



“Shocking Grace”

Matthew 20

Small Group Plan

Bob Schwartz was the owner of a trucking firm in Chicago. He made the decision to sell the company to a large national corporation while he was still ahead of the game.

Each Christmas Bob gave his employees and drivers a bonus based on company profit and time on the job. The final year of operation was an especially good year and so Bob decided to give everyone an especially generous bonus. Everyone would receive more than they had during the previous years and everyone would receive the same amount. If you were on the payroll December 20th when the checks were written, you got the bonus!

When the envelopes were first opened there was joy all around, even laughter and cheers. But then, people began to compare checks. “Hey Bill, what did you get?” — Matthew 20 all over again!

“I couldn't believe it,” Bob said, “I tried to do something good for everybody and now I get angry phone calls at home from people who got larger bonus checks than they ever got before. Are people that greedy?”

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- In the story above, why was the initial joy followed by anger?
- When someone says, “That’s not fair” what do they usually mean?
- How early do children learn to compare how many cookies, rides and toys each has received? How does this impact their spiritual growth?

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

— WHY WE SAY, “IT’S NOT FAIR” —

Matthew 20:1-12

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.'

- If you had been one of the first workers hired, how would you have reacted to the landowner? Explain.
- From today's business standpoint, was the landowner too soft, unfair, or balanced in his compassion? Explain.
- When pay time came at the end of the day how would you have felt if you were in the last group hired? Explain?
- It's interesting that the first group expected higher wages only **after** they heard what the last group was being paid. If they had never known, they would have been happy. What changed inside their hearts?

— WHY GOD SAYS, "IT'S NOT FAIR" —

Matthew 20:13-16

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."

- If the landowner represents God, what does His answer mean?
- Why is it dangerous for us to compare our situation to that of some someone else?
- If God was really "fair" and gave everyone what they deserved, how would you describe the outcome?
- Why did the Twelve need to hear this story?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- For those who have lived a moral life for a long time, why might it bother them to think that those who didn't live a long moral life would receiving the same benefits of God's grace?
- Should we conclude from this story that people should wait until just before they die to follow Jesus because the reward is the same? Why or why not?
- To some, God seems unfair. To others, He seems generous. How can He be thought of in both ways?
- We often say that we want what is "fair" and "just" but considering the condition of humanity, if we all received what we deserved, what would we receive?

Justice is receiving what you deserve.
Mercy is not receiving what you deserve.
Grace is receiving what you don't deserve.

- How can God's mercy to us guide and empower our mercy towards others?
- Close by thanking God for his mercy and grace.