

MATTHEW 20:1-16
IS YOUR EYE EVIL BECAUSE I AM GOOD?

In the name + of Jesus.

“Is your eye evil because I am good?” (Matthew 20:15) This is the literal translation of the question the landowner asks one of the servants who was hired. It is a damning question. And it is a question we must apply to ourselves, because God’s grace makes us angry. In fact, we often do not want God to be gracious, because we think that we have earned better from him.

Well, we have not even gone one paragraph into this sermon, and we are already raising objections in our hearts and minds. *“Pastor, what do you mean that God’s grace makes me angry? That is not true. I rejoice that God is gracious to me.”* And that is probably true. You rejoice that God has been gracious *to you*. But, like the servant in the parable, we do not rejoice that God is gracious to others. Like the servant in the parable, we find it unfair that God would give the same reward to those who work less, who suffer little, or who sin more.

We protest, *“Wait a minute, Lord; they did not go through what I’ve gone through. They went about drinking and carousing late into the night while I went to bed early and got up for church. They told lies and spread gossip. They cheated their clients and their employers. They stoked their lusts on seedy websites. They were vulgar and obscene. And they are forgiven, just like that?! Now they get a free pass?! Shouldn’t there be strings attached? Shouldn’t there be a period of probation, just to see if they are serious?”*

“Is your eye evil because I am good?” (Matthew 20:15) asks the Lord. God’s grace makes us angry. We are like the Pharisees who believe that salvation is for the good people who behave themselves. Some people should receive less because we have been here longer. We’ve done more. We’ve been better. Yes, these are all claims of a Pharisee. These are the words of one who puts himself first, puts other last, and sneers at them. Repent!

“Is your eye evil because I am good?” (Matthew 20:15) asks the master. We must answer, *“Yes. My eye is evil. I do look down on others, because I think so much of myself. I credit myself for my time of service. I expect honor for my good deeds. I want a reward for my sufferings and my perseverance.”* **This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on the earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23,24)** Dear Christian, do not boast of your deeds; for you have nothing that wasn’t given to you by God. Repent! And do not grumble about God’s goodness to others; it is that same goodness that saves you.

St. Paul says it this way: **It is by grace that you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:5)** Now, if it is truly grace, then there is nothing that you can say. For, grace is a gift. Grace is God giving you something that you did not earn or deserve. What we have earned and deserved from God is punishment. But what does God do? **He is like a landowner who**

went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. (Matthew 20:1)

And he is not content with that. He goes out again at the 3rd hour, and the 6th hour, and the 9th hour, and the 11th hour. He is not willing to leave any out. So he continually goes. He is always seeking people for his vineyard, which is his Church.

Do not let your eye be evil because God is good. And how good God is! He sent his Son to redeem all mankind. The Son came into this world to pay for the sins of all. He did not take inventory of the world's population to see who was worthy and who was not. That was simple. All are unworthy. **There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:22,23)** You are no different. Even if you boast that you are not as bad as the pedophile or the drug dealer, you are unworthy because you insist you are better. You are first; they are last. Repent; for, **“There is no difference!” (Romans 3:22)**

Jesus took up the sins of all – the sins of those who boast of their many sins and the sins of those who boast that they don't have many sins. Jesus died for the sins of all – for those who are convinced they have no chance to enter God's kingdom and for those who are convinced that God's kingdom could not exist without them. Chances are, you have swung to both ends of the spectrum – overwhelmed by your guilt or overconfident in your goodness. In each case, you have made your salvation all about you – as if you have been so bad that you cannot be forgiven, or as if you have been so good that you really don't need much help. But it is not about you. You cannot do it. You cannot even help. It is by grace you are saved. It is all Jesus' work. His obedience is your righteousness. His death is the payment for your sins. His resurrection is your deliverance from death and hell. His word is your answer at the final judgment. That alone is your hope. That is your denarius; and that saves you completely.

Do not let your eye be evil, because God is good. Do not boast of your strength, your wisdom, or your riches. Those can't save you. Your strength will wilt. Your wisdom cannot outsmart the grave. Your riches are worthless. **“Let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on the earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:24)**

Your confidence, your confession, and your comfort are in Jesus Christ. That is where God shines his grace upon you. It was given you to in your baptism, the mark of salvation which you received on your head. It is given to you through God's Word, which you receive in your ears. It is given to you in the Holy Supper, which you receive in your mouth. It is given through Holy Absolution which you take to heart. So it goes: God gives because he is so good and generous; we receive the denarius, we rejoice in his salvation, and we give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

So, if God summoned you to labor in his vineyard at the first hour of your life, God has not been unfair to you. It means you have been under God's grace your whole life long. It means that the master marked you from your earliest moments as his beloved. How can there be any grumbling about what God gives to you? And how can there be any grumbling about what God gives to others, even if it is given at the last hour? That just shows how good God continues to be. You have not been short-changed if God has been good to you longer. Do not let your eye be evil. God has the right to do what he wants with his goodness – including condemning every last one of us. It is what we deserve. Instead, God has chosen to be gracious, sending Jesus to labor for the

forgiveness of your sins and purchase your place in his kingdom. It is by grace that you have been saved; for Jesus has done the work, and Jesus gives the gifts.

The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out ... to hire men to work in his vineyard. (Matthew 20:1) Whether the Lord brought you into his Church at your first hour or in your last moments is irrelevant. You are in the Church because of the Father's love and grace. The wage you receive was earned by Jesus Christ. The blessings of the kingdom are given you by the Holy Spirit. And while you labor, producing godly works and feeling the heat of worldly scorn, rejoice that your master holds your reward in his hand. He gives it, not because you labor, but because he has graciously called you, and because he is generous.

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