

Imagine for a moment an employment agency in downtown Wildwood. The Villages is growing to over 200,000 residents, and more houses need to be built. The employment rate is .01 % in Sumter County. And so contractors are looking for day laborers. The employment agency opens at 6:00 A.M. Several contractors enter the building at 6:00 A.M. looking for day laborers. The agency is filled with illegal aliens. One contractor says to a potential worker in the employment agency, "If you work for me today, a 12 hour day, I will pay you \$120.00. The day laborer says, "Sounds fair, let's go. At 9:00 A.M., the same contractor comes back looking for workers. He speaks to another potential candidate. "I'll pay you \$120.00 if you work until 6:00 P.M. The worker says, "Sounds fair to me." The contractor goes again to the Wildwood Employment agency at 12:00 noon and 3:00 looking for workers. There are some newbies who have just arrived. The contractor says, "If You work for me today until 6:00 P.M. I'll pay you \$120.00. The workers shake hands and go out to build houses for a portion of the remaining day. Finally, at 5:00 P.M., the contractor goes to the employment agency one last time. He finds a guy who is sleeping in the corner. He pokes the guy and says, "Do you want to work 1 hour, and I will pay you \$120.00. The guy jumps up and says, "Sure, let's go. Well, 6:00 P.M. comes around, and its pay time. This contractor pays in cash. He starts with the guy who went to work at 5:00 P.M., and gives him a hundred dollar bill, and a \$20.00. When the next employees come, they expected to receive more. When they received the same pay, they were upset. Why didn't we get more? We put in more hours than that lazy slug who only worked an hour!" The boss said, "You shook hands and agreed that what I was paying you was fair." I did nothing wrong.. Isn't the real problem here that I am generous, and you are envious? You may be shocked to hear this, but our God deals with us in the same way. When we look up to God today, we are all going to say, "That's Not Fair!"

That's Not Fair! When I attended the Player's Championship at Ponta Vedra Beach this year, I was amazed to find out that Martin Kaymer took home 1.8 million dollars for his first place finish. Second place received, Jim Furyk, 1.08 million dollars. I thought to myself, "That's not fair." We pay professional athletes too much money. Or what about you, look at the house you presently live in. Then look at the house Labron James is selling in Miami for 17 million dollars. Does Labron even have a college education? You do! "That's not fair, you say. Or when we both see a person in Denver Colorado, who gets \$1000.00 a month from the government in SSI payments, a free 1 bedroom apartment, food stamps, and a cellphone for his tough times dealing with addiction. And how does this person spend his day. He buys legal pot, and smokes away the day in the park, watching other people go by to work. That's not fair.

But listen to the landowner's reply: "Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" The landowner was right. He didn't cheat the first workers. He gave them exactly what he said he would. And if they questioned the "fairness" of equal pay for all, the landowner said that it was his money and he could be generous if he wanted to. Yet this is still a parable that doesn't sit well with us.

But do you know what makes this parable even harder for us to chew on and digest? It's not really about work or pay or money. The first verse says, "The kingdom of heaven is like . . ." Jesus is teaching us a lesson about his people, about himself, and about heaven. And so just like in the vineyard parable, there are people who are Christians their entire lives. They are born and raised Christian. They live to be 80 or 90 or more, and then they go to heaven. That's the "pay" they receive as a free gift from Jesus. But there are some people who become Christians later in life. Maybe when they get married and have a family. But then, there are some people who are unbelievers down to their last few dying moments and then become Christians. So far so good. This makes sense. We know this happens. So maybe we get a little more credit then. Maybe we get a little better place in heaven. Maybe we enjoy heaven a little bit more, right? Not at all! Jesus is telling us that he gives to all believers—no matter the length of belief—equally and the same amount of "pay." Every believer receives the same, equal, free gift of heaven.

Now wait a second! This is what makes us cringe and makes our skin crawl a bit. Many of you from Wisconsin remember the name, Jeffrey Dahmer. Jeffrey Dahmer was a mass murderer. He killed 17 men and boys, most of them over a four year span from 1987-1991. Some of the men he had relations with first. Some of the men he had relations with after he killed them. Some he cut up into pieces and ate. When he was finally caught he had fridges full of body parts. He was sentenced to 15 consecutive life sentences. But in 1994 an inmate stabbed him to death in prison. However, many sources claim that Jeffrey Dahmer had repented of his wrongs and believed that Jesus was his Savior from sin, and only way to heaven. That would mean that Jeffrey Dahmer is now in heaven.

Wait a second! That's Not Fair! 3 years ago, Steve Jobs died from cancer at the age of 56. He revolutionized the world. He gave us Apple Computers, iPhones and Ipads. While he was worth several billion dollars, he also gave very generously to many causes. He was an innovator, a pioneer, an entrepreneurial mastermind, and seemingly a pretty nice guy. Yet it would appear that he was not a Christian, which means that he would be in hell. So Steve Jobs, the nice guy and world changer goes to hell, but Jeffrey Dahmer the mass-murdering cannibal makes a last minute change and goes to heaven? That's Not Fair! Ah! Now we really understand why Jesus told this parable.

Peter, like us was also confused. Just before this parable in chapter 19 of Matthew Peter said to Jesus, "We have left everything to follow you. What then will there be for us?" Peter also figured that since he had committed himself to the Lord longer and more, he should get something better. So Jesus then told this parable. Well what should we get? What should we get if we are Christians? What should we get if we are Christians longer in life? I suppose we should examine what's really "fair."

God has offered heaven to every human being. It was really a simple offer and a simple command. God has said, "Be perfect because I am perfect," and "Be holy because I am holy." God also said that if we obey him, then we will be his people and he will be our God. It is very simple. If we want to live with him in heaven God says that all we have to do is obey everything he tells us to do. That's very simple. That's also a very big problem. I haven't upheld my end

of the bargain. I haven't been perfect. I haven't been close to perfect. I've done so many things in my life, many of which I would never want to even share with you. Even if I thought I was pretty good, God tells us, Even one sin makes me a total sinner, and yet I've sinned much more than that. That means I've broken my end of the deal. That means I should face the consequences for breaking the deal. God says, "The wages of sin is death," and, "The soul who sins is the one who will die." Therefore, because I'm not perfect—in fact far from it—because I've sinned, I should die physically and die eternally in hell. That's fair.

You see, as we ache and moan and whine and complain about who receives what from God, we have flipped everything upside down. We've turned God's grace into something we can earn. But that's the problem right there. Heaven is not something we earn. God's grace is not something we merit, because we can't. We could never do enough to please God because we sin too much.

Now let me read for you something else that isn't fair. This is from the book of Isaiah, "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." What isn't fair is that Jesus was perfect. He was innocent. He always obeyed his Father and never sinned once. Yet he was pierced and nailed to a cross for our wrongs. He was crushed under the weight of our sins. He received the punishment of death and hell that we deserve. We were the ones to go astray, but he was the one to suffer and die for it. That's Not Fair!

Jesus teaches us about his grace, his boundless grace, in this parable. It's not at all fair that he was the one to suffer and die, but he did for us out of love. It's not at all fair that we sinners should receive the gift of eternal life. But he gives it to us because he is generous and gracious. That's what grace is: You get what you did not deserve. We are given the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, because of a generous gift of our God. We don't get to heaven by how many hours we put in at church. The agreement was signed after Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden. You are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus. If a 90-year-old comes to our church for the very first time at Christmas Eve this year after a wild and sinful life in the Villages, but then learns about the Savior and goes to heaven, terrific! If the thief on the cross next to Jesus could be crucified for his crimes, then repent and turn to Jesus, then be promised by Jesus that he would be in paradise too, amazing! And if Jeffrey Dahmer would be a mass murderer of the most vile kind, but in his last few months perhaps repented of his sins, turned in faith to Jesus for forgiveness, and is now in heaven, then thanks be to God!

You see, not one of those people deserve eternal life. But I don't either! It is only by the, grace, of our God that any person—including me—would ever go to heaven. So be it the life long Christian, the recent convert, the rebel man now turned believer, the modest woman who has lived an entire life of faith, or the one who turns to Jesus on the deathbed—whoever receives Jesus' generous gift of forgiveness and heaven—That's Not Fair, but that's grace. It is by the grace of God, I am who I am.