

God's Generous Grace

Matthew 19:27-20:16

September 9th, 2018

Big idea: God's saving grace is shockingly free and equally given to all who come to Him.

Intro:

Christians affirm that God's grace is freely given and generous. It can't be earned. It can't be merited. No one deserves to be saved any more than anyone else because every person shares a sinful status inherited from Adam. Every person has a sinful nature dwelling within them and from that nature commit acts of sin that they are morally accountable for. That's Bible 101, standard Christian beliefs.

And yet, some examples push us to examine whether we really believe that.

From the late 1970's through the early 90's Jeffrey Dahmer committed incredibly wicked crimes. He killed 17 people in grotesque ways before he was finally arrested and confessed. While in prison he gave a tv interview and said that he wished he could find some inner peace. A woman named Mary Mott heard the interview and thought *I know where you can find inner peace*. She was a Christian and sent him some bible studies. He quickly worked through all the studies and asked for more. She sent more but she also reached out to a local pastor near his prison in Wisconsin to ask him to visit Dahmer. Nervously the pastor began to visit him and share the gospel. He helped him to see that his sin was heinous before a holy God but that even his sin could be forgiven. He writes that he came to grips with his own sin, said he came to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is truly God, and I believe that I as well as everyone else will be accountable to him. He says he came to see Jesus as his Lord and savior. From his account backed up by his father's words and the pastor who met with him, he came to saving faith in Christ and was baptized. Is it possible that his profession wasn't genuine, that it was some manipulation technique? Sure. But maybe not. There wasn't an opportunity for Dahmer to demonstrate a changed heart because shortly after being baptized he was killed by a fellow inmate. Are you ok with seeing Him in heaven?

In the Old Testament, we find the account of King Manasseh.

2 Chronicles 33:2 And he did evil in the sight of the LORD

2 Chronicles 33:3 For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he also erected altars for the Baals and made Asherim,

2 Chronicles 33:6 And he made his sons pass through the fire in the valley of Ben-hinnom; and he practiced witchcraft, used divination, practiced sorcery, and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him *to anger*.

2 Chronicles 33:7 Then he put the carved image of the idol which he had made in the house of God,

2 Chronicles 33:9 Thus Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the sons of Israel.

2 Chronicles 33:10-13 ¹⁰ And the LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. ¹¹ Therefore the LORD brought the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria against them, and they captured Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze *chains*, and took him to Babylon. ¹² And when he was in distress, he entreated the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. ¹³ When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD *was* God.

2 Chronicles 33:15-16 He also removed the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the LORD, as well as all the altars which he had built on the mountain of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem, and he threw *them* outside the city. ¹⁶ And he set up the altar of the LORD and sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it; and he ordered Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel.

How would you feel about God forgiving Manasseh if you were the mother of one of the children that was ripped from your arms and sacrificed to a false god?

We sing about God's marvelous and amazing grace, but these extreme situations might make us feel uncomfortable.

Carry over from last week's message where Jesus showed that the rich young ruler – and by extension everyone – cannot earn his way to eternal life. It's impossible. Lead's to a question by Peter and then a follow up parable to explain Jesus' answer.

1. Jesus' followers will receive ***blessings*** greater than their ***sacrifices***. 19:27-30
 - a. The rich young ruler refused to give up everything to follow Jesus. Peter and the other disciples had.
 - i. His question seems brash but Jesus is very gentle with Him.
 - ii. He doesn't rebuke Him right away but draws Peter's attention to the blessings they will receive in the present and the future.
 - iii. The rebuke comes in the parable, but even that is gentle.
 - b. Usually Jesus has emphasized the sacrifices required for those who follow Him.
 - i. **Matthew 16:24** Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.
 - ii. That's appropriate for Jesus to be clear on this.
 - c. But here He emphasizes the blessings, and they are real, tangible, and a mix of present and future.
 - i. **Mark 10:29-30** Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, ³⁰ but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.
 1. Honest about the persecutions as well
 2. How are we to take the blessings here? Not strictly literal in that you can't have 100 fathers. But what a believer finds as he or she is integrated in a local church functioning as it should is that they gain older men and women who provide counsel and support, they have homes they can go to if they need help or a place to stay, they have brothers and sisters to share the burdens and joys of life.
 3. The "leaving" has to be kept in tension with a passage like:
 - a. **1 Timothy 5:8** But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
 - b. One man shared how he overheard a couple guys talking in a coffee shop about how they had left their wives and kids so they could go have a "ministry" somewhere. That would be a violation of God-given responsibilities.
 - ii. Jesus also looks ahead to the "regeneration," the time in the future when He will rule over His restored kingdom.
 1. Most likely referring to the millennial kingdom, 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth before the final judgment and the creation of the new heavens and earth.
 2. ~~**Revelation 20:1-5** And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. ² And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old,~~

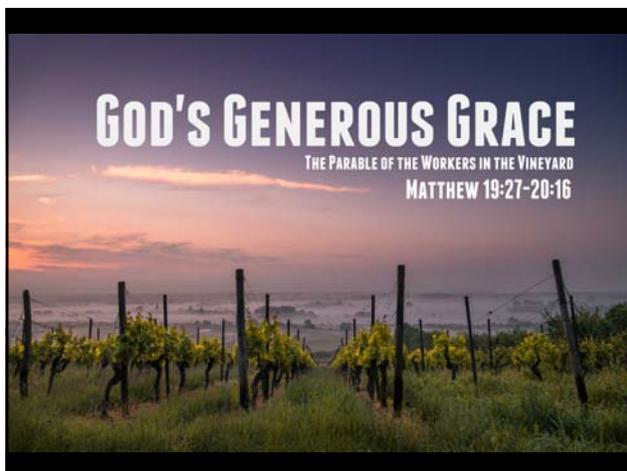
~~who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,³ and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.⁴ And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.~~

- d. But the main thing they get is eternal life. They was the rich young ruler's question in v.16. Jesus explained that it is impossible for man but not for God.
 - i. Their sacrifice no more earns eternal life than the rich young ruler would have been able to.
 - ii. But their sacrifice reveals that they are trusting in Jesus as Messiah.
 - e. He goes on to give a parable that highlights God's generous grace. It was a gentle rebuke to the disciples who were emphasizing their own sacrifice.
 - i. The gift of eternal life does not depend on the magnitude of their personal sacrifice.
 - ii. It begins and ends with the somewhat cryptic statement
 1. "many who are first will be last, and the last, first"
 2. We typically only use this in Christian circles as the Christian equivalent of a dad joke.
 - a. when lining up for a potluck in a joking way and someone cuts in front
 3. But what is the point that Jesus is making?
 - a. We learn how the last can become first by God's free and generous grace.
 - b. Every person who is saved receives the same gift of eternal life.
2. A parable on God's **free** and **generous** grace (20:1-20:16)
- a. **Unequal** work performed (20:1-7)
 - i. Summarizing the historical practices in the vineyard (adapted from John MacArthur)
 1. May have been preparing a new vineyard, pruning the vines of an existing one, or getting ready to harvest the grapes – all of those tasks required considerable hard labor.
 - a. Probably harvest time as that would explain the need to get all the labor possible even if they only worked a portion of the day.
 2. Vineyards generally were planted on terraced hillsides, most of which were stony. Preparing the terraces involved digging out the tiers and using the stones to build small retaining walls on the outside edges. Then the terraced areas had to be filled with good soil, most of which often had to be carried a considerable distance up the slopes from more fertile ground below. Every summer both new and old vines had to be pruned back to improve production and that too of course was demanding work. The final major operation was of course harvesting done in late September. The weather was still hot then and it was necessary to gather the grapes before the fall rainy season began. If for some reason the grapes were slow in ripening, the time for harvesting could be significantly shortened. Consequently, the grape harvest was hectic and demanding time.

3. Most had to hire outside help because they had too few household servants. Those hired would be day laborers from the villages, often the lowest on the socioeconomic rung, only slightly above beggars.
 4. Unskilled, desperate for work, vulnerable to being taken advantage of or underpaid. Because of his great compassion for the downtrodden, God commanded His people:
 5. **Leviticus 19:13** 'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob *him*. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.
 6. **Deuteronomy 24:15** "You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he may not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you.
- ii. He hires the first workers at 6:00 am (sun up) and then the other workers at 3 hour intervals until the final group at 5:00 pm.
 - iii. The day laborers would have been waiting at the marketplace to be hired.
 1. My experience in LA with migrant farm workers standing on the streets waiting to be hired in the same way.
 - iv. He agreed to a denarius with the first worker, which would have been a day's wages for a soldier so fair and possibly even generous for a worker in the vineyard.
 - v. For each subsequent group they didn't agree on a price ahead of time, apparently they trusted him to do what was right and fair.
 - vi. Some worked 12 hours, others 9, 6, 3, or 1.
- b. **Fair** and generous wages paid (20:8-9)
- i. When evening came, they were paid.
 1. 6 pm
 2. The practice was for the workers to travel to the field on the employer's time and head home on their own time. So they would have been "on the clock" since the landowner hired them.
 - ii. He started with the last hired and moved on to the first (see how it ties in with the statement that bookends the parable.
 - iii. The wages are fair in that everyone got at least what they deserved. They are generous because many got more than they deserve.
 1. If a day's wage was \$100, the first group paid made \$100/hr. The next group \$33/hour, \$16.50/hour, \$11/hour, then the last group a little more than \$8/hour.
 - iv. Day laborers had very little security. If they didn't work at least several days each week then they would likely starve. If the landowner paid them only a portion of a day's wage, they might not have had enough to eat. It was an act of generosity to pay them more.
 1. But most of us would admit that if we were the first hired and we saw the people who only worked part of the day getting paid the same as us we may tend to grumble. And that's just what happened.
- c. **Complaints** rise (20:10-12)

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 - 1. Not a parable about how you should run a business.
 - 2. What is so shocking about this is the contrast to how normal life works.
 - ii. Who is being represented by those that labor all day? Those who labor only part of the day?
 - 1. Some have suggested Israel and the church, but that doesn't seem to be anywhere in the context.
 - 2. In the context of Peter's question, it is contrasting those who sacrifice greatly for many years vs. those who come to saving faith late in life. Both are freely given the same gift of eternal life.
 - 3. In Biblical examples, the thief on the cross had hours at most between his salvation and death and he had little he could do for Christ in those hours. John the disciple was a young man when he walked with Jesus, usually assumed to be the youngest of the disciples, and was the last apostle to die in his old age, believed to be the only apostle not to die a martyr's death.
 - 4. Example of former coworker with a nursing home ministry that saw dozens of people trust Christ in the very last season of life. On the other hand in our children's ministry we have young children trusting Christ.
 - iii. If we share in the grumbling that this is how the Lord works, it is likely because we view ourselves as the ones who have labored all day. What if we have more in common with the ones hired late?
 - iv. Dan Doriani - We have twisted amazing grace into boring grace, unaware of how kind and generous God is to us.
- d. **Generosity** defended (20:13-15)
- i. "Friend" – kind and gentle rebuke
 - ii. He gave the first people exactly what was promised.
 - iii. Because the funds are his, he can do what he wants with them. He can be generous.
 - iv. "is your eye envious" –
 - 1. Eye used in this time as a term of miserliness – "evil eye"
 - 2. **Matthew 6:22-23** "The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"
 - 3. **Proverbs 28:22** A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth And does not know that want will come upon him.
 - v. God can freely give the same salvation, the same access to the very presence of God in heaven to the thief on the cross and the apostle John, to the death bed conversion at the nursing home and the young child converted in Mrs. Miles Sunday school class at age 4.
 - vi. All who are saved receive far more than they deserve anyways.
- e. The **last** and the **first** (20:16)
- i. God's grace is free in that He distributes it as He wills.

- ii. The one who trusts Christ early in life and has years of faithful service receives the same eternal life as the death bed convert who truly repents and believes. Such is the grace of God. Such is the work of the Spirit that, as Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3, blows where it wishes to bring new life.
 - iii. The one who trusts early gets the joy of a life of fellowship with Jesus. Get's the blessings described at the end of chapter 19 to Peter.
 - iv. The one who thinks he will wait until the end of his life so that he can live however he wants is deceiving himself. Why does he assume his heart will be tender in the last days if it isn't tender today?
3. Responding to God's generous grace
- a. Trust in Christ and be forgiven ***today***.
 - i. **1 John 1:9** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
 - ii. Manasseh and Dahmer had to face the reality of their wrongs. It would have been phony if they thought they could be forgiven and yet not recognize that they had something to be forgiven for. Manasseh went on to demonstrate a changed heart by showing "fruit of repentance." Dahmer didn't have a chance.
 - b. Don't ***grumble*** against God's generous grace.
 - i. **Psalm 103:11-14** For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. ¹² As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ Just as a father has compassion on *his* children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. ¹⁴ For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are *but* dust.



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