

“I Get Paid for Doing This?”

Matthew 20:1-16

A man had a vineyard. At harvest time he spent the day finding laborers to harvest his grapes. Some of the laborers worked all day. Some of them worked most of the day. Some of them worked half a day. Some of them worked the last hour of the day. At the end of the day, the owner of the vineyard paid them all a day's wages, regardless of how long they actually worked.

The laborers who had worked all day got angry and said, “That's no way to do business. It's not fair.” Instead of being grateful for what they had, these people looked at what others had and what they thought they might have. And, instead of being grateful for their day's wages, they were angry.

There's a lot of that going on these days. People look at what others have or what they thought they would have and they say, “It's not fair.”

If you look at what others have, you'll probably not be happy with what you have.

Rhonda did an interesting little study in human nature during the children's moments this morning. She gave the children candy. She gave some of them one piece of candy, and she gave others two. And the children with one piece of candy said, “That's not fair.” When they came to the altar rail, none of them had any candy. But that's human nature. Instead of being grateful for their piece of candy, they looked at what others had and they weren't content with just one piece, even though only a few moments they had no candy at all.

Why is it that some people make a thousand times more each year than the majority of us? They will say that it's because they worked hard, made sacrifices and made good decisions. Most of them do work hard. They do make sacrifices. They have made good decisions.

But there are a lot of other people who are not wealthy who also work just as hard, make sacrifices and have made good decisions. Is there anyone who works harder than teachers? They work hard all day long. When I spend an hour teaching a confirmation class, it takes me weeks to recover. Teachers spend the whole day teaching children five days a week. Then they go home at night and grade papers and prepare lesson plans, if they don't have a school function to attend. What about sacrifices? They spend at least four years in college preparing for their careers. Many teachers buy teaching supplies out of their own salaries. And talk about good decisions: They have decided to dedicate their lives to preparing students for life, and they understand that the best way to teach their students how to live is to set a good example. The great majority of teachers live good, moral, disciplined lives. They go to work day after day, year after year, as long as their health holds up, and then they retire at some fraction of their salary.

What's the difference between a teacher who makes \$40,000 and someone who makes \$40,000,000? It's not how hard they work. It's not they sacrifices. It's not the discipline and good decision making. It's about goals and gifts.

The wealthy are wealthy because their goal in life is to be wealthy and they have some extraordinary gift. They have extraordinary athletic ability. Or they have

extraordinary ability to entertain. Or they have extraordinary tolerance for risk and the ability to pick winners. Or they have extraordinary ability to organize and motivate people. The list goes on and on.

Of course, there are those who are wealthy because they are lucky. They inherited a fortune from their family, or they just happened to own land on top of a huge oil deposit, or something of that nature.

But most of the wealthy are people who were born with extraordinary gifts and decided to use those gifts to make a lot of money. They probably had to work hard to develop those gifts. But, again, if the gifts weren't there, their hard work would have simply landed them in a middle class job making about the same as the great majority of people.

We all have gifts. The rest of us have gifts that we share in common with many other people, or we have decided to use our gifts for other purposes than being wealthy.

Those who draw great salaries have a choice. They can say, "I have what I have because I earned it." Or they can, "I don't deserve this any more than the millions of others who work as hard as I do," and they can receive what they have humbly and gratefully and share it generously.

But that should be our attitudes as well. None of us deserve what we have. We all use the gifts that God has given us. We all should receive what we have humbly and gratefully and share it generously.

We can look at those who are wealthy and say, "It's not fair," and give in to bitterness and self pity. But if we go to God and say, "It's not fair," we are probably going to hear God say, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? I promised that you would have your daily bread. Are you envious because I am generous with some?"

It's our choice. We can look at what others have and say, "It's not fair," or we can look at what we do have and be grateful.

Or we can look at what we thought we would have and say, "It's not fair."

I think we especially need to remind ourselves of that today. I confess that in the glory days of the internet companies I had visions of becoming moderately wealthy. The church has a pension fund for the ministers, and most of our retirement is invested in the stock market. In the late 1990's the stock market was shooting up. I told my wife that when I retired, we would be wealthy. Then the internet bubble burst. Slowly but surely over the last ten years the market climbed back up. I told my wife a few months ago that when I retired, we wouldn't be wealthy, but we would be very comfortable. Now the stock market has collapsed again. A couple of days ago I told my wife, "I won't be able to retire."

I'm not sure I ever really wanted to retire anyway. I am a preacher. That's my calling and my life. What would I do if I didn't preach?

Many people who had dreams of being more or less wealthy have seen those dreams die this past month.

We can say, "It's not fair," and give in to bitterness and despair. Or we can say, "I will trust God to provide for my needs all the days of my life and for all eternity. I may not have more than I need for this day. But I am certain I will have what I do need."

The real joy of life is family and friends. It is spending our lives doing something we believe in and making a real difference in people's lives. It is walking with our

Savior in faith and obedience. It is hearing God say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

Wealth cannot buy those things. And not being wealthy cannot take them from us.

Be at peace and know that all is well. Stock markets may tumble, but God is still God.

God is good...all the time.

All the time...God is good.

When stock markets fall...God is good, all the time.

When pension funds shrink...God is good, all the time.

When the economic system stumbles...God is good, all the time.

When the heads of finance are lost and confused...God is good, all the time.

So go about your daily lives, doing what God has called you to do, and don't worry about the news from Wall Street. God has always taken care of us and God will continue to take care of us.

Don't look at what others have. Don't look at what you thought you would have. Look at what you do have and be grateful. God is good, all the time.

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