself is an accurate yardstick, and we all fall short of his "stature." This underscores our need for God's grace toward all. We must hold our human thinking in check.*"<sup>3</sup>

Life is too short to spend time comparing ourselves to those around us. But our nature is to compare and measure ourselves against others rather than the example of Christ. We desire equity. Matter of fact, we desire more than we deserve. The parable was Jesus' way of teaching his disciples that it wasn't about them, it was about God. Therefore, here are a couple of truths we need to keep in mind that the parable teaches us.

First, God is full of grace and desires to lavishly pour out his goodness to all people. Now, let's be careful here! This isn't a state-

ment to support the false teachings of prosperity gospel. Just because we love Jesus doesn't mean that we will prosper financially. The more you love Jesus doesn't mean that God will bless you more with material things. Actually, today's parable rejects the very notion of the prosperity gospel. God loves all people so much, he desires to pour out his blessings of joy and peace to all who believe, more than anyone deserves. The Kingdom of Heaven is open to all who profess their belief in the death and resurrection of Christ. Whether you are rich or poor, own a house or homeless, wear Armani suits or raggedy jeans, been a Christian for 50 years or just five hours, the Kingdom of heaven is open for all who will confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that God raised him from the dead. In Romans 10:13, we stand on the promise that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Look back at what Paul said to the church in Ephesus. (Ephesians 1:3-14) It says that Jesus blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing. Jesus chose us to be holy and blameless in his sight, even when we were full of guilt and shame. Jesus desired for us to be a part of his family, not because of anything we had done but because of everything he had done. Jesus lavished on us all wisdom and understanding in order for us to understand just an inkling of the depth of his love for humanity. Jesus, the Giver of all good gifts, desires to lavishly pour out His love to us. It isn't about us. It's about JESUS!

Second, envy and jealousy will eat away at