The Goodness of God

Sermon Transcript: Matthew 20:1–16

Speaker: Pastor Jesse Blaine | **Date:** September 20, 2026 | **Location:** Christ the King Anglican Church, Denver

Opening Prayer & Introduction

Good evening, everyone. Evening. Could you pray together with me?

Lord, as we open your scriptures and your word, we ask that your Spirit would speak to our hearts and to our minds, that we would be transformed. And especially as we look at this very simple parable and message this evening, that you would expand our view of your goodness and your grace, and then that would just overwhelm and overtake every other movement in our life. So may we leave here more filled with your grace and your love. In your name we pray, Amen. Amen.

Well, this evening we are in Matthew chapter 20. It's a parable that's about many things, but at its core it's a parable about the goodness of God and the reactions that we can have in our own hearts when that goodness shows up in the lives of others. And so I want to start off this evening with a short quote from a minister named John Claypool. He said this:

> *“To learn whether or not you are a person of grace, see how you respond when somebody else receives it.” — John Claypool*

I remember many years ago, between the ages of 17 and 19, my speeding tickets began to accumulate because I was what you might call an aggressive driver. And there was one time where I didn't realize it, but I was going so fast down I-81 South in Virginia that according to the state trooper, “Young man, you were passing everything in sight.” And I said, “I didn't feel like I was driving that fast.”

Well, so I got to know police officers well, and I got used to the court system of showing up to fight my tickets. And I remember for this one ticket I was going way too fast—don't drive, I'm teaching my daughter how to drive right now, don't drive that fast, okay—but I was going so fast that in the state of Virginia I was considered a reckless driver. And so I had to show up to court. I had full control of the vehicle, but I had to show up to court. And as it turns out, I was there with some others who were charged with reckless driving, which was more than just a little speeding ticket—it was something that could affect my driver's license at that time.

So I went there nervous. And I remember that I was sitting there waiting in this tiny little courthouse in rural Virginia, and different cases came up on the docket, and the judge would talk sternly to them. And then my case came up, and as it turned out, the police officer never showed up, and so there was no witness against my crime, and so I was let off scot-free—no penalties, no charges. And the looks I received from those who were waiting in the courtroom—I wanted to read to them this parable from Matthew chapter 20:

“Do not begrudge the judge's generosity.”

The truth of the scriptures though, of course, and the truth of this parable, is that God's grace is so overwhelmingly good in our lives that it actually offends our sense of fairness. And it actually removes any sense of us having a ledger that we can bring to God and a ledger that we can use with other people. God's grace is so overwhelming and his goodness is so overpowering that we can say together with the words of the Apostle Paul that “to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

So this is our hope for this evening. This is the good news. This is what I hope to see in this parable: that God's grace is so good that he wants us to change how we show up together with him as we walk together with him, and change how we show up in the lives of those around us—those to our left and to our right, and in the world around us.

Theme 1: The Goodness of God as Represented in the Parable

So let's look here at this parable here in Matthew chapter 20. In any parable that you read in the gospels, our main task is to ask the question: what is the main point? What is the center of gravity that Jesus is driving to in this parable? And for this parable, we see it here in verse 15. He says, “Or do you begrudge my generosity?” Or I like the RSV (Revised Standard Version) rendering of it—it's a little bit closer to the Greek. It says, “Is your eye evil because I am good?”

So as we look at this parable, I want to take it in two themes. We're going to trace it back. We're going to see the goodness of God as it's represented in this parable. And secondly, we're going to see what does it look like in our own hearts, and how we can have an evil eye or a non-evil eye towards the goodness of God.

So if we track back through the parable, the main character in it is a vineyard owner. He's the master of the house, and this owner is a generous owner. He goes out and he finds the workers himself. Normally in this time, they would send out a steward or a servant to find laborers. And here, the owner himself goes out to find the laborers.

The workers he finds are idle. Now idleness in this context aren't people just sort of hanging around at the corner, but these are people that didn't have land to own for themselves. They didn't have a trade that they could ply for themselves to earn money, and so these were day laborers. And the people in that context would have understood those who were idle to be the poor, those without resources, those without land. These were the disenfranchised that didn't own land to work themselves. In fact, if you go back to the Old Testament, you'll see that the idle laborers—those who didn't own land—are in the same class and category as the sojourner and the poor and the widow and the orphan.

So these are idle people who had no power in themselves, no resources, no agency on their own, and they were out there waiting. So these are people in great need. The people in the morning were in great need. The people at the ninth hour were in great need. And especially imagine if the morning people were in great need, the 11th hour workers were especially needy because they were not chosen, and they needed work and provision.

So this generous landowner, he goes out, he picks idle people—people who need work—and he goes out to find them in the marketplace. He hires them, and he says to them, “I will pay you what is right.” Or in some translations he says, “I will pay you enough.” Then he goes back out in the sixth hour, and the ninth hour, and the 11th hour—this is in reference to 3:00 p.m.. So that's the idea.

And so this generous landowner goes out, and he seeks those idle, those who are in need, those who are without power. And he agrees to pay them one denarius. So one denarius in this time would be the equivalent of one full day's wage of what somebody needs to live for that day. So the focus here isn't necessarily commensurate pay based on hours worked, but it's pay based on what is right as chosen by the landowner, and what is needed for that day as chosen by the landowner.

So if we understand all of this in terms of grace, there's a generous God who himself goes out to seek those in need—those who are disenfranchised, those with no power in and of themselves, those without any resources. He seeks the idle and the spiritually poor. Then he gives them the full measure of grace of what they need. Not based on an accounting ledger or the amount of time served or a timesheet, but on his divine wisdom based on what they actually need—full measure, enough. This is the idea of who the landowner is.

Now if you capture this in the movement of the whole book of Matthew, we see here God or Jesus is painting a picture of God the Father as one who is generous and filled with grace—one that is going out and seeking those who are in need, those who need to know his grace. So this week we have the vineyard owner who is filled with grace, and he goes out and he seeks these idle workers. Last week it was a forgiving king who forgives impossible debts—10 billion dollars. We have the father of the prodigal son, who breaks all convention and humbles himself, and he runs to the prodigal son—the one who offended him—and he gives him a hug and he says, “Let us have a feast because you are back.”

This is what Jesus wants us to see about who God is. God is this generous, loving God. The whole narrative of the Old Testament testifies to this, too: this loving God continually going out to those people that offended him time and time again, who disobeyed him and even betrayed him, whose desire is to find the lost sheep, the idle worker, the unfaithful Israel, and invite them into this divine life together with him.

Now for ourselves, any moves we have into the life of God have to keep this image of God the Father—how Jesus presents him—as the foundation of our spiritual lives. We are all on a journey together spiritually with God. Some of us just sort of trying to make it and get along faithfully. Some have the opportunity in this season to go deeper with who God is.

And one of the things that we are constantly fighting is different distortions of the image of God the Father in our minds, in our hearts. Who is God? Is God somebody that's an accountant standing over us, waiting for us to fail? Is God a genie that's just there waiting for you to ask for something and him to give it to you? What is your picture of God?

And as we walk through the scriptures, we're constantly reorienting our vision for who God is. This is who Jesus wants us to see who God is: a God that with generosity and love goes out to find those who are needy and idle, those who want help and growth. This is what it looks like together to walk with him—a generous God, one that seeks us.

It's no wonder Paul speaks with such flowery terms later when he writes his letters; as Scripture says: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” This is the love that he lavishes upon us—this loving, generous, grace-filled God. This is the God of this parable of the scriptures, and this is the one that is present here together with us here and now at this church.

Now next week we have an annual meeting—it's going to be a meeting where we have kids in the room, so the sermon will be short, and then we'll be able to go into a time where we have our annual meeting. But one of the things that I want us to remember as we talk about our strategy, and our buildings, and our programs—what little programs we have—and our life as the church, and our hopes and our dreams, is that underneath all of this—our strategy, and our ideas, and our vision—underneath all of that is that we are a group of people that are seeking to know this generous, good, gracious, and loving God, that we're seeking to discover him more and more together in our lives as a community, and to be able to invite others outside of this church to come and encounter and know this same God.

He is a generous God that loves us. I pray that we know that. I pray that as you form your opinion of who God is and as you walk with him, that this vision for who God is would also overwhelm your heart and your mind, and it would be like a floodlight shining out every other image of God that you might have—this loving, good, and generous God. So this is who Jesus wants us to see God as.

Theme 2: Examining Our Hearts & Distortions of God

Second theme that we see in this parable: what's very telling in this parable is what it reveals to us about the hearts of the workers. They can be an image for us and all who walk together with him.

So again, these workers were idle. They were in need. They're not landowners. They needed to be hired, and this is a mercy. So there's an initial relief. You can imagine if you wake up and there's no food in the refrigerator, and you don't know how you're going to eat, and you go out to the market and somebody comes by and he hires you, you say, “Yes, I am good, I'm cared for today, I will eat today, this is a good thing.” So they work all day joyfully, thankful that the landowner has given them this opportunity.

And then when they go to collect their wages, things begin to unravel on purpose. The landowner starts with the 11th hour worker, the one that was most needy, and says, “Here's your one denarius.” Then the ninth hour gets one denarius. Then the sixth hour gets one denarius. And then they come, the ones who worked all day, who said in their own words, “In the hot sun we labored,” and they still get one denarius.

And there's a feeling of injustice, of course, that they feel, and they say, “You have made them equal to us.” This is unfair. The generosity of the landowner was offensive to their categories of fairness and the ledger that they kept. And what was interesting about the movement of their hearts is that they went from probably thankful or at least relieved, to then aware—“Wait a second, they're getting one denarius, hopefully he's going to give me more”—to counting, to a feeling of injustice, and then ultimately the people that started out in the morning probably thankful that they were hired and for the landowner's provision ultimately end up in resentment.

Now nothing changed in the contract. The original coin that they were promised was still in their hands. But what changed was their perception of what is good, and in particular that line that we read a moment

ago: “You have made them equal to us; they don't deserve the same treatment as me.” Then the landowner says to them, “Why do you begrudge my generosity?” Or again, perhaps even sharper, “Why is your eye evil because I am good?”

Now in the immediate context of this parable, if you go back a chapter in chapter 19—you don't have to flip there, but I think it's verse 27—Jesus is talking about having to leave everything to follow him. And Peter says to him, “See, we have left everything to follow you—what do we get?” And basically implying, “What is our reward?” Don't we get special treatment as we go together and walk together with you?

And Jesus, right after Peter says this, gives him this parable. Peter had this in mind: a sort of spiritual ledger, a contract that he had together with God. And Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is different.” There's a different economy. There's a different system. You can't carry your own ledgers back into this kingdom. So immediately Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is not a matter of accounting; it's a matter of grace and of invitation.”

So this is where I think the parable begins to press on us. First, I hope that we have a greater vision for God's grace in our lives: that he loves us and he lavishes his grace upon us. So anytime there's a sense where God asks us to do things that to us feel foreign, or like we're having to sacrifice things, or to spend our time or our money in ways that we don't like, or to maybe trust him with our sexuality, or trust him with our jobs, or trust him with our future—anytime we have challenges with what God asks for us, we have to remember: this is the God that's asking us those things, the one that loves us, that provides for us all that we need based on his own love because he chose to.

The second way that this parable I think begins to press in on us, is just like the disciples here, Peter or the workers, is we begin to ask the question: is this fair? Our categories of justice and what seems right begin to be pressed on. And ultimately what this leads to is a distortion, again, of our view of who God is.

There are many names that we can have for God. I love—there's a writer named Miroslav Volf; he's a theologian and a philosopher and a writer. And he talks at length about the names that we can have for the distortions of God, and he gives great names for these distortions. And one of the distortions he names is “God the Negotiator”—that our view of God is God the Negotiator, one that we bring a contract to, and we say, “God, so I see you're offering me these terms, I'd like to counter and ask for these terms,” or “God, I've done this, would you be able to respond to me in this way?”

And so I want to end this evening by asking us a few diagnostic questions along those lines. How do we maybe subtly contort the image of God or distort him in ways where our human nature or the world starts to creep in? So I want to ask you three questions.

Question 1: Do you feel like you have a contract with God?

In light of this parable and in the goodness of God, do you feel like you have a contract with God in your life? A relationship where somehow God owes you something good—either a reward right now or a sense of standing before him in comparison to others?

In what I've observed amongst most Christians, myself included, if you were to ask me that point blank, I would say, “No, of course not, I am a child of grace.” “There's nothing I can do to earn more with God; I am

so thankful that he's given me everything that he's had.” But if you were to examine my heart, if you were to get into the crevices of my mind and see some of my thoughts or even some of my subconscious feelings towards others at times, you might see a different picture.

I've observed this among other Christians: it doesn't often show up in the eternal sense, but it can often show up in a temporal sense—“God, I've been good, I've done the things right, I followed the rules, I've been doing well, I've been listening to the sermons, I'm not speeding and going to court in Virginia, and yet I am still very lonely.” “Where's this companionship that we had a contract about?” “Or I just feel this sense that my life is not all as it should be; it's not working out how I expected it to work out.” “God, where is this goodness that you promised me?” “I've followed all the rules, you owe me these benefits here and now.”

Or, “God, I've been to church for 10 years, faithful tithing and present.” This isn't anyone in this room, because we're only four and a half years old—this is somebody else. But, “I've been in this church for 10 years, faithful tithing and present, but the person that gets celebrated is a guy that turned from his lifestyle of drugs and really is a mess.” “How come I don't get celebrated at church?”

Is there a contract that you have with God—something unspoken, but present in your heart? God's grace overwhelms that contract. He rips it up. He says, “There are no contracts with me, because I've given you everything.” “You're my son, you're my daughter whom I love; there are no contracts with me.” But search your hearts: do you have a contract with God?

Question 2: What kind of eye do you have?

Now the RSV captures this Greek idiom, and it's actually an idiom that is borrowing from the Hebrew, which is this idea of the “evil eye.” And the evil eye shows up in many ways—come back next summer for our series on Proverbs, we'll do a whole sermon on the evil eye. But basically, evil eye means you're stingy.

So in the Old Testament it says don't have an evil eye towards the poor, don't be stingy towards the poor; God hates an evil eye towards the poor. But it also goes against this virtue that God is a generous God, a bottomless God, a one that is a neverending well of goodness and resources that fills all of our needs. So if you have an evil eye, it means you're doubting that God has everything that the world needs. If you have an evil eye, it doubts that God is abundant in his grace and his love and his provision for you.

So an evil eye looks at God like there's a fixed sum with him—that somehow there's not enough of God's goodness to go around. God wants us to see him and our life together with him through a lens of generous and joyful abundance. And by the way, this one denarius, this idea of a sufficient sum of grace—God gives all people who come to him through Jesus Christ a sufficient sum of grace, which is more than we can ever understand, more than we can ever know.

In our catechism class—by the way, join next time if you can, it's so much fun—but in our catechism class we talked about how there's this reality that we get to be inheritors together with Christ of everything that God is remaking in heaven and earth, and Christ will be the head, and he will make us co-heirs together with him. What did we do to deserve that measure of grace, that we can inherit all things together with Christ? We are co-heirs together with him. That is the measure of grace he's given us; it is more than enough. So there's no sense where we look at the other person's measure of grace or ours; we've been

given more than we deserve and more than we can ever understand. This is God's grace to us. Do not have an evil eye towards God or his grace.

Question 3: Where is your eye focused?

Thomas à Kempis was a Middle Ages thinking monk. And yeah, I've been thinking about that recently, I am middle-aged. Anyways, and he said the sign of spiritual maturity is an increasing awareness of and appreciation of God's grace. The more you know God, the greater glimpse you get for God's goodness, the more you're both aware of your need for his grace in light of your sin and the greater appreciation you have for his goodness and his love for you.

In this parable, every worker in the story began unemployed. Every worker received full measure. Every worker was sought out by a generous landlord. And so there is no space for any worker to look at any other worker and say, “Why are they equal to me?” Because they should be so taken by God's love that that is the only place that their eye looks.

So Christ the King, can we sit in joy? Can we sit with our eyes fixed on God's grace and his love for us, his loving rescue of us? And as our eyes go, so do our souls. Can we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and the perfecter of our faith, who because of a good and generous God came down to draw us into full life together with him?

Closing Prayer

Let me pray for us.

Lord, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace and your mercy. Would you give us the ability to grasp just a little bit more of how good you are? Would that rest deep within our souls, and would that carry us through this life? Bless us, Lord, by the power of your Holy Spirit to know you, to have a greater awareness of and appreciation for your love for us. We pray all of this in your great and holy name, Amen.