

“11th Hour Faith” // Matthew 20:1–16 // Listen 3

Mother’s Day

For those of you always trying to figure out what to write in your Mother’s Day cards other than, “Have a great day!” or “Aren’t you glad I’m your kid?” make sure you bookmark that video and use some of the lines in your card next year. You can’t use it this year, unless she doesn’t come to church here, but next year...

Mother’s Day is a day to honor some among us who rarely receive the recognition they deserve, a day to **celebrate some of the most noble and fierce warriors** in our culture—moms.

We have been calling 2018 at TSC the “Year of Prayer,” and during services each weekend we have been spending focused time praying for a topic or a situation. Would you join me this weekend in thanking God for the gift that mothers are and praying for their ministries? Let’s pray...

God, it’s hard to think of a loftier or more important assignment than rearing the next generation. I pray that you would empower our mothers in this church to bring up a godly generation that fears you, loves the gospel, and is devoted to your kingdom.

Works Consulted:

“So the Last Shall Be First and the First, Last,” Todd Unzicker

“Workers in the Vineyard,” J. M. Boice

“God’s Frustrating Grace,” Judah Smith

“Laborers in the Vineyard,” Ryan Britt

“God Pays by Grace, Not by Works,” Braden Greer

God, we are grateful we are for the sacrifices many of our mothers eagerly embraced to make us who we are.

Father, at the same time, we recognize that for many, this day can be a day of *sadness*. It brings up feelings of loss, or regret, or even estrangement. For some, this day brings to the surface the pain of unfulfilled dreams.

So, on days like this, God would you remind all of us deep in our souls that our primary identity in life is not as mothers or fathers, but as sons and daughters of God.

Would you remind the ladies here at TSC that they hold a special place of honor before you not because of a particular assignment you’ve given them, but **because of the worth you placed upon them** when you chose them for your kingdom and the plans you have had for them since the day they were born.

And for those who struggle with the pain of loss on this day, would you remind them that even better than one day of recognition each year is the joy of being called a daughter of the King.

Thank you for the gift that mothers are. Thank you for revealing so much of who you are through they are in our lives, Lord.

We pray and thank you in Jesus name – Amen.

So, to our mothers, we salute you, and to **all our ladies,** we honor you.

SC, could we put our hands together and thank God for the gift our sisters in Christ are to this church?

Introduction

If you have your Bibles, take them out and open them to Matthew. We're in chapter 20 this week.

This is our 3rd week of a series called *Listen* in which are unpacking some of the Parables of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew.

It's called *Listen* because that's the word Jesus often used when he told these parables. It indicated that the real meaning in his parables was often hidden below the surface, so that only those of right posture of heart could perceive it.

Being able to listen and truly understand what is being said is a critical life skill in any context.

- The 1st week of this series I told you about **one of our campus pastors** who didn't really listen to his wife and ended up a \$1400 credenza.
- When I was young I heard **another story about a couple of rednecks** are out in the woods hunting when one of them suddenly grabs his chest and falls to the ground. **He doesn't seem to be breathing**; his eyes are rolled back in his head. **The other redneck whips out his cell phone** and calls 911. He gasps to the operator, "I think Bubba is dead! What do I do?" The 911 operator responds, in a very calm, measured voice, "OK, but before we do anything, we need to make sure that he's dead." **There is a silence, and then a loud shotgun blast.** Then the redneck's voice comes back on the line, and says, "Okay, now what?"

I'm sure it wasn't true—but the point is, **in these parables, we need not just to hear the words** that are being said, we need to understand the meaning behind those words and images.

Today, of all days, this is true, because we're going to look **a parable that gets at the heart of one of the most fundamental elements** of our worldview—our sense of justice.

Few things are as ingrained in us as our sense of justice.

- Where you are religious or irreligious, conservative or liberal, young or old, you have this deep-seated need for justice.
- One of the phrases I never had to teach my kids was "that's not fair."

Justice makes us feel like there is an order and meaning to life; it gives us a sense of control and peace.

Thus, one of the most frustrating things for us in faith is when God doesn't seem to be operating according to the rules of justice.

- **Jesus addresses this frustration** head-on with this parable, and this teaching, while confusing and frustrating at first, is critical in learning to trust God and to be at peace with what he is doing in the world.
- **If you've ever asked God**, "*God, why did you let this happen to me (or them)—it doesn't seem fair!*" **this story is for you.**
- (This parable has the potential to be a **complete worldview changer** for many of you and **do more to help you trust God than anything I've ever taught!**)

Matthew 20:1–16

The parable is in chapter 20, but we're going to start with the last verse of chapter 19 because the story of chapter 19 is the backdrop for why Jesus told parable. (CHAPTER BREAK THEOLOGY)

The story is Jesus's encounter with a guy we refer to as "the rich, young ruler."

The RYR was, as his name implies, a **young, successful, morally upright** community leader. He had it all—money, power, good looks—I’m sure everybody envied him. And **one afternoon he came to Jesus** to ask what *else* he needed to *do* to inherit eternal life.

YOU HAVE TO HAND IT TO HIM. HE AT LEAST REALIZES THAT his riches and success are no good if at the end... The **problem was that the whole basis** of his question was wrong! There is **nothing we can do** to earn eternal life—if there was, Jesus would not have come... He would have dropped an instruction manual...

Instead, **you have to admit that there’s nothing you can do** and give up control of your life to Jesus so that he can do it for you. **We have to admit that all our riches—whether monetary or spiritual—are ultimately worthless before God** and **receive eternal life and God’s favor** as an undeserved gift of grace.

Well, Jesus tells the young man this and sadly, he walks away because his possessions were just too many and his sense of worthiness too great that he couldn’t just let those things go.

Jesus ends that whole encounter by saying, ^{19:30} **But many who are first will be last, and the last first.**

And then, he tells this parable: **20:1**“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning (about 6 am) to hire laborers for his vineyard. **(You don’t see this much anymore,** but back then, there were parts of the city where day laborers would go and wait to be picked up for jobs. In many parts of the world it is still quite common. In SE Asia where I lived, for example, there were 2–3 spots where you’d see a bunch of men gathered hoping someone would come along and pick them up. Some of them would wait around until noon; some never get picked up. There are a few places in our city where this still happens. One of our staff members told me that her husband was driving through town when it got a flat tire, so

he pulled over to change it and he heard a commotion and a bunch of guys with tools were climbing in the back of it because they assumed he was there to pick them up for the day.)

Well, **2** After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. A denarius was the standard day’s wage back then. **It was fair, straightforward,** and everyone was happy.

3 And going out (again) about the third hour (9am) (they measured his from 6 am, the start of the work day, so this would have been at 9am) he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, **4** and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ The thing here to notice is these later workers **go with no agreement** on a wage. They just **believe the Master’s promise to take good care of them.**

5 So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour (noon) and the ninth hour (3pm), he did the same. (Again, no contract)

6 And about the eleventh hour (What hour are we? **5pm**). If you haven’t been picked up by **5**, I’d think you’d hang it up) he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ **7** They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ **Again, no contract.** Only the **1st** guys got a contract. Everyone else just trusts in the goodness of this Master and believes his promises to take care of them.

8 And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ **9** And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.

10 Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. **11** And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, **12** 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.'

So, here's what's happening: The Master lines them all up, with the more recently hired workers at the front and the earliest workers at the back.

And he opens up his bag of coins and says, "Okay, 5pm guys. Where are you?" And they step forward. They are all fresh and energetic; they smell nice; there's no sweat marks under their arms; their manicures are still impeccable. **The Master says, "I told you I'd take care of you, right? So, here's a denarius for you, and a denarius for you, and YOU get a denarius, and you get a denarius..."** and he starts working his way down the line.

Well, the guys who have been working for all day are way at the end of the line, but they can see what's going on and they start getting excited. They are like, **"Whoa! One denarius for just an hour?** That's crazy generous. That means I'll be getting..."

But finally, when he gets to them, he says, "And a denarius for each of you!"

At which point they say, "Wait, no fair! We're getting the same thing they got!"

13 But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? *15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?'

When the Master said that, I imagine some of them probably thought, *"Well yes, actually, I do begrudge you your generosity. Honestly, I'd rather have justice. I understand justice. Justice is*

quantifiable and predictable and comfortable. I want to deserve what I get and get what I deserve."

And that's where I imagine Jesus probably got a twinkle in his eye and said, "Really? You really want *justice*? You want to talk about what you really deserve? I don't think you want to go there." Justice is a dead end. Literally.

You see, that's where **we zoom out from this story to the larger picture** of the NT and here's what we realize:

- **First, if God gives any of us what we deserve, we are doomed.**
 - The Bible says in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death. **If we're going to get technical about it**, that's what we deserve. **Anything more than that** is sheer grace and mercy.
 - So, let's stop talking about what we deserve.
- Instead, it's **better to have the relationship with the Master that the 11th hour guys have**, where you just go with him, trusting in his goodness and his promises to take care of you.
 - **I mean, think about the One telling this story.** According to the New Testament, Jesus is really the one that worked all day while we sat around and did nothing.
 - And then, not only did he not get what he deserved, he was **punished for our laziness**.
 - The wages that he was due was given to us and the punishment we deserved was placed on him.
 - **He lived a perfect life** and then died the sinner's death. On the cross he was beaten and whipped and crucified for sin. *Not his sin*, but ours.
 - **We, by contrast, lived the sinner's life** and reap instead the reward of the righteous!
 - Sometimes in **business books** you'll encounter the question of which is the better motivator—the carrot or stick? ... **Think about the gospel**. God took the stick of justice and beat Jesus with it; then took the carrot of reward and gave it to us.

- **You want to talk about fair? Really?** I don't think you want to go there.
- But **incredibly, Jesus has offered** you grace. And **when you see what he was willing to go through** to get it for you, surely you can trust him and just go with him like the 11th hour guys did, right?

It's interesting when you consider that the Master of this parable **could have avoided this whole controversy by simply** paying the **guys in the order he hired them**. He could have given the 1st workers their denarius and sent them on their way. **They would have been happy** and none the wiser.

But he **insists on paying them in reverse order** so that the first guys, who worked 12 hours, see that the guys who only worked 1 hour are getting the same as they were.

It's like he's trying to pick a fight. But he's doing it this way to make a point, and the point is not to **advocate some new Marxist Christian business** philosophy where everyone gets paid the same regardless of how much they work.

- **Nor is Jesus trying to say there will be no degrees of reward** in heaven—that there's a flat rate of reward regardless of the work you do. **Numerous other places in the Bible teach** that there will be degrees of reward in heaven according to our faithfulness.
- **The key to this parable, as with all parables, is context and this is Jesus's response to the rich, young ruler** (and other people like him) who think they can earn eternal life or deserve the blessings of God.
- And his **point is that you don't want to be in a contract relationship with God**. You don't want to receive what you deserve. Better is just to follow the Master and trust in his grace like the 11th hour guys did. It will work out a whole lot better for you.

And he ends the parable the same way he started it: ***16 So the last will be first, and the first last.** Better to be last in life, trusting in God's grace, than first, getting what you think you deserve.

Listen, so many of our spiritual problems and so much of our spiritual unrest comes from having a "contract" mentality with God—believing that God owes something to us and we want him to give us what we deserve.

Let me give you 5 SIGNS that you are in a contract relationship with God, most of which you see right here in this story:

1. Bitterness:

*(Diagnostic questions) ASK: **Am I bitter because God has withheld some blessing from me I think I deserve?***

In this story the **12-hour workers are bitter** at not getting more because they think they *deserve* more.

But again, **what Jesus is getting at** is, *"Really? Everything good you receive in life beyond death and hell is a gift."*

A lot of times we say, "Lord, why is this bad thing happening to me?" Or, we talk about the problem of evil as if we do not deserve any bad thing ever happening to us.

- **Jesus presented a different perspective:** Luke 13: you will all likewise perish.
- **We get mad that the tower** fell on us. But the fact that it didn't fall on us yesterday is grace. EVERY DAY I get up with breath in my lungs is more than I deserve...
- **Any life and blessing and certainly salvation** is more than we deserve.

- Listen, if **all Jesus did in your life was save you from hell**, and after that everything else in your earthly life was taken, **would we still not consider ourselves the recipients** of incalculable levels of grace—grace we didn't deserve?
- I mean, **what are a few years of pain and loss** compared to the joys we experience in eternity?
- **No matter what you go through on earth**, don't you think in heaven you'll be singing the words of **Amazing Grace** "When we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise, than when we first begun?"

When you say, "God, you owe me... (this or that blessing)" you are trying to go back to a contract relationship with God! And that's not where you want to be.

- **I know a couple in our church who have struggled** for many years with why God has not yet given them children. "Aren't children a blessing from the Lord? Why hasn't God given us that blessing?"
- *And listen, that's a normal struggle.*
- But **they told me recently that they quite often slip into the mentality that God owes them that**, and when they do that it's like they disqualify themselves from the grace God has given to them.
- **None of us want to demand that God give us what we deserve**, and the greatest blessing God could ever give us is forgiveness of sin and eternal life and forever fellowship with him and his promises, and **they can trust him** with this issue of children.

2. Jealousy

ASK: Am I jealous of good things others have that I want?

Jealousy/resentment

In this story these workers are jealous of what the later workers got because they think they are more *deserving* than the others were.

We're like that, aren't we? We look around and say, "Why did they get that opportunity? Why did she get married? Why did they have kids so quickly? Why are their bodies good looking and healthy? Why did they get the job? **I deserve these things more than them.**"

But **don't you see how that has put you again** in the mentality of contract? **Isn't everything good you've received a gift of grace?**

And **hasn't Jesus promised** he'll take care of you and do what's right—and proven that you can trust him?

The fruit of jealousy springs from two evil roots: a) unbelief in the goodness of the God who has promised to take care of you; and b) the foolish pride that assumes God owes you certain things

Promises from my QT this week: (don't read the Bible?)

- "Do not let your heart envy sinners... there is surely a hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off." (Prov 23:17–18)
- "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." (Ps. 37:25)

Like the Master said to the late-day workers, Jesus has said to me, "Just trust and follow me! I'll take care of you."

And, **I know I don't really deserve** any of his goodness or the promises he has made me. So, how can I complain?

- **Tim Keller says:** "If Jesus didn't complain when he received a life infinitely worse than he deserved, how can I complain while I experience a life infinitely better than I deserve?" *He did not deserve the death he got, but he did not begrudge it. And we do not deserve the salvation we receive through his suffering, but he*

*does not begrudge that either. Why do I then begrudge some other blessing given to someone?*¹

Realizing that the blessings of your life aren't owed to you, but are gifts of grace, will change how you look at them. It will turn a person of jealousy and resentment into a person of gratitude and sharing.

- **E.g. woman eating bag of cookies story.** You think you deserve those cookies and you're mad that someone else is eating them.
 - **When you realize all the cookies you enjoy in life** were purchased by Jesus, it changes things.
 - **If Jesus gave you cookies when you didn't deserve them...**

Which leads me to #3...

3. Anger (and I mean specifically over *unanswered prayer*)

ASK: Do I get angry when God doesn't answer my prayers the way I think he should?

When we assume that God owes us all these things, we get angry when he doesn't answer a prayer. *But God I did this or that—you owe me!* (I went to church; I tithed; I obeyed the rules; I did what you told me with my kids)

But thank God, his goodness in our lives is not in proportion to what we deserve. It's a gift of grace.

And—**when we go through pain**, it's not a punishment for bad living—because Jesus absorbed all the punishment for our sin in our place. Which means there is **literally no punishment** left for me.

- **Romans 8:1**, "There is therefore *no condemnation* for those who are in Christ Jesus?"
 - *How much? NO* condemnation.

- So, QUESTION: **If you are in Christ, does God ever do anything to pay you back for your sin?** (No, he fully paid *Jesus* back for your sin, and there is no condemnation left for you.)
- So, **ASK YOURSELF: when you pray, and you ask God for good things, on what basis** are you asking him to give you those things? **Based on all the good you have done? That's foolish!**
 - **R.A. Torrey** told a story about a man who **wrote him complaining** that God has not answered his prayer even though he had served God faithfully for 30 years. **Torrey** said, "If you are asking God to do something for you because you have served him faithfully for 30 yrs, you are **really praying in your own name, not Jesus's.**"
- **When you realize that God only responds to you now based on what Jesus deserves**, you can trust that even the bad things in our lives—those times when God doesn't answer a prayer the way you thought he should—are **done for a good purpose.**
- **Knowing that everything God gives me is on the basis of what Jesus deserves helps me believe Rom 8:28**—that all things are working together *for good.*
- **Everything in my life is given for good—because** all the condemnation was taken into Jesus and all that is left for me is gifts of grace—which he has promised to redeem for good—and that takes me from anger (and bewilderment over the ways of God) to peace and rest in the promises of God.

Which leads to sign #4 that you are in a contract with God...

4. Insecurity

ASK: Do I feel uncertain about where I stand with God or insecure about my future?

¹ Tim Keller, *God's Wisdom for Life*, May 7.

If you have a contract mentality with God and assume that what God gives you is in direct response to what you deserve, you live in a constant state of insecurity. You'll constantly ask: Have I been good enough to earn his blessing?

And every time a bad thing happens to you, you ask: **Am I being paid back for something?**

IN AMERICA, a lot of hipsters talk about how much comfort Zen Buddhism brings them. Most people who say that only mean that they like to get quiet, do some stretching and drink hot tea. And I like that, too.

But true Zen Buddhism—when you get into the philosophy of it—is the complete opposite of rest. Because it is built on the idea of karma—if you do bad it will be returned to you.

So, when you are experiencing something bad, you have to wonder, “What did I do that is causing this?” And sometimes you can't remember what bad thing you did. And then when you add reincarnation into it—that means you might have done bad in a life you aren't even aware of. And your hope is to be good enough that maybe in the next life you can get absorbed into the great nothingness where you'll have no more consciousness.

I would humbly say the gospel offers a vastly superior peace, and on an entirely different basis.

Jesus tells us to trust in his goodness and grace—to believe that he has removed all threat of punishment from our lives, so that he will turn every bad or good thing in our lives for good—and that he will take care of us and supply all our need just like he promised.

That will give you a rest that clearing your mind and listening to Enya can't provide.

I think here of so many of my favorite songs: ***Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus! Just to take him at his word. Just to rest upon his promise, just to know, 'Thus says the Lord!'***

Or this one: ***The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose, I will not, I will not, desert to his foes.***

Believing that promise is better than clearing your mind and doing downward dog. Again, I like stretching and hot tea, but I'll take the Word of God and the promises of Jesus any day.

You can start your day with Yoga if you want. I'd prefer to start on my knees at the feet of my Heavenly Father believing his promise.

One quick question, here, because I know some of you ask it: *You say, “Well, how do I know that I belong to Jesus? For example, what if I am one of the ones who doesn't know him?” SPURGEON, “He could never say to me, ‘I don't know you.’ If he did, I'd say, ‘Not know you, Lord? I leaned on you as my gift righteousness when I was guilty; for strength when I felt weak. You can't say to me, ‘I don't know you.’”*

The 5th sign you are in a contract relationship with God...

5. Indifference

ASK: ***Am I moved to action by the suffering of others?***

When you believe that the good things you are experiencing are the sole result of your hard work, you tend to be calloused toward those who have less and say, “Well, you're just getting what you deserve. If you had worked harder, you'd have good stuff, too.”

That's what we see in this story. These first workers aren't thinking about these guys—or the fact that they probably have families. They

are just thinking, “You didn’t work like I did—you don’t deserve the good things like I do!”

Jesus’s **story challenges their mindset** in a very subtle but very fundamental way.

- Notice that **when the landowner says to 11th hour guys**, vs. 7, “Why aren’t you working?” They answer, “No one has hired us.”
- **I used to think that this last group represented really lazy** people. A group of millennials that had played Fortnite all night and woke up at noon, sauntered out around 4 to see if there was any work and then **complained**, “There are no jobs in this town!” The other one responded, “Yeah, not unless you want to work 40 hours a week or something.”
- **But nothing in Jesus’s story indicates these 11th hour guys are lazy.** They were just as eager as the 1st guys, they just had never been given the opportunity.
- **I’ve pointed this out before:** most of the blessings I am experiencing—both the financial blessings as well as the spiritual blessing in my life—are the result of graces in my life I had nothing to do with.
 - What **did I do that deserved parents** that taught me the gospel and taught me the value of hard work?
 - Did I **do something as a baby** that made me worthy of growing up in a church where I’d have access to the gospel and a **good, supportive community**, or to grow up in America where I had access to privilege and opportunity.
 - Even my talents? **Something special?**
 - I **didn’t experience those things** because I was worthier than others. God in his grace gave me opportunities and privileges. And that puts me under obligation to those without them.
- **To use any position of privilege I have to empower others:** I showed you a few weeks ago that JUSTICE, biblically speaking, is

not just not cheating people, it is leveraging whatever your position of strength you have for the empowerment of others.

- **Justice in our mindset usually means** stopping the oppressor. **But biblically speaking**, justice is also helping to lift up the oppressed.
- **More importantly, spiritual obligation. Romans 1:14.** Why did Paul feel obligated?
 - **This passage shows us that God wants to keep going back “to the corners” to call people into his service.** He is even today going back to the nations—searching for sons and workers!
 - **Are we going with him**, eager for them to receive the salvation we’ve received, knowing that we were no worthier than them to receive it?²

(MUSIC) **YOU SEE, when you see that you don’t deserve salvation and blessing**—that Jesus did all the work and you got the blessing—it will produce in you a generous spirit toward others and redefine your concept of justice. You’ll go **from indifferent to generous.**

SO, get rid your contract. In humility, embrace the grace of God and trust in the goodness of the Master who called you to follow him!

When you do, I promise you...

- bitterness \square will be replaced by gratitude
- jealousy \square with contentment
- anger \square peace
- insecurity \square assurance
- indifference \square compassion (LEAVE UP)

Again, like I said, for many of you this could be a game changer. **You walked in here with a contract with God** (which led to bitterness, jealousy...) **and you’re going to walk out of here with trust in Jesus and hope in his grace** (which will lead to gratitude, contentment...)

² John MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary*, Matthew 16–23

A practical way of cultivating this: A-C-T-S (Adore God for grace; confess your need of it; give thanks for the blessings, and pray out of this mindset!)

Let's pray

