

You have shown us, heavenly Father, that our salvation in Christ is beyond all human understanding, and confronts man with much that seems absurd to human reason. Preserve us, O Lord, from the hypocritical notion that we can become much better than others, and thus reach a position where we may claim Your blessings and mercies as merits. Open our eyes, that we always recognize that we are paupers in Your sight, absolutely dependent on Your grace for all that we need as Your children. Keep us ever mindful of Christ's death, not for the righteous, but for sinners [like ourselves, in His name we pray]. Amen. (Luther for the Busy Man, ed. P. D. Pahl, pp. 98, 101-2)

[Jesus said:] "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. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. 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.' And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. 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.' 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?' So the last will be first, and the first last."

In Christ Jesus, who did not begrudge the generosity of His Father and willingly allowed Himself to be spent for us all, dear fellow redeemed:

Most of us have grown to appreciate the system of justice we have in our country, especially when we hear of foreign judicial systems. Although we are influenced by media which perpetuates a suspicious attitude toward our neighbors, so that the seriousness of the accusation changes it from being innocent until proven guilty, to being guilty unless or until proven innocent. Sometimes, even with that, the suspicions are still perpetuated. Yes, there are abuses of what we are guaranteed by our constitution, but compared to other countries our system still appears to be among the best.

But in the process of exercising our rights, we engage lawyers to help us to ensure that we receive fair justice. Yet, this pertains to our life in the kingdom of the world. It is entirely different when it comes to the kingdom of heaven. Think of it, you and I are guilty before God from the day we are

conceived and remain so all the way up to our death. In fact, death is our just dessert for our guiltiness in regard to the law of God. However, there is a path of escaping all such just desserts. It is completely unjust, but we love it. It comes out in the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Let us consider this **Blessed Injustice: One Bore the Burden and the Scorching Heat Alone.**

## I

And, of course, that One, Christ Jesus, willingly bore it, not for Himself, but for you, me and the entire human race. Consider how unjust it was. He was perfect in every way, yet He was punished for sin – punished with the due everlasting punishment of hell. It was not just for one other person, but for each and every person, beginning with our very first parents – Adam and Eve. It was also not just for a friend, or a large group of friends, but of hostile enemies who hated Him and His Father. That is what you and I are, my fellow sinners. Every sin against God’s holy law is a hate-crime, if you will; hatred toward God who demands holiness of living.

It was by grace alone that God was moved to make such a sacrifice. The next time you are tempted to cry out with outrage against some injustice committed towards you in this life, think of the unjust treatment beyond compare which happened to our Lord Jesus. By this great injustice we are spared the eternally just sentence of everlasting condemnation in hell.

Jesus’ parables were never said without context, so it is good for us to understand the context of what He intends us to learn through them. This parable follows upon two examples of people who did not understand how much had to be done to save sinners like us.

The first was the rich young man who approached Jesus asking: “what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” When Jesus reviewed the Ten Commandments with him, he responded unrealistically by saying: “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?” Jesus did not let him off with that empty boast. He touched upon his greed and “he went away sorrowful”. But his sorrow, it would appear, was not that he had failed in the required righteousness of the law, as much as he could not let go of his many possessions to follow Jesus.

Then the disciples marveled at this, considering a fellow Jew who seemed to be so very privileged in every way materially and spiritually and asked: “Who then can be saved?” Then Jesus declared: “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” It would only be on account of a great injustice – the punishment of the only holy human being, that everyone is now saved. With God, this alone is possible – and is done!

## II

How then does this come out in the parable of the workers in the vineyard? Sadly, you and I can relate to it so very well. Most of us have been Christians for a long time, some even from birth. We know well the account

of the injustice which the holy Son of God had to bear for us. Regardless of knowing this well, we know how quickly the cry of injustice can emanate from us when we hear of someone in the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of his/her life receive heaven. We may object internally that we have borne the burden and scorching heat of life-long cross-bearing following the crucified One.

Oh, certainly we can be generous with a person who has come to the end of his/her life and for the first time has heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, believed and is saved. But what about the gruesome murderers like Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer? It is reported that both repented of their sins and confessed Christ before they died. We can expect to see them welcome us into the courts of heaven. Is it fair? You have not committed such heinous crimes and yet your "reward" will be exactly the same. Does the thought of seeing in heaven others who have made your lives here miserable make you cry out for justice? That bully who made your life miserable as a child or an adult? That person who destroyed your reputation, so that you lost a job?

Then there is the matter of those, our brothers and sisters in Christ, who we can grant are saved, but in our opinion their level of piety has not reached ours. Certainly we are recognized in this life now by our Lord as those who do some things or refrain from other things and are thereby deemed to be more faithful, more loyal, more dependable – an example to others. Should not this count for something when you consider the heat of the day which we have borne?

No, not at all, my fellow redeemed! Our Lord is generous to us poor sinners without distinction. The work that avails before the throne of heaven is the work of the only One who bore the burden of the day and the scorching heat of our punishment, namely Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ask yourself, who before God in heaven was considered the last? The One who alone can say: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the beginning and the end." But the Last here in the quote from Revelation is not the same as the last in regard to our parable. The last in our parable is the lowest of all the lowly. Jesus descended into your depths of depravity, not that He shared in your miserable inherited condition, but He was nevertheless named as the lowest, most wicked of all of mankind. Jesus was charged by His Father with the sins of all sinners of all time.

So generous and gracious is your God toward you that you are given the full inheritance of everlasting life, which His only begotten Son alone deserves. Recently I read what I assume was a Christian trying to describe the uniqueness of the Christian faith and put it this way: "*In the Christian view: God offers salvation as a free gift to those who wish to receive it.*" Sad, salvation is a free gift, but not given to us because of our change of heart and desire to receive it. A free gift is a FREE gift. The nature of God's grace, is

that His love for us in His Son is given without any action on our part for which we cannot even take a little credit.

When we understand this, we see the utter ridiculousness of expecting more from God than others receive. By His gracious working through His Spirit in you, you are able to look upon God's goodness this way: *You, O Lord, are not only allowed to do what You choose with what belongs to You, but I love trusting all that You do for me. I extol Your generosity in Christ to me and to all mankind. Jesus alone is the One who bore the burden and scorching heat for all my sin. By Your grace I am willing to consider myself last before You, but trust that You have given me all good things for all eternity enabling me to share in the eternal inheritance of Your only begotten Son. What a blessed injustice indeed! Amen.*