

# “Equal Glory”

Matthew 20:1-15 & Jonah 3:10-4:11

**Pastor James York**

September 21, 2014

**Matthew 20:1-15 NLT** “For the Kingdom of Heaven is like the landowner who went out early one morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay the normal daily wage and sent them out to work. “At nine o’clock in the morning he was passing through the marketplace and saw some people standing around doing nothing. So he hired them, telling them he would pay them whatever was right at the end of the day. So they went to work in the vineyard. At noon and again at three o’clock he did the same thing. “At five o’clock that afternoon he was in town again and saw some more people standing around. He asked them, ‘Why haven’t you been working today?’ “They replied, ‘Because no one hired us.’ “The landowner told them, ‘Then go out and join the others in my vineyard.’ “That evening he told the foreman to call the workers in and pay them, beginning with the last workers first. When those hired at five o’clock were paid, each received a full day’s wage. When those hired first came to get their pay, they assumed they would receive more. But they, too, were paid a day’s wage. When they received their pay, they protested to the owner, ‘Those people worked only one hour, and yet you’ve paid them just as much as you paid us who worked all day in the scorching heat.’ “He answered one of them, ‘Friend, I haven’t been unfair! Didn’t you agree to work all day for the usual wage? Take your money and go. I wanted to pay this last worker the same as you. Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money? Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?’”

Who is revealing something about God in this parable? The landowner reveals God’s abundant resources, unmerited grace, generosity, and valuing of every person equally. God’s love and blessings are infinite. God has more than enough to pay all of us in full, to make all of us whole and perfect. God loves each of us fully, perfectly, completely regardless of our productivity, actions, or inactions. God is eager to welcome us all home to heaven, to celebrate with God, to feast at the heavenly banquet.

The worker who worked all day reveals Jesus who humbled himself, taking on human flesh, valuing himself as our equal, our sibling. Even though Jesus loved and served perfectly, he still suffered and died. Jesus is enjoying the same glorious eternal life that all of us will enjoy. Unlike the all-day worker in the parable, Jesus never complains about us or desires that we get less. Jesus came so all of us can equally receive the full blessings of God.

Who do you identify with the most in the parable? The gracious landowner? The all-day, jealous worker? The excuse making, yet grateful one hour worker? What is God inviting you to do? Who is God inviting you to be? All of us have aspects of all three people within us.

We are called to be like the gracious landowner. God will fill us with an endless supply of love. We are to love everyone. We are to be gracious regardless of how we are treated, what another does or does not do to us, we are to love them. We are to see goodness and beauty in every person. We are to value others equally, because everyone is a cherished child of God. Value of others and our self does not come from our job, our earthly status, how much money we make, productivity, or how hard we work. Everyone’s value is the same. Everyone should be paid the same regardless of how much or how little they work. Everyone should have the same amount of food, shelter, health care, clothing, transportation, and entertainment. In heaven everyone is treated the same. In heaven everyone equally enjoys the fullest measure of peace, love, and joy. As Christians we are called to make earth like heaven. How do you think we are doing on equal pay, benefits, and value of each person?

How are you like the one hour worker? Are you grateful to God knowing that you will receive all the blessings of glorious eternal life even though you are undeserving? Are you grateful to serve in a small way? Are you able to not compare yourself to others? Do you value yourself equally with others?

How are you like the all-day jealous worker? These people pride themselves on being up early, working long hours, being productive, contributing to society, being active in church, and being a great friend and family

member. They are eager to answer God's call and give their all serving God. All of this is good as long as two thoughts do not spring up in their mind. First, that they are earning God's blessings. Second, that they are better than another person. Working hard in gratitude to God, to give God the glory, to love and serve others, to make earth more like heaven, is wonderful. Working hard to elevate yourself above another, thinking you are more productive, valued and better than another, is sin.

Are you jealous of others? Are you jealous that a nonbeliever, who you perceive to be more sinful than you, doing less good than you, less loving than you, is loved, cherished, and valued by God the same as you? Most of us have a works righteousness thought pattern. Sometimes we even say things like, "Your service was so outstanding you will get an extra star in your heavenly crown." That is what the all-day workers in the parable thought. They did not have a problem with the one hour workers getting a full day's pay until they were not paid proportionately more for their work. Helmut Thielicke said, "You will never be able to see the goodness of God with a jealous eye."

The parable goes to great lengths to fuel, to even justify, the jealousy of the all-day worker. The work was hard and fast-paced in the scorching sun. Everyone available was hired at 9 am, noon, 3 pm and 5 pm. What were those who could not get out of bed, dressed and ready to work until 5 pm doing? Were they out rousing, partying, and drinking all night, hung over, that they didn't get to the marketplace until 5pm? Were they lazy, lounging around all day, not motivated until 5 pm? Those hired at 5 pm did not have any good reasons for not being at the market place earlier. When asked why they were not working they blamed the employer saying, "No one hired us." The gracious employer was not insulted by their blame. The gracious employer did not lecture them for their failure to show up earlier. The gracious employer did not warn them about the poor, lethargic work that they were likely to perform. Instead the gracious employer hires them, and then pays them in full. Do you become jealous in these situations?

The disciples were struggling with status, value, jealousy, and envy in the context of this parable. They asked Jesus what their reward would be for following him. They pleaded that they were doing more, so they should get more blessings in heaven. They were competing among themselves. Some of them even asked for preferred seating in heaven. Jesus responded with today's parable calling them and us to let go of jealous and value ourselves and everyone the same.

Jealousy comes in many forms. One may be jealous of another person, or stuff, or money. One may be jealous of one's self at a different time in their life. Jealous of the past, if only things were like the good old days. Jealous of the future, once this or that happens then things will be well. In Star Wars, Yoda when training Luke to be a Jedi knight said, "All your life you have looked away... to the future, to the horizon. Never your mind on where you are. What you are doing." Jealousy, envy, comparison leads to the dark side.

Today's parable warns us of the dark side of competitiveness, the destructiveness of jealousy which drives a wedge in our relationships. When we feel that we are not getting what we deserve, then corrosive thoughts soon grow. Comparing one's self to others is destructive. Consuming out of jealousy is hollow.

There was a faithful man who worshipped regularly and studied the scriptures. He discovered, believed, and knew the power of God's grace. He knew God loves everyone equally, even those who openly rebel and curse God. He realized he was saved by grace yet worshipped and served in gratitude. His belief in grace clashed with his work ethic. His belief in grace clashed with his view of fairness, that those who love and serve more should be blessed more. Overtime these clashes sparked jealousy. Soon he began to judge others. He began to value some people more than others. His jealousy grew.

God had the cure for his jealousy. God asked him to tell those who this man despised that God loved them and would save them. He ignored God's call. Since he knew he was saved by grace, not whether or not he answered God's call, he decided to move and live it up in another city. Since God loved this man, in hopes of freeing him from his jealousy, God through a series of amazing coincidences brought this man to the very people he was jealous of. Finally this man begrudgingly, feebly told these people about God's grace. God saved these people as this man knew God would. Instead of being joyful the man became bitter, frustrated, and angry. He became so much on edge that even a worm causing a plant to wilt set him off in anger. You know this man as Jonah.

**Jonah 3:10-4:11NLT "When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, God changed God's mind and did not carry out the destruction God had threatened. This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. So he complained to the Lord about it:**

**“Didn’t I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. Just kill me now, Lord! I’d rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen.” The Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry about this?” Then Jonah went out to the east side of the city and made a shelter to sit under as he waited to see what would happen to the city. And the Lord God arranged for a leafy plant to grow there, and soon it spread its broad leaves over Jonah’s head, shading him from the sun. This eased his discomfort, and Jonah was very grateful for the plant. But God also arranged for a worm! The next morning at dawn the worm ate through the stem of the plant so that it withered away. And as the sun grew hot, God arranged for a scorching east wind to blow on Jonah. The sun beat down on his head until he grew faint and wished to die. “Death is certainly better than living like this!” he exclaimed. Then God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry because the plant died?” “Yes,” Jonah retorted, “even angry enough to die!” Then the Lord said, “You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. It came quickly and died quickly. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn’t I feel sorry for such a great city?”**

Why should we work a full day instead of one hour if the pay is the same? We are called to work to make earth more like heaven, to make earth a place where all are fully loved and valued.

Jonah was the most successful prophet with the shortest amount work. He is enjoying heaven equally with everyone in heaven, even those from Nineveh. All is perfect in heaven, so Jonah is free of his jealousy and is rejoicing with his new friends from Nineveh. When you get to heaven, you will enjoy the glory equally with Jonah and the people you dislike.

Jonah made earth more like heaven for the people of Nineveh. Jonah could have personally enjoyed more heaven on earth if he would have gone directly to Nineveh. Jonah could have enjoyed more heaven on earth if he left that wilted plant and let go of his jealousy, so he could enjoy a cool drink in the home of someone from Nineveh.

Working a full day cannot make heaven grandeur, because heaven already is perfectly grand. You will equally enjoy heaven with great all day workers like Mary, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mother Teresa. Working a full day may not make your personal life more like heaven, but it will bring more heaven to earth for all of us.

Certainly Mary, the mother of Jesus, worked all her life lovingly parenting Jesus. Mary changed her life plans, so Jesus could save you. Martin Luther King Jr. helped us see that we are all equal. Mother Teresa showed us that everyone desires dignity, love, and compassion.

Let go of your jealousy. Love everyone. Celebrate grace.

The good news of the parable. God is relentless. God keeps coming back for everyone. God keeps giving everyone another chance. God welcomes everyone to enjoy a full measure of glorious, joyful, love for eternity. Amen