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Doing the Right Things for the Right Reasons
Matthew 20:1-16
October 13th, 2013, Jeff Germs

We've been looking at the parables of Jesus for quite some time now, mostly from the Gospel of Matthew, and particularly the kingdom parables – the ones that Jesus begins by saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like...". The reason that we have spent so much time in the gospels is because Jesus told us in the Great Commission that the things we are supposed to be doing while we are awaiting His return is to make apprentices of Jesus by teaching them to obey Him. Those were his marching orders to the disciples before he ascended to heaven – make disciples by teaching them to obey. That is his mandate for the church.

So, it only stands to reason that if that's what we are supposed to be about we need to know what Jesus said we are supposed to do. So, we need to immerse ourselves in the teachings of Jesus. Now, the kingdom parables are very important because in them Jesus tells what our lives will be like if God is ruling our hearts.

It's easy to read the parables in a sort of cursory manner without really zeroing in on our hearts. And a common way to deal with the teachings of Jesus is to say that He was just holding up some impossible ideals and He never really meant for us to live that way. Those teachings are just for the radicals – the pastors and crazy Christians – the fanatics. The everyday follower of Jesus isn't really meant to take it so seriously. But, if you take a close look at His teachings you easily see that they were meant for all of us. And he actually said that we are foolish if we don't obey Him.

Now, to be sure, the things that He tells us to do are impossible for us to do on our own, and so it's easy to get discouraged when you take a serious look at the teachings of Jesus. But, Jesus never meant for us to do the things He commanded us on our own.

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Acts 1:8 (NLT)

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

And even when Jesus gave us the Great Commission just before He ascended into heaven He said that He is not going to leave us alone.

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Matthew 28:18–20 (NLT)

¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

So, don't get discouraged at the great task He has given us. What we need to do is learn to rely on His Holy Spirit. I cannot stress this enough. We will not change without His power. We might be able to do a bit of cosmetic touch ups to cover up some blemishes, but we cannot do real lasting change without the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's so easy to give in to fear or discouragement when we take our eyes off Jesus. Just like Peter when he jumped out of the boat and walked on the water with Jesus for a few seconds until he looked down and saw the waves and got afraid. We need to constantly remind ourselves to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. We are sunk if we don't.

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John 15:5 (NLT)

⁵ ***“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.***

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So, **the first step** in living in the power of the Spirit of Christ is to confess this fact, “I cannot do the things that you have called me to. I cannot change. I need you, Jesus.”

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The **second step** is to practice daily depending on His Spirit. We have to enter into training with the Spirit of Jesus. The reason we have to train is because He is calling us to do things that aren’t natural for us.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV)

¹⁶ ***All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*** ¹⁷ ***that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.***

Once we begin this process of discipleship it’s important to be continually asking God to check the motives of our hearts.

David did this in the Psalms.

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Psalm 139:23-24 (NLT)

²³ ***Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.*** ²⁴ ***Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.***

The problem with us is that, often, we do not know what’s in our hearts. We need the Holy Spirit to probe our hearts and show us what is really there.

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Today we are looking at one more parables from Jesus. We typically call it The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. In it Jesus deals with the motives of our heart for doing what we do.

Motives are hard to figure out. Why do we do the things we do? Why do we do the things we know we shouldn’t do, or say the things we know we shouldn’t say? Why do we do the good things that we do or say the good things that we say? Motives are hard to figure out and we really need to have a healthy self-awareness in order to understand our motives.

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Closely related to motive is ambition. The dictionary defines “motive” as:

“The psychological feature that arouses an organism to action toward a desired goal; the reason for the action; that which gives purpose and direction to behavior.”¹

Ambition, on the other hand is defined as: ***“a strong drive for success.”***

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Now, ambition, in and of itself, is not wrong. It’s not wrong to want to be good at something. I think we all want that and it’s a God-given desire. As a matter of fact, Paul wrote this.

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Colossians 3:23 (ESV)

²³ ***Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,***

So, there is such a thing as godly ambition. It’s good to be ambitious, but doing the right things for the right reasons is vital. It’s not enough to just do the right things.

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¹ Wordbook English Dictionary

Doing the right things for the wrong reasons can lead to all kinds of unhealthy consequences.

I have to struggle with this question every time I step up to the pulpit to preach. Why am I doing it? Is it so that I can receive the accolades of people and hear people say, "Good sermon, Pastor"? Why do I get up here Sunday after Sunday and preach? What is the real motive of my heart?

Like I said earlier, motives are complex. As fallen human beings we will probably never have 100% pure motives. We may do something for altruistic reasons, but thrown in the mix will be some other less than holy motives, such as we want to be noticed or whatever. So, before we go any further, I want to make it perfectly clear that we will all struggle with a mix of motives for the things that we do.

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Struggling with your motives is not a reason for not doing the right thing.

If that were the case I would never do anything good. I've had people who say to me that they don't feel right about serving because they struggle with pride and they want to wait until their motives are one hundred percent pure. Let me tell you, you will be waiting until heaven. We do the right thing because it is the right thing to do, while struggling through our emotions with motive.

Let's take a look at our passage. We've already read it so we won't read the whole thing again, but I will paraphrase it and walk through it so that we can hopefully leave better understanding God's heart for us in our service to His kingdom.

Now before we do that, it's important that I point out that Jesus tells this parable in response to a question that Peter asked in **19:27**.

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Matthew 19:27 (NLT)

²⁷ Then Peter said to him, "We've given up everything to follow you. What will we get?"

Now, Peter asked question right after the rich young ruler had his encounter with Jesus. We talked about him the last couple of weeks. The rich, young ruler comes up to Jesus and asks what he needs to do to get eternal life and Jesus, knowing what his god was told him to sell all of his possessions. The man turned away sad because he was very wealthy. He turned down the deal of a lifetime.

Immediately following this, Jesus speaks directly to His disciples and tells them how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, meaning that it's hard for them to allow God to rule their hearts.

To which Peter replies, ***"We've given up everything to follow you. What's in it for us?"*** That's really what he's asking. "What's in it for me?" He reveals the motive of his heart.

Jesus patiently responds to this self-centered question by telling Peter that the things they have given up to follow Him are nothing compared to what they will receive for doing it. They have gotten a bargain.

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Then He says in verse 30,

Matthew 19:30 (ESV)

³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

And then He goes on to tell this parable. Now, before I get to the parable notice that 20:16 is very similar to 19:30.

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Matthew 20:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ ***So the last will be first, and the first last.***”

This is very important because it gives us the clue to the meaning of the parable. In literary terms it's called an **inclusio**. These two verses are literary bookends. The greatest will be the least, the least the greatest, the last first, and the first last. God's economy is completely different to ours. Between the bookends Jesus fleshes out what he means by them.

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He said that there was a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. What they would do in those days was go to the city gates where workers would wait for potential employers to come by and hire them for the day. The normal wage for the day was a denarius, and so they agreed upon the usual rate of pay.

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At the third hour, which was 9:00am he was passing through town and noticed that there were some more people who looked like they could use some work, so he in turn hired them telling them that they would be paid an appropriate amount at the end of the day.

Jewish law, from Leviticus 19:13 required that all workers be paid at the end of the workday so that the family could have money to purchase food. In those days, the average worker really did live from payday to payday. It took about a denarius a day to meet the basic needs of the average family.

Again at the sixth hour, or 12 noon, and then at 3:00pm he did the same thing. And finally at 5:00pm, about an hour before sundown when work would stop he went out and found more workers with nothing to do and told them to join the others in His vineyard.

That evening when things were shut down for the day he gathered all the workers and paid them starting from those who were hired at 5:00pm and moving down the line.

Now, I want you project yourself into this situation.

The boss pays a denarius to those who had only worked for about an hour. How would you have felt if you were on the receiving end of that kind of grace? I'm sure you would have expected to get something quite a bit less than that, but your employer knew that no matter what time you started you would still need a denarius to meet your needs, so, in his grace, he pays you much more than you deserve. How would you have felt? I am thinking that you would have been ecstatic. You would have been humbled by such grace.

Now, those who were hired first, and had worked a full day, saw this and I'm sure they were very excited too, because if he paid those who had only worked for an hour a denarius, he would most likely pay them a whole lot more. And so, their mouths start to water at the thought of how much it could be.

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They likely worked from 6:00am to 6:00pm. They should, then, get 12 denarii. The math is simple. They worked twelve times longer. And so, when their boss comes near them they eagerly and expectantly put both their hands out, thinking that they're going to need both of them to hold their loot, and he drops one measly denarius in their hands.

Immediately their innate sense of justice wells up inside them and they say, "Excuse me, but we worked 12 times longer than those free loaders that you hired at 5:00pm. This is not fair." They were naturally very indignant. They deserved more, they thought.

Well, the boss responds to their accusation that he has been unfair. And he begins very intimately.

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Matthew 20:13–14 (NLT)

¹³ ***“He answered one of them, ‘Friend, I haven’t been unfair! Didn’t you agree to work all day for the usual wage?’*** ¹⁴ ***Take your money and go. I wanted to pay this last worker the same as you.***

There was absolutely nothing unfair about this transaction. Had the workers who worked all day for the agreed upon price not seen what the others were paid; they would have been perfectly content. Their only complaint really was that their boss shouldn't have been gracious to those who started later. They compared themselves to the others and their hearts became filled with greed, venom, and ingratitude. They hated the fact that he was generous with people who didn't earn His favor.

Their boss continues.

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Matthew 20:15 (NLT)

¹⁵ *Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money? Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?*

It's the right of the landowner to be gracious if he so chooses. His grace given to one who worked less in no way diminishes the worth of the one who worked longer. There is some skewed thinking there.

The next question from the boss is the crux of this parable. ***Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?***

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That's the NLT. The NIV says, ***"are you envious because I am generous?"*** Literally, in the Greek, it is rendered, ***"Is your eye evil?"*** The KJV says that, basically.

The New King James says, ***"Is your eye evil because I am good?"***

The landowner knew that no matter what time the workers started they would need the same amount of money to feed their families, and so in his grace and goodness, he compassionately gave a denarius to those who started later so their needs would be met.

So, what Jesus was saying here was that if the disciples had their eyes fixed on temporal earthly things as the measure of their worth, significance, or security, it sheds light on the darkness of his heart.

He puts the cap on this parable with the same words that chapter 19 closed off with.

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Matthew 20:16 (NLT)

¹⁶ *"So those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last."* In other words, things in God's economy are totally different than what we think, in our own human thinking is normal.

Let's bring this home now.

Here are a few truths that we can glean from this passage. The overriding meaning of this parable is:

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- 1. If we think that we deserve something because of our hard work, commitment, and diligent service we have missed the point of and the true value of what we have done.**

Peter's question, ***"We've left everything for you. What's in it for us?"*** revealed that He had missed the point. He thought it was about Him and what he could get from following Jesus.

Remember in Matthew 6 Jesus said, if you are doing your deeds to get accolades from others you might get it, but that is all the reward you will get. You negate anything that God might have wanted to do for you. God's economy is one of grace. He loves to give good gifts to us, not because we might deserve it but simply because it is in his nature to give.

There are those of you here who have been Christians all your lives. Some of you have been at CRBC for many years. Others of you are brand new baby Christians and have just started your journey with Christ and with us as a church. You have all the same rights and privileges as those long timers. Nobody can say, "I've been at this church for decades. I have more say over how things should go around here."

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2. There is no pecking order in God's kingdom.

I think we are going to be surprised when we get to heaven as to who really had eternal impact while on earth. It may not be those that we think. When I think of the many people at CRBC who serve behind the scenes without any expectation of reward or a pat on the back or any recognition I am blown away with gratitude to God. I asked the staff to add up for me all the people who are serving in some capacity at CRBC and the numbers astounded me.

In **children's ministry** alone there are about 80 people serving. All totaled there are somewhere in the neighborhood of 250 to 300 people serving in various ways. Just on Sunday morning alone we have 50 people serving, from making coffee, to ushering and greeting, to helping Leora with **Christ Kidz**, to helping Steve with **ReGen**, or serving on one of our worship teams. And I don't hear anyone drawing attention to themselves and wanting recognition for their efforts. We have people who have been at CRBC for several decades working alongside others who have been here for just a few weeks. I want to congratulate you all for your service to kingdom of God at CRBC. There is no pecking order in God's kingdom.

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3. Motivation for service should come out of a heartfelt gratitude for what God has done for us. We should count it a privilege that God allows us to partner with Him. The motivation should be love for Him and others.

So, again, we should ask God to search our hearts. Why do I do the things I do? Why do I serve in the church? Why do I give? Ask Him to purify your heart so that your motives are in line with how he wants you to serve, not because we are going to get something, but simply because it gives us great joy to serve our risen King. And remember, as we said a couple weeks ago, we don't give to pay God back for what he has done. Nor do we serve him to pay him back. Our service flows out of our love for him.

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4. Don't stop serving just because you struggle with impure motives.

We all struggle. Two wrongs don't make a right. While you are serving, ask God to give you His kind of heart and motives that come from gratitude. Invite him into the struggle and allow the Holy Spirit to transform you.

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God has called each of us to partner with Him in His kingdom. He has given us a job to work together, to participate with Him and with each other. Some of us have been in the faith for as long as we can remember. Others have just started the journey. Each equally receives the grace of God in full measure, no matter how long we have been at it. There are no seniority privileges in God's kingdom.

And if you are wondering how you can serve in the church talk to Adrian or Robin. There is so much work to be done. We are always looking for more help. If you are breathing this morning, and are a Christ follower, God has given you gifts and talents that he wants you to use to build his church. One of the things we really need help with is our congregational care. We need people who are willing to visit people in the hospital, or those who are shut in in their homes for various reasons.

So, again, if you are wondering where you can fit in please talk with Robin or Adrian. There really is a place for everyone and there is tremendous joy that is ours when we are using the gifts God has given us. And by the way, thank you for your generosity in contributing to our Fill the Front food drive for the Food Bank.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story. (Ps. 107:1-2)



Doing the Right Things for the Right Reasons

Week of October 13th, 2013

Matthew 20:1-16

Objective: To allow the Holy Spirit to probe our inner motives so that we are focus on doing the right things for the right reasons.

Worship (5 - 10 minutes)

1. Spend five minutes in silent prayer asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
2. Have someone read Psalm 37 meditatively to the group.
3. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Welcome (5 minutes)

Icebreaker: Share a time when you enjoyed getting to know someone by working together with them.

Word (30-40 minutes)

1. What stood out for you from the sermon?
2. Read Matt. 19:27 - 20:16
Who is Jesus directing this parable to? What question is it in response to?
3. How did this parable make you feel? Do you identify with or relate to anyone in the story? Imagine yourself hired at the first, 3rd, 6th, or 11th hour. How would you feel about your pay?
4. Think back to the sermon. Why was a denarius the agreed upon pay for the first workers? How long were they happy with that?
5. Why were the workers who were hired first envious? Flesh this out. Why are we envious in similar situations? Can you relate to a sense of competitiveness when serving God?
6. On the other hand, have you ever felt left out, slow, undeserving for some reason, and someone welcomed you into the group?
7. The generosity of the landowner:
Consider the character trait that describes the landowner (v. 15). "Jesus patiently responded to Peter's question by telling him that the things they have given up to follow Him are nothing compared to what they will receive. They have gotten a bargain." What is this bargain? i.e. What did Jesus in fact say to Peter in response to his question? See Matt. 19:27-29.
What's the big problem with wanting what we 'deserve'?
5. What does this parable say about motives for serving in God's kingdom?

Work (30-40 minutes)

1. Quote from the sermon: "In the kingdom parables Jesus tells what our lives will be like if God is ruling our hearts." Now we will look at God's heart for us, His desire for us, in our service to Him.
2. Our envy:
Have someone read aloud the following passages while the others listen with eyes closed and consider the causes and effects of envy and God's better way:
Gal. 5:13-15
James 3:13-18
3. God's generosity:
Again, have someone read the following passage and everyone get quiet and think about God's generosity to us:
Col. 12-14
4. God's invitation to intimacy with Him:
Notice how the landowner addresses the envious worker in v. 13: "Friend..."
Eph. 1:6 (KJV) says that we are "accepted in the beloved." This is a beautiful place to be! We don't deserve to be there.

Jesus said "Remain in My love..Love each other as I have loved you...I have told you this so that your joy may be full... I have appointed you to bear fruit that will last" (John 15:9-16).

5. God's desire for us is that out of our intimacy with Him we will experience joy and be fruitful, and become like Him. We too will become generous. Instead of looking at others in a competitive way, we will also welcome them "into the beloved" and rejoice with their success.

Closing prayer

Father, we praise You for welcoming us "into the beloved", into Your family, for "qualifying us to share in Your inheritance in the saints", for promising to share Your glory with us at Christ's return. Forgive us for the times we take our eyes off of Your goodness and become envious of others. Thank you for Your generosity to all of us! Thank you for giving us joy, both to "the one who sows and the one who reaps" (John 4:36) and for allowing us to partner with You in the exhilarating (though difficult) and eternally valuable job of building Your kingdom.

Prayer

1. Take a couple minutes of silent prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to probe your inner most being to see if there is anything he wants you to work on.
2. Share answers to prayer and prayer requests and pray for each other.