

THE GREAT REVERSAL

MATTHEW 20:1-20

Jesus has been walking with His friends for some time and attempting to communicate the nature and dimensions of this thing called the Kingdom of Heaven. It is like nothing they have ever seen or known. Last week we looked at Matthew 16 **Jesus inviting His disciples to have a different kind of Vision - a vision towards the Kingdom - sees the King - moves in the access and authority of the King and sees the Cross not as an instrument of defeat and death as Success in this Kingdom.**

Some things are about to change that you had not expected and this Good News that I am proclaiming will be spread to every tribe language and tongue! **It will no longer just be a message contained by Israel but by those who received the Good News of the Gospel. And the very people you thought would have no chance of entering are not only going to enter.....the First will be last and the last will be first....everything is about to change!**

Here is what is fascinating as we commence through the book of Matthew

- Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount gives this message that challenges everything that they had known of what it meant to be a solid follower of the Law and the Prophets.....you have heard that it was said love your neighbor and hate your enemy but I say love your enemy.....and pray for them that you may be called sons of your Father who is in Heaven!
- In the Sermon by the Sea Jesus used these familiar symbols from everyday life to invite those listening to see and understand the Kingdom as something very different than the Kingdoms they were familiar with....**so last week we hear Jesus beginning to introduce His disciples to His soon death and departure.**

Now before we go into the text in Matthew 20 it bears noting the backdrop of Matthew 20. The Rich Young Ruler Matt 19 who comes to Jesus and asks *what must I do to be saved?* As this man walks away grieved.....verse 22 Jesus makes this comment.....***it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.....***

- Oh man verse 25..... ***'Then who can be saved?'***
- Here Jesus friends are speaking from their weak understanding..... Remember the Jewish mind-set in order to be saved you had to be Jewish - Healthy - Wealthy and seen as Righteous.....
- **Jesus if he doesn't get in.....who gets in?**

Yet Jesus had already answered this question....blessed are the poor for theirs is the Kingdom..... In His Kingdom the poor get in.....In His Kingdom the weak and powerless find themselves with Access to the King! ***With man this is impossible...but with God all things are possible!***

Now Jesus goes on in Matthew 20 to invite His friends to reverse their thinking.....they thought the Grace of God was limited to His chosen people.....**Jesus now speaks a parable about the Kingdom that clearly trumpets the Largeness of the Grace of God that is about to reverse everything they had ever known. - Read Text**

Now Jesus tells the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard - which is often related to the Lavishness of the Grace of God reaching whomever chooses to accept His Grace but in this story is another layer. Remember that His audience are these Jewish boys who all their life have been told we are the chosen of God. In fact the very reason Jesus **Uses the terms He does here is because of their grasp of scripture!**

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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Scriptures like:

Psalm 80:8-9

*You removed a vine from Egypt;
You drove out the nations and planted it.
You cleared the ground before it,
And it took deep root and filled the land.*

That Vine is Israel

Hosea 10:1 ***'Israel is a luxuriant vine...'***

Isaiah 5:1-2

***Let me sing now for my well-beloved
A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.***
*My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.
He dug it all around, removed its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
And He built a tower in the middle of it
And also hewed out a wine vat in it;
Then He expected it to produce good grapes,
But it produced only worthless ones.*

Isaiah 11:1

*Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,
And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.*

John 15:1-2

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit."

Now lets look again at Matthew 20 -

- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for His vineyard.....

The Picture Jesus uses here is of a Vineyard - Israel

- Then of the landowner who would look for Day Laborers....something that would happen everyday during the harvest.
- Day laborers would go to the market to find labor for the day. These laborers agree to a wage for the day and begin their work - which would be a 12 hour day 6 - 6.
- A long hard day but a one that would give them something they would not have otherwise had - if they had not been employed - the days wage.

But the landowner Jesus describes begins to do something that was out of the ordinary.

- He went back 3 hours later and hired more workers....then 3 hours later he hire more....then 9 hours later he hired more again and still 2 hours later with only one hour left in the work day he hires still more.
- **Now lets be clear about this.....why have you been standing idle all day long.....?**

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Jesus is touching a nerve here.....that we can miss because we are not familiar with this kind of culture.

- Because the context is so far removed from our cultural setting.....let me see if I can paint the picture.
- I used to work with a Church that saw hundreds of unemployed folk walk into our doors. I had a man with whom I had the privilege of working during his retirement years. He was an ex-Marine and a retired GE executive. One day as he was talking with a young man who had come in for help he asked the young man why he did not have a job. The man said I can't find work.
- Ed (who has now gone to be with Jesus) looked at him and said with a smile on his face.....'young man do you know why you can't get a job? Look at you? I would not hire you!' Now it was not a put down he actually went on to help the young man get cloths and put together a resume.

Here is my point.....the folks who were hired at the eleventh hour?

- **They were not hired because they were not seen as profitable!**
- **What landowner would hire someone without skill?**
- This would not make sense to anyone who understands the value of hard work.
- I mean we have had a healthy barrage of this kind of talk over the last several days watching the Summer Olympics. All the hard work paid off.....for 3 people....**what about the others?** Those who worked focused and perhaps gave even more time?
- My point is that these 9th and 11th hour people are **obviously NOT high capacity people.**

And the response of their fellow workers reveals the value system of their hearts.

- As they watch these workers who first only worked an hour and then those who worked 4 and so on get paid the same. Surely this would not be the same for those of us who worked 12 hours
- Their contempt and jealousy revealed a value system in the heart of man.

My Performance is who I am and I should be recognized for it.

- People therefore are valued by their ability and some just do not have a lot to offer.
- Blessing and abundance are mostly connected to what we do and bring to the table.

There is NOT one person who would read or hear this parable and not have an honest reaction.....seriously.....this is NOT Fair!

- **Because it so clearly reveals a Value system deep in the heart of humanity!**
- **You Get what you Deserve.....!**

Jesus is proclaiming a message of Good News that we are Given what we do not deserve!

Now as we look a little more closely as this Parable - **don't forget Jesus opening words.....**

- **The Kingdom of Heave is LIKEthis.....**
- **Its going to be a Reversal of the Value system that has been in your flesh and ingrained in you since birth.....**

This is why we see these 3 questions at the close of the parable asked by those who had worked all 12 hours.....

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Did you not agree with me for a Denarius? Take what is yours and go....

In The Kingdom of Heaven

1. The Value of Labor is about Partnership NOT Position!

- Now we hear these workers saying something that is deep in each of our hearts.....**I worked 12 times as hard as these 11th hour laborers.....and they get paid the same?**

- **Where is the fairness in that?**

Especially for those of us who have given much of our time and effort to the labor of ministry if we are honest we can relate to Luke 15.....and the Elder brother....**Lord I stayed and labored and you bless this person who squandered your blessing.**

The truth is that it exposes the value we have placed on our own ability....our labor...above Gods

- Jesus declares that the Value of our Labor is not to Earn Grace.....
- **The Value of our Labor is Partnership not Position.....**

Performance says I am what I do....

- **Grace says I am what He did.....**and I get to live in Partnership with Him - in Relationship and Representation!

Hear is the First Question God asks in this Parable....

Did you agree with Me?

- You did not earn what you have been given?
- But see here is the problem that happens....when it looks like someone is getting blessed more....
- Some person gets saved....begins to follow Jesus and suddenly it appears that their life is filled with incredible blessing.....

And yet the Question remains the Same - **Did you agree with Me?**

- God they got more? God this does not seem Fair to me?
- **The real question here is this - has God been Fair?**
 - That is has He delivered on His Promise to you?
 - Not your ambitions - but had God delivered what He promised to you?

Beloved In the Kingdom - The Value of your Labor is about Partnership NOT Position!

- Did you agree with Me? *...but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you!* Vs 14
- Now watch the next question in verse 15

Don't I have a the right to do what I wish with what is My own?

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This is what the Kingdom is like.....

2. The Value of People is NOT based in Profitability but Partnership!

- **In The Kingdom People are Valued for something beyond their Ability!**
- But in the simplest capacity to receive the Measureless Gift of Grace - Beauty really is in the eye of the beholder....

Now again Jesus describes this parable and uses this term for the Vineyard - Israel

- And now He begins to introduce this extravagant idea that their would be others invited into the place of value and chosen status - **not based in their assessed worth or the assessed worth of others....but in His desire to reveal His Lavish Generosity.....**

And the Justice Bone in all of us.....says what?

- You see the truth remains that I am entirely convinced of that in the modern evangelical Church a strong connection to the idea that the level of blessing in our life is based upon what we deserve...
- Now this again is a little tricky..... there is the universal law of sowing and reaping always at work.....

Yet Beloved.....how easy it is to assess and evaluate God's blessing and favor based on what we see or do not see.....and what that exposes is that we still struggle with this conclusion:

- **I am paid for what I have....**
- God values all people but we still tend to lean into the un-scriptural posture of valuing individuals for their ability....**we are blessed because of what we do.....rather than the reality that we have a Generous Father.**

So if we live from this system of thinking there is a Perpetual temptation to Jealousy

- based on what we see happening in the lives of others....you know.....the place we evaluate what is going onFacebook.
 - But God I have labored more than them....!
 - I clearly have demonstrated more ability....and they get what I get?
1. You see the contempt in the eye of the laborers in Jesus parable **had overvalued their Labor....their Labor was their worth...**
 2. **Also revealed this ugly reality of the system in mens heart** - the one where we deem some people more valuable than others.....based on their ability. It begins on the playground.....

In the Kingdom People are valued for their Partnership not the Profitability....to the organization but to God.

Then Paul gives this vivid picture as a reminder.....we tend to value and give honor to the visible points of our body 1 Corinthians 12 - *but can I say to my foot I have no need of you.....?*

In the Kingdom God Values people based upon His Eternal Design!

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So what do we see in life of Jesus?

- He stops to speak to a sick widow woman crawling up behind Him....
- We see Jesus touch lepers and speak to Samaritan women....
- He reach's out to the Prostitute
- He reveals that Heaven indeed gives the time of day to those who had been seen as unprofitable....

I have often wondered how Jesus would respond to those who it is so easy to pass by and dismiss....the weak - the marginal - the broken - the powerless.....

- David who would come up to me before and after service drooling....with body odors and a total inability to speak an intelligible sentence. My wife and I would make a point of stopping our easy conversation look David in the eye call him by name shake his hand and embrace him....
- I had not seen David in years until recently....at a Church gathering. He recognized me and I was so blessed that he remembered me and asked about our family.
- Beloved I am convinced that as I reached out to David I was reaching out and touching Jesus.
- I am equally convinced he knows more about the Grace and Love of God than countless others with 4 times his ability.

The Kingdom is like this.....

The Value of Labor is Partnership not Position.

The Value of People is NOT ability of Partnership.

Now listen to the final question Jesus posed in this parable in vs 15

Or is your eye envious because I AM Generous?

In the Kingdom

3. The Generosity of God is the Highest Value!

Now comes the Great Reversal.....*the last will be first....*

- **The Basis of Gods Gift is the HE IS intrinsically Good!**
- **The Word for Generous = Good - Intrinsically Good, good in nature, good whether it be seen to be so or not, the widest and most colorless of all words with this meaning - Originates In God!**

Now Watch this...

- This what the Kingdom is Like....it is based not in the value systems of man but in the Largeness of the Heart of the God!
- Measureless Paul says in His Love....The Kingdom is about the revelation of the Nature and Character of the Uncreated God! The Kingdom lives and moves on the basis of His Generosity!

So it is a Reversal of the Value systems of the World....first will be last.....

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But then just a few verses later in Matthew 20 the mother of James and John asks....Jesus for a favor....*grant that my boys can sit or your right and left....*Jesus response....*you still are thinking about this Kingdom in terms of position and power....*

If you want to be Great....then become the Servant of all.....

Jesus in John 13 wanted to show the full extent of His love....picked up a towel and a basin....

Conclusions....What does all this mean?

- 1 Jesus gives all of us an Invitation to Embrace and Live from a Value system called the Kingdom of Heaven.**
- 2. Invitation to Expose the bent of the heart - to look with Envy towards others based on my weak judgment.**
- 3. Invitation to the Largeness of the Generous Grace of God!**

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