

Fair or Unfair?

Do You Hear What I Hear?

Community Group Discussion Questions

Opening Question: *What has 2020 taught you?*

Tell them: There are lots of lessons to be learned from a year like 2020. This week we Pastor Michael read from Matthew chapter 20, the parable of the vineyard workers. (read again if needed)

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² And after agreeing with the workers for the standard wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ When it was about nine o’clock in the morning, he went out again and saw others standing around in the marketplace without work. ⁴ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and I will give you whatever is right.’ ⁵ So they went. When he went out again about noon and three o’clock that afternoon, he did the same thing. ⁶ And about five o’clock that afternoon he went out and found others standing around, and said to them, ‘Why are you standing here all day without work?’ ⁷ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go and work in the vineyard too.’ ⁸ When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages starting with the last hired until the first.’ ⁹ When those hired about five o’clock came, each received a full day’s pay. ¹⁰ And when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But each one also received the standard wage. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to complain against the landowner, ¹² saying, ‘These last fellows worked one hour, and you have made them equal to us who bore the hardship and burning heat of the day.’ ¹³ And the landowner replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am not treating you unfairly. Didn’t you agree with me to work for the standard wage? ¹⁴ Take what is yours and go. I want to give to this last man the same as I gave to you. ¹⁵ Am I not permitted to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last.”

(Matthew 20:1-16, NET)

Tell them: Pastor Michael’s first encounter with humanity in this passage was an unexpected one: **“All of humanity is out of work and we can’t provide for ourselves.”**

Ask them: *What was/is your reaction to that observation? How has 2020 affected the way you look at humanity's ability to provide for ourselves in the face of uncertainty?*

Tell them: Pastor Michael said the second thing we can encounter with humanity in this passage is **“We don't think the kingdom of heaven is a fair place run by a fair God.”** To quote to the sermon, “for a Christian raised in America, this definitely doesn't seem like capitalism nor a very good way of keeping morale up with your longest tenured workers. This passage is seemingly antithetical to everything we've been conditioned to think and feel about work, worth, and fairness.”

Ask them: *What do you encounter about God and his sense of fairness in paying the workers? Do you have a problem with his management of the vineyard?*

Ask them: *Do you remember what the workers were doing before the landowner hired them? (Nothing.) Read these verses:*

The appetite of the sluggard craves but gets nothing, but the desire of the diligent will be abundantly satisfied. - Prov. 13:4

For even when we were with you, we used to give you this command: “If anyone is not willing to work, neither should he eat.” – 2 Thess. 3:10

Tell them: Pastor Michael said “the problem with our logic of fairness is we're only balancing our checking account with this month's statement; we're not going back far enough. Humanity thinks the kingdom of heaven should be fair. Fair enough. But what we're forgetting is that God's initial judgement of us IS fair. Romans chapter three says all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and there is no one righteous, not one. All have sinned.”

Tell them: Romans 6:23 says:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ask them: *What did you think of Pastor Michael's argument that God's judgement is fair and his analogy that we are all in dead end jobs without God's rescue?*

Tell them: This section culminated in the sermon point and encounter with God's nature that demonstrated: **"God's grace isn't fair."**

Ask them: *How does that statement make you feel?*

Tell them: The very definition of grace is that it is unmerited fair; it's not something you work for or deserve. So grace never makes sense on a balance sheet. And that grace is given for a purpose; Pastor Michael said this is our job description: **"You were rescued and given grace to point to the Great Rescuer and Grace-giver."**

"We are all spiritually unemployed if not for God's call to work for Him and the kingdom of heaven is work with a wage not retirement with a lottery ticket or for us to take the second chances and grace given to us and miserly roll around in it alone like a spiritual Scrooge McDuck. Do you hear what I hear? The kingdom of heaven is like a job, that's what the bible and Jesus are saying. It's like a job not a vacation on a cruise ship."

Ask them: *What is your reaction to this job description and that the kingdom of heaven is work and not a vacation? Does this change your outlook on the future and your present?*

Tell them: Pastor Michael said these truths leave us with three choices:

1. Accept grace.
2. Argue grace.
3. Refuse grace.

Ask them: *Which one are you more prone to do, usually? Do you accept grace easily? Do you argue grace trying to convince another that you don't deserve it? Or do you tend to just refuse and reject grace, saving your breath from arguing?*

Tell them: The summation of the entire message this weekend was-

1. All of humanity is out of work or in a dead end job.
2. God's judgement is fair and our calculation of fairness is not.
3. God's grace isn't fair but Jesus earned the right to give it.

Tell them: (From the sermon) **"Who were you and who are you?** Are you stuck in a dead end job, a calling that leads to death because you are excluded from the kingdom of heaven? Christ is reaching out. He has a job for you. You can accept it, argue against his grace, or refuse it. Or maybe you're in the truck heading to the vineyard, you've accepted the offer but you're trying to understand the terms of your employment and adoption. You're in the truck but wrestling or arguing the fairness of how the vineyard owner, if he knows that those that didn't accept are going to die, why he didn't force them into the truck. Or maybe you're in the truck on the way and you thought you were going on a vacation and didn't process that work was expected. Or maybe you're in the vineyard and it's time to take the step of moving forward beyond just being happy to be here and you want to do more to tell others about the boss; your great rescuer and grace-giver. Or maybe you have felt the Spirit's conviction of filling the role in the story of the first-hired hands. That you have had problems extending grace to newcomers, grumbled when someone gets a chance when you've been around longer, or just had a major hurdle with folks that sin in new ways that you never did.

Ask them: *So who were you and who are you?*

Tell them: We should pray for one another that we grow in the knowledge of who God is and who we are in Jesus in 2021. Let's commit to do that for each other this week and into the new year.