

Life's tough Questions, Part Two
Why Is Life So Unfair?
Matthew 20: 1 – 16
May 24, 2009

While visiting tornado-ravaged Macon County, Tennessee, in February 2008, President Bush spoke to some residents affected by a violent storm and this is what he said to them: “We’re sorry you’re going through what you’re going through. You know, life sometimes is unfair, and you don’t get to play the hand you wanted to play.”

We can identify with President Bush’s statement: life indeed is unfair sometimes – one could say it is unfair much of the time. Truth be told, the unfairness we encounter in life is experienced in small ways, such as the preference shown another person over us, to some of the biggest events in our lives, such as the loss of an innocent child to disease or tragedy.

From child to senior adult, each of us would have no trouble recounting some way we have been personally treated unfairly. As a matter of fact, one of the “life lessons” we all must learn as we grow up is the reality that not every situation is going to be fair to us, that we must learn how to carry on in spite of the unfairness of life.

As I prepared this sermon, I engaged in some background research on the subject of the unfairness of life. To my surprise, most preachers focused on the “how” side of the equation. They would identify that life is unfair, and quickly move to speaking about how to cope with unfair situations. I believe there is a gap in what information many Christians are given on this subject. The folks I have spoken to about an event in their life they believe was unfair, without fail they ask, “Why has this happened to me? I believe it is unfair! Why does God allow something like this happen to me, His child?”

First, let me say, “That is a good question. You are not wrong to ask it; I believe God has answers for you.” First,

Life is unfair because:

1. We live in a fallen (sinful) world (Genesis 3: 16 – 19). The first man and woman experienced this physical world in two extremes – in the beginning they lived in a garden perfectly suited to their needs and wants, but after they succumbed to temptation sin entered into their world, and with sin came a bitter spiritual harvest.

A. Everything changed for Adam and Eve; the creation which before nurtured and sustained them now resisted their attempts to subdue and manage it. One of their sons, instead of supporting and assisting his parents resented his brother’s success to the point of committing murder. The world that had at first been fair had become unfair.

Second,

2. Not everyone is playing by the same rules (Proverbs 6: 16 –19). The introduction of sin into the world has wide implications; in each succeeding generation: the sin of greed, hatred, pride, and avarice multiplied and spread. Where once God walked daily in intimate communion with mankind, today He is pushed to the margins while the gods of materialism, pleasure and power hold sway.

A. The prevailing motto in this present world could be summed up: “What is mine is mine, and what is yours will be mine if I can get it.” Greed and selfishness guide

many people's lifestyles. Therefore, if I treat you unfairly in the pursuit of my goals and ambitions, it is justifiable to me. The guiding rule for this day is, "Each person decides what the rules are for his life."

What is the answer in an unfair world? God's grace (Matthew 20: 1 – 16).

A. Jesus paints a word picture of what obviously was a common occurrence in His day. Laboring men gathered at a central location each morning, some earlier than others. Employers in need of day laborers would arrive, select the required number of workers, and take them to the place of employment, in this case a vineyard.

1. But evidently the employer went back into town to seek more workers, who would join the work crew at various hours through the day. As a result, at the end of the day some workers had toiled in the hot sun for 12 hours, some perhaps 6, and a few only 1 hour.

2. But when the employer paid off the men at close of work, he paid each man one denarius, the average wage for one day's work, regardless of whether they worked one hour or twelve.

3. The moral of the story is that, while the original workers felt he was unfair to them, the vineyard owner owned the vineyard, and he possessed the right to disperse the pay as he chose. All wealth for the day's pay was at his disposal. He had grace for the last guys hired, yes, but he was also fair and just to all the laborers.

B. This is not just a story about labor relations. Notice verse One: "*For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner...*"

1. God is the landowner. The kingdom of heaven is His alone; we come into the kingdom at different times, some even on our death beds. Therefore, He is simply being true to His character by rewarding each of us according to His love and mercy. This truth reminds me of an important reality:

1. We are not graceful, but God is full of grace. In his book, "What's So Amazing About Grace," Phillip Yancey points out that part of our problem with God is in the nature of grace itself. Grace is scandalous. It is hard to accept, hard to believe, and hard to receive. We are shocked by what it offers; it truly is not of this world. It frightens us with what it does for sinners.

A. Grace teaches us that God does for others what we would never do for them. We would save the not – so – bad. God starts with prostitutes and works downward from there.

1. Grace is a gift that costs the giver everything, but costs the receiver nothing. It is given to those who don't deserve it, who barely recognize it, and who hardly appreciate it.

2. That is why God alone gets the glory in your salvation; Jesus did all the work when He died on Calvary.

2. We should be grateful for this grace. We didn't deserve it. It is really unfair according to the world's reasoning, because each individual ought to stand on his/her own two feet, pay all his/her debts, and suffer the consequences of our own actions.

A. We deserve the judgment of God upon our sins, and separation from God for eternity in Hell. But God in His mercy has chosen to show us grace!

B. The Good News is good news because the receiving of the good news brings a profound change in the recipient. When I read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew Chapters Five through Seven, I hear Jesus outlining the ethical guidelines for the Kingdom of God. The principles Jesus laid out were revolutionary in the first Century, and they are revolutionary today.

C. He set a new standard for human relationships based on the Grace of God. He put an emphasis upon the value of each citizen of the kingdom based on God's love for each of us, not on our achievements or popularity or accident of birth.

1. For that reason, I have the right to realize my potential as a child of God. I am never disqualified from serving in the Kingdom, and never exempted from the standards of the Kingdom.

3. We should follow God's example, and show grace to others.

A. When someone else gets a break at work, assume they need it.

B. When someone doesn't get caught in some wrong thing, just remember the times you did something wrong and didn't get caught.

C. When someone seems to get off easy, pray they will be thankful for the grace shown, and will respect it.

Don't wish pain on someone for the sake of fairness!

Three applications:

1. Don't compare what God is doing in someone else's life with what He is doing in yours. Psalm 135: 6 says, "*The LORD does whatever pleases Him, in the heavens and on earth, in the seas and all their depth.*"

2. Ask the Lord "why," but remember He doesn't owe you an explanation. In His grace, God acts out of His intrinsic character, and according His plans, all of which are beyond our knowing. His ways are not ours, His plans are above our plans. But He always has our best at heart. He is sovereign.

3. When you cannot understand what God is doing, trust His faithfulness. While I confess there are times in my life when I cannot see the purpose behind what God is doing, I also have confidence in His intention. Always my heavenly Father is seeking to build me into a closer image of His Son, Jesus. And as the Scriptures says, "*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God...*"

There never will a moment in life when you as a Child of God will not be in the Father's care and nurture. So while the world is often unfair, God never is. Let others see your faith shine through in the darkest, stormiest hour.

Let's pray!