

Matthew 20: 1 - 16 // A Kingdom of Grace

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Preacher: Earl Buchan

[0:00] Today we're going to be in Matthew chapter 20 verses 1 to 16. Go and open your Bibles or tap and swipe your way there.!

If you have questions, come and talk to me. I'd love to talk with you about it. And the other thing is just this. You might have noticed if you were here last week, I was in Matthew 18 and now I'm jumping to Matthew 20.

I didn't actually skip Matthew 19. It's just that in Matthew 19, there's some very specific conversation and language about divorce. And there are going to be some things that I want to relate to in a podcast.

And so that's what I've done. And I spent a little over an hour talking about it from a historical point of view, the streams of thought that were happening back when Jesus was confronted with this question and the grace that we need to apply in all situations.

I hope if you listen to it, you're going to hear that I'm approaching it from a gracious and merciful point of view, because that's exactly what the word does from cover to cover. Not just in one place or two places, but if you read the whole Bible, you're going to see God's heart for protection and love and mercy and grace that we could not possibly deserve.

[1:31] And so I wanted to take some more time. There are going to be some issues like that that I want to just let marinate for a while. And I know I have a very gracious church here. I don't feel like I couldn't take the time that was needed.

But there are some things like history and such that I want to just kind of dive into a little bit more. So please feel free to listen or not. But I do talk a lot about marriage. And even if you're thinking about getting married, it's all in there too.

So I'll leave that just hanging in the air. But anyway, Matthew 20, verses 1 to 16. I think appropriately that this parable, this passage we dive in today is all about grace.

And what a perfect thing to follow up such a talk, such a teaching that Jesus gives on divorce. And also the parable of the rich young ruler. And if you don't remember that one, this guy had followed the law.

And I'm paraphrasing it, so please don't take this as the gospel. This is just me paraphrasing the gospel. This guy comes up to Jesus. He had followed the law. He had done everything right. And he had amassed quite a wealth.

[2:35] And he comes to Jesus like, Lord, what do I have to do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus looks at him and says, sell all that you have and come and follow me. And the little guy, sorry, not the little guy, I should say that.

The young ruler goes away in grief because he had amassed such great wealth that caused him pain to think about losing it all. And he left. And it's interesting that we move from those two topics into this one because now we're about to talk where it doesn't matter what you have, what you think you've earned, that we are all equal before the cross.

We are all equal before the cross. It doesn't matter what we have or what we think we don't have. What we've lost, what we found, we are equal before Jesus. So I want to dive in here because God's kingdom is not like the earth.

It isn't like the world. The world does things just a little bit differently. And at the time people were seeing in Jesus, and this is just before we get to the triumphal entry, they were thinking this is going to be our Davidic king, a king like David that's going to come in and save us from this oppression that the Roman army has given us.

These occupiers. This guy is going to come in and sweep them all away. He's going to bring us to a place where we can be exalted again among the nations. He'll bring us to a place where we have

revenge for all of the bad that's been done to us.

[3:59] Yes, this is our king. And there was excitement and you could feel it in the crowd. The thing is, Jesus would look at this and say, I'm not that guy. That is not the king or the kingdom that he brought.

Not yet. And not in that way. And people had a false expectation of who Jesus was. And he wanted to set things right. And I think this parable, he starts to get into it.

Because of course, the kingdom of God is far more complex than what this parable says. But it does show something very, very important. Let's dive in. I'm going to read verses 1 to 16.

And I'm just going to go through it from there. For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house. Who went out early in the morning to hire laborers in his vineyard. And after agreeing with the laborers for a denarius, a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

And going out about the third hour, he saw others idle in the marketplace. And to them he said, you go into the vineyard too. And whatever is right, I will give you. So they went.

[5:02] And going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour, he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, why do you stand here idle all day?

They said to him, because no one has hired us. And he said to them, you go into the vineyard too. And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last up to the first.

And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now, when those hired the first came, they thought they were going to receive more. But each of them also received a denarius.

And on receiving it, they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, these last work only one hour. And you have made them equal to us. Just imagine this for a moment.

Okay, just imagine this. The guy has work to be done. And he goes out and he finds people and he says, I need help. I'm going to pay you. Now, denarius was a fairly reasonable wage for a day's worth of work.

[6:33] It was not unreasonable at all. And so these guys come and they start working. And he goes out again and again and again at different times of the day. And then right up to the very last, he says, come on, guys, don't stand around.

I'll give you work and I'll pay you what's fair. And then all of a sudden he starts handing out. The foreman starts giving out the money. And the first ones in the lineup were the ones who had only been there an hour of that entire day.

And they get a denarius. I mean, that was probably the best work day labor they had ever had in their life. To get a denarius for an hour's work, that was huge. And I can't help but think because of human nature, maybe they weren't just kind of walking by going, ha, ha, ha, to the rest of the lineup. Look what I got. This is amazing. And the 12-hour guys, the guys who were hired in the 11th hour, they might have been thinking like, this guy's generous. We're going to make some bank. You know, we're going to be rich.

I can't wait to see what we get. And then the workers go through. They filter through. They filter through. And suddenly the guys are there from all day long working in the hot, sweaty labor environment.

[7:41] And they go up and they get a denarius. How would you feel? You get the same amount for working all day in the heat and in the sun as some guy who just showed up an hour ago.

See, this is how, I don't want to say upside down. This is how right side up the kingdom of God is. We don't get what we deserve. It is his good pleasure to give what he desires to give.

And once we start wrapping our mind around that, then all of a sudden competition, comparison, all of this stuff just starts to die away. And that is one of the beauties of this parable.

Everyone would have seen this from the back of the line. They would have been upset. They were upset. They challenged. But God can completely give apart from what people earn or deserve. And you know what? You and I should be really glad about that. We have to ask ourselves, what happened if God gave us what we deserve? I was saying in the discipleship class, I wouldn't be alive.

[8:47] I know that. I don't know about you, but I know that for sure right now if God gave me what I deserved. The fact that I'm here means that grace lives. And grace is real.

And it does not operate the way the world operates. This one hour guy, he did not earn a full day's wage. He didn't deserve it at all. But the landowner gave out of his generosity, not about what the worker worked.

The only thing I bring to my salvation is my sin. God brings grace and righteousness. We can't earn that. It is given freely to us.

It's for us to receive. Because of this principle, we are saved in Jesus. Romans 3.23 says, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Now, I've joked about it before, but it's worth saying again. I love studying ancient languages. It's a bit of a project for me. And the word all means all.

[9:51] I can't explain it anywhere around that. I can't make it seem something different. I can't fabricate it. All means all. So for all to have sinned, it means all y'all.

Right? All of us. We've all sinned and we fall short of the glory of God. That means all of us are equal before the cross. Whether we met Jesus yesterday or we've been here for 50 some odd years.

Do you see the kingdom of grace at work there? Imagine what heaven will be like. I mean, one of my favorite stories of this is there was a guy before.

Before I, I wasn't always a Christian. I came to Jesus in my teenage years, thankfully, to something wonderful like the summit like we have, which is incredible. And I met Jesus.

I had a friend prior to that. And his name is John Cargo. I'm going to call him out because he's a good guy. And the funny thing is, is that he used to, his nickname was Boots First. Because whenever we went to a concert or anything, he was one of the guys that was running up the stage and jumping Boots First into the crowd.

[10:55] Okay? That was John. Boots First. He was brutal. Okay? We graduated, passed on. I had become a Christian at that point. So our paths naturally diverged a little.

And it was hard for him to relate to me. So we parted ways. It was a little sad. I liked him. And years later, I got invited to go to a prevailing church conference.

I was called. And the leaders of our church, we all went. And I wasn't a pastor at all. And I'm standing at the book table. And I'm looking around at all these books and stuff. And I just kind of looked up the guy opposite.

It's John Cargo. You know, my first reaction is, what are you doing here? That was the first question I had for him. We crossed the table, gave each other a big hug. He told me how he found Jesus. He was studying to be a pastor.

I'm like, me too. Right? And then it was like, what happened to us? You know, how did this happen? And I can't help but think, like, this is what heaven's going to be like. I mean, maybe we're going to say, like, why are you here?

[11:54] And maybe somebody's going to be looking at us and saying, why are you here? But either way, there's going to be such joy, some happiness. We're not going to worry about the steps that it took, how long it took us to get there.

Suddenly, we're there together with Jesus. That's how it can be like in church. That's the kingdom of grace. And the world does not understand that. We had to earn our salvation.

We're doomed. I hope that doesn't burst anybody's bubble. If we have to earn it, we're doomed. We can't work enough to pay for these little emblems.

It just doesn't work like that. It's an eternal price. And you and I are finite people. We live, we die. We can't pay it in our lifetime. And it could only be done by the Lord.

His blessing is given on the basis of grace. His salvation is given on the basis of grace. We don't earn it, and we don't deserve it.

[12:57] So imagine a couple of people. I have given this picture before. So if this sounds familiar, it's because I gave this before. Sorry, not sorry.

I had an auntie K. Not our lovely K. There's another K that was equally as lovely. Before I became a Christian, she was praying for me every day.

That's because I knew her grandson. I knew her family, okay, from high school, and they were praying for me. And so when I became a Christian, she told me this. And my question is, why?

Why? But it was her faithfulness towards me that I'll never forget. This woman went on missions, sent her kids to go on missions. She was a pillar of the church.

She brought stuff every day to bless people. She lived her life. She breathed in and out Jesus. She lived her life for him. All I ever knew was the blessing of auntie K all around the place.

[13:57] Every kid you talked to knew of this woman. She would have us over, feed us.

Sometimes we'd just show up, and she would feed us. I mean, now that I have been a parent and now a grandparent, I'm kind of seeing how annoying that can be, that kids just show up and you're at door.

But, like, it was a blessing. It was a blessing to us. I learned from that. And so when I heard that she had passed, I thought, man, heaven's brighter.

It just, I didn't feel sorrow. I just thought, wow, I can't wait to see her again. And then years go by. I'd become a pastor. I was pastoring a church in a big city.

And I did a lot of work in the downtown east side of Vancouver, which is the poorest zip code of Canada. And the Lord put it on my heart to befriend this guy named Phil.

Now, Phil was a shopping cart guy. And if you don't know what I'm talking about, he lived out of his shopping cart. Everything he owned was in his shopping cart. I'm not sure if Phil ever took off his clothes.

[14:58] They seemed kind of fused to him. And the thing is, is Phil was a hugger. And I'm not too sure why. And a lot of people stayed away from him because you just, you smelled Phil coming about a block away.

And thankfully, I have a bad sense of smell. So there was a good connection there. And I would hug him every time I saw him. And he was the kind of guy where just like his teeth were just hanging on my threads.

But Phil loved to read. And I thought, okay. So I would go across. There was this little bookstore called Titan Books, which was right across the street, a used bookstore from where I was working. And I would get Phil a sci-fi book or something like that.

And I would test him. I was like, you know, so have you read this? And he'd go, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. And then we would talk about it. And he had. And then I actually had a moment where I was able to lead Phil to Jesus.

And it was pretty sweet. Because I thought, okay, Lord, you told me to befriend this guy. And I'm obeying you. I don't get it. This guy will probably never show up at our church.

[15:59] But there was something about him that I thought, okay, I need to pour into this guy's life. And I hadn't seen Phil for a little bit shortly after that. And, you know, when you're working in those environments, you get to know the police really well.

I have a deep respect for police officers. And this one woman comes up to me and says, hey, have you heard what happened to Phil? I'm like, no. Phil was killed. Like in the sense his life was taken. And that was one of the last days that I worked down there. You know, when your heart breaks over losing someone like that, you're changed.

I remember I went back to the work and the building was six floors up. I rode that elevator up and down. I don't know how many times. Just because I needed something to kind of reset. And you know what the Lord showed me?

It's that Auntie Kay and Phil are side by side. Now, I'm not saying that literally. I can't see into heaven like that. But that sense that it doesn't matter that Phil only was with Jesus on this earth maybe two or three weeks.

[17:06] Okay. And Auntie Kay followed Jesus most of her life faithfully. That's the kingdom of grace. Both are in heaven.

Both are equal at the foot of the cross. Though Phil's story was a dark one, sad, lonely one. And Kay's was filled with much love, much warmth and peace in Jesus.

Because they're both equal at the foot of the cross. And it changed me to think this. So when I read this parable, I have to think about them. Those two people. Because you could not get two more different individuals as those two.

They go to the same heaven. And God's given exactly what he promised to give. Out of the riches of his grace. Because if God dealt with us out of strict fairness, we'd be in trouble.

God is free to give according to his grace apart from the principles of earning and deserving. That's all under the system of works.

[18:10] It's a system of law. Praise God. We do not live under that. But not everyone is happy with this kingdom of grace.

That's the challenge for us right here. Not everybody is happy. Because the other guy in the story, he wasn't happy about God. He didn't understand.

He was thinking, but I earned that. I worked harder. I worked longer. I was here longer. I'm upset about this. This doesn't seem fair. But I think there's two reasons why people are unhappy with God's kingdom of grace.

And one of them is pride. It gets in our way. It really does. Some people cannot receive the kingdom of grace because of pride. Because grace offends pride.

It doesn't make sense that Phil and Andy K should be in the same place. That doesn't make sense. And if you knew Phil, you'd probably, well, you might even agree with me to some degree.

[19 : 10] But praise God, it's a kingdom of grace. Grace says you cannot earn it. You don't deserve it. It's freely given. The challenge is it's for you and me to receive it. Grace gives no credit to you and me whatsoever.

It's not what we've done. It's not what's on our resume. It's not what we bring to the table. It is wholly based upon God's goodness and his grace and his mercy to share what he chooses to share, which is himself.

If we get stuck in a pattern where we don't want to do something unless we get credit for it, we're going to have a hard time getting along with God's kingdom of grace when someone else gets what we think they don't deserve.

That is where pride gets offended. We should be able to celebrate the victories of others. Praise the Lord that we have such a forgiving and loving God that Andy K and Phil are able to dance together. What a world is that? I cannot wait. We need to set pride aside and come to the Lord as a humble sinner because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

[20 : 21] Grace treats us equally. Some are not happy unless they get exalted above other people, unless they're given special honors. But that's not how it works in God's kingdom of grace.

Because we're all on level ground in front of the cross, each one of us. It doesn't matter where we come from, what we've learned, what we haven't learned. None of that matters. What matters is that we are equal at the foot of the cross.

We can get hung up on titles at work or in church or at school. But that's not according to the kingdom of grace. Because we are all equal before him. No one is in a better right standing with God than you are before the cross.

No one. Because we're equal. The other people that are unhappy with the kingdom of grace are the people of unbelief.

Now, before you go to the place where you're thinking that I'm talking about someone who doesn't believe in Jesus, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about those of us who think, this is a little too good to be true.

[21 : 27] My home of origin was not a kind place. Maybe you're saying that. And you're thinking, no, you see, it was performative for me. I will love you if you do this and this and this.

I will accept you as my son or my daughter if you're this and this way. Okay? God's kingdom of grace does not operate like that. And so you might be hearing this and thinking, okay, that's great for a story in the Bible, but that's not how I lived it.

I have really good news for you. God does not operate in the way the world does. Or how we were raised. God operates on a kingdom of grace.

He sees you. He loves you. You belong. You're important to him. He died for you. That's a sobering reality of God's kingdom of grace.

Is that just because we think it might be too good to be true, it isn't. It's just a different way of thinking. It's his way of thinking, not the world's. If you're expecting your school to operate in the kingdom of grace, you're going to get disappointed.

[22 : 36] You get the grades you earn. I tried that once during one course, just thinking, you know what? I'm smart enough. Nope. That didn't work. I had to work for the grades that I got.

My grades are good, but I had to work. That's the way of the world. And it makes sense there.

When you go to work, you can't expect to operate on grace either.

You're going to get what you earn. You don't show up to work. You don't get paid. Pretty simple formula. Work, school, church, all of this stuff doesn't necessarily operate on God's kingdom of grace, but it can within each one of us.

And it should where God's family gathers together. Maybe we were raised in a harsh home where much was expected of you. You're made to feel, unless you were perfect, you were not loved. I am deeply sorry. I really am. I'm deeply sorry. But God's kingdom of grace operates differently. And you are enough. And he loves you exactly the way you are right now.
[23:45] You don't have to do anything. You don't have to wear special clothing. You don't have to say special words. You are loved right now for who you are. Receive that.

That's God's kingdom of grace. Receive it. That is your salvation. Not anything you do for yourself. So the pride, let's put it away.

Let's celebrate with other people. Regardless of where they've come from, how long they've been here, or whatever else it is. Let's celebrate Jesus with them. We're going to make it together. We're going to see Phil and Andy Kay in the same place. And I'm sure there's names that you can fill in those blanks with in your own life. Cannot wait. Put unbelief away.

Receive this and accept that this is God's kingdom of grace. You and I are citizens of that. More than that, we are heirs. We are sons and daughters of the Lord.

[24:43] And he looks after us like a good, good father. God loves even you and me. And the reasons for his grace are in him.

Not what we do. Not whether we've earned it or not. You don't have to prove yourself worthy of God's love. Just receive it in faith. And you may think, sweet.

I'm going to live however I want. Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls this cheap grace. Because the thing is, is that God gives us grace, yes. But he gives us a transforming grace.

And if you've ever loved anybody, you're going to love them enough to take them from where they are and help them be more of who they could be. God sees the potential in each of us.

He doesn't look towards our past. He keeps no records of wrongs. He's not looking at you and thinking, well, you messed up ten times. You really need me? He's saying, look at what we can do together. Follow me.

[25:42] Receive this grace. See what life we can have together. Just trust me, son. Just trust me, daughter. Let's go here together. He's an encouraging, good, good father.

Receive that today. Put away the unbelief. These changes won't happen all at once. Praise the Lord.

He's not harsh with us. He didn't give us whiplash. Some things are changed slowly. And that's okay. 2 Corinthians 5, 17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. It's a transforming grace that we are given. And there's something new waiting to burst inside of you.

And maybe the Holy Spirit has laid it upon your heart today. Say yes to that. Maybe he's giving you an idea that nobody else has had. Say yes to that. Maybe he's healing something in your heart because you were raised in an environment where you're told you're not enough.

[26:44] And he's telling you today you are. And I love you for who you are. Receive that. Receive that in his love. Something has changed in us.

We now want to honor God. And it's not that we're going to be a sinless person or live a sinless life. The thing is, is as we move closer to him, it starts to bother us a little bit more. We start to change our attitudes and patterns.

We start to make different decisions. That's a transforming grace. So my desire is that we would all receive joy, peace, and confidence that comes from living in a kingdom of grace.

Let's pray.