



**KIAMA ANGLICAN**  
CHURCHES

**Leadership Ethics - Spiritual Pride**

**Sermon - Steve Stanis**

**26 February 2023**

**Matthew 20:1-16; Leviticus 19:10-16**



I was a worker who was picked up at the marketplace as a vineyard worker. The year was 1987. I was in the Swan Valley winery region in Western Australia. A truck would arrive at sunrise and pick up any willing workers to pick grapes. I quickly became known as someone with dexterous secateur skills. I enjoyed this work and was quickly offered a career path in the grape industry.

It could have been fruitful, but love called and I returned home to marry Nicki. Interestingly it was grape picking four years earlier that led to me meeting Nicki... funny story... After finishing my HSC, all my friends went to help a fledgling boutique winery for a weekend. On Sunday at the end of the day, we were asked to come and learn about the finer points of tasting wine. I thought it would be a good moment for a quick wash down in the dam. I slipped in at the back, only to be asked to come to the front and show everyone all we had been taught. I picked up my glass and downed the wine in one mouthful, to the horror of the wine maker and to the mirth of my friends... one time I could 'wine' with success.

One of the people I met this weekend ended up introducing me to Nicki... long story... the connection is picking grapes. No huge insights into this parable, just a nice story...

Today's sermon is entitled *Spiritual Pride*. Tim Keller defines spiritual pride as, "The illusion that we are competent to run our own lives, achieve our own sense of self-worth and find a purpose big enough to give us meaning in life without God."

C.S. Lewis defines spiritual pride as "ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration on the self."

Spiritual pride could look like a reliance on Bible knowledge... of having all the answers... rather than a humble dependence on God.

Spiritual pride could look like our acts of service, turning this into **my** church, not **God's** Church.

In this passage from Matthew, spiritual pride looks like my sense of justice - I know better than God. **The ethics of this passage challenges our sense of justice.**

Justice makes us feel like there is an order and meaning to life; it gives us a sense of control and peace. One of the most frustrating things for us in faith is when God doesn't seem to be operating according to the rules of justice.

Jesus addresses this frustration head-on with this parable; this teaching is critical in learning to trust God and to be at peace with what he is doing in the world.

If you've ever asked God, "God, why did you let this happen to me (or them)—it doesn't seem fair!" this story

is for you. This parable should help you trust God and his work in the world.

Last week Trevor spoke to us from Matthew 19 about the rich young ruler. He was smart enough to know that his money would not buy him the Kingdom of God. He, like us, must admit that there's nothing we can do to enter the Kingdom of Heaven; Jesus has done it for us. We must admit that all our riches—whether monetary or spiritual—are ultimately worthless before God. We receive eternal life as an undeserved gift of grace. Sadly, this was too high a price for the rich young ruler. In today's passage, a master goes to the marketplace to hire workers, first early in the morning, then at 9am, then later in the afternoon at 3pm. Each time he offers to pay a denarius to the worker. At the end of the day, he lined the workers up to pay them; those he employed last were first in the line. Understandably, those employed from the beginning of the day felt outraged when they finally got to the front of the line to find out that all the workers received the same pay.

*The master said to them, "I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?"<sup>14</sup> Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you.<sup>15</sup> Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"*

When the Master said that, I imagine some of them probably thought, 'Well actually yes, I don't appreciate your generosity; I'd rather justice. I understand when you follow the rules; rules are predictable and fair.'

Remember every parable is teaching us about the Kingdom of God. So zoom out to the story of the Bible, to God's plan for his people. God calls us to be holy and righteous. We read a moral list in Leviticus. Our holiness has to be more than morality, although morality is part of it.

God says, "Be holy, for I am holy". Holiness means we are set apart. We are set apart exclusively for God. This goes beyond morality.

Belonging to God, living on his terms, delighting in him, obeying him, honouring him - these are more fundamental than the specifics of obedience we label morality. To be holy, we no longer live for ourselves. We live for God.

*1 Corinthians 6:19: You are not your own, you have been bought with a price.*

You are a recipient of free grace. In Jesus Christ the laws of Leviticus were fulfilled. You are clean and acceptable in him. Every part of your life has got to be holy. To be holy is to belong to God.

It's interesting when you consider that the Master of this parable could have avoided this whole issue by simply

paying the workers in the order he hired them. He could have given the first workers their denarius and sent them on their way. They would have been happy and none the wiser. But he insists on paying them in reverse order so that the first workers, who worked twelve hours, see that the workers who only worked one hour are getting the same as they were.

Jesus is using this parable to make a point. Jesus is saying there will be no degrees of reward in heaven.

The key to this parable, as with all parables, is context and this is Jesus' response to the rich, young ruler (and other people like him) who think they can earn eternal life or deserve the blessings of God. You don't want to receive what you actually deserve!

Jesus finishes the parable the way he finishes chapter 19.

*"So, the last will be first, and the first last."*

Better to be last in life, trusting in God's grace, than first, getting what you think you deserve.

So much of our spiritual pride comes from believing we should get what we deserve. Timothy Keller says there are five signs in this parable of spiritual pride.

### **1) Bitterness**

In this parable, the twelve workers are bitter at not being paid more because they think they deserve more.

But Jesus' point is that all blessing is a gift from God. Bitterness erodes our holiness by turning our eyes away from God and onto ourselves.

Ephesians 4:31-32 speaks directly to this:

*<sup>31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

None of us want to demand that God give us what we truly deserve. Instead, God gives us the undeserved blessing of forgiveness for our rebellion, and he sets us apart to enjoy eternal life with him. Knowing this, we should trust him with our issues in daily life.

## **2) Jealousy**

In this parable, the early workers were jealous because they thought they were more deserving than the later workers. We can be like this, looking around and questioning the opportunities of others, believing we deserve these things. When we are jealous, we are not trusting that God promises to provide our every need. Blessings of this world are not **owed** to us.

Understanding grace will change how we view them.

Jealousy erodes our holiness by turning our eyes away from God and onto ourselves.



Like the Master said to the late-day workers, Jesus has said, "Just trust and follow me! I'll take care of you." Do you believe this truth? When you do, jealousy is replaced by a thankful heart.

### 3) Anger

It is easy to feel anger or disappointment when God doesn't answer our prayers the way we want.

Thankfully, God's goodness in our lives is not in proportion to what we deserve. As I have said, it's a gift of grace. And—when we go through pain, it's not a punishment for bad living—because Jesus absorbed all the punishment for our poor choices.

*Romans 8:1 There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...*

We return to a place of trust. The weaker we feel, the harder we should lean into God... and the harder we lean, the stronger we grow spiritually.

Romans 8:28 says that God works for good for all who love him. Knowing this, my anger lessens, and I find peace to rest in the promises of God.

Colossians 3:12-15 provides the practical outworking of how to manage anger; this was taught to the first century church but some things never change.

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. <sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

#### **4) Insecurity**

When I am insecure with God, I need to please him. He loves you! Just be with him. Listen to the Holy Spirit speak into your life. Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to you. This is the transforming work of holiness, not JUST by outward practices but by a change of heart. God does the transforming. You do the adoring.

#### **5) Indifference**

Am I moved to action by the suffering of others? When you believe that the good things you are experiencing are the result of your hard work, you tend to be hardened toward those who have less and say, "Well, you're just getting what you deserve. If you had worked harder, you'd have good things too." That's what we see in this parable. These first workers aren't thinking about the

other workers; they are thinking, "You didn't work like I did. You don't deserve the good things like I do!"

Nothing in Jesus' story indicates these 'eleventh hour' workers are lazy. I would assume they were just as eager as the first workers; they just had never been given the opportunity.

We should use any position of privilege we have to empower others: JUSTICE, biblically speaking, is not just 'not cheating people', it is leveraging whatever position of strength you have for the empowerment of others.

When you see that you don't deserve salvation and blessing—that Jesus did all the work and you got the blessing—it will produce in you a generous spirit toward others and redefine your concept of justice. You'll go from indifferent to generous hearted.

There is no place for spiritual pride. In humility, embrace the grace of God and trust in the goodness of the Master who called you to follow him!

When you do:

- bitterness will be replaced by gratitude
- jealousy will be replaced with contentment
- anger will be replaced with peace
- insecurity will be replaced with assurance
- indifference will be replaced with compassion

*Hebrews 12:14 "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."*

*Amen.*



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