

PRAISE INTERNATIONAL
GENEROUS GRACE – THE POWER TO BECOME
MATTHEW 20:1-16

Good Morning

Prayer Needs – October 1, Baptism and open house.

Read Text

My daughter took me to lunch this past week:) A result of an unfortunate car issue she experienced in Muncie and thankfully we were able get remedied before returning to Upland. So it was about noon and she asked would you like to eat lunch - sure!

Now I should also mention that the regular dining hall on the campus at Taylor is shut down and being renovated. So as we hopped back in the car I said where are we headed she said the Student Union - great. At the STU we discovered that the only option open at that hour (it was like 12:30 on Saturday) was Chik-fil-a. Well that makes it easy right? Except that it seemed that a large portion of the student body was attempting to grab lunch at the same hour and the Chik-fil-a had only one person checking students out. So when we got our sandwich we looked realized that the line was curving out and into the main building.

But hey we are having some time together - right? Now I should openly admit that I am no fan of lines - I came by that honestly from my Dad :) So after a while sure enough another worker stepped in to begin checking out students and I suggested 'honey lets step in that line' to which my daughter said 'no Dad' the line splits over there behind to pole. Cool my daughter is being courteous and considerate - then as we turned around the pole and got to the split...something happened. The dude who had walked into the little market AFTER we had already stood in line for our meal stepped up to the second line - what? Then the folks who came after him lined up after him and we watched him check out before us - what? To which I said something like - 'should I let them know where the line is?' Nah Dad we'll be alright it will be ok - and something in me wanted to just rise up - where it not for the great company and her gracious attitude. Oh how I wish I could report that I did not give an ever so slight sigh of 'disgust'. I mean come on man this is supposed to be Taylor University and everyone is supposed to be oozing with the love of Jesus! Well truth be told I wasn't exactly oozing in that moment - it wasn't fair.

Suddenly the passion of injustice burns....because we are not getting what we deserve.

- Getting what we deserve....or others finally 'getting' what they deserve!
- **The truth is we are all pretty well schooled in the Merit system aren't we?**

One person described how we think of this merit system with the word "Justice".

"We worry about justice, but too often we dress up as justice what is in reality jealousy or we use justice as a weapon to limit generosity"

In our text Jesus is revealing that God's Kingdom is not based on the merit of what is deserved or not deserved. A Kingdom based in the Generous heart of our Father whose loving-kindness gives at His own expense - not what we deserve but what we need Grace and that is Good News!

What a Reversal – When Generous Grace trumps what's fair! – Jesus parable in Matthew 20:1-16.

- Is a story that if we are honest makes no sense our sense of what's fair....and watch this the reason - He tells the story is to teach His friends about the Kingdom of Heaven!
- You see its not just little kids that like 'fair' – we all do!

And the secret is simply this Christ in you!
Yes, Christ in you bringing with Him the hope of all the glorious things to come.
Col 1:27b JB Phillips

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- Fairness to be clear gives us some sense of order, predicatability, even a heirarchy.
- And to be clear sometimes it is fair to give a reward or at other times a punishment (run that red light enough times and get ready for a 187.50 dollar ticket!)
- Fairness is based in what we deserve, how we work, what we achieve or how we behave.
- But then when we use that template in our experience with God it does not work.... **His Grace trumps human fairness....everytime!**
- **That is Jesus in our text – The Kingdom of Heaven beloved is not based on a Merit system of man but on the Lovingkindness of God – revealed in His Generous Grace.**

Its a Reversal – when Generosity ignores our systems of merit....and something else comes into being...Grace!

- The person who works one hour is paid what the 12 hour worker is paid....**because the Father is giving people what they NEED at His own expense - not what they earned!**
- Its a boring sports match....there are not winners and losers.
- No score...everyone gets a trophy....the lavish goodness of the Father!

Merit or Grace, or could we say **Religion vs the Gospel?**

- In the Merit system – where I am convinced that my relationship with God, my forgiveness, my security, my belonging and my significance is based in what I have done or not done - **that is called religion** beloved.
- Grace proclaims that God choose to relate to us not on the basis of what we have done but on the basis of what He has done and what we need most – that is the Gospel!
- He came and invaded our darkness and light freedom forgiveness and life came into being.

Lets remember that Jesus is in the process of inviting His followers to see and live in the world differently.

- **In Matthew 18 He was confronting the debt system – Jesus seems to have a vision for a world where we live Free of debt systems that hold lives in bondage.**
- **In Matthew 20 He is confronting our merit system.**
- **Imagine seeing the world in a way we have not seen the world or ourselves in that world...not in a system based in human debt or merit - but a world defined by the Mercy and Grace that He has paid for and in love supplied.**

So Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of Heaven is different - its not a place where people ‘Get what they deserve’.

- Rather it’s a place where God is giving freely at His own expense what people need!
- And I will add further that as long *‘as we think of or perceive people as getting what they deserve - we will never understand the Kingdom of Heaven’.*

This past week I awoke from a very vivid dream – where I was asked to speak to a larger congregation and I was trying to find my way to the front and at the same time looking for my notes and asking who might know where they were....and then I took the mic and began to proclaim John 1 – the God who came into being – something that was not there before came into being - gave us the right vs 13 to become (something come into being) children of God – the power to become is the essence of the Gospel beloved!

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The Power to become is NOT based in our systems of debt or merit beloved!

- To Become is a work of God to allow our humanity to actually flourish in the presence of eternity – that we could touch the eternal in the present and experience another realm based in the Mercy and Grace of God – this is called the Kingdom of God beloved!
- Beloved this is not about Debt or Merit but the Generous Mercy and Grace of God – it is a Great Reversal - to allow eternity to become visible in our human existence – anyone who received Him He has given them the right to become....that's you and me!

His Generous Grace beloved is the '***Power to Become***'.

1. That means Performance is not the issue – but rather Participation with God!

- The goal of the landowner was NEVER about profit but participation and meeting the need of the workers. Or said another way their worth to him was NOT based in their accomplishments, their behavior or even their failures.
- The goal of the landowner was Participation in His Generosity!
- I see a radical invitation to rethink how we view what Jesus called our 'acts of righteousness'
- No longer from the weak merit systems that I often use....
- What good was all that I did for God?
- It was never about my performance but rather my participation – it's about Surrender.
 - *'Righteousness is not a performance of conformity to outwardly-imposed arbitrary rules that brings about an external and meritorious reward. It's not a demonstration that I can follow instructions and a cookie for doing so. Righteousness is how we live into our redeemed humanity fully, and the "rewards" we experience for doing so are inherent to the way of life. The goodness we experience from living a righteous life is a natural byproduct of the life itself, rather than an external reward for following the rules. In other words, righteousness is not an individual performance for an external reward, it is always a communal participation in a life so rich and good that it is its own reward.'* Ben Sternke

2. Power to Become again Creates Space – for New life

- How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity....
- Grace reveals the goodness of God – merit reveals man's effort!
- In this kind of surrender Grace the Power to Become reveals there is more to you and who you are than what you have done or left undone!
- In a world based in Debt and Merit – I choose Mercy and Grace to reveal life!

3. Power to Become is revealed by the subversive ways of the Cross!

- This is the Great Reversal beloved when we choose in a world defined by debt and merit to choose Mercy and Grace...
- How does Mercy and Grace behave?
 - **The Real Practice's of Generosity – Gratitude and Humility beloved!**

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- *We don't follow Jesus to the cross because we're masochists, we do so because we can see in the life of Jesus that it's actually the only way to truly live. So we're not merely "thankful" that Jesus died for us ("Whew, glad I got out of the pickle I was in!"); we're enthralled by the love that caused him to die for us, and desire to be filled with the same love, even if it leads us into suffering and death. We can see that love is stronger than death, and it makes us desire it with all our hearts. Ben Sternke*
- Gratitude – Generosity and Humility is HOW this Kingdom operates.
- Begins with choice to embrace gratitude, generosity and humility.

Jesus closes His parable with the master asking this chilling question Matthew 20:15
'...is your eye envious because I am generous?'

Beloved part of what we wrestle with in embracing what Jesus story tells us is a bit uncomfortable... I am likely going to feel things that are unfair – yes.

Can I choose in that place to surrender to the magnitude of the Fathers heart toward me?

Matthew 20:4

And to those he said 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you'...

His Generous Grace giving us 'whatever is right' based in the goodness of the Father not in our merit...

- So the Power to Become is not about us comparing our life to one another.
- It means that I rethink how I view others. Maybe someone else does not have to loose for me to win, because the Father is giving each of us what is right.
- So I don't have to figure out who 'deserves' what? Comparison, competition, expectation and judgement of what you or others deserve or don't deserve....lets surrender to the Power of Generous Grace!
- **It means quit simply in God's economy there is enough for everyone and what they need!**

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Closing Prayer

O God,
from your providing hand even the dissatisfied and grumbling
receive what they need for their lives.
Teach us your ways of justice
and lead us to practice your generosity,
so that we may live a life worthy of the gospel
make known through your Son Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Communion

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