

Divine Unfairness

St. Paul very clearly tells us in our Epistle lesson for today that everything that took place and is recorded for us in Scripture is recorded so that we might learn from it. Okay...so what do we learn from today's lessons? Well...based on the parable we hear in our Gospel lesson, it's clear that **life isn't fair**. Now, I know that some of you will be quick to disagree. I know you won't disagree with the fact that life isn't fair. It's not, and no one will argue that. However, some of you will disagree with the fact that this should be the message we should glean from the text. After all, the Master in this parable very plainly tells the disgruntled workers that He *most certainly was fair* in His dealing with them. He gave them exactly what He told them He would. He didn't cheat them in any way, shape, or form. He didn't renege on the deal. He didn't change the rules. In fact, we could rightly say that He was fair to everyone involved. He's free to do what He wants with His money, and He agreed to give everyone a denarius, whether they worked all day or just a few minutes. He was fair. He kept His Word. If your takeaway from this is some simple Chicken Soup for the Soul type of advice that life isn't fair, then you really aren't paying attention to the text.

Then again...*isn't that what mercy and grace are all about?* If you remember, mercy is defined as not receiving what you do deserve, and grace is understood as receiving something you absolutely do not deserve. When you think about it, **there's nothing fair at all about mercy or grace!** To say that these lessons really are all about unfairness isn't wrong at all. In fact, it really gets to the heart of the matter.

Look at the Old Testament lesson. *What did those whiny, thankless Israelites deserve?* Keep in mind that these are free Israelites who are grumbling and fighting and making a stink. They're no longer in Egyptian captivity. They've borne witness to God's care, protection, and providence time and time again. They were brought through the ten plagues. They were brought out of Egypt. They were brought through the Red Sea while Pharaoh's mighty army all perished. They were led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They were given manna and quail to eat. And they complained the entire time! In fact, they went ahead and made a golden calf and worshiped it, basically giving the middle finger to God. *And yet He didn't strike them down...even though they certainly deserved it.* They were given all that they didn't deserve, and they didn't receive what they definitely deserved.

Today's lesson is just more of the same. Today we hear them complaining—again—this time that they're thirsty. Think about this. After all God has already done for them; after all that God didn't do to them, even though

they deserved it; after all this undeserved and unmerited grace and mercy, *all they can muster up is more self-centered complaint.*

And how does God respond? Not how we would, right? If someone repeatedly acted like this to us, **that would be it.** Three strikes and you're out, and that's assuming that it even makes it to three strikes. Sometimes it comes down to the one strike warning: *Go ahead and cry, and I'll give you something to cry about!* (I know I'm not the only one to have ever heard that growing up. And I deserved it too!) But that's **not** how God deals with these folks. In fact, ***He actually gives them what they want.*** He rewards them! **Talk about not fair!** I've complained to God plenty of times, and I've never received what I was complaining about. Maybe I need to step up my game. (*That's NOT the lesson God is teaching me here! I know!*) Why do these schleppts get rewarded and I don't? That's not fair. ***God gives them what they don't deserve, and He doesn't give them what they do deserve.*** And the same can be said for the messed up Corinthian Christians Paul is writing to. The same can be said of the apostles, which is who Jesus was teaching this parable to. The same can be said for us.

And it is precisely here that we can rightly speak in terms of fairness; fairness for everyone, no matter who you are, who your daddy is, what you did in high school, what your tax bracket is, or what your IQ is. All this talk about "life isn't fair" finds a HUGE exception to the rule when it comes down to sin, death, and damnation. St. Paul tells us in Romans 3 that *"all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and the wages for that sin is death."* All means everyone; every man, woman, and child—even the littlest lives still dwelling in the womb. Everyone is a sinner and everyone deserves temporal and eternal punishment for that sin ***in the eyes of God.*** Remember: Sin isn't just what you do; it's who you are, by nature. As children of Adam, we are all sinners. We're all dead in our sin.

Of course, the exception to the rule that "life isn't fair" isn't just restricted to matters of ***death and damnation.*** It carries through and bursts into the wonderful Gospel reality that ***God freely gives His grace and forgiveness to everyone,*** even and especially to those who don't deserve it (which is everyone). Remember: God so loved the **whole world** that He sent His only-begotten Son to die for it. That means that Christ died for ***EVERYONE!*** And right there: ***You want to talk about unfair?*** Jesus Christ, the innocent and perfect Son of God; the blameless, the sinless Son of God, died for the sins of the ***entire world.*** The innocent died in place of the guilty. The undeserving One suffered our justly-deserved wrath and punishment. Our heavenly Father gave to Jesus all that we deserved, and He gave to us all that we didn't deserve. That's the very epitome of mercy and grace. That's God's mercy, grace, and love for you.

And I want you to really think about what this means. When it comes to our complete forgiveness before God; when it comes to our eternal life and salvation in

God, *we are all equally and completely forgiven because of the selflessness and the love of Jesus Christ.* This means that I'm not *more* forgiven or *more* blessed than any of you. You are not *more* forgiven or *more* blessed because you give more of an offering or more of your time than anyone else. That's trying to rationalize and conform these gifts of God to your fallen and sinful logic. That's not how God works though, is it? "*Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to Me; namely, My grace, My forgiveness, and My gift of eternal life, or do you wish to put yourself in the place of God and begrudge My generosity?*"

My brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus: When you really think about it, *even God's not fair, and that's a good thing.* All are equally damned sinners in His eyes, and all are equally saved and redeemed in His eyes because of *saving faith alone in Christ's death and resurrection alone.* He made His Son take the fall and punishment for the *whole world* so that all of us could have eternal life with Him. No one was left out or excluded from this divinely unfair display of wrath and love. God died for us. **That's not fair at all.** Thank God that He doesn't operate with our notion of fairness. Thank God that He is *lovingly and mercifully unfair* to us because of Jesus Christ. My friends: Thank God that our lives with Him are not fair at all.

May this same sense of *true Christian unfairness* shine forth from this point forward in your daily thoughts, words, deeds, and dealings with your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and may the true peace that comes with *simply trusting in God's loving and complete unfairness* guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus alone.

AMEN