



Theme: Summer Stories with Jesus

“Unfair Grace”

Weekly Memory Verse:

¹⁶ **“So those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last.”** –
Matthew 20:16

Monday, August 1 – Read Matthew 20:1-10. In Jesus’ day, agricultural field workers had even fewer rights than they do today. The owner in the story Jesus told was not typical. He hired extra workers near the end of the day and overpaid them. The “all day” workers in the story watched those who’d only worked an hour receive the same amount that they had agreed to work for. (We can imagine their pro-rated mental calculations— “Maybe we’ll get 8 days’ wages!”) But they got a full day’s wages, too—exactly what they had agreed to.

 Does the master’s way of paying the workers in this story feel unfair to you? It was not unfair, of course. No one was underpaid. It was just that some received what appeared to be unreasonable generosity. Jesus says that this is what the kingdom of heaven is like. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul said Christ was treated as we deserved, and we are treated as he deserved. In what ways does that “unfair” exchange draw your heart toward Christ?

 In Matthew 5:45, Jesus used the forces of nature almost as a parable to describe God’s generosity: “He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”. In what ways have you experienced God’s grace as lavish generosity? What aspect of God’s generosity most encourages and amazes you? Does God’s grace seem unfair to you? Why or why not?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, if I’m a recent arrival in your kingdom, thank you for welcoming me generously. And if I’m one who’s been here longer, help me to celebrate your generosity and seek to share it with others. Amen.*

Tuesday, August 2 – Read Luke 18:9-14. Most people thought tax collectors were among the last people you’d ever find in God’s Kingdom. Jesus’ story said there was more value in a tax collector’s humble faith, where he “struck his chest” which was a gesture of sorrow, than in a Pharisee’s swollen, spiritual ego. Luke said Jesus told this story, “to certain people who had

convinced themselves that they were righteous and who looked on everyone else with disgust.” The Pharisee didn’t trust in God’s mercy, because it never crossed his mind that he needed it!

 Which character in this parable are you more often like: the Pharisee, looking down on others with disgust, or the tax collector, feeling a deep inner sense of need for grace? How can God’s love and grace help you maintain a healthy awareness of spiritual need, yet avoid contempt either for others or for yourself?

 An “examen” is a prayer for the end of the day, a way to review the day through God’s eyes. Why not try it when this day ends? Review these questions with God. At what points today did I feel better than someone else? How did that affect the way I related to them? At what points today did I sense a deep need for God’s grace? Did I turn to God to seek the grace I needed?

Prayer: *O God, Hebrews 4:16 invited me to come before you “with confidence,” not because I’m good, but because you are. Help me live confident of your grace, but never arrogant about my goodness. Amen.*

Wednesday, August 3 – Read Matthew 20:11-16. Jesus heard lots of grumbling during his earthly ministry. The religious leaders seemed to deeply resent him offering salvation to tax collectors and sinners who hadn’t worked, “the whole day in the hot sun.” The landowner’s questions were God’s questions: “Don’t I have the right to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you resentful because I’m generous?” The fact is that this landowner has not wronged the complaining workers by showing extra kindness to others. **Grace is not fair; it is generous.**

 Salvation, eternal life with God, is a gift greater than we could possibly earn in a lifetime. Yet at times we, like the older brother we studied a few weeks ago in the parable of the loving father, or prodigal son, in Luke 15:25-32, are tempted to think “service time” should give us extra privileges or rank us above “newbies.” How long have you served God? Do you generously accept newcomers to God’s Kingdom, as Jesus did in Luke 23:32-33 and 39-43?

 Many psychologists, as well as preachers, have observed that we humans tend to ask, “Why me?” about bad things that happen to us, but not about good things. Like the “all day” workers in Jesus’ story who thought they would receive more, if anything we tend to think we deserve better. When have you found yourself inflating your expectations because of what you’ve seen someone else receive? What helps you counteract this natural tendency?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, shape me and grow me into a person who has the same generous attitude toward others that you have toward me. Amen.*

Thursday, August 4 – Read Luke 16:1-13. A wasteful steward faced dismissal. Given time for a final report, the steward instead “cooked the books” more, earning himself favor while costing his master more money. Jesus said, “The master commended the dishonest manager because he acted cleverly.” Did Jesus endorse cheating? No, don’t forget this is a parable! The swindler won the master’s grudging admiration because he went after his chosen values with all his energy. Jesus asked: if even a swindler can do that, shouldn’t my followers put equal thought and energy into living out the kingdom’s values?

 The clever and dastardly steward in this story seemed to buy friends with money. Jesus is suggesting we act with the same kind of foresight and use our money things that are lasting and eternal. What are some ways you can pursue things that will truly last? What would it look like for you, as Jesus' follower, to seek to live out Jesus' values every day with as much ingenuity and vigor as the servant gave to assuring his financial security after his firing?

 In a very real way, this parable could inspire stagnant ministries to think original thoughts, make new friends across old barriers, and throw caution to the winds. Where do ministries and organizations that you are a part of need creativity and a focus on ultimate goals? How can you be a force to bring the servant's shrewdness to bear on kingdom causes you care about?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, your story was puzzling, but it makes me think. I want to be serious about your kingdom and stay open to new approaches to accomplish your work. Amen.*

Friday, August 5 – Read Matthew 6:19-21 and 24-34. Jesus said that making the pursuit of wealth the center, the guiding standard, of your life inevitably conflicts with loyalty to God. He stated the common-sense principle which we often forget: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Then he pointedly added, “You cannot serve God and wealth.” Treasure in heaven, treasure by God’s standards, is the most precious item we can “collect.”

 Conduct a simple life audit. Review your calendar and your checkbook. Based on the time, energy and resources reflected there, what “master(s)” would you say you are serving? Can you see your loyalties shifting as you choose to invest in heavenly treasure? What kinds of changes could you make to give you greater freedom to fully serve God as Lord of your life?

 Jesus knew our hearts. Pastor Rick Warren wrote, “Money has the greatest potential to replace God in your life... When Jesus is your Master, money serves you, but if money is your master, you become its slave. Wealth is certainly not a sin but failing to use it for God’s glory is.” Have you ever faced the temptation to serve God while in worship, but to serve money the rest of the week? What steps have helped you to break money’s power to rule your life?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, calling you “Lord” isn’t just a nice, polite title. It means that you rule over my life and my priorities. Give me the courage and devotion to truly mean it when I call you “Lord.” Amen.*

Saturday, August 6 – Read 1 Peter 1:13-19 and Acts 3:1-10. The letter we call 1 Peter seemed to particularly address new converts to the Christian faith. Peter addressed how our redemption did (“the precious blood of Christ”) and didn’t (“perishable things like silver or gold”) come about. It wasn’t just theory for Peter. Acts 3 reported the vivid story of how the Holy Spirit worked through Peter and John to offer Jesus’ healing to a disabled man who started out hoping for nothing more than a few coins in his beggar’s bowl.

 Peter and John showed no interest in profiting from the man they healed. Later, a man named Simon tried to buy the apostles’ power, and they sternly rebuked him in Acts 8:9-22. In what ways are today’s assumptions about the connection between money and

healing helpful to human well-being? In what ways, if any, do you believe they are damaging?



How did Peter, in his letter, explicitly reject any idea that we might be able to redeem ourselves? In whose character and actions did Peter instead firmly ground our confidence of redemption? God did not redeem us to leave our lives unaltered. In what part(s) of your life is God calling you to live differently? How will you respond?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, wherever your followers went, people's lives got better. I want to follow you as they did, open to let your power flow through me to better the lives of others. Amen.*