

Let Him Be Better Than You

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, December 31, 2023
PASSAGES	Matthew 20:1-15; Revelation 21:2-7; Psalm 16:5; Psalm 73:25-26; Lamentations 3:22-23; Matthew 11:28-29; Acts 20:35
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:05:46 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

There is no version of the Christian life in which you eventually pull even with God. His generosity is so extreme that, given enough time, it will offend you — and Jesus told a parable about exactly that so we would see it coming. The only honest response is to stop trying to settle the account and let him be better than you are.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ The workers hired at the eleventh hour did not receive a partial wage with eleven hours still owed. They received the whole denarius. Nobody in the parable is asked to work anything off.
- ◆ The grumblers are not villains — they are the people who worked hardest and know exactly how hard they worked. That is what makes the warning land where it does.
- ◆ Jesus is not defending a wage structure. He is asking a question about us: “Do you begrudge my generosity?”
- ◆ God's giving is not obligation being discharged. Revelation 21 lists what he gives away and every line of it benefits us more than him — and it is described as his joy.
- ◆ The real inheritance is not a better address or a larger reward. It is God himself. That is the great equalizer, and it is what makes the arithmetic of who worked longer meaningless.
- ◆ Going back to God for grace again — after you have already gone back too many times — is not an imposition on him. It honors him, because it trusts that he has not run out.

- ◆ Two groups need this: the people quietly grumbling about who is getting saved, and the people too embarrassed by their own ledger to ask for anything more.

► 1:05:46

The last Sunday of 2023 fell in the gap between Christmas and New Year's, which at Hope Chapel usually means a thin room and a hard time staffing children's ministry. Instead the auditorium was full — no kids' classes, all ages in one room, a lot of people back in town, and Ron Parish, Hope's second senior pastor, in the seats to honor Dan Davis, the founding pastor, whose memorial was the following Saturday. Matt kept the message short on purpose and did not pad it. It was one parable and one point.

The gift you cannot match

► 1:08:32

He started where everyone had just been: Christmas. You give someone a gift, and it is fine. The one they give you is spectacular. And something in you goes quietly sideways about it. It really is more blessed to give than to receive — which is precisely why being out-given is uncomfortable. If someone does you a large favor, you would like to return it, if only to close the file in your head. You do not want them up on you.

That instinct, Matt said, is the one this parable goes after. “There is no way we will ever be able to compare to his generosity,” he put it, “and we're going to have to at some point relent and let him be better than us” — which, for people who have served God a long time, is a difficult thing to swallow.

1. The parable, and the math that offends

► 1:09:41

Before he read it he pushed the idea to its absurd end. Suppose there were a wing of heaven where we made license plates to work the loan off — even there, he said, God would be giving away more the whole time than we were paying back. “It'll only be a growing problem.” You cannot out-earn a person who keeps handing you the earnings.

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.”

MATTHEW 20:1-2 ↗

► 1:10:15

He read straight through the hiring rounds — third hour, sixth hour, ninth hour — and then the last batch, the men still standing in the marketplace at the eleventh hour, who give the only reason they have. Not laziness. Nobody hired them. And when the wages are handed out, the order itself is a choice: last first.

“And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too!’... And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’”

MATTHEW 20:6-8 ↗

He stopped the reading to make sure the arithmetic was clear, because the arithmetic is the whole thing. This is a twelve-hour workday. The men hired at the eleventh hour worked one hour of it. They were paid a full denarius — the entire day's wage. And notice what the foreman did not say: here is the denarius, come back sometime and work off the other eleven hours. Nobody in this story is put on a payment plan.

► 1:12:09

Which is why the men who had been there since dawn got their hopes up, and why anyone would. Twelve hours at that rate should be twelve denarii. Debts paid, a good dinner, a night worth celebrating. Matt's point was not that their expectation was greedy. It was that their expectation was *normal*. Anyone standing in that line does the same math.

“And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’”

MATTHEW 20:11-12 ↗

► 1:13:26

“But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’”

MATTHEW 20:13-15 ↗

2. Who, exactly, is grumbling

▶ 1:14:04

Matt walked the room through the parallels and was blunt that this is not one of the hard ones. The master and the foreman are the Lord. The workers are people who serve him. The eleventh-hour hires are the ones who came to faith late, or who simply did not work as hard as you did — and, he added, you know precisely how hard you worked.

▶ 1:14:52

He deliberately did not name the grumblers yet. First he made the room say the ideal answer out loud — what a free person says when the master pays whatever he pleases: “Yeah, Master, you do as you please. We love when you do what you want.” That is the sentence. Hold it up next to whatever actually rises in you, and you have the entire diagnostic.

▶ 1:15:38

The grumblers are the interesting part. Not because they are wicked, but because their complaint is so reasonable. It does not feel fair. I gave my money, my time. I converted early in life — I could have just done a deathbed confession. I serve the Lord. I just do not like that he was that generous with *those* people. And you know who I'm talking about.

▶ 1:16:27

“Have you ever thought what it would be like for God to get on your nerves? I think Jesus is trying to warn us — hey, fair warning, I might bother you.”

3. What it is like to be on the wrong side of a good man

▶ 1:17:22

To get at the scale of it, Matt ran a small ladder. Offend a wicked man and you will remember it: charges filed, every cent repaid and then some, because you injured his dignity — and maybe he goes

easy if you beg enough. Offend a good man and he probably does not press charges; he may reasonably ask you to pay back what you took. Then offend a godly man, “one whose desire and joy is to overlook an offense.” For your curses he blesses. He gives away the thing you stole as though it had been yours the whole time. He is strangely concerned for *your* reputation.

► 1:18:00

And here he turned Acts 20:35 back around on the room. A godly man is “someone who, like God, really believes it when he says it's better to give than to receive.” We read that verse as instructions issued to us — as if God were saying, this part is for you, it does not apply to me. It applies to him first. He is the one who finds giving better, and the parable is what that looks like when nothing restrains it.

► 1:18:40

And even that ladder runs out before it reaches God, who is off the scale entirely. Human analogies get weird here, Matt conceded, because he is not just a better version of a guy. But the parable is clear about the direction of the problem: his generosity is so extreme it comes off wrong. There is no amount you can give back that will let you stand there and think, *now that's fair*.

4. A bride, not a work crew

► 1:19:31

He turned to Revelation to show that none of this is God discharging an obligation. Look first at how the city arrives — not as a worker in a newly issued uniform reporting for a shift, and not in beggars' clothes either.

“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’”

REVELATION 21:2–4 ↗

► 1:21:42

Matt asked the room to read the list slowly and notice who benefits from each item. God dwelling with people. Us being his people, as an end in itself. Him being our God. Tears wiped away, death gone, mourning and crying and pain gone. At first glance every line of that is a favor done to us — and yet the passage reads as his joy. He is not paying something off. He wants to.

“And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new!’... ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.’”

REVELATION 21:5-6 ↗

► 1:22:27

Life, immortality, forgiveness, grace, dignity, relief, comfort — given freely, and not only to people who gave their lives for him. Not only to martyrs. Matt did not soften this: God is lavish with people you would not have picked. “Weird, scummy people. Creepy weirdos. People you don't like at all — you're like, why are they here?” And then he put himself on the wrong end of it: if that is who makes the cut, “I'm definitely in the owner's box of heaven, because this guy is a scummy weirdo — at least that's how I remember him.” The joke has a hook in it. The people you are appraising are appraising you.

“The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”

REVELATION 21:7 ↗

Heritage — and sonship. The terms are entirely his to set, and the terms he sets are family.

5. The gift underneath all the other gifts

► 1:23:08

Jesus does talk about rewards for sacrifice — Matt was careful not to erase that. But there is something that outranks every reward, every heavenly dwelling, every anointing, and it is the thing that flattens the whole grumbling calculation.

“The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.”

PSALM 16:5 ↗

Portion is an inheritance word. The real prize in heaven is God himself — intimacy with the Father — and, as Matt said, that is “the thing that's going to really mess with you.” It is also the spiritual maturity he said plainly he would like to walk in:

► 1:23:47

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

PSALM 73:25–26 ↗

► 1:24:26

He is generous with things — spouses, children, family, the air, the ground, even his own body, physical and tangible and given away. But the largest gift is himself, which nothing we hand back can approach. “And the weird thing is, he loves doing it.” That is the hardest part to hold, because human generosity almost always keeps a receipt somewhere in the arrangement — you can pay me back later, or you can come work off the other eleven hours sometime. The foreman never says it. Neither does God. He is simply thrilled to do it.

6. Stop dolling yourself up first

► 1:25:08

Two groups needed this, Matt said, and they need it differently. Some of us need to stop grumbling — to stop presenting the gospel grudgingly to people we do not particularly want saved, and to start sharing it joyfully with people we know do not deserve it.

► 1:26:21

The others are the discouraged: people whose return on investment feels small, who do not want to go back to God for grace and mercy and forgiveness *again*, because they already owe him big time. It is the feeling of calling a friend for a favor, calling the same friend for another one, and being crushed by having to dial. *I have already given back so much less than he gave me, and I'm going to ask for more?* Matt's answer was two words, said twice: “Yes you are. Yes you are.” And two things will meet you when you do. Where else are you going to go. And he is glad you came.

► 1:26:59

So do not detour through a little self-help to make yourself presentable before you come back. Going straight to him is a joy to him and an honor, because it says you actually believe how much he wants you. This is the one whose invitation Jenny had already read to the room earlier in the service: “come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden” — the yoke is easy, and he calls himself gentle and lowly. *But I did that and failed again.* Then the only question left is whether you are worried he has run out.

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

LAMENTATIONS 3:22–23 ↗

► 1:27:32

“At the end of the day, just let him be better than us. Maybe even revel in it. I think that would give him glory.”

Then he prayed it rather than restating it: “God, thank you for your generosity. I ask that you would open up our eyes and our ears to see and hear what you are doing, and to glory and boast in you and your generosity, by your Spirit, in Jesus' name.” A concise service, on purpose — but nobody was hurried out. The Heart Ministry teams were up front and glad to pray with anyone who wanted it, and the room was sent out the old way: go in peace to love and serve the Lord. A fitting last word of the year from a church that had just spent an hour thanking him for a year some of them were glad to see end.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Acts 20:35](#)
- [Matthew 20:1–2](#)
- [Matthew 20:6–8](#)
- [Matthew 20:11–12](#)
- [Matthew 20:13–15](#)
- [Revelation 21:2–4](#)
- [Revelation 21:5–6](#)
- [Revelation 21:7](#)
- [Psalm 16:5](#)
- [Psalm 73:25–26](#)
- [Matthew 11:28–29](#)
- [Lamentations 3:22–23](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. When you read the grumblers' complaint in verse 12, where do you hear yourself in it — and what exactly are you counting when you do?
2. Matt said God's generosity is so extreme it eventually gets on our nerves. Who is someone whose welcome into the kingdom you would find genuinely irritating, and what does that expose?
3. Walk the ladder Matt used — the wicked man, the good man, the godly man. Which of those three do you unconsciously expect God to behave like when you have failed?
4. If the true inheritance is God himself and not the rewards, how much of what you want from him is actually him?
5. Where have you been dolling yourself up before going back to God? What would going straight to him look like this week instead?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TapMX6soshE&t=3946s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.