

September 12, 2004 by Steve Brandon



Is Your Eye Envious Because I Am Generous?

Matthew 20:1-16

1. God will be fair (verse 13).
2. God will be gracious (verse 14).
3. God will be free (verse 15a).
4. You need to accept it (verse 15b).

Life is full of surprises. You never know what a day will bring. My father is an orthopaedic surgeon, who has considered his retirement from practice. I can't tell you how many times I have heard him say, "One of the things that prevents me from retiring is the thought of one of my grandchildren breaking a arm. If I'm retired, I can't help." Nevertheless, about three weeks ago, his privileges at Kishwaukee Community Hospital were finally dropped. For all practical purposes, this was the beginning of his retirement. Well, this past Friday evening, my family was in DeKalb. We had dropped off our children to be with various friends, while we enjoyed dinner with my parents. Just after dinner, right before dessert, we received a phone call, "Carissa was outside riding on some roller blades. She fell on the ground, in front of a little boy, who was riding a bicycle. The bicycle tire ran over Carissa's arm. She has been crying ever since." We told our friends that we would come right over to pick her up. I went to get Carissa and brought her back to my parent's house. My father took one look at it and said that it was broken. However, since his privileges at the hospital were recently dropped, he couldn't go to the hospital to x-ray my daughters arm. To make a long story short, my father put a cast on her at home to help her be comfortable. And we spent the night at my parents' home in DeKalb. First thing Saturday morning, we headed off to his office, where her arm could be x-rayed, her bone set in place, and another cast placed on her arm. Today, she is feeling fine.

Life is full of surprises. We had our plans. We had our expectations. But things worked out differently than we expected. This is life, "The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). We need to be open to the guiding hand of God's providence, and willfully accept it. What is true of this life is also true of the life to come. We might have in our minds a view of what ought to take place when we stand before Christ to account for our lives. We may very well be surprised with what actually takes place.

This morning, we are going to be studying the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, which is found at the beginning of Matthew, chapter 20. It's a simple story with a surprise ending. The parable is bracketed on both sides with two verses of Scripture that are practically identical. Look at Matthew 19:30, "But many who are first will be last; and the last, first." Look to Matthew 20:16, "Thus the last shall be first, and the first last." These verses say the same thing and are the point of the parable. But, the point of the parable is surprising to us. We don't expect the first to be last. We don't expect the last to be first. We expect the first to be first. We expect the last to be last.

In some ways this parable reminds me of the story that Aesop told of the tortoise and the hare. A hare was making fun of the tortoise one day for being so slow. "Do you ever get anywhere?" he asked with a mocking laugh. "Yes," replied the tortoise, "and I get there sooner than you think. I'll run you a race and prove it." The hare was much amused at the idea of running a race with the tortoise, but for the fun of the thing he agreed. So the fox, who had consented to act as judge, marked the distance and started the runners off. The hare was soon far out of sight, and to make the tortoise feel very deeply how ridiculous it was for him to try a race with a hare, he lay down beside the course to take a nap until the tortoise should catch up. The tortoise meanwhile kept going slowly but steadily, and, after a time, passed the place where the hare was sleeping. But the hare slept on very peacefully; and when at last he did wake up, the tortoise was near the goal. The hare now ran his swiftest, but he could not overtake the tortoise in time."

This story is similar to the parable that Jesus tells here in Matthew 20. It all illustrates this point: "The last shall be first, and the first last." We had every reason to believe that the tortoise would be last. But it turned out that he was first. We had every reason to believe that the hare would be first. Instead the hare was last. Jesus says that there are many people who are first in this life, who will be last in the life to come. And there are many people who are last in this life, who will be first in the life to come.

Let's begin with this parable in chapter 20, verse 1. I call it a parable because of how it starts. Jesus said, "For the kingdom of heaven is like ..." (verse 1). This is a standard way for Jesus to introduce a parable. Perhaps you remember back in Matthew 13, where Jesus told seven parables. One of them he explicitly called a "parable." He said, "Hear the parable of the sower..." (Matt. 13:18). The other six of them started with this phrase, "the kingdom of heaven is like...."

Matt.13:24 - "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field."

Matt.13:31 - "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed..."

Matt.13:33 - "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven..."

Matt.13:44 - "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field..."

Matt.13:45 - "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls..."

Matt.13:47 - "The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea..."

When Jesus teaches in parables, He takes a commonly understood event in everyday life and says that the kingdom is like this in some way.

It might be like a man who sows the seed upon different soils. Depending upon the soil, the seed might grow or it might not. So also are the results of the preaching of God's Word. Depending upon the heart, the Word might take root and grow or it might not. Even as I preach this morning, and spread the seed, some of you will receive it differently than others. The kingdom of heaven might be like a mustard seed, that starts out small, but grows big and large. So also is the kingdom. Jesus said that it may start small, but it will grow large. It began with twelve disciples, but now has grown to reach around the world. The kingdom of heaven might be like a treasure hidden in the field that a man found. He goes out and sells everything that he owns to buy the field which contains the treasure, because he knows that the treasure is worth far more than he owns. So also is the kingdom. When you give up all to follow Christ, you will find more blessing than you ever gave up in this life and in the life to come. Parables are common events which describe the kingdom in one way or another. Here in Matthew 20, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to ... "a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard" (**verse 1**).

The Jews of Jesus' day would have known much about vineyards. With the bright sunshine during the day and the heavy dew during the late summer nights, the land is in an ideal climate for vineyards. For thousands of years, the land of Canaan has been filled with vineyards. Even before Israel ever settled in the land, it was filled with vineyards. Perhaps you remember the story of the twelve spies who were sent to spy out the land of Canaan. As they returned from the land, they "cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes; and they carried it on a pole between two men" (Numbers 13:23), so that the people could see that the land was fruitful. The Hebrew people learned and adopted this particular industry. So, as Jesus tells this story of the laborers in the vineyard, His listeners would have clearly identified with the description that Jesus provides. As 21st century Americans, we need to work a bit harder to understand what was going on in this story.

Jesus introduces us to a man who owned and operated a vineyard, which grew grapes. These grapes would most likely have been crushed to make wine. Wine was the common drink of the day since it could be preserved for a long time. These grapes could also have been dried into raisins. Raisins would provide the people with a source of fruit during the winter months since they keep well for a long time.

This man probably had several regular workers who cared for his vineyards daily. They would cultivate the soil, water the vine, fertilize it when necessary, prune the vines, and pull the weeds. But, for some reason, he needed additional laborers on this particular occasion. My guess is that it was harvest time, the time of the year when he needed to gather in the grapes. They were ripe and needed harvesting as quickly as possible. The harvesting of the grapes takes place in September (just like it is right now).

So, he went out in the early morning to hire laborers to pick his grapes. He probably went out early in the morning, just as the sun was coming up, about 6AM. In **verse 2** we read, "And when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard." Apparently, these laborers were ready and willing to work for him. They knew that every September, there would be plenty of work available to those who wanted to work in the vineyards. They knew that the marketplace was the place that vineyard owners and managers would come to look for a few extra laborers to help in their harvesting. They knew that the earlier that they arrived, the more certain it would be for them to secure a job for the day, that they might have something to bring home to their family. They certainly came dressed and ready for such work, wearing their grubby work clothes. They knew what this landowner needed them to do. They knew that they would spend the day in the "scorching heat of the day" to gather in the grapes.

When the laborers met this landowner, they began to speak with him about the possibility of working for the day. The wage that was agreed upon was a denarius. A denarius was a coin that the Romans and Jews used for commerce. It had a picture of Caesar Augustus on one side. On the other side, it glorified all of the Caesars. A denarius was a fair wage for a laborer. If you want to put in today's terms, you're talking \$100-150. That's assuming a pay rate of about \$10 or \$12 an hour and working all day long. The landowner was willing to pay this wage. The workers were willing to work for this wage. And so off they went into the vineyard. I suspect that this man went with them in the vineyard and oversaw their work. Remember, this vineyard was family-owned and operated. After a few hours of work, this landowner gauged how quickly the work was being done, he probably noticed that it was going a bit slow. You want to gather the grapes when they are ripe. It won't do to gather the grapes next week when they are ripe today.

So, the landowner probably went out from his field into the marketplace to find more workers, which leads us to **verse 3** which says, "he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place." The landowner probably went out around 9AM. He saw some "standing idle." Like the other laborers, they had come to market place to find work in the vineyards, but they hadn't yet been hired. We don't know why they weren't hired. Perhaps it had to do with their own laziness. They knew that they should be at the marketplace by sunrise to secure for themselves a job for the day, but the pillow and the warm cozy bed got the best of them. Perhaps it had to do with their responsibilities. They made every effort to be there first thing in the morning, but something held them up. Perhaps they had to milk their goats before coming. Perhaps they had to get their children to school. Perhaps the other potential laborers had seized all of the available jobs before they had a chance. Perhaps they weren't in the same location at the marketplace that the vineyard managers originally went to, and therefore the laborers missed out on the opportunity to be hired.

Perhaps it had to do with their interviewing skills. While camping at the Stronghold last weekend with several families from church, we were telling stories around the campfire. One story told of Swen and Ollie, who came to America from Norway. They were seeking employment and decided to try the United States Air Force. And so they both came together to the recruiting station to see if they would be accepted. After a few moments, Swen was invited back to interview with the recruiter, who asked him what he did for a living. He said, (with a heavy accent) "I am a pile-it." The recruiter was quite pleased with his answer and said, "We need pilots in the Air Force. We'll sign you up." A few moments later, he came out to called Swen's friend Ollie in for an interview as well. The recruiter asked Ollie what he did for a living. He said, (with a heavy accent), "I am a wood cutter." The recruiter politely told him that the Air Force doesn't need any wood cutters. He kindly suggested that he might seek for employment down at the saw mill. But, the Air Force wasn't a place for him. Ollie was a bit confused. He asked, (with a heavy accent), "Well, then, why did you accept my friend Swen?" The recruiter said, "Because he's a pilot. Here at the Air Force, we need pilots. But we don't need wood cutters." Swen replied, "Yah, yah, it's true. He is a pile-it. But, he can't pile-it, until I cut-it!"

We don't know why these people weren't hired. But, we do know that the owner in our parable saw these potential workers and said to them, "You too go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you." And so they went" (**verse 4**). This vineyard owner needed more workers in his vineyard and was quite pleased to hire these laborers. These laborers were certainly thankful to get a job at such a late hour. In fact, they were so thankful that they didn't even worry about their wage for the day. Now, in such an agricultural community, they probably had some

sort of acquaintance with the landowner to know that he was a man of his word and was able to be trusted. When he said, "whatever is right I will give you," it was good enough for them. They were hardly in a position to negotiate with this man. And so off they went to pick some grapes.

The afternoon wore on, and the landowner realizes he doesn't have enough workers. It says in **verse 5**, "Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing." Even with the additional laborers, the harvesting process was going too slow, so he went to find other workers. For some reason there were still more workers waiting around at the sixth hour, which is about noon. He hired them. Around three o'clock in the afternoon (i.e. the ninth hour) there were still some workers waiting to be hired, he hired them also. He probably said to them, "You too go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you" (as he did in verse 4).

When we come to verse 6 in this story, we meet with the last group of laborers that this landowner hires. Look at **verse 6**, "And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing; and he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?'" Here it is in the eleventh hour (i.e. somewhere near 5 o'clock in the afternoon). He was somewhat surprised to see these men still waiting to be hired. To an industrious business owner, he would probably have expected them to be busy with something. Rather than wasting an entire day standing around, they could have been productive with something. Even going home and getting some sleep so that they could arrive at sunrise the next day to get hired might be better than standing around idle all day. They gave their reasoning in **verse 7**, "They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You too go into the vineyard.'" By now, it's late in the day. Taking into account the travel time to the vineyard, they probably worked less than an hour. As the evening began to cool down, they didn't even have time to break into a sweat. They barely get started working when the whistle sounds and the day is over. It's time to receive their wages.

Verse 8 tells us how this all took place, "And when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.'" The landowner's foreman must have lined up all of the workers in a line. The first in line were those who had agreed to begin working at 5pm. To the surprise of everyone, we read, "And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius" (**verse 9**). Those who had worked only an hour were pleasantly surprised. They had certainly expected to receive a fair wage. As they had worked for only an hour, they were probably expecting an hour's wage, say a 12th of a denarius. There were coins available that were worth less than a denarius. And this landowner could have paid them using one of those coins instead. But he didn't. Rather, he was gracious to these laborers who had worked for only an hour and gave them more than they deserved. I'm sure that they went away rejoicing. They had spent all day standing idle in the marketplace. Certainly they were thinking of what a terrible day it was. They had wasted the day and have no profit to show for it. But, then, this kind landowner came along and paid them a full day's wage! What looked so bleak an hour ago has suddenly turned into utter joy!

I'm sure that as the others watched, they were pretty excited. They began calculating in their mind what might possibly take place. "If they who labored only an hour received a full denarius, I wonder what is in it for us? Certainly we will receive more than this! Perhaps we'll have enough to take tomorrow as a vacation day." And then comes the disappointment in **verse 10**, "And when those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; and they also received each one a denarius." Their hope was capsized. Expecting to receive more, they received only a denarius. And they were upset. In **verses 11-12** we discover how upset they were, "And when they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.'" In their minds, this was really unthinkable. They grumble as if they were treated unfairly. They tried to lay their case out before the landowner. They said, "Hey, this isn't fair! We worked for the entire day! You can go look at what we have done! We have filled five vats full of grapes! Look at what they did! They didn't even fill up a single vat half-way. Mr. Landowner, you are being quite unfair with us. Please give us what we deserve!"

I believe that their comments establish the very point Jesus was attempting to make in His parable. This parable is describing the gracious ways of God. The kingdom of heaven is not about earning from God. The kingdom of heaven is not about placing God under an obligation. It's about God being gracious. There are those who will give years of their life in service to the king. They will make great sacrifices for the sake of the kingdom. They will labor and toil under great adversity in Jesus' name. And yet, when it's all said and done, they will receive exactly what those who were converted on their deathbed will receive. All who believe in Christ will receive eternal life. All who believe in Christ will receive every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:3). All who believe in Christ will be fellow heirs with Christ of their inheritance (Romans 8:17).

It doesn't matter whether you enter the vineyard when you are young or when you are old. It doesn't matter how long or how short you labor. God gives abundantly to all. And this is surprising, because we don't think that it should be this way. In fact, we think just the opposite. We think that God owes something to those who labor long and hard for Christ.

This week I read the story told by Reuben Torrey. It's a story that illustrates this tendency. He was conducting some Christian meetings in Australia. During the course of the meetings, he received a note that read,

"Dear Mr. Torrey, I am in great perplexity. I have been praying for a long time for something that I am confident is according to God's will, but I do not get it. I have been a member of the Presbyterian church for thirty years, and have tried to be a consistent one all that time. I have been the superintendent of the Sunday school for twenty-five years and an elder in the church for twenty years; And yet God does not answer my prayer. Can you explain why?"

Mr. Torrey replied,

"This man thinks that because he has been a consistent church member for thirty years, a faithful Sunday school superintendent for twenty-five years, and an elder in the church for twenty years that God is under obligation to answer his prayer. He is really praying in his own name, and God will not hear our prayers when we approach him in that way. We must, if we would have God answer our prayers, give up any thought that we have any claims upon God. There is not one of us who deserves anything from God."

After the meeting, this man came up to Reuben Torrey and said that he had written the note, and that his answer to the question was totally right. He did think that God owed it to him for his lifelong years of service. (Recorded by James Boice in his commentary on Matthew, p. 419)

This tendency is in all of us. We all think that there is this one-to-one correspondence in the sacrifices that we make and the treasure that we will receive from Jesus. In some sense, this is what Jesus said back in chapter 19 when responding to Peter, who said, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" I sense in Peter a slight spiritual pride in the great things that he had sacrificed for the sake of the kingdom. Jesus assured Peter that his great sacrifice would be rewarded. Look once again at verses 28-29, ...

"Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life."

If you sacrifice greatly, you will be rewarded. That is true. But lest we ever drift into a spiritual pride that might look favorably upon our own achievements, Jesus here is directing His disciples to see that all who believe will receive eternal life! What a great blessing this is! Eternal life makes it worth it all, regardless of whether or not we get rewards. We ought to rejoice in this, rather than boasting in any self-sacrifice that we might make for the kingdom. Perhaps you remember the account of Jesus sending out His seventy disciples. They returned, boasting of their spiritual power, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name" (Luke 10:17). Jesus said that he saw their great spiritual power. He affirmed it and rejoiced in it, but there was something more important:

"I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven." (Luke 10:18-20)

We ought to rejoice in the gift of eternal life that God gives us. And as He gives to others freely, in this we ought to rejoice and not complain. But too often we come to think that God is under some sort of obligation to us. In this parable of the laborers in the vineyard, Jesus reminds us of the perspective that we ought to have. God may very well be gracious to those who only labored for an hour in the kingdom, by giving them a full reward. We need to be content with how God will act on that final day. We ought not to be like these complaining laborers who worked all day long, but objected when they got what they deserved. Rather, we ought to rejoice in the generous grace of God in giving to others.

I admit that it is difficult. It finds difficulty in our house at times, when dad decides to be gracious to one of our kids, by letting them have a special dessert, or by allowing them to stay up a bit longer than the other children, or by purchasing something special for one of the kids. Rather than rejoicing at my act of kindness, there are times when I only hear complaints such as "She got a dessert, don't I get one too?" "If he gets to stay up late, why don't I get to as well?"

I want for you to think about your salvation. If you are a believer in Christ, your salvation is an entire work of God's grace. In the second chapter of Ephesians, we are told that all of us were dead in our sins. It means that we had no spiritual life at all. It means that we were incapable of responding to Christ. And yet, we are told in the same chapter that God, "made us alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5). He gave us faith by the sheer richness of His great mercy and love (Eph. 2:8, 4). He was under no obligation to save any of us. We were all "by nature, children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), under His curse. And yet, God was gracious to save us. Do you know why he saved us? He saved us, "in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7). In other words, God saves people so that God might be able to show to the world for all ages to come how gracious and kind He has been to us in Christ. And the things that we do in this life for the sake of Christ are all His grace as well. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul spoke about how he "labored even more than all of [the apostles]" (1 Cor. 15:10). That means that Paul worked harder and longer than Peter did. That means that Paul worked in circumstances more difficult than Andrew or James or John. And yet, Paul made it clear who exactly deserved the credit for all of the labor that he did. He said, "yet not I, but the grace of God with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). Even the things that we do in this life for the sake of the kingdom, even the righteousness to which we obtain, all of it can be attributed to the grace of God.

And now I want you to think about this: What about those who are saved late in this life? What about those who are saved at the age of fifty, or age ninety, or saved on their deathbed? What about those who have so little time in this life to experience much of the wonderful grace of God working in them to produce fruit of righteousness? How can God use them to "show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward [them] in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7). How can He do it? One way is by welcoming them into heaven and giving to them the same reward as those who labored for seventy years for the sake of the gospel received. They didn't deserve to be saved in the first place. They did little upon the earth that deserved any reward. And yet, God gives them a full reward, for a work that they never did. Wouldn't this lift high the great grace of God? Wouldn't this "show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward [them] in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7)? Wouldn't this direct praise and honor to God for His wonderful, matchless, marvelous grace of Jesus? You are saved by His grace. The works that you do are accomplished by His grace. Any reward that you will ever receive in heaven is only because of His grace.

How different, really, is it for those who were saved late in life? Perhaps they were obstinate and rebellious for their first seventy years. It is still all God's kindness to them as it is to us. They served Christ for only a little time here on earth, but God is generous to reward them as well. I believe this parable teaches God's generosity! You have those who came into the harvest early in the morning (which I believe represents early in life, perhaps as a child). You have those who came into the harvest at 9am (perhaps as a young adult). You have those who came into the harvest during the noon hour (perhaps in the middle ages of life -- in their forties). You have those who came into the harvest after 3:00 in the afternoon (perhaps after children are come and gone). You have those who came an hour before quitting time (perhaps as their health deteriorated). And they all receive a full denarius. Doesn't it direct our attention to the kindness of the landowner?

And God gives to those who believe in Christ, a full, eternal life. Those who were saved late in life don't receive simply a portion of eternal life. They receive it all. There aren't any second class citizens in the kingdom. We are all fellow heirs. All receive what God has promised to those who have faith in Jesus.

So, rather than complaining to God that he is unfair in being overly gracious to others, we ought to give Him praise because of his kindness to the 11th hour laborers. I want to close my message this morning by looking briefly at the last four verses of our text. In them, we find four lessons for us to learn from this parable.

1. God will be fair (verse 13).

The land owner said to one of these complaining, grumbling workers, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?" (verse 13). The laborers who signed up at the beginning of the day agreed to work in the vineyard for a denarius. They worked all day. They received their denarius. The contract was fulfilled. There ought to have been no complaint. Life should have gone on. The fact that this landowner was more gracious to others, ought never to put doubt in our mind that God won't be fair. God will forever be just and will do right! Don't even ask God for what you deserve, because what you deserve is not what you want! You deserve to die and spend your eternity in hell, suffering forever! The Bible is clear, "His work is perfect, for all His ways are just" (Deut. 32:4). "All His works are true and His ways are just" (Dan. 4:37). You ought never to accuse God of being unfair!

2. God will be gracious (verse 14).

Look at verse 14, "Take what is yours and go your way, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you." When the landowner gave a denarius for an hour's work, it was out of his pure pleasure and kindness. He didn't need to give a reason, other than His pure pleasure. This is the way of God's dealing with us. God will be gracious to us for his own reasons. If the landowner in this parable is able to be accused of anything, it is that he was too gracious. But, this is the point. This is God.

Lest we think that God acts according to a strict merit system, as Peter may have supposed at the end of chapter 19, Jesus points out that God might just do what you least expect Him to do. It's the last who shall be first, and the first who will be last (verse 16). The only reason why the last are ever first is because God graciously gives more to the last.

3. God will be free (verse 15a).

The landowner said, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?" (verse 15a) The landowner was perfectly free to do as he wished with what he owned. If he wanted to be generous to some and not to others, that's fine. Isn't that how gifts work? When you give a gift to someone, it doesn't obligate you to give a gift to everybody, does it? When you go to a restaurant, you are free to tip your waiter or waitress as much or as little as you like, aren't you? So also with God. He can give graciously to each as He desires. After all, it's His universe! After all, He created us. After all, we are His possession! God is free to do with us as He desires. In fact, the Bible describes us as clay in the hand of a potter.

4. You need to accept it (verse 15b).

Look at the last half of verse 15, "Or is your eye envious because I am generous?" This is the title of my sermon this morning. It is the question that I want burned into your heart. We ought not to despise the grace of God. For non-Christians, this is one of the most disgraceful things about them. They despise the grace of God. Romans 2:4 says, "do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" There are many, many people who walk this planet of ours to whom God has been very gracious. He has given them life. He has given them health. He has given them good things to enjoy. He has been patient with them, even when they have blasphemed Him and provoked Him to anger. He has brought the gospel to them through a church, or through a friend, or through some literature, or through short-wave radio. They have heard of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. They have heard that all who call upon the Lord will be saved. And yet, they have rejected His kindness to them. Rather than believing in His grace to us in Christ, they have been stubborn and unrepentant and have gone their own way. God says, (in Romans 2:5), "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." It is because people have failed to repent when they have seen the "kindness and forbearance and patience" of God that He sends them to hell.

Sadly, this type of response is natural to those who believe in Christ as well. When we see God's gracious dealings with others, we can be so envious of them, wanting what they have. We want their family, children, house, job, car, Bible knowledge, or godliness. Thinking that we deserve what they have, we grumble at the Lord. Church family, this ought not to be. We ought to accept the fact that God's dealings with others might just be a bit different than we would expect, which is the point of the parable: "Thus the last shall be first, and the first last." And it will all be to the praise of the glory of His grace!

Let me close with the question that Jesus asked: "Is your eye envious because God is generous?"

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 12, 2004 by Steve Brandon.
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