

Matthew 20:1-16 (NIV)

1 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. 2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. 3 “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. 4 He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ 5 So they went. “He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. 6 About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ 7 “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ 8 “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ 9 “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. 10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 12 ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ 13 “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ 16 “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

“It isn’t fair!” That’s one of our favorite phrases to use isn’t it? Life never seems to be fair no matter which side your on. Someone always has more; someone always has less. Some are born with a silver spoon in their mouth; others have to earn every penny they get. Perhaps our idea of fairness stems from the thought that all people are created equal. Perhaps it comes from our conscience telling us the difference between right and wrong. Whatever it is, we all have this inner fairness alarm that’s constantly going off.

Sometimes, we even are brash enough to accuse God of not being fair. We accuse him of being unloving and uncaring in the way that he treats people. We pose the question, *“How could a loving God allow this to happen?”* Perhaps the question is prompted by a personal hardship. Perhaps the question flows from seeing people suffer. Natural disasters and terrorist attacks have led people to question God’s fairness. That’s exactly what the disgruntled workers in the vineyard were doing. They didn’t think it was fair that those hired last received the same as they did. But who were they to complain? They had agreed to work for exactly what they got paid.

This parable is about God’s generosity in sharing the Gospel. Some people have contact with the Gospel from the moment they are born. Others don’t hear of it until the last days of their life. But no one deserves to hear it at all. No one can say that they deserve God’s gospel or his generosity. Because of sin, all people deserve nothing but hell. But God is unfair in his treatment of us because he looks at us through Jesus, his Son. Jesus has taken away our sinfulness by his saving work on the cross. He has given us his own perfection. That’s what God sees in us now. That is the reward that is ours simply because of God’s generosity, his undeserved love for sinners. So the next time you hear someone say, *“It isn’t fair!”* Think of just how right they are!