



Special Music: "GRATEFUL"

Empty Hands Music

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sO2o98Zpzq8>

(Verna, I will be using this in the sermon at some point. Thanks.)

Be Thankful for what we have

Nick Vujicic

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJUXjkQNCRc>

Matthew 20:1-16

1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.

2 He agreed to pay them a denarius. (A denarius was the usual daily wage of a day laborer.) for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

3 “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.

4 He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’

5 So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing.

6 About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

7 “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

8 “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

9 “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius.

10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.

11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.

12 ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

13 “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’

14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you.

15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

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

A CUSTOM JOB

I tried to buy
My salvation.
Over the counter.
Off the shelf.
Placed there
By a religious elf
Working to meet
The needs of
Everyone else.
One size fits all.
I was appalled
When I took it home
And found it was much too small,
Coming apart at the seams.
I screamed
And blamed the maker
Of religious things.

I think generic.
I should be able
To buy generic.
Generic suits me.
Besides,
The cost is less
And I am still blessed
So, whose to decide

**Other than me
On the quality of
The sanctity
Of my salvation?**

**What I forgot
Was I'm quite unique
I can't be found
Hanging around
The local boutique.
I am fearfully and wonderfully made
Specific in every way
Knitted by God
In my mother's womb
A tailored glove
For the hand of my Lord.
What would cause me to think
That I could purchase
An off-the-rack
Canvasback
Bootblack
Generic
Crackerjack
Paperback
Imitation of the real thing.**

**No, I need a custom job
Made to order**

**By the master tailor,
And so does
Each and every unique soul
To be made whole.
Salvation is
The great equalizer
And stableizer,
Customized,
Not plagiarized.
It cannot be bought.
The cost is the same
And will always remain
Both priceless and free,
Guaranteed for eternity,
Batteries included
No one excluded.
No assembly required.
It comes with a message
A great invitation
To a feast at the table
Of our Tailor,
The Master
Of all Creation.**

This is our second series on the parables of Jesus. Jesus often spoke in stories to help people understand concepts that were, to some extent, foreign to them. Many of the parables of Jesus are about the nature of The Kingdom of God. Have you ever thought about why He would need to do that? We have all grown up in a time when people have been taught that heaven is a natural extension to our lives here on earth, that death is a transition. Even if people choose not to believe in life beyond death, they are still exposed to teachings and understand the concept. That wasn't true in the time of Jesus' ministry on earth. The promise of heaven was not an everyday teaching. Life beyond their physical lives was not an expectation. The biggest difference between the Pharisees and the Sadducees was the Pharisees belief in the possibility of resurrection and the Sadducees did not believe in the possibility of a resurrection. And even the Pharisees believed that you had to lead an exceptionally religiously adherent life to even have a possibility of an afterlife in the presence of God. Those whose lives were led on the fringe of society had no hope.

Enter Jesus, who starts teaching about the nature of heaven with the promise that life beyond death is not only possible, but affirmed. He begins teaching that it isn't about whether there is life after death, but where one might expect to spend life after death. He is telling the masses, even the most sinful by Jewish standards, that an afterlife in the presence of God is possible.

But they are reluctant to listen. After all, the poor and disenfranchised people that made up the majority of His followers still believed that you had to lead an exceptionally pure life to receive an invitation to heaven. And the people

Jesus was talking to, were not considered moral giants. He was talking to tax collectors, prostitutes, adulterers, thieves as well as the everyday person that most Jewish leaders found unclean and untouchable. Being offered a seat at the table of God was like a foreign language being spoken.

Jesus did what he could to simplify the nature of The Kingdom of God so that all people could understand what heaven is and how God distributes grace, mercy, and judgment. He used parables, stories to do that. But even today there are many who still believe that a person can work their way into heaven. If they are good enough, if they earn enough brownie points, they get to step through the gates. The cross, the crucifixion, and the resurrection don't really play a part in their understanding of the workings of the universe God created. They talk about Karma, weighing the good against the bad in life. They talk about Yin and Yang bringing balance to life. They embrace crystals or mysticism to get rid of dark spirits. And somehow they fit all this information into their understanding of heaven believing that if they just lead lives good enough, God and the universe will accept them into heaven.

When we start talking about this particular parable, The Parable of the Workers, so many people just kind of skip over the opening to get to the actual meat of the story so that they can make it mean what they want it to mean. But Jesus starts out with this phrase, and we should too:

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.”

We want to bypass Jesus telling us the story He is about to relate is an analogy for The Kingdom of Heaven. We want to get to the meaty part where Jesus will give us guidance on how to lead a good life so that we can get to heaven rather than focusing on the analogy that He is presenting to us. But when we read the story, it sounds so... Socialist. Everybody makes the same amount of money no matter how long they work. Everyone gets fed the same. Everyone walks away at the end of the day with the same number of coins in their pocket. And those who worked longer, resent it. Those who worked the least are overjoyed.

The situation is so contrary to our capitalistic mindset. This teaching doesn't fit in with what we actually believe, and we find ourselves in disagreement with the story. We say things like: "Those people did not work as much so they shouldn't get as much." "Those people that worked hard did not get paid enough." "The system is broken." "This is turning into a welfare state." But that is not what this parable is about. Don't let your mind fall into that trap. The parable is about The Kingdom of Heaven, not the man-made government of the United States. If we look at the parable from the wrong viewpoint, we might begin to think that we can create heaven on earth and don't need a Kingdom of Heaven at all. And that is just what many people do. Which leads us into that shadow area that John Lennon talks about:

**Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us, only sky**

Imagine all the people
Livin' for today
Ah

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion, too

Imagine all the people
Livin' life in peace
Ah

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

And we buy into it because it makes sense to us. It almost sounds like something Jesus would say with just enough truth to make it attractive.

But the parable is not about making heaven on earth. It is about a heaven that already exists. A heaven that existed before the universe itself was created. A heaven that God welcomes us into. A heaven where even the worst of us stills measures up through God's grace. A heaven where each one of us is seen as unique through the eyes of God. A heaven where no matter how little or how hard we worked, we are still welcome at the table. A heaven where no matter how great our sin, we still have a chair with our name on it. A heaven where the blood of Jesus equalizes us all in the presence of our Creator.

"But that's not FAIR," we cry out. "I worked harder than he did so I deserve a bigger mansion!" "I lived a pretty good life and she was a wretched wreck of a sinner, a prostitute, a junkie! I deserve a place closer to the head of the table." We can't seem to let go of the idea that we did not earn a place at the

table. In order to sit at the table, we each received an invitation that we had to accept. An invitation catered to us, our souls, our essence. Not to be compared with any other soul at the table. We are guests, and guests do not get to make the rules. And just because we may not understand the reasoning behind the rules, that does not grant us the privilege of changing those rules to meet our own desires.

If we find ourselves on a highway and we decide the posted speed limit is unfair, we can choose to ignore it, but we can still get a ticket. Screaming that it isn't fair will not get us out of that ticket. Only God gets to decide who sits at His table. No one else. We don't have to accept the invitation. God won't force us to. Nor does He have any obligation to explain Himself. If we choose not to sit at the table with the rest of the chosen, if we choose to leave, God will not bar our exit.

However, if we accept the invitation to enjoy the banquet in The Kingdom of Heaven, we have to put away our petty and trite understanding of what is fair. If God chooses to be generous, who are we to interfere? Isn't it more productive for us to celebrate the salvation of those who accept the invitation than to despair over the inclusive nature of the invitation? Didn't the shepherd celebrate when he found the lost sheep? Didn't the Prodigal Son's father throw a feast for his son whom he thought was lost to him?

Call me crazy, but I'm ready to party. I'm ready to dance for every lost soul that has found their way to the table. I am ready to sing out for every soul that has escaped the clutches of this world. I am ready to feast at this table that Christ has invited us to, in spite of my past, in spite of my sin, in spite of my

shortcomings, in spite of the times I have failed, in spite of the times I have fallen short. The feast that Christ has prepared for us is catered specifically to us and our needs. We are unique.

So, rather than worry about what is on everyone else's plate, rather than compare our lives to the lives of others, rather than try to balance some cosmic balance scale based on good and bad, let us instead appreciate what God has done for each of us individually. Let us be thankful for what we have, rather dwell on things we don't have. Did we eat today? Let us be thankful. Did we have a place to sleep today? Let us be thankful. Do we have clothes to wear? Let us be thankful. Did God wake us up for another day of service to our brethren? Let us be thankful. We truly have everything we need to accomplish what God is asking of us in this world. Our relationship with God is just that, our relationship with God. It is not something that we should compare with other people's relationships with God.

- 1 **You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.**
- 2 **You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.**
- 3 **You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.**
- 4 **Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.**
- 5 **You hem me in behind and before,**

and you lay your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?

8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,

10 even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"

12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

13 For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,

when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

17 How amazing are your thoughts concerning me God!
How vast is the sum of them!

18 Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.

PSALM 139:1-18

God bless you all,

AMEN

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