It's not fair!

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[0:00] It's a big adult, an old granny, or a young child. Everyone cares about fairness. Everyone likes to say, that's not fair. Or you have to do this because it's fair.

We say, you know, I shared something with you, therefore you must share it with me. I get this most often with my nieces and nephews. My brother has two beautiful children, Jade and Libeth.
And I was taking care of them once with Sierra, my wife. And we didn't have much to do, so I was trying to find something to fill up the time, something to play with them while we waited for Daddy to get back so that they could go home.
And I found a nice, beautiful blue balloon. Just a nice balloon. I said, let's play a game with it. Let's keep it up. We've got to run around the room, make sure it doesn't hit the ground. And Libeth was very upset about this.
She said, no, that's not fair. There's only one of them. And I said, oh, that's fine. All of us can play with just one balloon. She goes, no, but it's a blue balloon. That's a boy's balloon. I need my one.
[0:58] Where is my one? It's not fair. And I was trying to explain to her that actually it is fair because we're all going to share this one balloon. But she couldn't be reconciled. She went behind a couch and had a small tantrum and a big cry.

And me and Jaden, we played with the balloon. Eventually it was fun enough that she gave up on this idea of fairness and just wanted a bit of fun. She came to do it. Well, I think today what we're reading in Matthew chapter 20 is a story where Peter has just asked Jesus before this.
What will we get? What's our fair share of the reward? What special thing are we doing? And he has this conception of fairness that I think little Libeth had, which is fair means everyone gets the same thing in the same moment.
And I think Jesus has a very different answer for that. So we'll be reading about the parable of the workers in the vineyard. But before we get there and before I actually read, this morning I read the whole thing, the whole passage to you at once.
But I want to read this in part so that you can see every moment of the story and maybe you can be surprised if it's something that you haven't read recently. But before we start there, I think there's three big questions that we need to understand before we hear Jesus' words of the parable.
[2:06] First of all, what is a parable? Right, you might not have heard that word. Or maybe you've heard it so many times but no one's ever defined it. I don't know if you've ever had a conversation with someone where you figure out that you're both saying the same name but thinking of two different people.

Well, that's something about when we get the definition wrong. So I want to make sure we have the right definition of what a parable is. Why did Jesus teach in parables? That's a helpful thing to ask. Why would Jesus use these little stories to teach us big truths about God?
And the last one would be, how should we interpret parables? What's the best way to do it? I love being a Bible teacher. I love teaching people how to read their own Bibles for themselves, how to open it up and see what God is saying to them.
So I want to give you some tips for when you go home and maybe pick up another parable where you're reading through Mark or Matthew or Luke, that you can actually understand what Jesus is doing all by yourself, that you can see the good news that God is bringing in every parable that you read.
So let's work through those. What is a parable? Well, it's quite easy, actually. A parable is a very short story. It's a made-up story. It's a fictional story that's used to explain a deep spiritual truth.
[3:11] And parables are not unique to Jesus. In fact, there were parables in the Old Testament. The most famous is a parable of Nathanael to David. David had done this great sin of stealing

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another man's wife. And God sends a prophet to convict him and say, you have done wrong by this.

And he uses a story to show David his hypocrisy and his evil. So it was true, Isaiah also used parables in different moments in his book. But now Jesus used them to communicate truth to his hearers.
But he used them also in one way to hide the truth. Jesus tells his disciples that they have access to the secrets of the kingdom, that he will explain the parables to them in detail, make sure that they understand it.
But the crowds who were hearing Jesus speak before his resurrection, that they would not truly understand. That actually it's only in light of the work of Jesus, in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, that his parables could truly be understood.
So we know that they are truth, that they are vehicles for Jesus' teaching, but we need to understand them in light of who he is, not just in light of what we might think of the stories. And there's some good things to look at.
[4:15] There's often cool characters, lots of people, there's conflict occasionally, sometimes it's subversive. So what you think is going to happen doesn't happen. And Jesus is trying to communicate a truth there.

And I think it's good, because you might misunderstand one or two parts of a story, but you can still get the big message. And that's why Jesus used parables. They were memorable. They were ways of him telling the truth to some people, but also allowing those who knew him better to understand a fuller truth that they could then proclaim.
And then Jesus also often used parables to answer questions or objections. There would be a problem. Someone would stand up and say, Rabbi, my brother's stealing from me.
He's not giving me my inheritance. And Jesus would then tell a story to answer that question. Or the Pharisees would come and tell him that he was doing something wrong. And Jesus would tell this story, a parable, to help them understand where they had in fact gone wrong.
So that's why Jesus taught him parables. That's what parables are. They're short, fictitious stories that teach us spiritual truth. In the case of what we're going to read today, it's a parable of the kingdom of heaven, or in the other gospels, it's called the kingdom of God.
[5:21] So it's teaching a truth about God's kingdom, God's realities that are different to our realities. Remember, God's ways are not our ways. God's thoughts are not our thoughts. God's kingdom is not like the kingdoms of this world.

It's different, and that's what we're going to see today. But now let me give you some help for how would you interpret a parable when you come across a parable in your own time. There's two schools of thought, often. One is that there is just one meaning to a parable.
The other is that there is a meaning for every single character in the story. So there's three main characters in the story. There's three truths being told. I want to be friends to both sides and have both sides be happy with me.
So this is the way I've thought about it, and it's been helpful. I think every parable is about one big truth that Jesus is trying to communicate, but that the characters in the story show us different ways that that truth applies to people's lives.
Think of the prodigal son. There's the father, there is the runaway son, and there's the judgy brother. There's one truth being told here, which is that no one is so far away from God that they cannot be saved.
[6:22] No one is so far away from God that they cannot run back to him. That's the truth. But the difference is, the application of that truth is different. That tells us, on the father's side, how good God is, how gracious God is.

For the runaway, the application is, come back to the father. You can be redeemed. You can be restored. And with the brother, it's a strong word against the religious.
You know, the Pharisees who think that God will only save certain kinds of people that look just like you, that act just like you, that believe just as you believe. It's a rebuke against them. Do you see one truth that can be applied to three different groups of people?
So that's what we're going to do today. We're going to look at the one truth that Jesus is teaching in this parable, and we're going to see how it applies to three different groups of people. The man who owned the vineyard, the first workers, and the last workers.

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So now that we've got that big idea, and I've hopefully helped you to understand parables generally, we need to understand, okay, what happened before this, that Jesus is now telling a parable. Because I told you, Jesus tells parables to answer questions or problems or help people understand when a situation's come about.
[7:29] There's a context that we need to understand. And the context of this parable is in just the chapter before, chapter 19. And this is a good tip. If you ever read in the Bible and you're confused by something, go read the chapter before, go read the chapter afterwards.

It'll probably start making sense to you if you do that. So if you're reading chapter 4, there's many amazing things that happen in Matthew chapter 19. It begins with Jesus teaching for a long passage on divorce, on children, and then there's this crazy thing that happens.
Matthew 19, verse 16. A rich young man, or some of your Bibles might say, the rich young ruler. A man with authority, with wealth, all sorts of things. He comes to Jesus and he says, good teacher, what commands must I keep to be saved?
What must I do to be saved? And now you would assume, if you know something about the gospel and about the story of Jesus, if you heard me this morning, Jesus would say, just believe in me and you'll be saved.
Jesus actually says something crazy to him. He says, go and sell everything you own and then come follow me. It doesn't make sense. Jesus, I thought this was a faith thing.
[8:33] You did the work, not us. We believe in you. We can't do it. We can't meet them all. But what Jesus exposes about this rich young ruler is that he finds his security, he finds his heart, his joy in his wealth.

Jesus once said that where your treasure lies, there your heart will be also. This young ruler, he clung to his riches, to his comfort, to his security. Jesus told him, if you're really going to follow God, if you're really going to trust God, if you're going to believe in God, if you're going to be a follower of me, you need to let go of your security in this world and cling purely to the goodness of God.
So that's the story he tells. And the disciples are very shocked by this. And they ask him, why are they doing this? And Jesus says something even more crazy. He says, it is harder for a rich person to get into heaven than it is for a camel to move through the eye of a needle.
Wow. Is that really what he's saying? He's saying, only those who are poor in this world could ever have a chance of being saved. And that's what his disciples asked. They said, well, who then could be saved? Jesus says, there's a bit of good news now.
So our panic isn't too high because I want you to know, if you put a whole bunch of the world together, no matter what your situation here is in this room, what your context is, there's always someone a lot poorer than you than mine.
[9:50] If you think, oh, if we're on a scale, I might not crack it. I might not be poor enough for the king. That's not what Jesus says. Jesus says, with man, this is impossible. But with God, all things are possible.

Do you see, he's trying to make his disciples understand that the problem of the rich young ruler wasn't just that he lacked obedience, it was that he lacked faith. He lacked trust in God. He lacked a clinging to God for the good things, a trusting in God for his protection.
But the disciples still weren't getting it. They weren't understanding. So they say, okay, well, if someone did give up all this to them, what happens? And Jesus says, well, those who lose houses and brothers and mothers, those who sacrifice for the kingdom, God will give them a hundredfold and eternal life.
And now, before the disciples get too excited, which they do, because Peter says, well, we left everything to follow you, Jesus. So what does that mean for us? What is our reward?
See, Peter's asking the same question I think little Lily Beth was asking, which is, well, then what's fair for me? What do I get? What is my blessings? What's the hierarchy? How good are we?
[10:55] Because we're your first followers. You called us by name. We've been with you from day one. Peter still doesn't get it. He doesn't understand what Jesus is teaching.

He doesn't understand how radical it is that with God it is impossible, with man it is not. He's still looking to his own works, his own ideas, his own problems. He's looking at the rich young ruler and saying, well, he messed up, but we did it.
We left, like you told us to. We have done enough. Jesus tells this parable, this short story, to explain to Peter something very different, which is what he says at the end of chapter 19, and he'll

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say it again at the end of the parable, but many who are first will be last, and those who are last will be first.
That's a crazy statement to say. Right? I don't know if you ever did it in school, but they would make you line up when it was lunchtime or when you were going somewhere, and what did you say you've got in the front? I used to trick people. I would say, you know, let me in front of you and then I'll let you in front of me so I end up a bit further in the line, but we want to be first in the line.
Jesus says, no, no, no, it's actually the ones in the back, they're going to get blessed first. What does he mean? With all that in mind, let's look at the words of Jesus and hopefully we'll understand it better than his audience did that day.
[12:09] Matthew chapter 20, verse 1. For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house or the lord of a house or the ruler of a house, someone who owned it, had authority over it, right?

It's actually the master is the same word for lord, which you'd use for God or for Jesus. Who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. So he has some work that needs to be done and he goes out to hire some day workers, some day laborers.
After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, so a coin a day, he sent them into the vineyard and going out at about the third hour, that's three hours later, 9 a.m., 6 a.m. he went out first, 9 a.m. he goes out again, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace and the master says this, go into my vineyard too, I will pay you what is right or what is right I will give you, depending on what translation you're reading.
Verse 5, so they went, going out again in the sixth hour, this is at midday, 12 o'clock in the afternoon, he goes out and then in the ninth hour, that's three o'clock in the afternoon, he goes out again and he keeps inviting more and more workers to come work in his vineyard and then about the 11th hour, 5 p.m., just before knockoff, they had finished work at six o'clock, so just one hour before the day is done, the sunlight's gone, there's no more time to work in the field, he goes and he calls some more workers, he says, come on, and this is what he says, and at the 11th hour, he went out and he found others standing and he said to them, why do you stand idle all day?
Why are you guys still here? Have you not found work? What's the issue? Verse 7, they said to him, because no one has hired us, so he says to them, go into my vineyard too, go get some work quickly.
[13:54] Verse 8, and when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, call all the laborers and pay them their wages. We're going to stop right there. I want you to see this next part. At the very beginning, we get told this story and it would be a common story.

Anyone who was with Jesus that day, who lived in Galilee in the area of Israel that he lived in, they would have known this story. If you didn't have a job, a full-time job, you would go stand in the local market and you'd hope someone gives you work.
Right, still today, all over the world, even here, you'll find people looking for day gigs, right, some day work. In South Africa, where I grew up, we'd go to the building, big builders' warehouses, so we'd buy all your builders' supplies.
Outside of it, there'd be a bunch of guys holding signs saying, I'm a painter, I'm a gardener, I'm a this, you know, come hire me for the day and you would agree. In that case, it was a couple hundred bucks for the day's work for them.
This master, he offers them a denarius. Now, denarius is a single coin, but it was about a day's worth of wage. That's what a Roman soldier would receive for one day of work with people.
[14:55] If you did it to today, you know, they just changed minimum wage to 1144. If you do that times by 12, it's 130 pounds a day. That's your idea. It's a one day's wage.

It's what these guys needed. For most of them, if they didn't get paid that, they didn't eat that night. Their family didn't eat that night. They needed it. They were living day to day, hand to mouth, hoping for something.
This is a situation, a situation everyone knows. And Jesus calls them in as he would. But the shocking thing is, usually, you get hired in the morning, and then you're done. You don't need any more. But this master, he keeps going out.
He keeps calling. It seems as if his vineyard is bountiful. There's no end to the work that he needs. There's no end to his supply. There's no end to his riches. He keeps calling them in, constantly. And the crowd would have thought, wow, this guy's really rich. He's really well off. And the first crowd, he says, I'll pay you what's right. And then later, he never even talks about payment. People just seem to trust him. They trust that he's good and that he will pay them rightly.

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[15:51] And they go in to work. Now, the crowd would have been very shocked at the end when the 11th hour came. It's only an hour left in the day. Why go hire more people?

How good could they be? At most, what they'll do is probably just pick up the bags of grapes and just put them in the storehouse. Well, that's not that much of a problem and you probably don't need daylight to do it. He could have done it himself.
They would have been thinking to themselves and the audience, why? Why has he gone out again? Why has he gone out in the last hour? And they would have perhaps made some assumptions about what each person would be paid, how much each of them would.
We only know what the first group will be paid. Let's see what the next one will be paid. So we understand what a denarius is. We understand what a day worker is. We've set the scene. We've seen the oddity of why go out in the last hour and invite more people in.
Now, I want to look at the payment of the workers from verse 8. And when evening came, the owners of the vineyard said to his foreman, Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last workers in, up to the first.
[16:56] Interesting. That's not how you think it would happen. As you know, you pay the first guys all the way down because the last guys, they're still working. They should still be working until the day ends. They need to finish off some work. But that's not what this master says.

He says, put the first guys here. And it's because Jesus wants the first to see what happens to the last in the story. He wants there to be a bit of conflict about this because this is the next thing that happens. And when those hired at about the 11th hour, the guys who came in and worked just one hour, not 12 hours like the guys at the beginning, he gave each of them a denarius, a full day's work.
Whatever, 130 pounds I said would be the equivalent day. That's what he gives them. For one hour of work, that's an amazing hourly wage. That's a lot of money to get for just one hour. And now, when the ones who were hired first came and thought they would receive more, they said, okay, well, the guys who worked one hour got 130, so we must get something more.
He must give us a bonus, give us maybe double, triple. We should get 12 times, but we'll take double. It's probably what they thought to themselves. They thought they would receive more, but each of them received a denarius as well.
Each got one coin. The ones who worked one hour got a coin. The ones who worked 12 hours got a coin. The ones who worked six hours got a coin. The ones that worked three hours all got their one coin, 130 pounds, a little bit more than that.
[18:16] But that is what they all got, exactly the same wage. And it says, now, the ones who came first thought that they would receive more, but each of them received their denarius.

Let's pause the story there. In Jesus' audience, and maybe if you're here today, you would think to yourself, that's not fair. That's not right.
How could they get paid the same? How could they be treated as equals? They didn't do the work. These other guys, they did all the work. These other guys came in the last minute, and they got all the praise and the glory.
I don't know, maybe you've done it in a workplace where you've been working on a project, or you've had a job building, or whatever you're doing, and you've worked the whole time, and one of your colleagues comes in at the last minute.
They just sign a form, or just put a last brick, or just do one last thing, and suddenly everyone's like, wow, so amazing. They're so great. They get all your praise. We feel that that's wrong.
[19:13] How come they're getting praise when I did all the hard work, all the hard graft? Well, I want you to understand that this wasn't an injustice. I don't believe it was, and we're going to see what the master has to say to the last workers when they come up to the next part, but I think what we are seeing here is both justice and grace, and Jesus' story is going to explain the working of here.

The other thing I want you to notice is all of these workers are reliant on the vineyard master for their work. None of them deserve to work that day. They're not contracted workers.
It's by grace or by luck, right, in the world that you happen to get some work, that there is something for you to do. They all are graciously offered an opportunity to make money that day.
As well as that, they all have the same needs. They all go home, and a day's wage leads to a day's living. They all have the same needs. They all have the same opportunity. What's happening here?

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We might feel that it's unjust, and you're going to see the last workers agree, but Jesus is going to point out where the justice and the grace come together. Verse 11. And on receiving it, they grumbled at the master's house.
[20:26] So they grumbled. That's the first thing. Oh, how could he do this to us? This is so terrible. What's he doing? So they come in and say to him, these last workers, these last worked only an hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.

I mean, it sounds like a fair thing for them to say. They said, you know, you're treating these workers as if they've done the same as us, as if they're equal to us, as if they've put in the same work, but we were the ones in the sun, 12 o'clock, burning, getting our backs all hot, sweating, working hard.
We're the ones who did the 12-hour shift. The only reason you got your grapes in was because we did the work, not because of those guys. It seems almost reasonable, but it's not, and this is what the master says.
But the master replied to one of them, friend, am I doing, I am doing you no wrong. Did we not agree, did you not agree with me for a denarius?
Verse 14, take what belongs to you and go. And then he goes on to say, I choose to give this last worker as I give you. I choose. Verse 15, am I not allowed to do what I choose to do with what belongs to me?
[21:41] Or do you begrudge my generosity? Now, actually, in the original Greek here, it actually says, is your eye evil to the good I do? Do you have this envious, evil eye to the good I do?

Seems like our first thought might be wrong. Like something's happening here where there was justice. You see, the master had agreed a wage to the first workers. He didn't agree anything to the workers that came at 9, all the workers that came at 12, all the workers that came at 3, all the workers that came in the last hour.
The second one, he did say, he said, I'll do what's right. What's right? It's what he wills. There was no agreement. There was no place. But these first workers presumed, even though they had agreed, even though they had been told, this is what you're going to receive, that they would get more because if they got more than I must because that's fair.
The master says this, he says, that's not what I promised you. We had a fair agreement. But what I've done with the rest is grace. I've done justice. I haven't done injustice.
I haven't broken my word. I haven't broken my promise. I've dealt justly with you and I've dealt graciously with them. I want you to understand that the point Jesus is making here is these workers, none of them got less than they deserved, but some of them got more than they deserved.
[23:00] And that's the picture of heaven that is trying to be described here. That the goodness of God in his grace and in what he does is that we not only don't get what we deserve, we all get at least that or more.

When we're faithful, he is faithful. When we do good, he rewards. When he blesses, he blesses, but it is his sovereign will. It is his grace.
It is his provision. It is his goodness. So this is what the workers did. They begrudged and they grumbled. They had problems. They had evil eyes. Then they thought to themselves, we deserve more, even though they agreed to it.
Let me tell you a story like this. I was working with a new believer once. We had just started, came to a small group I was leading and we were meeting and we had spoken about tithing and for the first time ever, he tithed at church that Sunday.
Put his, I think it was 200 rand into the tithe that week. That was his 10% and he did it. Amazing. And then he told me that he had been walking in his complex around all of his apartments and he looked down and he found 200 rand notes on the ground.
[24:11] He just found them. 200 bucks back right after he tithed. He went, how good is God? And I thought, maybe God, maybe luck, whatever, maybe someone's just not very smart. But for a moment, I thought to myself, is he really going to get blessed for just one time?

He's tithed once in his life. I've tithed my whole life. As soon as I've got money, I've given it to the Lord and here's this guy getting provision. I heard stories of other new believers that were looking for work or jobs or all sorts of provision.

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They just start coming to church. They just start following Jesus and suddenly, jobs and blessings and promotions and someone gives 200 and receives 900 back. And you can think to yourself, God, what's wrong with you?
I've been doing it. Like, if you wanted to pay me three times, there would be a year's wage probably at this point. It's what you owe me. We think he owes us. And I understand what they're saying.
Or imagine someone just joins the church. They just come in to start serving. You've been serving on the worship team. Four, five, six, ten years you've been serving. This new person comes in and they've just got the voice.
[25:14] They just sound amazing. They're so great. And suddenly, they're on every single week. Suddenly, they're getting to lead songs and do it. Do we think to ourselves, well, God, I'm the one who's been doing it.

This is what I serve. No, God gives gifts to different people. He gives different levels of gifts. He gives different levels of blessings. And it's not an injustice. Why? Because you don't deserve it. And that might be a hard thing to hear, but we actually deserve nothing.
Every good and perfect gift comes from God. We turn our backs on him. We go against his word. We fail in all sorts of ways. Even the good we do, the good is done because God works in us for the good.
Because the Holy Spirit changes us and makes us more like Jesus. The reality is that all of life is by the grace of God. Just like those workers. There was no vineyard, there would be no place to work. There was no master, there would be no one to pay the wage. So the master has the right over what is his. And when he promises something, he'll do what he promises. And God does. God does promise to bless people that are faithful and good in this life in different ways, in all sorts of ways.
[26:15] We get blessed in this life and we get blessed in the last. That's what Jesus said just at the end of chapter 19. He says, those who lose houses, who lose friends, who lose brothers, who lose mothers, they will receive a hundredfold back.

That's a good promise. I'm not denying that. But the point of this parable is all of it is grace. None of it should be expected. And that's the warning he's giving Peter and his disciples.
Don't expect that God plays a one plus one equals two story with your obedience. A scoreboard one where you're getting up and you're ticking off boxes or you're filling up scoreboards if I mix analogies.
And you think, okay, I've got enough numbers up here. Now God owes me this. It's not how it works because we can't get enough good numbers on the board to counter everything that we do wrong. Every way that we fail, every way that we stumble, the good news of God is that he fills it up by the work of Jesus. He fills it up by the grace to give. The master has the money to pay us and he does it graciously to all sorts of people.
[27:13] And this is the crazy thing at the end of the chapter, verse 16 now, at the end of the parable. So the last will be first and the first will be last.

It's the same thing he said at the end of chapter 19. And he's making sure his disciples hold in tension this truth that people who are faithful do receive good gifts because every good gift is from above.
It's from the Father. But that we can't play math equations with what God owes us. And some people will get blessed in different ways that we won't. Some people will get given different gifts to us.
There are some pastors who have been faithfully serving the church for 40, 50 years and their congregation has never been more than 50 people and it will never grow more than that. And there's other guys who come in and they've been in ministry for two years and they have, you know, 500 people filling their church, 20 people being saved every week.
So great. But is any of it because of them? No, we're told that it's God who makes the word work. It's the Holy Spirit that convicts hearts. It's the God that saves people, whether it's in the 50 people, the 500 people, the 1,000 people, the Billy Grahams who can preach to stadiums.
[28:19] It is God who does the work. It is God who brings the blessing. So this is what I want you to understand is that the kingdom of heaven, according to Jesus, is an upside down kingdom.

See, the kings of the world say you do this input, you do this action, you do this work and you get this reward. You work hard at work, you get a promotion. You put in extra hours and you get paid for it.

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That's how it works. It's a serious summon convention. Hopefully, you'll end up good on the other side. The kingdom of heaven is opposite. It's those who are meek, those who are poor in spirit. There's what we call the kingdom of heaven. Those who understand that they can't do it. They're not the rich young ruler who thinks, what can I do? What extra thing can I add to my CV to enter heaven? But it's the one who comes and says, with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.
This is the outrageous story of the kingdom. God's ways are not our ways. God's thoughts are not our thoughts. God's mercy is his mercy. He can do what he wants with it, and we don't get what we deserve.
[29:19] In fact, we get much more than that, no matter what it is. So let me end by telling you this story. Imagine for a moment that you were looking into heaven. Imagine for a moment that you saw all the saints who've gone and been with the Lord in the past.

Some of them you know, some of them from very long ago, and you look at, there's a table over there, and there's a few men talking. You know, they're just in between worship sessions, between singing, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.
They're sitting down and they're talking about the goodness of God. And there's two men sitting right next to each other, and they're talking to each other, shoulder to shoulder. Now the one man, his name we know, and his list of credentials is large and great and amazing.
The other, we don't know his name at all. We actually only know him by a title that tells us what he did wrong in life, not what he did right. See, the one man is the man I spoke to you about this morning. His name's Paul.
He's the apostle saved by Jesus, commissioned to preach the gospel in all churches. He wrote 13 letters in our Bible. God used him, not only to start the church, but to fuel the church by writing his very words.
[30:28] We know his name. We know his great esteem. The man next to him, we don't know his name. We know only what he did wrong. He's the thief on the cross. Sitting right next to each other, both in heaven with God.

Both have eternal life. One has an amazing CV. A whole list of great things he can do. Stories he can do. The other had never gone to a Bible study. Never had the gospel explained to him. Probably never even heard a parable. He is a convicted criminal with nothing good. He did nothing. He was never even baptized. Both sit there. Why? Because of the grace of God to save them. Because they both got the living wage that they needed to pay the debts that they had. Because even Paul, with his great sheet of accomplishments and education and money, was still a sinner in need of God.
He was still just someone outside of the vineyard needing to be invited in. And Paul got to do great work. He served the 12 hours. He was stoned. He was put in prison. He was kicked out of towns.
[31:29] He caused riots for the gospel. He saw people be saved. He baptized people. He wrote scripture. But when it comes to heaven, when it comes to standing before God and worshiping, they stand on equal ground.

Thief on the cross is there by the grace of Jesus. Paul is there by the grace of Jesus. That's the point of the story. It's all grace. God might use us in different ways and different levels, but there are no small people in the kingdom.
There's no small contribution. There's no hierarchy in heaven. There's the goodness of Jesus. Some people might be rewarded for things that they've suffered with, but all people stand equal. All people receive eternal life.
All people receive the goodness of the kingdom. So the last will be first and the first will be last. What does that mean for us today? It means if you're a believer and you've been in church your whole life, that you're not going to be keeping records of, God, I did this much for you.
I've tithed this much for you. I've served in all these ways. Therefore, you owe me that. That's not how God works. God calls us to be thankful for everything he does, to accept that all the money we actually get is his money.
[32:36] He only asks us to give 10% of it back, but all of it he gives from us. All the provision we have, he provides to us. We need to be humble before God for the grace that he's given us in our moment.

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We mustn't look towards rewards and greatness and glory and all these things. We look with thankfulness to our God. The good news is if you're not a church person, not a churchy person, you haven't served, you haven't been there, you just maybe joined this church just a month ago, something like that.
It's fine. The last workers get paid the same as the first. They all get the title of son. They all get to be part of the kingdom and God pays the wage that they need to survive.
God pays the wages of sin and death for all of us. That's the revolutionary part of Jesus' gospel. That's the upside down kingdom and that in fact is the good news.
I think we'll be singing for a moment and then I'll close us in a time of prayer.

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