

Grace Isn't Fair, But It Isn't Unfair Either

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Bible Text: Matthew 20:1-16

Preached on: Sunday, May 20, 2007

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It is our privilege again to have Dr. Feinberg here with us this morning. Many of you do not know him perhaps, it's been about three years since he's been here and it's just a pleasure to have him here again but also just a good time to be able to give him thanks again for his faithful service. He has had a great influence on this church whether you guys are aware of it or not through his books and through his teaching. I know Matt is always looking forward to some of the writings that Dr. Feinberg has put out and I know he's looking forward to hearing this sermon once we get the tape for it. But it's just our privilege, again, and our pleasure to bring Dr. Feinberg here this morning. Again, there is a piece in the news that I did not want to read for you this morning.

Thank you so very much. It is always a real privilege and joy to be with you here at Temple Baptist and I didn't realize it had been that long but it seemed like it had been not as quite as much time but I always feel very, very welcome when ever we're here and I can tell that you are well taught in the word by Pastor and so I am happy and pleased to have the opportunity to be here this morning to share with you from the word of God.

If you have your Bibles in front of you, will you turn with me to Matthew's gospel, chapter 20 and I want to read in your hearing verses 1-16. This is a parable of our Lord which in a number of ways seems to be a very, very strange one and perhaps you thought that in the past when you have read it. But it begins with the Lord saying,

"1 For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; 4 and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went. 5 Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. 6 And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?' 7 They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' 8 When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the

last group to the first.' 9 When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. 10 When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, 12 saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.' 13 But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 'Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. 15 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?' 16 So the last shall be first, and the first last."

May the Lord add his blessing to the reading and now to our study of his holy and inspired word.

I want to speak to you this morning on the theme "grace is not fair but it isn't unfair either." Now, I'm wondering if on one occasion or another you've ever been in a conversation with someone who didn't know Christ and somewhere in that conversation that person said to you, "You know, you Christians claim that God can do anything that he wants. You say that he can save anyone that he wants from sin and he can give them eternal life. Yet then you turn around and say that God only saves a few, he doesn't save everyone and the rest of mankind he consigns to eternal punishment. Now how can it be fair for God to operate in that way? If your God is so loving and so powerful, why doesn't he just save everyone? I can't believe in Christianity," this friend says, "when it believes in a God who is so unfair." Perhaps you've been engaged on another occasion in a conversation with someone who has experienced horrible tragedy in their life. Perhaps it's even someone who is a believer and as you talk about what happens, that person says to you, "You know, I know that life is full of problems and I know that just because I'm a Christian that doesn't mean I escape all difficulties, but I never expected something like this to happen. Oh, if I were an evil person, I suppose that this might be a fair punishment but what evil have I done that merits this horrible tragedy? What really is troublesome to me is that there are other people who have not followed the Lord anywhere near as closely as I have and yet they have never had something like this happen to them. Now don't misunderstand me, I don't mean that I wish other people would have my afflictions, I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy but the point is that some people have escaped this kind of tragedy so why not us? It just doesn't seem that God has been fair in the way he's handled me and my family."

Well, dear friends, these are indeed challenging questions that sometimes can even rattle the faith of the deepest believer in Jesus Christ but is there an answer to questions of this sort? Is God fair in the way that he treats the lost? Is he fair with respect to what happens in our life in terms of afflictions and trials that we come across? Well, I believe that there is an answer to such questions and I believe that the place to begin in giving the answer is with a clear understanding of the difference between grace on the one hand and justice on the other. Once that distinction is clear, then I would propose to you that the key to

answering the kind of questions that I've already raised is the simple and yet profound claim that grace is not fair but it isn't unfair either. Now, you may wonder how in the world am I going to lay this out and explain it. In fact, you may not even be sure what I mean when I say grace is not fair but it isn't unfair either. Well, in order to explain what I have in mind, there are going to be three basic parts to this message this morning. First of all, we're going to look at the difference between grace and justice and then we're going to come to this parable in Matthew 20 that I believe illustrates very, very clearly and wonderfully the point that I'm making this morning about grace and justice and fairness. Then, once we have seen the teaching of this parable, we are going to go back to those questions, those scenarios that I began with and see how it applies to those issues and even more.

Well, if that's the case, then let's get started. First of all, I want to talk about the difference between grace on the one hand and justice on the other. I'm thinking here of the biblical concepts of grace and justice. Let's begin with grace and if I were to ask you, "How would you define grace?" Many people would give an example of grace but they wouldn't actually give a definition of it. Let me give a definition: grace very simply is unmerited favor. That means you get something good that you didn't deserve, you didn't earn and is not owed to you by anyone. On the other hand, there is justice and justice basically is the idea of bestowing or giving to someone exactly what they deserve whether they have earned good or whether they have earned evil. So grace is a free gift, justice gives you exactly what you've earned and what you deserve.

That's the definition but the crucial thing that we need to see is how grace and justice relate to one another. You see, there seem to be some people who think that the opposite of grace is injustice and so when they don't receive grace that someone else has received, they believe that God has been unjust, unfair to them. But dear friends, the opposite of grace is not injustice, the opposite of injustice is not grace. The opposite of injustice is justice. Grace is an entirely different sort of thing. It has nothing to do with what is earned, what is deserve, what is owed. You see, grace is not fair. It is not deserved. It is not owed. But on the other hand, it's not unfair, it's not unjust either. It is something entirely different and I think we see this whole set of points that I'm making, this basic relationship between grace and justice illustrated beautifully in the parable that we read just a few moments ago.

Well, what about that parable? As you have it recorded here in Matthew's gospel, chapter 20, it seems in some respects to be very, very strange. Probably as you read through this on one occasion or another, you have been inclined to react the way that the laborers did who were hired first in the day. It sounds like the land owner really wasn't all that fair in his handling of them. Well, let's see what the passage actually teaches. In verses 1-7 you have the basic setting of this parable and I would ask you to note that initially in verse 1, that Jesus begins this parable by saying, "For the kingdom of heaven is like." That means that whatever this parable teaches, it shows us how things are covered, handled in the kingdom of heaven. Alright, Jesus says there was this certain land owner, he had a vineyard and he wanted to have people go out and work a day in the vineyard. And so, at various times of the day, he hired people to work and he sent them out to work. Now, in

order to understand what is being said as to when they went out to work, it's helpful to remember that the Jews divided the day into 12 equal segments of time beginning in the early morning at 6 and ending in the early evening at 6 PM. So when it talks about the sixth hour, that would be new. When it talks about the thirrd hour, that's 9 o'clock. When it talks about the ninth hour, that's 3 o'clock. And the eleventh hour would be 5 o'clock, about an hour before quitting time.

One other thing we need to note here from these early verses as well, it is only with relation to the workers hired very early in the day, the ones he first hired, it is only with them he made a specific agreement of how much he would pay them. Verse 2 says, "When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard." As you look at what he did with those who were hired at 9 and noon and 3 o'clock, he said, "You go out and work and whatever is right, I'll do that." But he didn't set a specific amount of money that he would pay them. When it came to those that he hired about 5 o'clock in the day, he just simply told them, "You get out and work." Well, okay, if that's the way this is set up, we probably have a certain idea at this point in the game as to how much each of these workers would get paid. It's natural to think, isn't it, that if those who worked all through the day get a denarius, those who start at 9 will get well, maybe like a quarter less of money than those in the first place. Those who start at noon, well they should only get paid for half a day's work so whatever half of a denarius is, that would be their pay. And so on and so forth.

Well, in verses 8-11, we have recorded the fact that at the end of that day of work, the land owner asked the foreman to call the workers in to pay them and he said to his foreman, "Begin by paying the last workers first," that is, those hired last in the day, first, "and work your way back to those who were hired first in the day and you pay them." Well, that sounds okay and obviously that's crucial to the point of the parable because if it turns out that the way this is done is to pay the people hired first and then those hired second and so on and so forth, you aren't going to get much of a reaction from people hired earlier in the day. But if you start at the very end of the day and you work your way back to those who were hired first in the day, well then those who were hired first in the day will see all along what other people are getting paid and will see their reaction and then the point of the parable can be made.

So in verse 9 we are told that the workers were brought in and he began with those hired at approximately 5 PM and he gave to them a denarius. Now a denarius at that time was worth about \$.17 in our currency today. Not an awful lot of money but a wage for a whole day at that time. And as you look at this, you see that he gives each person who worked for him a denarius. Everyone gets the exact same thing. Well, in verses 11 and 12, we get the reaction of those who were hired first in the day. We read, "When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more," they worked longer than these other people so it seems as though they had earned more. "But each of them also received a denarius." They got exactly the same amount as those who had worked one hour, those who had worked six, those who had worked nine. Everybody got the same thing and what do these people say, those hired first in the day? Verse 11, "When they received it, they grumbled at the land owner, saying, 'These last men have worked only

one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day." What are they saying? Aren't they saying, "This isn't fair. We are the ones who gave you the most work. We were out there all day long and you're paying these other people who barely worked an hour or 3 or 4 hours, you are giving them the same amount that you give to us? That's not fair."

I think probably if we had been among the first group of workers hired, we probably would have said something that is similar. We would think that the land owner was unfair. Well, fundamentally what they are saying is, "Somebody else got a better deal in life than I did and that's not fair." But look at the land owner's response in verses 13-16, "But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?'" Absolutely he did. Look, if you are not sure, look back at verse 2. He told them to go out and work and he would pay them a denarius. So in essence what the land owner is saying, "Look, we had a deal. You have kept your part of the bargain, you worked the whole day, now I'm going to keep my part of the bargain. I'm going to give you what you've earned, what I promised, what I owe you and you have nothing to complain about further. We made a deal. You kept your part, I kept my part. Case closed. No complaint necessary."

But the land owner knows that they aren't going to be satisfied with that so he has a few other things to say to them in verse 15 in particular, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? After all, whose money is it anyway? If I want to give these other people more than they deserve, well, whose money is it anyway?" Doesn't he have a right to be generous? Maybe what is troubling those who only got a denarius but worked the whole day, maybe what's troubling them is that they are envious of these other guys. "If I had known that I could get a denarius and work only an hour, well I would have jumped at that opportunity but you didn't tell me that that was possible and you've treated me unfairly." "Well, no I haven't," said the land owner. "I've done exactly what we agreed upon. You earned it. You got it. If I want to give more, if I want to be generous to the other people who are working, well what's wrong with that? Don't I have a right? After all, whose money is it anyway?"

Well, perhaps we understand to a certain point what the land owner is saying but I think we can all identify with those workers who were hired first in the day. I think it is just human nature for all of us to do what the workers hired early in the day did. We look around at other people and we see that they got a better deal in life than we did and we'd like to have that too. We think that's not fair that that has happened. Now, I'm not sure where that attitude of comparing what we have to what others have, I'm not sure exactly when and where that begins in life but I suspect it begins pretty early. I would think that associated with birthdays and Christmas and things like that, we begin to receive things and we start to look around. Look at it this way, it's really a pretty good deal when you think about it: you are born and for a period of time you don't really know a whole lot of what's going on around you but eventually you're going to get old enough so that you understand and it comes the time to celebrate your birthday and so mom and dad give you presents and you wonder, "What have I done to deserve this? This is terrific." Well, you're a year older. "Well, that didn't take me an awful lot of work." Well, don't worry,

we want to celebrate that. We want to give you presents. And if birthdays are neat, think about how great it is at Christmas. "Let me get this straight now, first it's my birthday so I get presents and then it is Jesus' birthday and so I get presents again? Hey, works for me." You see, we are so delighted at first to be getting something for nothing that it doesn't occur to us to start comparing what we have with others but after a while, we get used to getting presents and we begin to get the idea that somehow or other presents are owed to us and surely that's the message that is drummed into our children, let alone to us as adults, around Christmas. I mean, what do you do when you go to see Santa Claus? yYou not only tell him what you want but you tell him how good you've been this past year. Why? Because the idea is if you have really been a good boy or good girl, then you have earned presents and you ought to get more of them and neater ones the better you've acted. And if you've not been a good boy or a good girl, well then you can expect coal in your stocking not a present. You see, we believe that somehow or are other we have earned a certain amount and a certain kind of present and when we don't get something in accord with our expectations, we start looking around at your brother or your sister and you say, "Hey, this isn't fair, mom and dad. You got them more presents than you got me and not only that, their stuff is neater. Why didn't you give me as much as you gave them?" You see, we've lost the whole idea of what is going on, what is supposed to be going on with the giving of a present. It isn't that you get presents because you deserve them, you get them because a generous, giving heart wants to show you love and lavishes it upon you. But it still is human nature to complain if you think somebody else gets more than you do.

Well, what does this parable as a whole mean? I think I can explain most efficiently what it means by asking a series of questions and answering them. You probably figured that if you come to church and there's a teacher, he's going to give you a test. Well, now's the time for that test. Well, what are those questions? First question: was the land owner fair to those whom he hired first? Actually, yes because fairness depends on getting what you deserve, getting what you earned, what you are owed. You see, he gave to those workers exactly what they had earned and they had agreed upon. Giving someone exactly what you agreed to pay them is justice, it's fair.

Second question: was the land owner fair to the other workers? Now actually, I have to confess, that's a trick question. It's a trick question because the answer is yes and no. Was the land owner fair to the other workers? Well yes, in light of what he paid those who had worked the longest, those who had worked the shorter amount of time, were surely treated fairly. I mean, it's not as though there is any injustice in the way the land owner has treated those who were hired at 9 and noon and 3 and 5. He said to them, "You go and work and I'll do what's right," and giving them as much as people who had worked the whole day, well surely that's treating them right. So there is a sense, yes in which he was fair to the others but I suppose if we think that everything should be handled in strict fairness and strict justice, well then we'd have to say that he didn't handle them fairly. He probably should have given the other workers less than he gave to those hired first in the day because if you are really trying to be fair with everyone, you're going to give exactly what they are owed and they have earned and those who worked the shorter time haven't earned more or even the same as those who have worked the whole day. But you see, the

land owner never obligated himself to give everyone exactly what they had earned and deserved. But that doesn't mean that he was unfair with these other workers hired later in the day. No, he wasn't unfair. He wasn't fair with them either. He went beyond fairness and gave them grace. You see, grace is not fair, it's not justice and it's not unfair either, it's not injustice. It's an entirely different thing

One more question: did the land owner owe the workers who were hired first in the day? Did he owe them more because he gave the workers hired later as much money as he did, the same as he gave to the first? So, did the land owner really owe those who were hired first more than they got? The answer is no. No, he didn't owe it to them. Why? Because grace is never owed. You see, what he gave to the workers hired at other points in the day was not justice, it was grace and if the question is, "Well, having been gracious to those who were hired later in the day, didn't he owe those hired first grace?" No, no one is ever owed grace. That's why it's grace. Remember, grace is unmerited, unearned, unowed favor. You get something good that you didn't deserve, you didn't earn and you didn't merit. You see, grace isn't fair, it's better than fair. It's surely not less than fair. And if it turns out that the land owner wants to be gracious to some people while not to others, well whose grace is it, whose money is it anyhow? Of course, I'm sure you could see that the land owner represents in this parable God himself. Doesn't he have a right to do what he wants with his own money?

The parable ends, verse 16, Jesus says, "Thus the last shall be first, and the first last." To understand this, we need to see the context at the end of chapter 19. The disciples were having a conversation that evidently they had more frequently than we perhaps could imagined, way more frequently than they should have, they were wondering about what their position of authority in the kingdom was going to be. As you look back at chapter 19:27, for example, Peter says, "We have left everything and followed you, what then will there be for us? What kind of authority, what kind of reward will there be for us in the kingdom in light of all that we've done for you?" It's in this context that the Lord says, "Well, wait a minute, the first shall be last in the last shall be first," verse 30 and then he teaches this parable which illustrates that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. What does that mean? Well, it means very simply that in the kingdom of heaven, if your position of authority, your position of reward, depends upon how impressive your spiritual resume is, then if you don't have much on that resume, then you're probably not going to have much of a reward. On the other hand, if you have a lot on that spiritual resume, then you should expect great reward and great authority. That's if the Lord always and only does things on the basis of justice, what is earned and what is owed and what is deserved, but the point of this parable is that sometimes, in fact on many occasions, God does not give us what we earn, he gives us way better. He gives us graciously and generously way beyond anything we've ever earned and so what does that mean? That means that even the person with a very meager resume, so to speak, could wind up with great authority, great blessing in the kingdom. It depends not on what they did, but upon God's grace and so the Lord says, "You need to realize that there may be people who have privilege and authority in the kingdom who haven't done anywhere near for me what you've done but don't say that I've treated you unfairly. I've given you what

you deserve. But if I want to be generous to these other people, well what's the problem with that? Are you envious? Well, that's not a proper attitude."

That's the parable, now let's come back and apply it to some of the scenarios which we began and I'll throw in another just for good measure. First of all, what about the way God handles the salvation of the lost? You don't have to believe in divine election to know that God extends grace to draw some people to salvation and he doesn't extend grace to draw others to salvation and there are some people who think that this is just unfair and unjust. But dear friends, if justice is what we want and if justice is only and always what God gives to us, then how many would be saved? No one. None of us deserve to be saved. None of us is going to do something that will earn our salvation and if no one deserves salvation, then it can't be unfair if some people get it and other people don't. "Well," you say, "okay, I understand. God doesn't owe me salvation. He doesn't have to save me but, alright I understand that but still the fact is that some people have been saved and if they've been saved, why not others? If God saved no one, then we'd all be in the same boat. None of us deserve salvation, none of us would get it. But the fact is, none of us deserve it and some of us get it anyway and if some get it, why not others? Isn't it unfair for God to give it to some people and not to others?" Dear friends, it is not unfair and it isn't fair either, it is grace that anyone should be saved at all and since grace is never something that is owed, there is no complaint for us that God has been unfair when he saves some of us doesn't save the other. He gives those who are not saved exactly what they deserve, he gives to the rest of us better than we deserve. That's not fair, it's not unfair, it's grace, an entirely different thing.

Okay, there is another item with respect to salvation that perhaps you may have wondered about, especially if you were raised in a Christian home, accepted Christ as your Savior very early in life and you lived a very consistent Christian life. There are things as you were growing up that you saw other people doing. There were possessions that you saw other people possessing, having. And you probably thought, "Wow, I would like to do that. I would like to have that," and perhaps you even went to your parents and you said, "Can I have that? Can I do what my friends are doing?" And mom and dad said, "No," and you said, "Why?" And they said, "Because those just aren't things that Christians do. Those aren't the kind of things that Christians own." Well, I think that there are probably some of you, probably many of you who can identify with that. But now for those of you who are in that spot and I'm one of those as well, I was raised in a Christian home and mom and dad oftentimes said, "No, we can't let you go to this, to do that or the other. Those just aren't things that Christians are going to do. That's not consistent with a biblically based lifestyle."

But now let me ask you something about that: surely you remember as I do, the thief on the cross next to Jesus who repented at the very last moment and the Lord said to him, "This day will you be with me in Paradise." Now, we're not told much of what this man had done in his life but whatever it was, it was enough to get him crucified but at the very last moment he turns to Christ and Christ says, "You'll be with me in Paradise." Those of you who have followed Christ all of your life and you've been deprived of things that the world thinks and perhaps you've even thought at times would be neat to do or to have,

when you get to heaven, are you going to have a conversation with the Lord that sounds something like the following? "Lord, thank you so much for saving me. This is just fantastic to be here in heaven but Lord, I'm thrilled but there really is something that I need to say because it does trouble me a little bit. Lord, you know that I accepted you as my Savior very early in life. You know that I've been careful to live a life that matched with your commands in Scripture and that's been great but, Lord, that repentant thief, he did whatever he wanted to for most of his life and then at the very last moment he turned to Christ and he was saved. Are you telling me, Lord, that I am no more saved than that repentant thief is saved? Lord, that's not fair! At least for the first 500,000 years of eternity, keep him outside the walls of heaven. Don't throw him into hell, he did accept Christ but keep him outside the walls of heaven and then when you do bring him in, don't give him one of those shiny mansions on Main Street. Put him back in a corner maybe a little doghouse or something." Are you going to say that to the Lord? Of course not. Never begrudge someone the grace that God gave them but didn't give to you. If you are a recipient of that grace, don't feel superior to those who didn't get it. You didn't get it because you deserved it, you've got it because God was generous in your case. Thank him and pray for and help those who didn't get that grace.

Well, what about that other situation? God's grace and escape from affliction. We all know that there are some people who live godly lives and they never suffer great tragedy. Others live ungodly lives and they never suffer great tragedy. But on the other hand, there are some people who are very godly and yet they have horrible tragedy to deal with. Think of Job. Beyond Job, you may know some people in your acquaintance today who are like Job and the natural reaction is to say that, "What I'm having to deal with, it's just not fair, Lord. Oh, it's not that we wish our afflictions on anyone else but rather the point is other people don't have to deal with this kind of disease. They don't have to deal with the loss of a loved one in an automobile accident or a plane crash. They don't have to deal with this sort of cancer and other kinds of heart problems. So why do I have to deal with it, Lord? The fact that I have to deal with this just isn't fair." Well dear friends, it's not unfair, it's not fair either that other people escaped, it's grace. You see, if what we really want is what's fair, well none of us deserves release from affliction. The fact that some people get release from affliction is not because they deserve it, it's because God is gracious. "Well yes, but is it fair that they escape and I don't?" No, it's not fair but it isn't unfair either, it's grace. It's grace that anyone escapes suffering, affliction, trial whatever it may be. "Well," you say, "if God lets others escape, why not me? Doesn't he owe it to me?" No, he doesn't because grace is never owed. So if other people get grace that you don't get, you and I who don't get it, we don't have any grounds for complaint that God has failed to do something that he's obligated to do. Grace is never owed. That's why it's grace rather than justice. Doesn't God have a right to be generous to some people if he wants? Surely he does. After all, who's grace is it anyway? There is no unfairness to those who don't get grace while a generous God gives to others more than they deserve.

Well dear friends, I'm wondering where you are in your thinking about how God handles salvation, how he handles Christian living, how he handles affliction and any other thing in life where perhaps you see that other people have a simpler and easier life than you do and you wonder if God doesn't owe you something better. If you've ever been inclined to

complain that God has treated you unfairly because he didn't give you grace that he gave to other people, that's human nature but what this parable tells us is that what's natural for us to think is not biblical. Why? Because when we realize that God owes us absolutely nothing, the fact that we get anything is an expression of his generosity. There is no injustice that God has done to us if we don't get grace that other people do because grace is never owed.

So this morning, if you are the recipient of grace that other people didn't get, don't consider yourself superior to them. You didn't get it because you deserved it. Rather be thankful that a gracious God has treated you better than you deserved to be treated and have compassion and concern and offer help to those who didn't get the grace that you did. If you are the recipient of grace, don't feel guilty that you got it when others didn't. You had nothing to do with it. You got it because God generously gave it to you. Thank him and care for others. And those who did not get grace that you wish you had received, let me say to you: there is no case that we can justifiably bring against God. He has not failed to do anything that he has obligated himself to do. Dear friend, if you are not a recipient of grace that others received, don't hold a grudge against them. Never begrudge someone the grace that God gave them but didn't give to you. This morning I have been speaking an awful lot to Christians but those who don't know Christ, there is a special message for you as well. Scripture tells us what all of us deserve, what all of us are owed and what Scripture says is that our sin earns its wages and the wages of sin, Paul says in Romans 6:23, is death. So if you and I want exactly what we deserve, what we deserve is death.

Now there are a lot of situations in life, in fact most situations, where you and I do not have the opportunity to choose whether God will treat us with grace or treat us according to justice. Usually that's up to him but here is an instance where you have a right to choose whether you want God's grace or whether you want his justice. You say, "I don't understand." Well, Scripture says that all of us have sinned. We have broken God's law and we cannot save ourselves and the penalty, the wages of sin is death. That's what we deserve but as Paul goes on to say in Romans 6:23, "The gift of God," that's grace, that free gift that we don't earn, we don't merit, "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." We need to recognize that we are sinners, that we cannot save ourselves. We need to realize that Christ has come and he has paid for our sins and he offers us salvation if we will only trust him, turn to him, repent of our were sin and accept him as our Savior.

So, dear friend, if you have never made that decision, this morning you do have a decision to make. You can either accept the free gift of God's grace or you can choose to accept the wages of sin that all of us deserve. As I said before, it's not often in life that you get to choose what you'll get from God, either grace or justice. This is a time when you have an opportunity to choose. I trust that in light of what you've heard this morning, that no one will reject the grace, the salvation, that God offers through Christ and choose justice, the wages of which are death. Don't reject grace. We can't manipulate it so that it comes our way but when it does come our way, when it is offered to us, don't reject grace.

Let's bow together in a word of prayer. Perhaps you could stand as well and after the prayer we will give the Benediction and then we can be dismissed."

Father, I thank you so much for your grace, your generosity to us. We know, Lord, all that we having you in this life, let alone what's in store for us in the next life, is as a result of your grace, your generosity being extended to us. Father, may we realize that the proper response to this grace is to thank you, to praise you and to have compassion and concern for those who didn't receive the same grace that we do. Lord, it's human nature to look around at others' lives and see ways in which their life is easier than ours and to think that it's not fair. But Lord, as we've seen this morning, it's not a matter of fairness or unfairness, it's a matter of grace because if God were not gracious, all of us would get what we justly deserve and no one would escape punishment. Lord, we want to thank you that through Christ we know where we are headed for eternity, we know right now that our sins are forgiven. Lord, it is our desire that those and we know it is your desire that those who don't know Christ would respond positively to his grace and accept Christ as Savior. Father, for those who perhaps have wrestled in their Christian walk with whether they deserve more exemption from affliction than they've gotten, Father, I pray that you would take the words of this parable and of this message and apply it to our minds and our hearts in ways that are redemptive, that help us to see that you have not failed to do anything that you are obligated to do. In fact, you have done way, way more positive for us than we ever could have imagined, let alone deserve. Father, we thank you for this grace and as we depart from this place, I would ask that the grace of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit would be with each of us and abide both now and until Christ returns and forever and ever. Amen