

## ***THE UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER, MATTHEW 20:1-16***

Parables: Stories with a Secret #10

◆**Intro:** Last week Fox News reported on a Washington DC suburb that's considering raising the minimum wage to \$15/hr! [Fifteen dollars an hour! Wow. I might have to quit and move there to work at McDonalds! When I was in college minimum wage was \$3.25. And we had to walk to school up hill. Both ways! In the snow! On our hands! In those days it even snowed underground!] Fox reported on a study predicting that while the wage increase would enhance some lower wage earners lives, it may not enhance the economy as some 47000 jobs would be lost over the next five years! And that would mean lost TAX revenue of 40 million dollars over that time period!! Wages really get people grumbling, don't they?!

◆The workers in Jesus' parable were grumbling over wages too, and I'll bet you can relate. Be honest; wouldn't it have ticked you off too? You've been shingling the roof with the crew since the crack of dawn. Sleepy neighborhood blocks have been waking up to the sound of scraping and nail guns. Shink. caShink. caShink (that's the sound of a nail gun in case you didn't know). The backs of your ears are sunburned because you forgot your lotion. Your hands feel like sandpaper from the shingles and they snag on nice clothes because they're so rough. When you close your eyes all you see is nails, boxes of nails floating everywhere. Now its 6PM and quitting time is one hour away, when some lemonade-drinking, shade-sittin', soft-handed, unsunburned tweedle-dee shows up on the job site. Says the boss told him to see what he could do. Sweeps up some debris, moves a few bundles. Doesn't even break a *sweat!* He still smells like Irish Spring when the day's over! And he get paid the exact same amount as you! Call the press! Summon the union! This is unfair!! Now, if we're

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mad, that's because we're like the people in the parable: we have an "evil eye." That is, a distorted outlook.

◆ Verse 15b literally reads "or do you have an evil eye because I am generous?" (wanna know who has an evil eye? My mom! I'll be yours does too!) Evil eye means your seeing things wrong, poorly. We're so used to it, we don't even think there's anything wrong. But there is.

### **◆1. Evil eyes miss the overwhelming generosity of God our Father!**

Because of their outlook, the workers couldn't rejoice, or clap, or in any way feel good for the unexpected goodness to their fellow man. God (the owner) is super, crazy generous! But they(we?) are walking through life hoping and counting on fairness, and equality, economic latitude. They don't want anyone to get *more* than their fair share. But they're not happy with their very real ("fair") share either! Life, they think, is about earning, performing and being rewarded proportionately. This is our mistake. Now, let's not misinterpret. This parable is not against a good work ethic. The Bible also says if a person will not work, he should not eat. But this is a different problem...

◆A. Evil eyes connect their personal happiness to their personal accomplishment in comparison to others. I must be this good, or that good. I must achieve that level. I must make myself great! And I can tell if I'm special, especially if you are not! (Sounds ugly saying it, right?) But in the Kingdom of God that's all backwards. That's part of the surprise in this parable. In the Kingdom of God, happiness is connected to the Giver, God,

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and it doesn't have anything to do with amount or comparison. Take a look at all the upside-down nature of what Jesus teaches:

◆“About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Which of us is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” Jesus called a small child over to him and put the child among them.” Matthew 18:1, 2, NLT. Then Jesus tells them they gotta be like kids to be great!

◆“*Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectfully to ask a favor. “What is your request?” he asked. She replied, “In your Kingdom, will you let my two sons sit in places of honor next to you, one at your right and the other at your left?” ...“But Jesus called them together and said, “You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must become your slave. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.”*”

*Matthew 20:20-21, 25-28, NLT.*

◆Jesus tells the disciples that being humble is great (18:4). He tells them giving mercy, not justice, that's great! (18:33) Staying married to the same woman? That's tough, but great! Not getting married at all but investing yourself in the Kingdom of God? That's tough too, but great. (19:1-11). Selling off your possessions and following Jesus instead of the buck? That's great. (19:21) Not to mention that on both sides of our parable Jesus say the same thing: the first will be last, and the last will be first.” (19:30, 20:16). The world sees it all backwards from Heaven's Kingdom. And here's the trouble with that.

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◆ **B.** Folks, the more you are consumed with being great yourself, the less you will be able to rejoice in all the greatness God puts all around you.

◆1) On the very first level, that means you won't be able to rejoice in the grace of Jesus Christ, who paid off your sins on the cross. He won't mean anything to you because you're trying so hard to be great and good all by yourself (which you can't be)! It's like he bought you a mansion but you insist on living on the beach until you can buy your own all by yourself!

◆2) On a second level, you miss joyful gratitude for other portions of grace. You know what the early workers aren't noticing?

◆ That they got to have a fulfilling job all day!

◆ That they didn't have to stand in the town square, fretting hour after hour about how they're gonna feed their 3 little girls at home cuz they don't have any work. Their arms were working, yes, but their stomachs could relax because the owner gave them work, which meant hope and security!

◆ Salvation is of God. All goodness is the grace of God, people. All of it.

The vineyard owner didn't have to give them a job. He didn't have to go out at 9, and 12, and 3pm, and 6pm looking for more workers. He did it for them! And likewise he doesn't have to let you or I get our paychecks, or have our cottage, or drive our cars. Or be healthy. Or live for that matter.

*The kingdom of Heaven is not a matter of the harder you work, the more you earn. Or the better you are, the better life goes for you.* And it's a

mistake for me to tell myself, "Well, I've got this nice farm because I worked hard for it." Or, "God blessed me with upstanding children because I raised

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them right.” Or, “Yeah, I have a 401k that’s doing well because I invested wisely.” And God *LET* you have parents who taught you to save, etc... AND God *let* you be born in North America and not a Third World country where just fetching water is a large part of your day. *We are not sovereigns over our circumstances. But there is one and you can miss him! A lot of us are the 11th hour workers, blessed beyond belief, for no deserving it at all. But we THINK we are the first hour workers who ought to get more than the rest!* Beware having the evil eye. You will miss the reality of grace!

◆ Some years ago a woman snuck into Queen Elizabeth’s chambers and waited for an opportunity to stab her with a knife. What she didn’t realize was that there is always a servant who scours the room before the queen retires. So she was caught and begged to be pardoned. The queen asked “What will you promise if I give you grace?” The woman retorted that grace with condition is no grace at all. The queen agreed and pardoned her and the servant escorted her out of the palace a free woman. That’s the Christian faith; all grace. No payments. Just the love of the royal One. Don’t miss grace!

◆ Ok. There’s something else that happens if we have evil eyes.

◆ **2. Evil eyes miss the joy in the journey because they connect all their joy to an expected end reward.** The mistake is they think the reward is merely economic. God followers can make this mistake too. We begin to see life as economic. We think that heaven is the only payoff. God is there, but not here. We don’t experience God much.

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◆ Now it is certainly true that we Christians look to our heavenly reward, when God will right all wrong. This week we're especially aware of that as we grieve with the Vanderkleed family over Logan's tragedy! Paul wrote,

◆ *"If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."* 1 Corinthians 15:19-22, NIV.

◆ A. But the startling part of this parable is not that the owner pays well in the end. Not even that all the workers get paid the same and everybody get the same minimum wage no matter how good a worker they are, or how many hours they put in. What's startling is that the owner keeps hiring people at all when it isn't in his best economic interest to do so! It is the but the value he places on each life, person! He's not going to make anything off the later hirers. Why did he keep hiring guys? Some postulate that the grapes were rotting on the vine and he needed to get them in fast. But there is nothing about this in the text. There is however, a clue in verse six: "why are you standing here all day idle?" Now these are not leather-clad bikers and girls with lots of product in their hair draining cases of beer to the beat of loud music in the town square. No, that was were you went to find a job if you didn't have one. They are unused. Unoccupied. Idle. Wasted. The owner was looking for people who needed something and giving them a change to NOT waste their life. Don't waste your time here, friends. Your time and life is precious to God.

◆ "When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you

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hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterwards you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.” Psalms 73:21-26, NIV.

◆ The Psalmist has learned to find God in both places! Evil eye folks are like, “Shoooot, why did I have to go and

◆ share my income,

◆ and do mission trips,

◆ and apologize to my wife,

◆ and go to church instead of golf every Sunday

◆ –when people don’t can get heaven at the last minute!!?” People with a ‘good eye’, people of God’s Kingdom are like “Whoopee, man! Look at chyou! Look, you got paid in the eleventh hour! Al-right! Doesn’t God ROCK?” You’re gonna find out how much joy there is in sharing, and serving, and reconciling, and yes, even going to worship!”

◆ B. Let’s look from another angle. Sometimes we live only in the future economy:

◆ when the kids grow up;

◆ when we make it big;

◆ when I meet Mr. Right;

◆ when I graduate; when I’m famous.

◆ The workers in the vineyard reveal that they didn’t notice or take joy in having meaningful labor, or being graced by the owner. They were picking grapes all day, just for the denarius at the end of the day. They were putting up with 9-5, just for Miller time. They were merely “working for the

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weekend.” If that’s you, do you realize how much of existence you are merely enduring? If that’s your job, you’re in the wrong job! ***The evil eye doesn’t live the gift of life in the moment.*** It is like a man who drives off on vacation with one thing in mind: arriving at the destination by a certain time. And arriving there before the van and camper that you passed on the highway half an hour ago. That’s why men hate rest stops, you know. No sooner do you stop to let one kid pee, but that guy you passed who was slowing you down, goes tootling past the rest area!! We have been seduced by “economy”. Getting ahead. What about the ride? What about the people you are with? What about the moment? Live life while your in it, it is a precious gift of God.

◆[This is also one of those things we seem to realize intuitively when something happens to someone we love, like Logan Vanderkleed. God reminds us that today is his gift too. Not just someday. Not merely eventual economic progress and success; but people, and life, and love, today.]

◆B. When you and I think and live only in terms of final pay offs in life we forego much of God’s blessing and growth of life along the way. That is, we might even be existing amid blessing, but we don’t know it, or appreciate it, enjoy it, or experience it. For example, take the man who says, “I don’t have to go to church to be saved. Heaven is free to the repentant heart.” And yes that’s true. But that’s kinda like saying, “My friend invites me every weekend to his lake house, but I don’t have to go to my friend’s lake house for him to like me. So I don’t go.” But your friend happens to be the most brilliant, and the most generous being on the planet! All the times you aren’t going, your missing friendship opportunity at the lake house. You’re

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missing discussions, and learnings, and gifts, and jetski rides, and pizza on the pontoon boat. It's the same way with God.

◆STORY OF ONION SELLER...An american businessman was on vacation in a southern seacoast when he passed a farmer selling a onions along the road in the town market. He had strings of about ten. They were 20 cents a piece. The business man asked how much for two? Forty cents. The businessman responded that if he got a discount he might buy more. Trying to teach the old man an economy lesson, he offered to buy the whole string if he got a 10% discount. The old man replied, "I would not sell you a whole string of onions. If I did, I would run out quickly and go home, and then I would not get to meet new people, or watch the children play as they pass, or enjoy the breeze, or catch up with my friends in the market."  
*There is more to be had than the future pay off.*

◆When we ignore him because we know he is generous at the eleventh hour, we miss all kinds of life walking with him along the way.

◆We miss becoming strong people who can respond in self-deference to other rude people, now.

◆Or becoming mature people who can take offenses without loosing it, and courageous people who can lay down their lives for something just because it's right, or for other's merely out of love.

◆Or being people who can suffer and loose loved ones but still pour out the love of God in the world without bitterness!

◆Or becoming generous people who bring hope to those without as much, by sharing wealth, and sharing life. (Or did you think all these

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qualities just come with age? They do not. They come with maturity and maturity comes with spiritual growth and that comes from God.

◆“*So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you hypocrites.*”  
*James 4:7, 8, NLT.*

◆**Conclusion:** What I have been describing is life *in the vineyard*, working for the owner. Every worker in the vineyard was being given a chance at life by grace. The farmer was offering each the opportunity to have meaningful existence out of his love. The goal is not just the paycheck at the end of life, people. It is the life. Life with the owner, now. Life with the owner then.

◆“*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, AND I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*” Psalms 23:4-6, NIV.

◆This guy isn't living just for heaven. He's living like heaven, on the earth! “All the days of my life” and “in the house of the lord forever.”