

“My Own Ideas” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 17

September 20, 2026

- I. **Matthew 20:14-16** – ¹⁴ I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first last.”
- II. **In my younger years, I worked a lot of construction jobs.**
 - a. In the summertime between school years, I was a manual laborer working in framing, concrete, electrical, excavation, or industrial projects.
 - i. I just paid my dues no matter how bad the job was because I figured working hard at whatever job the boss gave me would probably get me a raise someday.
 - b. When I think back about some of those jobs, I had blisters on my hands... I was sore... and those employers got their money’s worth.
 - i. But as I think about this parable today, the boss or master of the house would have made me pretty unhappy.
 - ii. One of the companies I worked for required me to work from 6am to 6pm, seven days a week.
 1. If I worked all week, and then on Friday afternoon some laborer was added to my group and spent one hour glopping tar on concrete walls... then at the end of the shift, all the checks got handed out and his was the same as mine?
 2. The first thing I would think is whether this was the owner’s kid... maybe he was getting him started easy... but mostly I would have wondered what kind of company does that?
 3. Would I look for a new job? Maybe... or at least bring it up to the boss and ask how I get in on that same deal...
 4. The problem is that I would look at this situation and feel like I got taken advantage of... or my labor wasn’t worth as much... or it’s just not fair... or maybe I’m not worth as much to my employer as this newcomer.
 - c. Perhaps this is true on the level of worldly affairs, but remember, this is a parable about the kingdom of heaven... what the reign of heaven on earth means – and how God chooses to love people and give them mercy.
 - i. Yet, it’s hard not to put our worldly wisdom and understanding into the circumstances of our lives.
 - ii. All our lives we are trained up to work hard – whether it’s studying at school or working a job – and we will be rewarded with good things.
- III. **The disciples asked Jesus about their reward for what they sacrificed.**
 - a. In the verses just prior to our reading today, Jesus tells Peter that those who sacrifice for Him now will be blessed with “a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.” (Matthew 19:29)

- b. As the disciples were usually trying to figure out their order of importance, or who was the greatest, they kept looking at things from a worldly perspective.
 - i. Jesus wants all people to know that the reward for faith and following Him is eternal life... salvation... and that means everyone who believes in Him as their Savior and Lord.
- c. It's no different for us today, as the people who sacrifice much of their time, talent, and treasure for the Lord might sometimes look at the people who don't and judge them for their lack of passion and love for God's work.
- d. Our parable today is about a master of a house who goes out to find laborers to harvest his vineyard... five times throughout the day.
 - i. A day's labor was usually worth a denarius, so the first workers agree to the wage for a 6am to 6pm shift.
 - ii. Then, the master keeps going to where the laborers are waiting and calls them to go help in the vineyard... and they will receive what's fair... probably less than a denarius.
 - iii. The last guys get there at 5pm, which seems like a waste of time.
 - iv. Yet, beginning with those who showed up at 5pm, the foreman handed each worker a denarius... all the way up to the ones who showed up at 6am.
 - 1. Seeing the disparity... the unfairness of it all... the first workers complained... I'm sure thinking to themselves... if the 5pm guys got a denarius for an hour, I should get at least 12 denarii!
 - 2. Nope, the master tells them they got exactly what was promised, so don't question me if I want to give the last guy the same as you got.
- e. It all goes back to the way that God works in the world – backwards... He makes the last first... He makes the weak strong... He makes the broken whole.
 - i. We, on the other hand, look at what is first by worldly standards and hold that up... the winner, the hardest worker, the smartest, or the wealthy and famous person.
 - 1. We look at the strong... the leaders and athletes... the most capable and healthy... and place them on a pedestal.
 - 2. We look at the people who have it together... who are whole... and we appreciate and admire them...
 - ii. But what does Jesus say to us in this parable?
 - 1. The last will be first... and our inadequate, petty understanding of God's love and work in the world is not what matters... and thank God for that.
 - 2. You see, the Lord is full of grace and mercy... and my own ideas are often the exact opposite of what He has in mind.

3. God tells us, “I have My own ideas about what is right, fair, and good in My kingdom.”

IV. **God always operates with His way and His will rather than our own.**

- a. Our ideas will always be tainted by sin and often reject the wisdom of God... and so we must rely all the more on the Word and Holy Spirit to receive the best way forward... the Way, as in Jesus the Way.
- b. It never ceases to amaze me... but the Lord had His own ideas about how to save all of humanity... and it started with power shown through weakness.
 - i. Jesus came to earth in the weakness of a little baby, born into this broken and sinful world... and though He grew up without sinning Himself in any way... the world's sin (our sin) had to be addressed.
 - ii. Not born to wealth and power, Jesus led an ordinary human life – and suffered through all the trials and tribulations – and even worse, He was betrayed and abandoned, falsely accused, tortured, and executed on a cross.
 1. Through His death, Jesus became the only rescue from sin, as He took what was due to us – death and destruction – and paid the price on our behalf.
 2. No good work or any other thing we do can possibly equal the payment already made in Christ on Calvary – and the most amazing thing about it all comes from the fact that we are saved by grace through faith alone.
 3. Our God doesn't want us to use the wisdom of the world in order to figure out who's best or who deserves what... He reminds us that we deserve NOTHING, and we get everything by grace through faith – a pure gift of love – regardless of when that grace comes in a person's life.
 - iii. We have our own ideas about God's saving grace, but God wants us always to remember that His ideas matter most.
- c. One final illustration, as I remember a story from a professor named Tom Hufty who once gave his students a final exam they would never forget.
 - i. After all the late-night studying and cramming, they were finally ready to take their exam... and it was sitting on their desk face down.
 - ii. He told them to wait until he gave the signal, and then said, “Begin.”
 - iii. To their amazement, every single question had already been answered... and a note at the end said, “You will receive an A. You passed because the creator of the test took the test for you. Your preparation did not earn it. You have just experienced grace.”
 - iv. Then the professor addressed the class by asking what grade they received, and they all said an A.
 1. He then asked if they deserved it, and they answered no.

2. Finally, he asked how much of their work earned it, and they answered none of our work earned it.
- v. Then he said, “Some things you learn from lectures. Some things you learn from study. But some things you have to experience. Today you experienced grace.”¹
 - d. Just like all of us, we do not earn our way to the kingdom, because God’s mercy and grace are ours as pure gifts.
 - i. Through faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we shall receive the greatest blessing of all – an eternal life in the very presence of God Himself. Amen.

¹ Source: Christianity Today, submitted by Denise Banderman, Hannibal, Missouri