

September 24, 2023 (Pentecost 17 A)

**Matthew 20:8-16**

***Expectation Recalibration:***

Have you ever experienced JET LAG? It happens when you travel long distances and your internal clock gets all mixed up. Let's say you fly to Europe or Asia – your body is going to think it's the middle of the day when the local time says it's the middle of the night. Your eating and sleeping schedule is thrown out of whack. You need to **recalibrate** your internal clock. The experts say the best thing to do is forget about what the time is at home, and force yourself to eat and sleep according to the local time. It won't take long to recalibrate your internal clock – then you'll be able to enjoy your trip.

The Gospel Lesson for today has to do with the **recalibration** of our **expectations**. Our expectations can easily get out of whack. So, Jesus tells us a parable that re-tunes them back in line with reality. In the first verses of **Matthew 20** Jesus sets the stage for us here. He finds people to go work in His field. Early in the morning He hires people willing to work for a denarius (a fair payment for a day's work). Then He goes out and hires people in the late morning / around noon / in the afternoon / and in the evening – shortly before quitting time. Now He's going to use this scenario to teach us critical spiritual information that **recalibrates** our **expectations** back in line with reality:

**Matthew 20:8-16** (NIV 11)

**8** “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

**9** “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. **10** So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. **11** When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. **12** ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

**13** “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? **14** Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. **15** Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

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

When the PAY was being handed out, everyone's EXPECTATIONS were overturned. Some people just got on the job – they didn't work hardly at all – and they got a denarius! A full day's wage! WOW! The boss is awesome! They expected very little but they received a whole lot. But, then the expectations of those who worked much harder and longer began to jump wildly. “*We worked several times harder and longer – surely several times the pay is coming our way!*” But – **nope**. Instantly they began to complain. “*That's not FAIR! Somebody needs to say something!*” Somebody does, and they ALL get a lesson in **expectation recalibration**. THEY don't decide what's fair – the Big BOSS does. It's *His* money – and He'll give it out as He sees fit. End of story.

I think the **disciples** really needed a lesson in **expectation recalibration** because, in the context of Matthew 20 – Jesus was teaching them things that were throwing their expectations all over the map. In Matthew 19 He had them wondering who could possibly be saved if we need to be PERFECT. He said it's harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Not many are going to make it. But, then He tells them that they will be rewarded abundantly in His Kingdom for all the sacrifices they made to serve and follow Him here. Up go the expectations once again. This parable **recalibrated expectations** and leads into Jesus telling them that He was going to face the Chief Priests and Teachers of the Law – who would beat and torture Him, and put Him to death. Then He would rise from the dead on the third day. It all seemed so CRAZY and so **unfair** – well, the King knows what He's doing and He decides what's fair. Case closed.

Do you think **we** need some **expectation recalibration** too? How long has it been since YOU grumbled and complained about something that wasn't FAIR and didn't meet up to our expectations? I'll go out on a limb and say: NOT LONG. The peace and incredible prosperity of our lives here has thrown our expectations all out of whack. We're very spoiled. We EXPECT a certain level of peace, health, wealth, success, admiration and respect – and, if we don't get it – we grumble and complain that it's not FAIR.

Our Gracious God has preserved these words for us to consider today because we need some **expectation recalibration**. This isn't just something that can improve our serenity and quality of life – this is **dead serious**. It relates to the very status of our soul, and could indicate that someone is in danger of eternal destruction in hell.

Could you imagine, (and it's probably not too hard) imagine someone from this spoiled society who expects to be rewarded for what (in HIS mind) was a very good life. He dies. Now he's standing before God and saying, "*Oh – good – you DO exist! I've got a bone to pick with you! I've always hated you for taking Dad too early, and now I get sick – pray like crazy – and instead I die too, WAY too early – it's not fair! If you're so loving and powerful, why did you allow all these horrible things to happen? Oh, I've got a lot of questions that you need to answer!!*"

**Yikes.** Based on **Matthew 7:23** I would estimate His response to be: "***I don't know you. I'm not accountable to you. Get out of my sight – forever.***" This is BIG-TIME serious. Jesus does us a huge loving favor when He **BLASTS** us with the reality that **God owes us nothing**. We have no rights / no bargaining chips / absolutely nothing to offer Him. We don't have the right to question Him, His Word, His authority, His decisions or actions. We have sinned against Him and deserve only His disgust and the eternal punishment that comes with being booted out of His presence.

**Yikes.** That's some **serious expectation recalibration** God's Word does for us. Then something BRILLIANT happens: We discover that God has **pity** on those who deserve nothing. He doesn't just toss a quarter at us – He gives us EVERYTHING that Christ won for us: forgiveness / peace / promises / protection / a new status / eternal salvation at His side in glory. Jesus said, "**The last will be first, and the first will be last.**" He **recalibrates our expectations** down to zero – then He picks us up and takes us from nothing and makes us into something powerfully impressive: His sons and daughters. This is vital to our relationship with Him. He loves us all and wants none of us to be like the people "at the back of the line" who think they can demand from Him more than He's decided to give us. He wants us to be more like the people "at the front of the line" – the last / people expecting and demanding nothing from Him – just receiving by faith God's mercy in Christ our Savior. Those who put themselves last become first (thanks to Christ) – and – those who put themselves first (who don't need Christ) wind up being last.

Does that "**click**"? "*OK – it's a spiritual concept involving my relationship with God – does it have anything to do with my day-to-day life?*" Well, there are about a million applications! When God **recalibrates our expectations** then we realize: EVERYTHING we have is a **GIFT** of His undeserved grace. My time here / my body / my health / my family / my spouse / my children / my job / my church / my belongings – ALL of them are undeserved gifts of God's grace.

*"But, one might say, I'm **disappointed** in myself, my life, my home, my spouse, my job, my kids, my church, my paycheck . . . . ."* Then you need some **expectation recalibration**. Forget about the way you look at your life and go back to God's Word. See all over again what it is you truly deserve from God. Now, thanks to Christ – look at what He actually gives you. It isn't fair. It's **amazing grace!** He's been WAY TOO GOOD to us – and what we've tasted so far is just the beginning.

*"But, having **expectations** is part of life – I need to have reasonable expectations of myself, my life, my spouse, my kids, people at work, people at church . . . . ."* Yes – **reasonable** expectations. The external circumstances of your life are nothing new and there's nothing all that unique about you. Therefore examine your reactions to the circumstances of your life. If you're always grumbling and complaining that no one and nothing is meeting up to your expectations – *then you need some **expectation recalibration**.* If, on the other hand, you set the bar so low that you are not held to reasonable standards and the people in your life are living up to anywhere near their God-given potential – *then you need some **expectation recalibration**.* Be in the Word of God. Let HIM adjust the way you see things and pray for His wisdom and power to recalibrate things for you.

I hope you realize – this isn't a **one-time thing** here. Just like the person flying all over the globe – our lives change frequently and they change fast. We find ourselves "all over the map". You will need **frequent expectation recalibration**. Get back in the Word and connect with God's wisdom and power. The **Law** of God will expose your unworthiness and bring you to your knees in repentance – and – the **Gospel** will help you see the boundless Grace and Power we have in Christ alone. He'll help you see that everything – even the challenges before us – are really **GIFTS**. He'll help us grow in wisdom so that we don't expect too much or too little from ourselves and those around us.

Just one closing thought: *What does **God** expect from us?* His expectations of us are perfectly tuned into what He's given us and the situation around us. He won't expect too much from you – and – He won't let you just slide on through. The path before you is just right for you. Whether we're "in the field" working for barely an hour, or if we're here bearing the brunt of the hard work, sacrificing for His Kingdom, and really feeling the **HEAT** of it – all of us are at work here. **Expect that.** Once the work is done, then we can all enjoy the reward Christ has earned for us and God so freely and graciously has given us. Indeed our Heavenly Father is very **generous** – He's **BEYOND generous**.