

The Grace of the King Matthew 20:1-16

That's not fair! How many times have you heard your kids say that? How many times have you said or thought that yourself?! We want life to be fair, but God wants something better. Discover the better-than-fair grace of God as we celebrate the resurrection of His Son which made that grace possible.

Many years ago – conference on religion in England

- experts debated what belief, if any, was unique to Christianity
 - o The Incarnation – God becoming human? No - other religions had similar stories
 - o The Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of people rising from the dead
- debate went on and on till C. S. Lewis entered the room – guy who wrote Chronicles of Narnia
 - o “What’s the rumpus about?”
 - o They explained: trying to figure out what’s unique about Christianity
 - o Lewis responded, “Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.”
- everyone thought for a moment... and then had to agree

Grace is the one thing that separates Christianity from every other religion

OK... So, what is grace?

Read Matthew 20:1-16

Explain story

- Very common situation in ancient world
- Lots of men didn’t own land or have a steady job – forced to depend on day labor
 - o Lowest rung on the economic ladder
 - o Slaves better off economically because they didn’t worry about starving every day
- Desperate to be hired by wealthy landowners & work down till dusk
 - o fair wage for a full day of manual labor = 1 denarius
 - o was enough money to feed an average family for 1 day – no more
- So far the story is very common
- **But then the landowner does 2 things that are very uncommon**
 - o **keeps hiring people all day long – not just in morning like you’d expect**
 - the landowner represents God – so this wasn't a failure to plan!
 - why does He keep hiring more and more... we'll talk about that in a bit
 - o **pays everyone same full-day’s wage regardless of how long they worked**

That angered the first laborers hired

And if we were in their shoes... it would anger us, too

- part of me that really doesn’t like this story.

Why? Because it’s not FAIR!

- We want life to be FAIR – all humans do
- We want everyone to get exactly what they deserve = fair
- By that definition, the landowner is clearly NOT fair

That's the first thing we learn about grace...

1. Grace is NOT FAIR

- **Fair: what humanity expects – what we aim for**
 - o We expect businesses to be fair to customers and employees
 - o We want a government that's fair to everyone – we protest when it's not
- **We expect fairness in life... that's why all other religions preach fairness**
 - o **All other religions: based on the idea that ultimately you get what you deserve**
 - o **Judaism** – obey the Law and you'll be blessed; disobey and you'll be cursed
 - o **Islam** – obey the 5 pillars and you get heaven; disobey, and you get hell
 - o **Hinduism and Buddhism** preach Karma – all about fairness!
 - future destiny based on how you act now
- **But that's not how this parable works – the landowner is not fair**
 - o **He gives good to people who *don't* deserve it... that's the definition of GRACE**
- Now notice: **His grace is never less-than-fair**
 - o no one in the parable is cheated – no one is shortchanged
- So if this is the standard of fair, grace never dips below that... it rises above standard of fair

So reword first point: **Grace is actually always BETTER than fair**

- **Think about it: If God was only fair to us, what would we get?**
- **I hope we can all agree: we are sinners – we do things we know are wrong, selfish**
 - o Rom 3:23 – we have all done things that we regret – that hurt people
- **According to the Bible the wage that sin should earn = punishment from God = wrath**
 - o Eph 5:5-6
 - o **Phillip Yancey... Point: We're not the first guys hired!**
 - o They did everything boss expected – not true for any person other than Jesus
 - o We are all the last guy hired – haven't come close to obeying all God expects
- **If God gives us what we deserve... we all get wrath**
- **But God isn't fair... He is something better... He is gracious!**
 - o You don't want a fair God – you want a gracious God!
 - o And that's the God of Christianity

2. Grace is offered to all

- **Landowner never stops looking for more people to invite**
 - o Keeps going back to town seeking more people he can hire into his vineyard
 - o Again, landowner = God – so this isn't a failure to plan
 - o = **a picture of God's compassion** – He doesn't want anyone left behind
- 1 Tim 2:4-6
 - o That includes *you*!
 - o Jesus died for your sins to redeem you – true for every person on earth
 - o God wants you to be saved no matter how far you've run from Him
- **In the family of God there's always room for one more!**
 - o United fiasco – fundamental problem = not enough seats on the plane
 - they needed 4 more seats, so they decided 4 people had to go
 - their hospitality had limits because the plane had limits
 - o But God's kingdom has no limits – always room for one more in the family of God!
 - o God's grace is limitless – there's always grace for you!

3. Grace overcomes all our failures

- For last workers hired – majority of their day had already been wasted doing standing idly by
- Yet when the day over – their fate exact same as men who worked all day long!
- **Point: grace erases all of our failures**
 - o When grace comes into our lives it's as if the failure and waste never happened

- 1 Tim 1:15-16
 - o Before becoming a Christian Paul was a murderer! If he can be forgiven, so can you!
- **Ill: grace is like cinnamon – a little goes a long way!**
 - o Tiny bit in a huge cup of coffee and you still taste it – overwhelms other flavors
 - o Want your kids to eat something they hate – just add cinnamon - cover anything up
- **That's grace: doesn't matter how much you've sinned – grace always enough to cover it up!**
 - o Rom 5:20b “But where sin increased, grace increased all the more”
 - o **You can't out-sin grace!**
- Grace overcomes all our failures – past, present, and future

4. Is ours by faith

- **How do we get this limitless grace? Simply BELIEVE**
- John 3:16 – if you believe in Jesus you receive eternal life and will not be condemned–
- Paul says same in conversation with a Philippian man in Acts 16... Acts 16:30-31
- **If you believe in Jesus you receive God's saving grace**
 - o You don't work for grace... don't earn it
 - o If you earned it, it wouldn't be grace... by definition!
 - o And you receive it by faith alone
- **But what is faith? What does it mean to believe in Jesus?**
 - o Some people think faith = a blind leap based on a feeling
 - o Others think faith = certainty – you're absolutely sure Jesus is real
 - o Neither are correct
- **To believe means that you are persuaded by the evidence that something is true**
 - o It's not certainty – we can't *know* Jesus is real till we die
 - o But it's also not a blind leap – it's based on historical evidence
- **So what evidence do we have for Jesus? A LOT!**
- **And the most important is the historical evidence we have for His resurrection**
 - o I can't cover all the evidence – but I can give you the top 4 reasons we believe

FIRST: Women were the first witnesses

- **Might seem trivial – here's why it matters:**
 - o In 1st Cent, women were not thought highly of
 - o They were not allowed to testify in a Jewish court of law
 - o **Josephus:** even testimony of multiple women should be rejected “because of the levity and boldness of their sex.”
 - o **Celsus** ancient critic of Christianity mocked idea of Mary Magdalene as witness of resurrection since like all women, she was “hysterical... and deluded by... sorcery.”
- 1st Cent views of women were incredibly bigoted
- The Bible totally disagrees – co-heirs of God's kingdom – equals to men in every way
- But here's why this historical evidence matters for the resurrection:
 - o **if you were making it up: wouldn't choose witnesses society assumed unreliable**
 - o Illust: If I'm trying to fool you into buying a fake investment
 - Not going to tell you, “Hey I've got this great investment opportunity – it's a guaranteed win – my 7-year-old told me all about it!”
 - No. 7-yr-olds aren't thought of as reliable judges of investment opport.
 - I'm going to tell you I read about it in the Wall Street Journal or Buffett
 - o I'm going to quote a witness you believe to be reliable if I'm trying to fool you
- If the apostles were trying to fool us... why did they choose women as witnesses?
- Only reasonable explanation = because it really happened this way!

SECOND: The Apostles looked foolish

- If you're making up a religion to get people to follow you... you'd make yourself look good!
- **But the Apostles don't – they look foolish throughout the Gospels**
 - o Take Peter – the chief Apostle and leader of the early church
 - o Yet in Mt 16 we're told that Peter rebuked Jesus and then Jesus said... **Matt 16:23**
 - o Or how about this from the night Jesus was arrested... **Matt 26:69-75**
 - Peter's a coward and a liar! betrays Jesus and runs away crying!
- If I'm making up a religion... I would never include stories like this!
- The Apostles present themselves as weak and cowardly
- **Why? Only reasonable explanation: committed to tell truth no matter how embarrassing**

THIRD: Jesus' enemies never brought out His body

- **Acts 4** – told that all of Jerusalem was in a frenzy over Apostles' claim that Jesus had risen
 - o 5000 people had believed in Jesus – Christianity was growing exponentially
 - o Even many non-Christian scholars agree early church grew rapidly during this time
- **Freaked out religious leaders in Jerusalem – just crucified Jesus to maintain hold on power**
 - o Now they feel it slipping away - everyone's converting to Christianity
- **What would have been easiest way to stop this new religion in its tracks?**
- **Just bring out the body!**
 - o Only a few weeks since Jesus' death – the body would still be recognizable
 - o Everyone in Jerusalem had seen Jesus during trial and crucifixion
 - o Just bring out the body – parade through Jerusalem – Christianity dies instantly
- **Yet as Christianity grows, that's the one thing they never do!**
 - o Will arrest, beat, kill Christians... but won't bring out the body
 - o That's how you know the resurrection wasn't a hoax or a hallucination...
 - o ...there would have still been a body for the enemies of Christianity to bring out
- **So why didn't they bring out the body? Only reasonable explanation: tomb was empty!**
 - o Even most secular critics agree with that conclusion!
- But critics of Christianity have an explanation... tomb empty because disciples stole the body
 - o overpowered guards, took Jesus' body, and then made it all up
- Here's the problem with that view... what did the Apostles get for their story?...
- Torture and death!

FOURTH: The apostles chose to suffer and die for their claim

- Acts 5, 12, 14, 16, shortly after 2 Peter, 2 Timothy...
- **11 of the 12 disciples were martyred for their allegiance to Jesus**
- **If I made it all up... would I choose to be imprisoned, tortured, and executed for it?! NO!!**
 - o If I'm Peter and I see soldiers coming... "Fellas, fellas, there's been a huge misunderstanding! That whole story about Jesus rising from the dead... yeah, I made that all up. Sorry. I thought it'd make me popular. Obviously I was wrong! So can we just forget about all this?!"
- Who willingly chooses to be tortured and killed for something they knowingly made up?!
- No good way to explain it... unless they really believed they had seen resurrected Jesus

God has given us so much evidence for Jesus' life, death, and resurrection

- If you're still not convinced, I invite you to study the facts – learn the history
- **All this evidence and more at – Resources – FAQ – How do we know Jesus actually rose?**
<http://www.grace-bible.org/resources/faqs/how-do-we-know-that-jesus-actually-rose-from-the-dead>
- I invite you to come talk to me or send me an email – won't offend me or make me angry!
- There's so much evidence for faith. Let's talk about it.

So... the grace of God comes by faith alone – all we have to do is believe

But that good news actually offends some people – feel like we're making salvation too free

- Feel like we're making grace cheap – giving people excuse to abuse it, take it for granted

So let me clarify: grace is NOT cheap... actually the most expensive thing ever purchased!

BUT it was purchased by someone else, not by us!

5. Was purchased by Jesus

- Back to the parable – this act of generosity wasn't free – cost the landowner a lot of money!
 - o He gave away a lot of money the workers had not earned.
- Grace is free for us... but it was costly for Jesus!
 - o Cost Him abandonment, betrayal, torture, and death!
- That was the price He willingly paid so that we could have God's grace for free
 - o 1 Peter 1:18-19
- Jesus suffered and died to pay the sins of all 107 billion people who've ever lived
 - o He paid the full price and then rose to prove the payment was sufficient
 - o When your sin met and the Son of God met on the cross, the Son of God won!
 - o Your sin was paid – your debt was cancelled
- And now you can have eternal life absolutely for free
 - o Not because it's cheap... but because Jesus paid it all!
 - o All you must do is say, YES! I believe!