

### Let's Be Real: God Isn't Fair

Picture this: You're back in a time when fans could watch sports in person and you're at your favorite pro sports team's stadium. You scream in excitement as they take the field or the court and warm up. You can't wait to boo their opponents and you're ready for your team to show no mercy. And then, you watch as a bunch of 8<sup>th</sup> graders run out and start warming up opposite to them. Everyone starts looking around and thinking the same thing: there must be a mistake. But it isn't. These 8<sup>th</sup> graders are going up against the pros. And after the first play, it becomes clear that your team won't be showing any mercy. It's the opposite of fun. What do you do? You walk out in disgust because someone somewhere should have stopped this unfair thing from happening.

Do you have a hard time picturing that as reality? Me too. Something that unfair would not be allowed to happen. Just imagining it grinds your gears. Deep inside all of us is the desire for life to be fair. Anything else, just feels wrong.

But then we hear Jesus' parable about these workers and we have to come face to face with reality. **Let's be real: God isn't fair.** Fair is not how things work in God's kingdom. Jesus told this parable because he needed to reset our normal way of thinking about fair.

He makes it easy for us to picture. A guy who owned a vineyard went out early one morning to hire people to work in his vineyard. Maybe it was harvest time. Maybe he needed people to stomp on the grapes or collect the juice for wine. Maybe they were expanding and making it bigger. Whatever it was, he needed workers.

When he found some He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. A denarius was a little coin that was worth about an average day's work. Something like \$100 today. And these first workers decided that was enough to get to work.

But the owner didn't stop with them. About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. "He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. As the hours of waiting went by, these workers knew they wouldn't get paid as much as the people who started before them. But they needed work so they went.

And then the owner does something weird. He goes out at 5pm. He finds more workers who haven't done anything and he hires them. With an hour left in the workday they head to the vineyard for a quick hour of work.

You could group all the workers by how long they worked. 12 hours, 9 hours, 6 hours, 3 hours, and 1 hour. And at six all of these groups finished their work and were ready to get paid. The owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' Even though it felt backwards, the 1 hour workers went up first and their eyes got big. They looked at each other in confusion, then with huge smiles they left. The other workers saw why, the owner had paid them a denarius for one hour of work.

You could see the excitement in the face of the workers who had done so much more. They knew they'd get more. But the 3 hour workers stepped up, and they only got a denarius. The 6 hour workers and the 9 hour workers stepped up, and only got a denarius. And the 12 hour workers, who had started right at sunrise, stepped up and got what the 1 hour workers got, only a denarius. It wasn't fair.

This parable makes you a little upset, doesn't it? This kind of unfairness offends us! We don't like it! Jesus, maybe try another way to talk about God's kingdom because this isn't right. Clearly the 12 hour workers deserved so much more than the 1 hour workers. Something's wrong if they get the same.

You know who'd agree with us? Jonah. Yeah, that Jonah, the one who got swallowed by a big fish and puked back up a few days later. How did Jonah end up there? He ran away from God's call to help the huge city of Nineveh but in the belly of a huge fish, God guided him back. Jonah went and the people turned away from sin to the LORD. And God didn't destroy the city.

And that made Jonah mad. Jonah wanted fair. He was so mad that God hadn't killed those sinners that he wanted to die. We remember Jonah for the fish but it might much closer to reality to remember him as someone who needed to learn that **God isn't fair.**

We can be like Jonah too. We can demand fairness and be outraged when we don't see it. Have you ever complained to God because someone who's living in open sin, seems to be blessed more than you? Are you frustrated when God gives money, or health, or happiness to unbelievers? Let's get more personal. Think about another believer who sins against you. A husband, wife, child, parent, friend, coworker... Even though they sin against you, God forgives them. They get to be part of his kingdom even after they've hurt you.

Deep down, we feel like we deserve better things than other sinners. Jealousy is a sad reality in our lives. For the most part, we keep it hidden, but sometimes it comes up. Way back when many Lutheran churches were switching from speaking German to English, do you know what older Germans complained about? That the English speakers would get to use their church buildings. They were actually mad that English speakers would get the blessing of a place to hear God's Word. They hadn't paid for any of

it or kept things going. Some would have been happy if those blessings had died with them.

Let's be real, sometimes it feels like God is spoiling people who don't deserve it. There's a part of all of us that is offended at this reality that **God isn't fair**. And that's where the devil wants your focus to be. The devil works to keep you looking at others so that you never have to be real with yourself about your own sins.

Jesus points our focus to the owner, to God. When the 12 hour workers went up to get paid, they each received a denarius. And they grumbled. It wasn't fair even if it was what they had agreed to work for. But here's what he said, Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous? The owner wasn't fair, he was generous. The owner wanted to give to those who didn't deserve it.

Let's be real: **God isn't fair** but God's grace doesn't spoil the kingdom. God is good and his grace makes his kingdom perfect.

God's grace is what you need. On your own you could never do enough to deserve to be part of God's kingdom. What you need is perfection outside yourself. And that's what God gives in Jesus. In grace, God gives you Jesus' perfection. Your jealousy and sins are wiped away. You are freely forgiven because **God isn't fair**.

But it isn't just yours, it's everyone's. In grace, God offers forgiveness to all people. Because no one could do enough, Jesus alone gives what all people need.

And God's grace is what makes your part in his kingdom solid and certain. Because it doesn't depend on you but instead on Jesus, it's a done deal. Your sins are gone. You are part of God's perfect kingdom. The one who

tells a story to help you see that **God isn't fair** made sure that God won't deal with you fairly but in grace and love.

Being a part of God's kingdom of grace changes your attitude too. It turns you from jealousy to looking for ways to pay it forward. Have you ever done that before? It's paying for the person who comes after you or giving freely without expecting anything back. Check out the board at Knoke's of how many people paid for ice-cream for someone else. Think back to when restaurants were feeding front line workers for free. That's the others first attitude that God's grace brings out.

**God isn't fair** and it leads you to rejoice in God's goodness to you and others. Rejoice by thanking those who have supported you in his kingdom. Think of the family, friends, pastors, and teachers that kept you in God's grace. Look for people you don't know, who are new around here and support them in that same way. And keep taking advantage of opportunities to let more know God wants them in his kingdom of grace too.

Let's be real. Make it a part of your everyday life because you and everyone needs to hear it. **God isn't fair** and that's a good thing. Amen.