

Offensive Generosity

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 May 2025

Preacher: Donald Smith

[0 : 00] This is God's word. Please do keep that passage open in front of you as we come together. Let us pray for the Lord's help with it as we do so. Teach us your paths, O Lord. Make known your ways.

You have spoken. We come to hear that we might receive your truth. For you are the God of our salvation, and we wait upon you always. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Emotions. Emotions. They are so often shaped by expectations, aren't they?

Some of you have maybe just finished exams. Some of you are maybe in the middle of exams.

When the result comes through, what are you expecting?

Your expectations will shape your emotions, won't they? If you are fully expecting an A and end up with a C, disappointment, right?

[1 : 09] But your classmate who was convinced they were going to fail and gets the exact same score, they're going to be over the moon. A runner who expects gold and finishes second will feel less joy than the one who came third but expected to finish dead last.

Expectations shape our emotions. I wonder, what reward do you expect to receive in the kingdom of heaven?

Last week, Ben, really helpfully took us through the latter half of chapter 19. We all want to go to heaven. But there is nothing we can do to get there.

That is what Jesus' conversation with the rich young man exposed, wasn't it? Here was a man who wanted to get to heaven and presented himself as good as could be.

Rich, young, obedient, faithful, diligent, committed, right? He's got it all. And this man came and asked Jesus, what must I do to be saved?

[2 : 31] In summary, Jesus says, doesn't he, it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to work his way into the kingdom of heaven, i.e. it cannot be done.

What must I do to get into the kingdom of heaven? Answer, there is nothing. There is nothing you can do to enter the kingdom of heaven. The onlooking disciples were understandably shocked. It is a shocking response, isn't it? As you might be if you're sitting here this morning in church the first time. And so the disciples asked only a simple but crucial question, one which shapes this whole section of Matthew's gospel.

Verse 25 there of chapter 19, who then can be saved? Who then can be saved? To which Jesus again says, doesn't he, with man this is impossible.

But with God, all things are possible. Jesus is saying, isn't he, you can't do it. But I can do it for you.

[3 : 45] That, friends, isn't it, is the gospel in a nutshell. You can't do it, but I can. Put your faith and trust in Jesus. Follow him. And what you could not do, he will do for you.

And you will go to heaven. That is good news, right? It is good news offered openly to everyone. And it is good news received by the followers of Jesus.

And the disciples, right, they knew, didn't they? They knew they were in that category. They've left their whole life behind to follow Jesus. And so Peter, as he so often does, right, blurts out the question on everyone's mind that no one else is brash enough to ask.

It's like the candidate in a group interview who walks in and immediately asks what the salary is.

Peter asks, we've left everything to follow you. What then will we have?

We are in the kingdom of heaven, and we've really committed ourselves to it. What is our reward going to look like, Jesus? The answer, again, more than you can imagine.

[4 : 56] More than you can imagine. Twelve forms, a hundredfold return, eternal life. How does that sound, Peter? Pretty good, right?

The kingdom of heaven comes with far greater riches than you could ever earn. No matter how much you have given up to follow Jesus, you will be given abundantly more.

Now, we've gone over those verses from last time, not only because it is good to remind ourselves of his core gospel truths, but also because this whole conversation that Jesus has just had with the rich young man and then with disciples, it is the scaffolding around which Jesus constructs the parable that we are coming to this morning.

We've just seen there, haven't we? There are three key questions and answers. What can I do to be saved? Answer, nothing.

Who then can be saved? Answer, only through putting our trust in Jesus, who can do what we cannot. What reward will heaven bring? Far, far more than whatever it costs you to follow Jesus.

[6 : 08] There are the three key questions and answers. And the point of this parable, I think, is basically to say, make sure you remember them all.

Make sure you remember them all. You can do nothing. Jesus has done it all. God will give you everything. Let's just walk through this parable together, listening to Jesus as he illustrates all that he has just said.

But then, but then, just in the last few verses, adds on a crucial warning to Peter and to his disciples and to all of us who follow Jesus.

So let's begin by seeing in verse 1 to 7 a picture of the gracious God. The four, right at the beginning of verse 1, is kind of our big signpost.

That's the reason we've spent so much time on what's come before. You know, don't you? You kind of get those road signs that say, you know, thank you for visiting such and such a place as you leave. Right?

[7 : 18] This little four at the start of this chapter is kind of like a road sign saying, you've not left yet. Right? You are still in chapter 19. This still matters.

We're still in the same place as we were a chapter ago. And in light of the conversation that he has just had, but which we've just reminded ourselves of, Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a master of a house who goes out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyards.

Now, you don't, I don't think, need a degree in English literature to join some of the dots here, do you? The house and the vineyards are the kingdom of heaven.

The master is the one who reigns over this kingdom. The master is God. The vineyard is the kingdom of heaven. But notice what happens. And this, I think, is Jesus immediately illustrating the point he made to the rich young ruler.

Laborers don't come knocking on the door, do they? Right? There's no one kind of knocking on the gate saying, here I am. Will you take me in? No one is showing up to work.

[8 : 30] No one is coming with a resume worthy of entry. That's what the rich young man imagined getting into the kingdom was like, isn't it? Right? He showed up at the master's door with his CV in hand and said, here's everything I've done.

Is it enough? What else can I do to add on in order to get in? We get a clear picture right away here in verse 1 that that is not how entry into this kingdom works.

Because what happens? The master of the house went out. The master of the house went out early in the morning to hire laborers.

And maybe you noticed it all the way through. That is what is happening. The master goes out to bring in workers to his vineyards. At no point, even at the 11th hour, no one is looking at the bustling vineyard and thinking, there's work over there.

Maybe we should go and ring the doorbell. Not once. Verse 3. Going out about the third hour, he saw others. Verse 5. Going out again. Verse 6. About the 11th hour, he went out.

[9 : 37] Let me ask you, in this parable, who has earned their way into the kingdom of heaven? No one.

Every one of these laborers was brought in by the master. Who then can be saved?

Those who God goes out to in order to bring in. Brothers and sisters, we heard it last week. We need to hear it again. We are saved by grace alone.

Through faith alone in Christ alone. There is nothing, nothing any of us have done to save ourselves. It is solely by the grace of God that we enter into his kingdom.

We need reminded of that, don't we? And if you are not a Christian here this morning, you need to hear that. God does not need you to make any changes to your life in order to accept you into his

kingdom.

[10:46] He is not looking at your CV and thinking, it is not quite there yet. You know, I have got a few bits to tidy up here and there. No, he reaches out to you.

Maybe he is reaching out to you this morning. As you are with his son. And says, trust in him and I will bring you in.

Grace alone. Grace, by definition, is unmerited, isn't it? So this is also a reminder that God does not bring people into his kingdom based on how much he thinks he will get out of them.

There are laborers brought in at the crack of dawn. There are laborers brought in at the last minute. There are people called to Christ when they are six. There are people called to Christ when they are 96.

Why do you think the master hires people in the 11th hour? If he needed 100 people to work his vineyard, you can be pretty sure he would have hired 100 people at 6 o'clock in the morning.

[12:00] This is a master who keeps going out. Not out of necessity, but out of grace. I'm assuming many of us here have heard of Hershey's chocolates.

It's an American brand of chocolate that you don't really get over here. I say chocolate. I'm pretty sure the reason you don't get it over here is because it's got less than half the amount of cocoa in it that you actually need to be called chocolate in the UK.

Anyway, that's beside the point. I bring Hershey's up not to slag off the chocolate, but actually to admire the founder. Milton Hershey produced his first chocolate bars in 1900, and the business boomed immediately.

Over the next couple of decades, it grew and grew, so that he became extremely successful and very, very wealthy. But then came 1929.

The Great Depression, which saw millions and millions of jobs lost across the United States. There was no flash in the pan.

[13:02] The situation got worse for year after year. At its worst, the employment rate hit 25%. To put that in some kind of perspective, the worst things got after the 2008 market crash and recession here was an unemployment rate of about 10%.

During the Great Depression, there was a lot of laborers standing idly by. People were losing their jobs right, left, and center.

And so Milton Hershey commissioned basically the construction of a new town. He had no need of it. But he wanted to employ people who had no income.

And so he hired people to do work, not because he needed them, but because he knew they needed him. That is, I think, something of what we see here.

The master going out to people and bringing them in, even at the 11th hour, not because he needs them, but because he knows they need him.

[14:17] Not because he'll get a lot of work out of them, but because he wants them in his kingdom. God is gracious. If you worry that you have nothing to offer, maybe you feel like it's too late in the day, that you've wasted your years and have nothing left to give, God is gracious.

He's not sitting there with a calculator, looking across Aberdeen, seeing he'll get the best value out of. No, he simply goes and brings in whomever he sets his heart on.

And to whomever God brings into his kingdom, he gives excessively generously to you. That is our second point this morning.

God is generous. Graciousness and generosity are obviously kind of very closely connected, aren't they? But the slight distinction we're making here is that the grace of God brings people into his kingdom.

The generosity of God is him lavishly giving to those he has brought in by his grace. We already got a pretty good indication, didn't we, of the excessive generosity of God at the end of chapter 19, verse 29 there.

[15:34] Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

Whatever it costs us to follow Jesus, we will be given immeasurably more in the kingdom of heaven. A hundredfold investment is pretty spectacular, isn't it?

If I put a hundred pounds into some shares and they were worth ten thousand pounds later on, I have done very well in this situation. But this, of course, is just illustrative, isn't it?

The point is, you really can't put a number on it. And in fact, the deliberate point of this parable is that there is no ratio to work from. The point is simply that everyone will be given far more than they deserve.

We get another picture in verse 8 of chapter 20 here in the parable. At the end of the day, the master gets ready to pay all the laborers that he has brought in. And he begins with the newest members of the workforce.

[16:39] And when those who had arrived at the eleventh hour, having done an hour's work, come to pick up their paycheck, that they look down and find they have received a denarius.

You might have a footnote in your Bible there that says a denarius was a whole day's wages. Now again, the important thing is this isn't a ratio to work from.

The point is, they get more than they had earned. It's twelvefold in verse 9. Back in verse 29 of chapter 19, it was a hundredfold. The big point is, no one is losing out. No one is losing out because they were late to the party.

Because those who were taken in first thing in the morning, they get a denarius too. And given what we've just seen, that actually makes sense, doesn't it?

No one has earned their entry into the kingdom. So it's not surprising to find that people don't sort of work their way up in the kingdom. The only reason that the first laborers have done more work is because the master out of his grace called them first thing in the morning.

[17:56] There was nothing in them that meant they shouldn't have been left until the eleventh hour. And so everyone receives the same reward from an abundantly generous master.

He brought people into his kingdom so that he could give them all equally out of his riches. And when we are focused on God's grace and God's generosity, this is a good story, isn't it?

What grace, what generosity, how good is God? And that is the right response. But it is not everyone's response.

Because what happens? What happens if you lose sight of God's grace? Those three questions we thought about at the beginning.

What if you think for a moment that you have done something to deserve a reward? What if you think that you have earned just a little something that is a work of God mostly, but also you a little bit?

[19:14] What if you think that heaven's reward is gained, not given? Well, this is, I think, what we see unfold in verse 11 and 12. Those who forget God's grace will soon grumble at his generosity.

Let's just look at our third and final point this morning, the grumbling disciples. We get a hint that things are about to turn a little sour, don't we, back in verse 10?

When a full day's wages are placed into the hands of the latecomers, the early arrivals are licking their lips. A day's wage for an hour's work. Right?

Hundred pounds an hour. We've been here since six in the morning. The money's about to come rolling in. But then the foreman calls them forward. Up they step, you know, picture in the holiday in Barbados, and they look up and it's a denarius.

It's exactly what they've been promised. But they are left disappointed. Not 12, not two, one denarius. Exactly the same as those who arrived at the last minute.

[20:26] And this is where we see expectations at the epicenter of emotions. If we think for a moment that heaven's rewards are in any way gained, not given, we will measure ourselves up, won't we?

Just like these laborers against others. And expect a reward proportional to our perceived performance. These laborers expected more because they thought they deserved more. but they didn't, did they? The language of deserving is exactly that of earning and exactly the opposite of grace.

They received exactly what they were promised. And even the opportunity to receive the denarius only ever came from the master's gracious invitation to come and work in his vineyard.

And having received exactly what they were promised, they come and grumble. these last worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us.

[21:40] You have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. They are puffing themselves up, aren't they? How can you make them equal to us? Haven't we done more?

Don't we deserve better? Have we not gained something extra? I wonder here, can you hear just Jesus' warning to the question that Peter asked a few verses ago?

He said, didn't he, look how much we've given up. The grumbling disciples here come saying, look how hard we've worked, look how much we've suffered, look at the hours we've put in, look at what we've done behind the scenes, look how much more we've done than those others over there.

This is not a rebuke to Peter, but it is a warning. Tread carefully, watch your step, guard your heart, you will be rewarded, you will be abundantly rewarded.

But your reward is because of what God has given, not because of what you have gained. Don't start thinking what you have done makes you worthy of a greater gift than others.

[23 : 10] Here's the uncomfortable truth that this parable reveals. It is often, not always, but often, the longest serving disciples who are the quickest to grumble.

Those who are new into the kingdom, those who arrived at the eleventh hour, they know they deserve nothing and have done little, and are just thankful to be welcomed in.

but those who have served from dawn until dusk, who have suffered much, who have given much, for them there really is a danger that the grace of God might be overshadowed by the years of service.

There are people, or these are people who know in their minds that they are saved by God's grace, but in their hearts they feel they have done just enough to earn a little bit more than the person sitting next to them.

Remember Jonah? He knew God was gracious, didn't he? He had excellent theology, but he was angry when that same grace was shown to others that he didn't think deserved it.

[24 : 34] He knew exactly who God was, but his heart nevertheless really did feel that he deserved better than the Ninevites.

I'm sure I had to get this point home other than to ask you to look honestly and openly into your own heart right now. Perhaps look to your left or right, see the new Christian in their own front of you, your brother on your left who struggled with sin, the sister at the back of the church, who doesn't seem to give as much as you do.

Honestly, is there a part of you, not in your head, but in your heart, is there a part of you that thinks you should receive just a little bit more in the kingdom of heaven than them?

if that is you, if that is me, we've lost sight of God's grace.

If that is you, listen to the words of the master. Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me, a denarius?

[25 : 53] take what belongs to you and go, I choose to give to the last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?

Or do you begrudge my generosity? When we lose sight of God's grace, we will begin to begrudge his generosity.

or to put it another way, if you think you should be first, you will be last. Not because you'll be given less, it's quite clear, isn't it, in this parable, everyone's given the same, no one's technically in last place, but those who expect to come first really will feel like they have come last in getting less than they think they had earned.

And those who expect to come last really and truly will feel they have come first in receiving what they know they did not deserve. God's generosity is given, not gained.

That is true of entry into the kingdom, it is true of life in the kingdom. Given, not gained. So how can we make sure we are not grumbling disciples?

[27 : 13] I hope at this point the answer is fairly clear. remember God's grace. That is the only reason you are in this kingdom.

It is the only reason any of us are able to serve at all. Only by God's grace can we come into his vineyard. Only by God's grace are we given anything at all. And what we are given is far, far more than what we deserve.

If we live every day remembering God's grace, then we will be able to delight in his generosity. The disciple who was brought into the kingdom in their earliest years but wait in life still knows that they deserve nothing and that they have everything because of the goodness of God.

That is the disciple who can look on God's outrageous, even offensive generosity and rather than begrudge it, rejoice in it. How good is God? We can rejoice in God's grace and generosity when we know that it is the very same generosity that has been shown to us.

And I hope there is great joy in that also for those of you who perhaps really do expect to come in last place. Maybe you feel you are sitting here this morning feeling like you deserve to be right at the back of the pack.

[28 : 42] Maybe you feel you have failed maybe you regret wasted years. Maybe you've made mistakes that you're ashamed of. In Christ Jesus, the first will be last and the last will be first.

Given, given, not gained. Given to you, not because you earned it, but because he is outrageously generous.

so let me ask you again as at the start, what rewards do you expect to receive in the kingdom of heaven? If the answer is more than them, even just a little, you've lost sight of God's grace and your expectations are going to cause disappointment and you, like Jonah, will grumble at God's goodness.

But if the answer is far more than I deserve, because I have never earned anything, then you will rejoice in God's generosity to you and you will rejoice in God's generosity to others.

Because we all are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. Remember God's grace and so rejoice in his generosity.

[30 : 17] Let us pray that that will be true of each and every one of us. Father, we do thank you that you are a God of grace, that you are abundantly generous, and that out of your grace you have reached out in love to those who did not deserve to be brought into your kingdom.

But Lord, you have sent your one and only Son, that whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life. Lord, we know there is nothing that we have done to deserve this, but it is solely out of your goodness and grace, and so we praise you for it.

But Lord, we pray that we would remember that truth at all times, through all of our days, that we would never think we have done more or earned more than anyone else, but rather would just rejoice in your abundant generosity that you show to all those that you bring into your kingdom at whatever stage.

Lord, we thank you that you are good. Forgive us for when we are prideful. Help us to rejoice in who you are at all times. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.