

Such Generosity!
Matthew 20:15

“Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, in sports there is a reason that the best players generally make much more money than those players who spend most the game on the bench. They are the ones who do the most to try to lead their team to victory. They are known for coming through with amazing plays, even winning plays. The bench players have some skills, but they are just not as good. So if one day sports leagues decided that all players should be paid equally, the best players would be quite upset. It wouldn't be fair they have to do most of the work without being paid most of the money.

Don't you feel the same way about life in the Christian Church? Is it unfair that you have held a church office for many years without a break while others have the time but refuse to step up? Or that you have to teach because no one else will? Or that you take care of the church property while others only tell you what needs fixing?

Human nature expects that those who do the most work will be compensated more than those who do less work. Many people in the Church would like this also to be true. But Jesus has news for His followers: the kingdom of heaven does not work according to human expectations.

In the prior verses a rich young man has come to Jesus asking what must be done to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds that one must love God with all your heart, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. The man says that he does.

Jesus then points out where he has failed. He is to sell all that he has, give the money to the poor, and come follow Him. The man leaves sad because He had great wealth and it meant more to Him than anything else, even God.

So the disciples exclaim to Jesus, “We have left everything and followed You. What then will we have?” The disciples are worried that there is no light at the end of the tunnel, that there is no blessing for the time they have put in.

But Jesus assures them of their place in His kingdom. In fact, as Jesus points out, all who have put Jesus first in their lives – ahead of parents, children, spouses, or wealth – will indeed inherit the kingdom of heaven.

But then Jesus has a parable. A master needs laborers for his vineyard. He goes to the streets early in the morning, and those who agree to work for him agree to work for the regular day’s wage. Because there is more work to be done the master goes out four more times to get workers. Finally, at the end of the day they need to be paid. The men hired last, who only worked one hour, get paid the full day’s wage.

At that point all the rest, especially the first ones, have to be pleased with the idea of the master’s generosity. It means they will get more. But as each worker comes up, he only gets the day’s wage. Now the master isn’t so generous in their eyes, and they complain.

But as the master says, the workers knew the deal. They agreed to a wage and that is what they are to be paid – no more, no less. As the master asks, “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?”

Now by human standards the master is out of line. If he is going to be generous to one he should be generous to all. What is missed is that he has already been generous to all. These men had nothing to do at the beginning of the day. By giving them work the master has helped them.

And that is why we need to keep in mind that this is a parable about the kingdom of heaven. It doesn’t operate by human standards. It is actually God being much more gracious than humans would be. He provides for those who are idle, but not in the context of work, but in the

realm of salvation. Yet at the same time those hard of heart will not understand God's generosity. They want special favors and places of importance.

Do you think God needs to be generous to you? Why? What have you done for Him? Have you taught, visited, made evangelism calls, and done otherwise all that you can to expand the kingdom of heaven? Do you think you deserve a better life than those who don't?

What about your sins? Do those factor in? What should be taken away because you worry more about your standing among men than you do with your standing before God? In keeping with the theme of generosity, it is likely that we have times in life when we are not. Instead of providing others with help we think only of ourselves.

This is why it is good to have an incredibly generous God on your side. He begins by calling on you to know Him. Think about that. God wants you to know Him. That means you don't have to chase Him or figure out hidden clues. He wants you to know Him as a God of forgiveness, love, mercy, hope, and compassion. He reveals Himself through His Son.

That Son is your life. Sin brings idleness to your life. You have no where to belong. Jesus gives you standing as a son or daughter of God. He went to the cross to take away your sin, every one of them. He took the sins of all. He took the wrath for all those sins. He accepted your punishment. He was convicted in your place. In that agony of dying on the cross He substituted His righteousness for your sinfulness. In death, He made sure the sacrifice was complete.

Yet in rising He made sure it was not all in vain. The promises are true because Christ lives. Your sins stand forgiven, completely gone. Your death is only a portal, not the end. And because heaven is open to you, you will spend eternity without pain or sorrow or want.

Now that Jesus has risen and ascended He has given you the Holy Spirit to lead you in the way of faith that trusts Jesus. That trust can be there when you are ill or injured. That trust

guards you when others speak falsely of Christ. It is a trust that endures as you approach death, as you feel the devastation of the death of a loved one, or when you seem not to belong. It is a trust that tells you that you can always go to God in prayer.

As Christ has promised to be with you always to help you, you have the Means of Grace of the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Jesus knew you would still struggle with sin even as you try to live faithfully. These three special gifts bring forgiveness, life, salvation, and the strength of the Holy Spirit to you every time. They are the marks that show that each person of the Church lives solely by the grace of Christ.

This also gives you a family of faith to watch over you. This is a collection of people who trust in God for the same reasons. And that means you have people to console you and rejoice with you. They'll help keep you in God's ways. They may even help teach your young ones.

And yes, there are material blessings. You probably won't get all you want, but God knows what you need. But most of you have income, vehicles, homes, food, and other comforts. The other things are better blessings by far, but material blessings help us through life.

This is how generous God is. But there is still a warning that we have to be careful not to throw it away. Judas Iscariot was one of those Jesus was speaking to. He loved money more than Jesus and went from first to having nothing.

This is why we need a generous God, one who is rich in forgiveness and true love for His people. No matter your human standing, God has a reward for you. You have the wages of life and salvation. You get to live now and forever by the grace of God. Amen.