

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 20:1–16

Sermon: “Not What We Deserve”

There was once a man who didn't have a job. His days were long and boring. He tried to find work. He had children to support. But there just wasn't any work. No one was hiring. So, he spent a lot of time hanging around construction areas, hoping someone would need extra help. Early every morning this man hit the pavement, looking to shovel or carry something, any odd job to make a little money. But no one was hiring. By noon, his chances for the day were getting slim. The workday was half over. You can't get a full day's work out of someone by hiring at midday. When three o'clock rolled around, he gave up completely, found a shady spot, sat down, and thought about what he would say at home that night. Another day not working. Another day bringing nothing back. Another day coming home empty-handed.

But around five o'clock a man walked up and wanted to hire him. Well, he thought, quitting time is only an hour away, but still it's better to get paid for one hour's work than nothing. So, he went with his new boss to a field, where the newly hired man was put to work. His job was to pile up mulch around the base of grapevines. He also had to tie up little vines so they didn't break off. If there were dead leaves, he was to snip them. But before he could even begin to get his hands a little dirty, the whistle blew. It was quitting time already. His "workday" was finished.

The workers came out of the field and lined up to get paid. The people who were hired last that day were to be paid first. The man wasn't too thrilled with the money he was expecting to get. He'd only worked one hour.

But when he held out his hand, something odd happened. He didn't get paid for one hour—he was paid for a full day's work! "There must be some mistake," the man said to his boss. "You only hired me an hour ago, but you paid me for a whole day's work. You paid me for something I didn't do." "You're right," said the boss. "I *have* paid you for something you haven't done. But I want to be generous to you. Go home, feed your family, fix your home, enjoy your time. This is a gift." So, with mouth open and a puzzled look on his face, the man said "thank you" and went home.

What an odd story! It shouldn't have happened. No one should be paid for eight hours of work when they only put in one hour. That man didn't earn his money. He didn't deserve to get what the boss gave him. The other workers were out in the hot sun all day.

Their clothes were drenched with sweat. Their hands were cracked and bleeding from the thorns. They earned their pay. But this man, this man who worked only one hour, was paid for a full day's work. If the boss was a fair boss, he should have given each worker only what he earned. If he was a fair boss, he should have paid the man who worked for one hour only enough money to cover that one hour.

That's how we live in this world. If you work by a time-clock, you get paid for the amount of time you work, not a minute more and not a minute less. It's very fair. You punch that time-clock and know exactly how much you'll get paid.

But not everyone in this world works by a punched time card. As Christians, we can sometimes stand before God with that dropped jaw and that glazed look in our eyes.

"God, what are you giving me? I don't deserve the life I have. I've sinned against you since I was a child. I've done some terrible things in my life. Even the little things I mess up time and time again make me realize how disgusting I must be in your sight. I haven't loved you with my whole heart. Rarely do I treat my neighbor or co-worker the way I'd like to be treated."

We hand God our time card and say, "Look, God, here's what I've done, here's what I've put in, but here are also so many, many times when I've failed. In fact, as I look more and more at this time card, I realize I haven't done anything for you. All I've done is slept on the job."

But God reaches out to us, takes that time card, and tears it in half. What God hands back to us is something much greater than a full day's pay. He hands back to us something we could never dream of having.

"Here," he says, "here is life. Here is my life for yours. Here is a new life for you right now and a new life after you die. You didn't earn it. You don't deserve it. But I want to give it to you. I want to give it to you because it's something you could never earn for yourself."

The people who worked only one hour were shocked. The people who worked all day long were also shocked. But the boss was happy. The boss was happy to be able to show kindness to those poor people who worked only an hour. After all, they had families to feed too. They had children who needed clothes, debts to be paid just like everyone else. How generous of the boss to help these people out. He was able to do it, and he wanted to do it. When that hired man stretched out his hand to be paid, he wasn't given what he deserved or earned. He was given so much more.

And when God helps us to stretch out our hands to receive something from Him, they never come back empty.

Jesus Never Leaves Us Empty-Handed.

When we fold our hands in prayer to take hold of the promises God has made to us, we're never disappointed. We know God will always give us just what we need at just the right time. When we stretch out our hands to receive the Lord's Supper, they never come back empty.

Jesus gives us something we could never work hard enough for. He gives us what he has worked for. Jesus gives us his life. He is so happy to be able to give us what we need. It can be a big shock to us to realize that God gives us things we don't deserve.

But that's God. His generosity never ends. God is always ready to lay the sacrifice of Jesus into our hands. God is always ready to hand to us what Jesus has done for us.

All day, every day, God comes to us and says, "It's time to be paid. You don't deserve to be paid, and you didn't earn it. But I am generous, and I want to give you something you could never get for yourself." God is always generous. He has been generous to us when we were young, he is generous to us today, and God will truly be generous toward each of us in the life to come.

There was once a class of school children who loved to go outside and have recess. Their teacher was very generous. If the class had been good and finished their work, the teacher would let them go outside for a few extra minutes. Usually the class was very good. They always finished their homework, always tried to be good, and always looked forward to their reward. But one day the class was a bit unruly. Paper airplanes were flying. Hair was being pulled. Talking was nonstop, and homework was simply not getting done.

All of a sudden, the teacher called everyone to attention and said, "Time to go out." All of a sudden the students' eyes fixed on their teacher, their mouths dropped a bit, and almost in unison said, "But why? We don't deserve to go out. We've been terrible. We haven't listened. We haven't finished our homework. We don't deserve to go out." "I know," said the teacher, "but I want to show you that sometimes in this world things are given to you even when you don't deserve them. Sometimes things are given to us *especially* when we haven't earned them." And with that, the students slowly stood up and walked outside, still a bit confused and unsure about the new world they had just stepped into. For the first time, some of these students experienced what grace, what a gift, truly was. They were given something that wasn't earned or deserved.

Amen