

⁹ “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

***Pray:** Gracious Lord, we come to you with all kinds of needs today. We know you are a generous God. Be gracious to us as we listen to you and satisfy our deepest needs. Saturate us in your Word and Holy Spirit and make us holy through your truth so we would walk out of here today with a renewed vision of life in your Kingdom. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

1. I only want what’s fair – does that sound fair enough to you?

I was having a laugh with my parents this past week over something that happened when I was a kid. It’s not a big deal, but I’ve never forgotten this event.

My sister and me were sitting up against the lime green bench, which was fashionable in the 80’s. We were waiting for some ice-cream that dad was scooping out for us.

Dad dished up a bowl of ice-cream for me and then for my older sister. Like I said, **‘I only want what’s fair.’** Anyway, I received my bowl and was quite content until I saw the mountain of ice-cream over-flowing from my sister’s bowl. Maybe I’m exaggerating a little. Then I made a mistake that’s lived with me for a long time. I complained to dad and said, **“Look how much she got...that’s not fair!”** Guess what happened? You didn’t top up my bowl with ice-cream did you dad?

Throwing all fairness and justice to the wind, my dad swept up my bowl and scooped all my ice-cream into my sister’s bowl saying, **“Well then Vaughn you get nothing!”** My sister was laughing and trying to cover it up – presumably so she didn’t lose her double portion; I was angry at dad because I had that ‘ripped off’ feeling and I was mad at my sister who was tucking into my ice-cream. Isn’t it amazing the things you remember? But tell me – was that fair!?

Now I know Aussie’s are all for fairness, but there is a point where that all changes. I’ve learnt in the school of experience that... ***Fair’s fair until we think someone’s getting more than their fair share...***

Is that what happened in Jesus’ parable of the vineyard today? Did some workers get more than their fair share?

2. The owner of the vineyard had been into town and picked up the first group of workers at about 6am. The story reads a bit like an employer going to Centrelink to pick up workers for his vineyard. They jump into the back of his Ute and are ready to go for the day as soon as they arrive back at the employer's property. They agree that the pay on offer for the day is fair to them and the employer, so off they go into the vineyard and start work.

Then at 9am, 12pm, 3pm and even as late as 5pm (just an hour before the work day ends), the owner comes back into town and picks up more workers. What was their pay agreement? The bible says that, *"⁴ He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.'⁵ So they went."* The employer promises to pay what is fair – so everyone is happy for now.

Then knock off time arrives. ⁸ *"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'⁹ "The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius.*

Here's an awkward moment! The workers who've been on the job for 60 minutes receive a whole day's wages. It's a tense moment. Those who have battled through the heat of the day, who got out of bed at 4 or 5am, whose muscles are tired after 12 solid hours of labour, see this happening and something dawns on them. Wow, perhaps the daily pay rate we agreed to work for is actually an hourly rate! Verse 10 says, *"¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more.'* Things are looking up...now they might buy something for the kids on the way home, some flowers for their wives and maybe a good bottle of wine to have with dinner.

Then there's a second very awkward moment! They receive the same one denarius that the workers who'd been on-site for 60 minutes received – and so they start grumbling! They've got that ripped off feeling because this just isn't fair. Wouldn't you agree? Would you be happy if you worked a 12 hour shift and then someone came along for the last 60 minutes and received the same pay as you?

I could imagine some pretty angry picket lines forming at the vineyard, media being called in, people sending emails to A Current Affair, headlines reading, 'Aussie workers ripped off in pay fiasco!'

3. But today isn't about what's fair – just as it's not about anyone getting ripped off.

Today is about common needs – not what you've got coming to you because of the hours you've put in or a fair day's pay. Today is about grace – which by the way is very unfair!

The Vineyard depicted in the parable is the Kingdom of God. When you hear 'Vineyard,' think about the activity of God's glorious Kingdom in your life and in the world around you. Fair's fair doesn't fit in the Kingdom of God. It has no place. In the back of your minds you know that full well. The Kingdom of God comes to you out of pure grace.

- It doesn't come to you because you will it into existence.
- It doesn't come to you because you usher it in with all your church work and effort in ministry or the number of working bees you've shown up for.
- It doesn't come to you because you've been in church longer than everyone else, or appear to have fewer struggles than the next person.
- The Kingdom of God doesn't come to you because your own self-assessment that says you're worthy of heaven.

It comes because the King of the Heavenly Kingdom is so very, very gracious. Grace is not fair – that's why it's grace!

We know this, but what tends to creep into our thinking is something different. It creeps in when we see people who are struggling to get their act together; when we look at people who never seem to put their hand up to volunteer and yet seem pleased to enjoy all the benefits of being in the Kingdom community. It's then that the thought pops into our head – **"Hey we do everything around here!"**

When this happens, even without meaning to do it, we start to see our spiritual worth and our spiritual health based on how much work we do for the church. It creeps in and before we realize it, we slowly begin to assume that maybe we need less grace than some of the other people we worship and live with because our contribution is so valuable. That's self-glorifying instead of glorifying God!

What a dangerous spiral when Christian's confess they're saved by grace alone, but live like their work in the Kingdom will somehow earn them greater pay, more grace or an even more lavish reward than the next person.

Which begs the question...

When you heard this parable of the workers in the vineyard today, which group of workers did you identify with?

I mean without really over-analysing it, did you see yourself in those hard working labourers who'd been on the job from 6am and worked all day til 6pm? And if you did, who told you that? Who told you that you were a part of that group and not one of the groups that clocked on later?

How do you know you're not one of the people who worked 60 minutes but received a full day's pay?

4. To the glory of God, today Jesus is turning our system of fairness upside down - by grace!

It's time to stop counting our working hours and hear the simple and awesome truth. Paul says in Ephesians:

*⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ **in order that** in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ **For** it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ **For** we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

My deepest joy and prayer for you today is that you would rejoice simply because you have been called to be a worker in the vineyard of God! [Baptism party @ 10am]

You have a place in the Kingdom. You belong here by grace alone – by the power of Jesus' death and his resurrection at work in your life today. You have privileged work to do and God has given you the talents you need to do it and so glorify Him!

Here's the freeing part! This needs to become not a point of comparison with anyone else, but a lifelong journey of ***gracious gratitude to the God who enables our work in the first place.***

- Grace called you to work in the kingdom,
- grace lets you participate in the glorious ministry of God for the joy of all peoples,
- grace compensates for yours (and my) shortcomings and challenges in that work,
- and grace, not your own work ethic or work hours is **what crowns the work** at the end of the day.

5. Our human instincts tell us fair's fair until someone is getting more than their fair share. As Christian's we've all received exceedingly more than we deserve from God's hand. We've received what we need more than anything else.

Will you rejoice today that the fullness of God's grace has touched your life? Will you rejoice ***in not*** comparing your life and service in the Kingdom to others?

Rejoice today that you have all received grace upon grace. Rejoice that you are all children of the light, called to serve the living God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength to the glory of His holy name. ¹⁰ **For** we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Amen. Pray: