

# What I Love About Jesus: Sheer Grace

## Matthew 20:1-16

Preached at 8.15 and C@10 on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2015

### Intro

“There’s no such thing as a free lunch.” So they say...

At Christmas at Panania we used to go up to the shopping centre and sing carols, and some of the blokes from church would do a sausage sizzle.

Do you know how hard it is to *give away* a sausage on a piece of bread? And this is before the food laws became as strict as they are now!

But tell people you’re raising money for charity and charge them a couple of dollars, and they’ll most often happily buy one.

It’s built into us that no one gets anything for nothing.

Effort gets rewarded. If you work, you earn.

The harder and longer you work, the more you deserve to get.

So no one will take a sausage on a piece of bread for free because they’re sure there’s something they’ll have to do to earn it – like listen to the person giving it to them, or come to church at Christmas.

But give them the opportunity to do something for their sausage – like give some money to a good cause – and they’ll take the sausage... because they’ve earned it... and you can’t expect them to do anything else for it now!

But giving someone something they’ve done nothing to deserve or earn – that’s sheer grace.

That’s what I love about Jesus – his sheer grace.

### Sheer grace

This story Jesus tells reflects life in the first century world when labourers were hired and paid on a daily basis.

There was no positions vacant section in the daily newspapers. When an employer needed workers he'd go to the labour exchange and find willing workers to come and work for the day.

So this landowner goes at the beginning of the day to hire workers to work in his vineyard for the day. He finds the people he wants, offers them a day's pay – a denarius, they accept and go to work in the vineyard.

He goes there again twice during the day and hires people who are standing around because no one's hired them. So he hires them – not because he needs them but so they'll get to take some money home to feed their family at the end of the day.

Are you already discounting in your mind how much they should be getting?

Finally at the eleventh hour... here's one of those expressions that we use in everyday speech that comes from the Bible...

...at the eleventh hour – that's an hour before the end of the working day, when it's all over bar the shouting – he goes out and does it again... hires the workers no one else hired and sends them to work in his vineyard, agreeing to pay them what is right.

How much do *those* guys deserve compared to the ones who've been out there in the vineyard all day?

At the end of the day the workers get called in reverse order from the order they were employed to receive their pay – the last ones first...

...a bit like your favourite competition TV show (Masterchef, The Voice, Australia's Got Talent...)

...you start with the people in the bottom three and work up to the week's winner.

If you do your calculations, these guys should be expecting to get about 8% or 1/12<sup>th</sup> of a denarius – a day's pay.

But the vineyard owner generously gives them a full day's pay. They didn't see that coming!

They knew they hadn't earned a full day's pay. They knew that didn't deserve it. They knew they had no right to demand it.

It was down to the sheer grace of the vineyard owner.

...

I remember Sharon Wood saying in a prayer letter once how a man in her church back in Ireland took her car to get it ready for registration for her.

He found a few things that needed fixing and got them fixed, and wouldn't take any money from Sharon for it.

And she found it difficult to accept sheer grace like that. I think we all do.

It's not the way that we start learning even as children.

If you do good work and behave at school you get a gold star or a merit award, and at the end of the year if you have enough merit awards you get a prize on presentation day.

If you work hard at your job, you might get a pay rise or a promotion, or make your fortune.

You get what you deserve.

But in Jesus, God treats us with sheer grace – not giving us what we do deserve, but what we don't deserve...

And that's humbling.

One day I was in the queue at the checkout at Franklins at Panania talking to a man who'd only recently started coming to our church. When the total of my purchases came up he leaned over and handed the cash to the checkout operator and paid for our groceries.

I was humbled by that – by his sheer grace that I'd done nothing to deserve.

All I could do was say 'thank you'.

...

In our Growth Group this week we were talking about the importance of context when we read the Bible.

Jesus is teaching his disciples about life in his kingdom when he tells them this story.

Just before Jesus told them this story, they'd watched a young man who thought he'd done all the right things and lived a good life walk away from Jesus after Jesus showed him that it wasn't enough to get him into the kingdom of God.

And his disciples had said 'what? What about us, then? Surely what we've done is enough... we've given up everything to follow you.'

Can you read between the lines to hear what they're saying? "Surely we deserve a place in the kingdom of God after what we've given up!"

But the kingdom of God is not like that. The kingdom of God is like this story.

Everyone who knows they don't deserve it will be at the front of the line to receive it... while everyone who thinks they've earned their place will be last, until they get the point too.

In 19:30 Jesus says

*"But many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first."*

The most deserving people, according to the way we normally think, will be at the end of the line until they're ready to see that the only way into the eternal reward of life in Christ's kingdom is through his sheer grace.

### **Forgotten grace**

As I get older I find I'm increasingly walking into rooms of the house only to forget why I came there and where I just came from!

You know, I think it's easy to do that sometimes with God's grace – forget why you're in the kingdom and how you got here...

The longer you've been a Christian, the greater the risk of forgetting the sheer grace of Christ that brought us into his kingdom.

When that man paid to have Sharon's car fixed, and when Eddie paid for my groceries, they paid what we would have had to pay.

Neither of them had to do it. It was sheer grace.

When Jesus died on the cross, it was to pay the price that we would have otherwise had to pay ourselves.

If we want to demand that we get what we deserve, that's what we deserve.

We deserve to have God take away the life he gave us, because we want to leave him out of it.

But Jesus has taken what we deserve.

He came and gave his life in place of yours and mine.

When my sin comes up on the register on judgment day, Jesus will say "I've got this one."

That's what I love about Jesus. That's why I love Jesus. That's why I follow him.

...

The disciples had obeyed Jesus' call to come and follow him.

And they had given up lots to do that during the almost three years they'd been following him by then.

And they asked "what's in it for us?"

In 19:28-30 Jesus reassured them that eternal life beyond their wildest dreams is what's in it for them.

But not because of what *they've* done... what they've sacrificed or given up – even if it is everything – even their life.

It's always and only because of his sheer grace in giving up his life.

And that will always be the case for us.

We don't come into Christ's kingdom by grace and then have to work to stay in.

We mightn't ever consciously think that way. But put your thinking to the test.

In your mind, does your attendance at church count for something that you think contributes to your place in God's kingdom?

How about your serving? Or your giving? Or your efforts at sharing the gospel with other people?...

Have you received Christ's grace to come into the kingdom but now think that what you're giving up to follow him is what keeps you in?

The kingdom of God is not like that.

The kingdom of God is where people who know they're the last people to expect to get anything from God but his judgment, *receive* eternal life through the sheer grace of Christ.

If we forget this, we'll be in danger of becoming proud in what we do as we follow Jesus... or we'll expect that God owes us better when we're suffering or the things we're doing for him aren't going to plan...

Or we'll hold back on giving ourselves to serve and follow Jesus because we don't feel we're getting out of it what we think we deserve – whether that's honour or credit or whatever else...

And we'll compare ourselves with each other so that we'll just do that bit more than someone who we don't see giving up too much to follow Jesus... instead of setting an example of whole-hearted service for others to follow.

And not even doing that for any other reason than that we love Jesus and understand what his grace means for the way we live.

God owes us nothing now or ever – no matter what we give up for him.

### **The face of grace**

What I love about Jesus is that he acts in sheer grace towards us as people who deserve nothing but God's judgment.

If we all grow to love this about Jesus it will shape our lives and our church.

Firstly it will shape how we view ourselves.

Secondly it will shape how we view and treat each other.

Thirdly it will shape our attitude to people who don't yet know Jesus.

Jesus' grace will shape how we view ourselves by assuring us that we are loved and accepted by God... that we'll never be left wondering if we're good enough for his kingdom.

When I was at school I was always one of the last kids to be picked when we played even just house sport because I was hopeless!

Jesus doesn't pick people for his kingdom on merit. He loves and welcomes everyone who knows he or she has nothing to his or her credit with God, and receives his grace in his death for us.

Your place in his kingdom – your place in this church family – does not and will never depend on your efforts or achievements in following Jesus. And your failures will never exclude you as you continue to trust in his grace.

Jesus' grace will teach us how to live with and treat each other.

It'll teach us to treat each other with the same grace that Jesus has shown to everyone in his church.

That means we will love and welcome each other.

None of us needs to do or be anything we expect them to do or be in order to earn our love and friendship.

No one in our church should feel that their value to the rest of us depends on their personality or abilities or anything else.

If we follow Jesus by treating each other with the same grace he's shown all of us, we should all experience the love and acceptance of God through each other.

There should be no cliques or circles that people are excluded from.

Listen if God might be prompting you now about someone here today who you could show Christ's grace to.

And the last one follows the same way.

Christ's grace teaches us that all people are like us 'but for the grace of God'.

We're no better than our neighbours, friends and family who don't know Jesus.

I want to encourage us all to stop using the term 'non-Christian'. I think it's unhelpful when people who aren't believers hear it.

But I think it can also make us feel a bit like members of a club that other people either don't want to or don't need to belong to.

There's certainly a distinction... but that distinction is that we are in the kingdom by the sheer grace of God in Christ.

They are people who are just like us – but for the grace of God in Christ.

They're people who need to hear about God's grace in Christ just like we did and still do.

If we do that I think it will help us to stop dividing our lives into Christian and "non-Christian" circles.

And we'll be much less likely to see the people we love or live amongst or work with as targets to be evangelised, but rather as people who Christ wants to share in his grace along with us...

...people who are no different to us.

And we won't come across as members of an exclusive club that they have to jump through hoops to join...

...we'll be what we are – beggars who deserve nothing who can show other beggars where they can find the bread that will give them life in the kingdom of God, by the sheer grace of Christ.

That's what I love about Jesus.