

# Coach House Church

# BEACONS

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## LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

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10TH SEPTEMBER 2020

In life, it can sometimes feel like some people have an unfair advantage. Maybe they're born prettier or cleverer or funnier. Maybe you feel like the only one that doesn't have some sort of special gift or party trick. Maybe you always feel like an outsider.

Jesus told a parable in Matthew 20:1-16. He said this:

*"For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing 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. 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.' 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 labourers 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 first came, they thought they would 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 worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' So the last will be first, and the first last."*

Our initial reaction to this is probably very similar to the workers who arrived first. This is so unfair. Why should those that arrived last and worked very little get the same reward as those who worked all day? Those that slaved away all day in the hot sun get the exact same as those that wandered in in the cool evening and only worked for one hour.

So why has God told us this? How can he be a just God if that is how he treats people in the kingdom of God?

Instead of being a story about injustice this is a story about grace. Christianity is the only religion that is reliant on grace. Most religions rely on working or behaving in a certain way. Even the God of making yourself happy requires you to work for it. We like to think we can improve our position. We like to think that by going to church or doing bible studies or working for the church, whether for money or not, we are making ourselves better people. We like to think that we have some power against our sinful nature. We like to think that we can stop ourselves doing bad things, but the truth is we can't help it. We do bad things before we even think about it. We are slaves to our sin.

We want to earn our salvation because that allows us to be competitive. It means we can compete with others and compare ourselves. There will always be someone who isn't working as hard as us or doing as well as us on the outside. We like to see someone that we are beating. But God doesn't give us that opportunity.

The point of this story is that, however long or hard we work, the reward for all Christians will be eternal life. We won't have a significantly better reward because we've done more volunteer work or because we've been born in a Christian family or because we have less sin than someone else. We will all inherit eternal life. Our reward will be the same.

In the day that Jesus told this story, the Jews would have thought that they were above everyone else. They would have thought that because of their sacrifices and prayers, they were saved and would receive a reward from God for it. Jesus was telling this story to show that the gospel was open to all. Jesus, throughout His life, made it clear, that His offer of salvation was for all. That is why, when speaking to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, he said these famous words "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

God loved the whole world so much that He died to save it. This would have been radical to a Jew at the time. They would have thought this was crazy. That God would become a sacrifice for them. He values every person, every soul and wants all to come to Him. He leaves the way open to all of us as long as He can. We are all sinners and we all need to repent and come to Jesus. Romans 3:10 says "There is no one righteous, not even one." God gives all of us grace. All He asks is that we turn to Him and ask for repentance. All He wants is for us to truly choose Him.

This means that we should be humble. We should love like Jesus loved and love all people, regardless of what they have done. Whether they have murdered or stolen or hurt us in some way, Jesus loves them and wants them to come to Him.

This is good news for us. No matter what we have done, no matter what we do, we will receive the grace of God if we come to Him. He will be gracious and even free us from being a slave to sin. He will allow us to become the person He wants us to be. The person we were made to be. But it also means we need to treat other people graciously. Whether they are outside the church or inside it. We are all at a different place in our journey and we shouldn't judge other people for where they're at.

So this story isn't fair. Those that work harder don't get more reward which means there is no point in being competitive. It's good news for other people outside the church and those that aren't doing as well as us, but it's also good news for us. We could never earn our way into heaven. So let's stop trying to.



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