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MATTHEW SLIDE INTRODUCE

Well, if you have your Bibles, and I hope you do,

- please grab them and turn to Matthew chapter 20.
- You can open a phone or a tablet to Matthew 20,
- or you can use one of the hard-backed black bibles
 - under every single chair.
 - You'll find Matthew 20 on page **825**.

INTRODUCTION: LAST FIRST

So, today's text really begins with the last verse of last week's text.

Last week in chapter 19, verse 30 we read this:

[30] But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

Now, that is a saying that we hear all the time, right?

But it mostly comes up in really ridiculous ways:

I remember being in line at King Soopers,

- and I had a full cart,
- and this older lady with like 3 things in a basket got in line.
 - Why she didn't get into self-checkout is beyond me...
 - maybe she realized,
 - "Hey, I don't work here!"
 - "I ain't doing their job for them!"
 - Not sure.

But she gets behind me,

- and I see she's only got, like, cat food and lemons...
- so, I say,
 - *"Mam, why don't you go in front of me?"*
 - *"I've got a full cart...you go first."*
- And she says,
 - *"Oh no, honey...the last shall be first!"*

Umm...that's not how that works.

- You're just gonna be waiting longer.
- but whatever.

I also know a guy whose son plays little league...

- and the kid was distraught
- because he was the last one drafted
- onto the little league team.

And I asked,

- *"dude, what'd you say to your boy."*

And he said,

- *"Well, I just told him, the last shall be first with God."*
 - To inspire him, or something...

Come to find out that pep talk didn't really work,

- because last I saw him he said to me,
- *"Yeah, he still stinks at baseball."*

I even hear that the Broncos had this saying all over the locker room...

- last season...
- like, as a way to inspire them.

CONTEXT

I'm calling today's sermon **SLIDE LAST FIRST**

I mean, that statement really doesn't make sense.

But it's really important if we are to understand who our God is

- And what we'll see at the end of our text this morning is,
- Jesus is going to say the exact same thing again...

So, he ended last week by saying,

"many who are first will be last, and the last first."

And then Jesus tells this parable. Chapter 20 verse 1:

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MATTHEW 20:1

[1] "For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard."

EXPLAIN: COMPLEX PARABLE

So, this is a parable. Jesus often uses parables in his teaching.

- And parables seem simple enough on the surface...
 - but in actuality, they are complex and nuanced...
 - and frankly, at times, frustrating.

So, parables...aren't always straight-forward...

- they aren't, at times, clear...
- and they will often disturb the hearer.

Because they are meant to make the hearer...

- dig deeper...
- to chew longer...
- to wrestle with what's being taught.

And this parable is one of the more complex parables Jesus tells.
But it teaches us some really important things about God.

EXPLAIN: LABOR WORKERS

So, Jesus says, *“This is what my kingdom is like...*

- *it’s like a master who went out early in the morning*
- *to hire laborers for his vineyard.”*

And, spoiler alert, the master is God...ok?

Now, this may not strike a chord with us particularly,

- but in many places around the world,
 - specifically in labor-type jobs,
- there will be workers waiting in a specific place in town
 - where employers can drive up,
 - pick a few,
 - and hire them for a day of labor.

Additionally, the Hebrew workweek was a little different than today.

- The day started at sunrise, around 6am.
- And the day ended at 6pm.
- So, 12-hour days...laboring in the vineyard.

And they worked 6-days-a-week. So, 72 hour work weeks!

- You’re like, *“Hey, I work that much...”*
 - And to that I’d say...not in a field.

So this is 6am. Verse 2:

MATTHEW 20:2

[2] After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

So, the master agrees with the laborers for the wage of one denarius.

- A denarius was the normal day-rate for a laborer.
 - So, this is fair compensation to a laborer...
 - enough to support his family.

Verse 3:

MATTHEW 20:3-4

[3] And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, [4] and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.'

EXPLAIN: TIME

Now, if you get confused with military time...

- you know, like 1700 hours...
- well, get ready for Hebrew time!

The third hour was measured after the start of the day...

- so, the third hour is now 9am.

So, at 9am the master sees other workers in the marketplace

- who no one has hired,
- and he hires them.

But note, there is no agreed upon contract for payment.

- The master simply says, ***"whatever is right I will give you."***

They just believe the master's promise to take good care of them.

- But remember,
 - they really do need a denarius to feed their families...
 - but a quarter of the day has already passed.

Verse 5:

MATTHEW 20:5

[5] So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.

So, he does it twice more!

- He goes back at noon and at 3.

So, now we have four groups of workers in his field.

But only the first workers know what they're going to be paid.

Verse 6:

MATTHEW 20:6-7

[6] And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' [7] They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'

EXPLAIN: 11th HOUR

Now, this is wild! It's the 11th hour.

- That's 5pm! There's only one hour left of the workday!
- And these guys are still waiting to be hired on!
 - And the master is like, "*Why are you standing here?*"
 - They say, "*No one has hired us!*"

So, these poor day laborers had been rejected by everyone else.

- They clearly wanted to work,
 - or they would have gone home long before.
- But no one would give them a chance.

So, he tells them to go to his vineyard, as well!

This is actually shocking!

- They're only gonna work 1 hour.
 - What's the point?

And one-twelfth of a day's wage is definitely what they're expecting!

POINT 1

And it's here I'll make my first point about the master...about God.

Our God **SLIDE** **RELENTLESSLY PURSUES** us.

Listen, the master is the relentless one here!

Sure, these workers are still out there...waiting...hoping...

- But he went out to hire workers five times!
 - Even at the 11th hour!
- For what?
- One measly hour of work?!?

But in God's Kingdom, it's the master who never stops pursuing us!

- The master is always pursuing...
- The master is always hiring workers...
- It's never too late to get in on this...

He's always relentlessly pursuing us.

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EXPLAIN: CRUX

But it's here that we find a crux point in the story. Ok?

- The original contract with the first workers
 - was one denarius for 12 hours of labor.
- But the agreement with the other 4 groups of workers
 - was **"whatever is right."**

The Greek word translated right here is (dik'-eye-yohs) *dikaiois*

- which means *righteous* or *just*.
- Whatever is right.
- Whatever is just.
- Whatever is fair.

Now, every reader, including us today, knows what's fair. We do!

What's fair is what's earned!

- And so, the first group SHOULD get one denarius.
 - The third hour group, three-quarters.
 - The sixth hour group, half a denarius.
 - The ninth hour group, a quarter.
- And the eleventh hour groups should really only get
 - one-twelfth of a denarius.

Listen to me:

- That's fair!
- That's just!
- Ok? It just is!

And we all know that!

TRANSITION

But remember what Jesus said right at the beginning of this parable:

- This is what the kingdom of heaven is like...

So, what's fair in the kingdom of heaven?

That's the crux point.

Verse 8:

MATTHEW 20:8-9

[8] And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' [9] And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.

EXPLAIN: SURPRISING

Now, every reader of this text...both then and now, are supposed to have the same response:

- *What!?! You've gotta be kidding me?*

Like, seriously, this parable has made me mad in the past. Really it has!

- Oh, here we go...
- is this the "every kid gets a trophy" parable?

What is Jesus doing here?

- Is this an anti-capitalist Jesus rant?
- Is this Jesus advocating some new...
 - Marxist Christian business philosophy
 - where everyone gets paid the same
 - regardless of how much they work?

Well, remember, this is a parable...

- it's meant to cause the readers to ask questions,
- to dig deeper,
- to be disturbed to a certain extent.

And this was shocking!

- When the master hired people at the last hour.
 - That was surprising!
- But this pay is even more so!

EXPLAIN: 11th HOUR WORKERS

But think for a minute from the perspective of the 11th hour workers.

- They need that denarius to feed their families.
- They need that denarius to pay their bills.
- They need that denarius to live.

We talk about living from paycheck to paycheck...

- these laborers were living denarius to denarius.

Imagine their thoughts as they waited hour after hour to be hired.

- The first batch got hired at 6 and they weren't chosen...
 - But then they were passed over at 9...
 - they were passed over at noon...
 - and at 3.
- And yet, they still waited.
- Imagine the agony.

ILLUSTRATION: DODGEBALL

It's kinda like those pressure packed days back in elementary school

- when you would be at recess,
- and it would come time to pick teams for dodgeball,
- and you'd all line up.

And you're standing in line as they're picking teams.

- And as the kids are starting to dwindle down...
- the anxiety of getting picked last starts to build...

And then they pick the kid with terrible asthma before you,

- and you're like, "Come on...you've got to be kidding me!"
- He runs for like three seconds and has to be medicated."

POINT 2

That's kinda what this is like.

- These guys are just waiting...and waiting...and waiting...
- and I imagine by 5pm they've gotta be like,
 - *"What are we doin'?"*
 - *We should just call it...*
 - *We should just go home..."*

But at the 11th hour...the master shows up...

- They do one hour of work...
- only to have a whole denarius pushed into their palm.

They must have been floored!

- Can you imagine these hardened laborers...
- with tears welling up in their eyes.
 - Visions of their children eating...
 - visions of their wives not having to skimp...

And it's my second point about the master...about God:

He's **SLIDE WILDLY GENEROUS**

Listen, the economics of what he does just do not make sense!

- He's getting almost 40% less work than what he's paying for.
- But he just tells them to trust him.
 - *"I'll give you whatever is right."*

And as readers, we are to be amazed at the generosity of the master.

- But then, we would naturally expect the first group
- to be paid proportionately higher.

And these guys start expecting that, too.

- The guys who were hired first...
- are way at the end of the line,
- and they can see what's going on...
- and they start getting excited.

They're like,

- *"Whoa! One denarius for just an hour?"*
 - *That's crazy generous!*
- *That means I should get, like, 12 denari!"*

Verse 10:

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MATTHEW 20:10-15

[10] Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. [11] And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, [12] saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' [13] But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? [14] Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. [15] Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?'

EXPLAIN: FAIR

So, when those hired first...

- only get the one denarius,
 - the same as the 11th hour workers,

- they cry out, *“THAT’S NOT FAIR!*
 - *If you paid them that much,*
 - *then you should have given us more.*
 - *We worked more...therefore we deserve more.”*

And the master just responds:

- *“Didn’t we agree on a denarius?”*
- *What wrong am I doing you?*
- *It’s my money...can’t I do what I want with it?*
- *Or do you begrudge my generosity?”*

In essence he’s saying:

What do you mean, ‘THAT’S NOT FAIR,’?

- *Who am I not being fair with?*
 - *Cause I AM being fair with you!*
- *Actually, the ones I’m NOT being fair with...is them!*
 - *They’re NOT getting what they deserve.*
- *And I’m certainly not being fair to myself!*

EXPLAIN: EVIL EYE

Now, a couple of things to note in these verses.

First, when the master says,

- *“Do you begrudge my generosity?”*

A more literal translation is:

- *Is your eye bad because I’m good?*
 - *OR is your eye evil?*

And in the scriptures the eye is frequently equated with the heart.

- To say, *‘set your heart on something’*
- and to *‘fix your eye on something’* are synonyms, right?

So, the indictment on those hired first is:

- *Is your heart evil?*
- *Is your eye bad because I'm generous?*
 - He's like, "the way you are responding to my generosity
 - *is showing that there's something wrong with your heart!"*

But the second thing to note in these verses is verse 14.

- The master says: **Take what belongs to you and go.**
- And many commentators interpret this as a harsh command.
 - There is an aspect of judgment here.

The master is sovereign, and has the right to do whatever he wants.

- And if those first workers don't like it...they can leave.
 - Just like the rich young man walked away last week.

POINT 3

And it's my last point about God.

Our God is **SLIDE DEVASTATINGLY HONEST**

This is a very different God than the...

- TinkerBell...
- Sparkle-in-the-spirit...
- Never says anything to offend you...
 - or to upset you...God
- That many imagine Jesus to be!

NO! He's DEVASTATINGLY HONEST.

When those who were chosen first...

- start complaining about fairness,
- the master won't have any of it.

- *I gave you what we agreed to.*
- *And you're upset because I'm being generous?*
- *Something's wrong with your heart.*
- *Take what belongs to you and go!*

It's a stern warning, church!

And then, the final verse. Verse 16:

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MATTHEW 20:16

[16] So the last will be first, and the first last."

APPLICATION

So, the point of this parable is for us to reflect on all the characters

- and to consider what this says about God,
- what this says about his kingdom,
- and then what this means for each one of us.

Cause, man, upon first reading this parable,

I did find myself siding with the first workers.

- It doesn't seem fair that they worked hard for 12 hours
- and they ended up going home with the same money
 - as those who worked 1 hour.

But then I begin to think a little deeper, and I find myself going,

- *"Thank God he doesn't play fair!*
- *Thank God the kingdom doesn't work like that."*

Because, if we're honest,

- there isn't a single one of us in here
- who wants to walk up to God and go,
 - *"I really want to get what I deserve from you!"*
- Right?
 - Cause we'd all back away...
 - and expect fire to come from heaven...
 - and burn that dude extra crispy.
 - Like go Old Testament on him!

Does anybody here WANT what they deserve?

Not me!

- With my life?
- With what I've done?
- With what goes through my mind?
 - Man, I hate some of the thoughts that I get!
 - I will sometimes catch myself thinking crazy stuff!
 - When someone cuts me off in traffic!?!
 - Anybody else?
 - Gosh, I think to myself,
 - If anyone could read my mind...
 - Cancelled!

But the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that:

- In the greatest move of THAT'S NOT FAIR,
 - God took all our sin and rebellion,
 - and placed that on his Son.
 - THAT'S NOT FAIR!

- And God took all Christ's righteousness and obedience,
- and offers it freely to us.

■ THAT'S NOT FAIR!

Oh, praise the Lord that he doesn't play FAIR!

- We are those hired last!
- And we have been given a whole denarius!
- And we didn't earn it!
 - He RELENTLESSLY PURSUES...
 - he's WILDLY GENEROUS...
 - but he's DEVASTATINGLY HONEST.

CONCLUSION: PRODIGAL

So, let me end with this: there's a parallel parable to this one that can be found in Luke chapter 15.

It's the story of a Father with two sons.

- One is known as the prodigal son...or the lost son.
- And he squandered his inheritance on licentious living...

And here are some of my favorite verses in the whole bible.

SLIDE W/PADS LUKE 15:17-19

[17] "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! [18] I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. [19] I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"

Well, you know how the story goes...

- the son heads home...
- but before he can even get there,
- the Father sees him from far off,
- and runs to him.
 - And he hugs his neck and kisses his face...
 - and wraps him in his robe...
- And he throws a party...
 - and kills the fattened calf.

This is so unexpected!

- Just like the lavish generosity
 - of the good master
 - giving the 11th hour workers
 - a full denarius.

And then the famous verse:

SLIDE LUKE 15:24

[24] For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

But the story doesn't end there.

- Because there was an older brother.
- And when he hears the music and dancing,
- he asks his servant who tells him,
 - *"Your brother has come home*
 - *and your father has received him back!"*

Verse 28:

SLIDE LUKE 15:28–30

[28] But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, [29] but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. [30] But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

He responds with: *"THAT'S NOT FAIR!"*

Verse 31:

SLIDE LUKE 15:31-32

[31] And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. [32] It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

Listen, both stories present the same conundrum...

- Who REALLY is the LOST brother in this parable?
 - Is it the PRODIGAL or the OLDER brother?
- Who REALLY is the PITIABLE laborer in our parable?
 - Is it those hired last? Or those hired first?

It's the **SLIDE LAST FIRST**

Listen, for some of you, the master is in RELENTLESS PURSUIT of you!

- Whether it's the 3rd, 6th, 9th, or even the 11th hour...
- He wants you to trust him, today...
- To surrender all to him, and become his.
- And he'll do right by you...he's WILDLY GENEROUS.

But for others...he's DEVASTATINGLY HONEST.

If you have not grasped the gospel fully and deeply,

- you will return to being condescending,
- condemning,
- anxious,
- insecure,
- joyless,
- and angry all the time.

So, this is the question for each one of us to ponder today, church:

- Are you like those FIRST WORKERS?
- Are you like the OLDER BROTHER?
- Do you begrudge the generosity of the master?

Just take a moment today, church:

- What do you need to lay at his feet?
- What do you need to confess?
- Where do you need him to flood your soul with gratitude?

So the last will be first, and the first last.

Let's pray.

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

RESOURCES CONSULTED:

- Blomberg, Craig. Interpreting the Parables.
- Carson, D.A. The Expositor's Bible Commentary. Matthew.
- Greear, J.D. *11th Hour Faith*.
- Keller, Tim. The Prodigal God.
- Osborne, Grant R. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Matthew.