

Stories : Old and New

Parables of Jesus for 21st century society

The parable of the Compassionate Employer (part 3)

Read: Matthew 20:1-16; Luke 15:1-2; Psalm 103:10; 1 Cor. 15:9-10.

1. Read Matthew 20:1-16. Have you ever used the phrase “It’s not fair!”? Why?
2. Why might the owner of the vineyard have done all the ‘donkey work’ when that should have been his foreman’s job? What might this tell us about the owner (God)?
3. Do you have a measure of sympathy for the full-day workers? (v10-12). What would have been your reaction if you had been in their shoes? Didn’t the owner have the right to do what he wanted with his own money? (v15). What major truth does this parable tell us about the Kingdom of Heaven?
4. Who might this parable have originally been directed at? Why? See Luke 15:1-2. In which way is this parable to be compared with the parable of the Lost Son?
5. Christian author, Max Lucado, tells the story of Jeffrey Dahmer, the mass murderer and cannibal, saying that the thing that disturbs him most is his conversion in prison. Are you troubled by the concept of grace for a cannibal? What are your thoughts on what Lucado writes, below:

Maybe you have the same reservations. If not about Dahmer perhaps about someone else. We’ve sentenced them, maybe not in court, but in our hearts. We’ve put them behind bars and locked the door. They are forever imprisoned by our disgust. And then, the impossible happens. They repent.

Our response? (Dare we say it?) We cross our arms and furrow our brows and say ‘God won’t let you off that easy. Not after what you did. God is kind, but he’s no wimp. Grace is for average sinners like me, not for deviants like you.’

6. Steve said: “With God, people get what they don’t deserve. It’s called grace.” How grateful are you to God that he has dealt with you by grace and not fairness? (see Psalm 103:10).
7. Steve said: “To say that someone deserves grace is a contradiction in terms. We can no more deserve grace than we can plan our own surprise party.” What point was Steve making here?
8. In which ways do Christians sometimes get the older brother and the father mixed up when thinking about the character of God? (in the story of the Lost Son, Luke 15).