

A Free Pass

Jesus tells the parable of the workers in the Vineyard:

Matthew 20:1-15 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. About the third hour, he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, you also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right. So, they went. He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. About the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around. He asked them, “Why have you been standing here all day doing nothing?” Because no one has hired us, they answered. He said to them, “You also go and work in my vineyard.” When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, “Call the workers and give them their wages beginning with the last ones hired and going on the first.” The workers who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. “These men who were hired last worked only one hour,” they said, “and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.” But he answered one of them, “Friend, I am not being unfair to you, didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go! If I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you, don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?” So, the last will be first and the first will be last.

This parable reminds me of my brother, who called me just 6 weeks before his death and told me of accepting Christ and finding forgiveness. I was happy and expressed my joy with him but a small part of me said “So now you get a free pass? You get the same as what others have wanted their whole lives. You get forgiveness and a place at the table?” I realized later that in that phone call he was not just telling me about finding Christ but was seeking my forgiveness. He was my brother and though his problems had hurt me, I still loved him deeply and wanted him in my life. When I was very young, my brothers were both my protectors and my tormenters. They could tease me and harass me but no one else had better mess with me. I adored them. I know one day I will see my brothers again, the ones who held me in their arms and cried because they thought they had killed me when I was run over by a bicycle, the ones who taught me to “look them in the eyes and kick them in the shins,” the ones who told me that once I learned the alphabet frontwards, I had to learn it backwards, the ones who persuaded me that that snake was dead and not sleeping in the sun and so I picked it up, and my brother took me to the funeral home to see my other brother and help me as I wept.

Lord, we thank you for the stories that Jesus told, the stories that give hope to all. We thank you Lord for those who have touched our lives with their love. Help us Lord to be accepting of all, no matter where they are on their journey. Be with our church, show us your way. Be with our Pastor, bless his ministry and watch over him and his family. Be with our staff and leaders, give them your wisdom and guidance. Help us Lord to be a forgiving and accepting people. Be with those who are ill and those that are grieving, comfort them. Help us Lord to remember who we are and who we belong to, in Jesus name, Amen.

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