

Matthew 21 shares a story of Jesus. Two sons inherited a family business which involved incredibly productive vineyards. The sons were of the age, and had watched how things worked and it was now their moment in the sun.

Dad brought them both to the breakfast table and said, "Today, I would like you to go out and manage the vineyard. You are ready. I am getting old. The two of you need to now take my workload and make it yours. You are ready."

The first son said, "Sorry Dad, I would rather be with my friends. I have decided I don't want to work for you." (But later on he changed his mind, and carried out his duties as a faithful son.)

The second said, "Yes, I will work." (But later he changed his mind and refused to work.) So, Jesus asked, who treated the father fairly? Which of the two did as asked? The son who said "no!" or the son who "lied?"

In a sense, both had treated Dad unfairly, one who was disrespectful and first and the second who lied. And yet and yet there was still a chance for each to repent. One came back to his senses while the other walked away.

The reality is that the Father treated each son fairly, and allowed the one who had been disrespectful a second chance. We might call that "grace!"

Is it fair that some countries struggle with famine, while we live in a country that has so much food we don't feel guilty wasting what others would kill for? Is it fair so many live with no health care yet we complain because the best health care in the world has a price? The questions go without end.

I had a conversation once with someone whose life seemed to be falling apart. They had endured a difficult tragedy in their family, were just coming to terms with that and then faced another. And another. And for understandable reasons wondered what they had done wrong and why God was allowing so much pain in their lives? They wanted to ask God, "why don't you stop; we have had enough!"

We have all had similar moments and reactions when life doesn't seem fair. But let's ask another question. When life is full of blessing and health, and jobs that are wonderful and a family that has not issues, do we ever stop and say "God, why don't you stop blessing my life, I have too much, don't give me more!"

We like to complain, don't we? Unfair is just another definition of sin, and the human condition is full of that. There is no one who has not lived with what is unfair – no matter what you think -- but it really doesn't matter anymore does it? What is "fair?" What is "foul?" What is good? What is bad? What is deserved? What is not deserved? How do we accommodate so much unfairness or so much undeserved fairness?

Who died and made us kings? Or did we forget that our King died to give us life and allow us to live as servants, following the example of his servant love for us?

In baseball lines are painted on the field to differentiate between fair or foul. When a ball lands, we know whether the ball is fair or foul – or for our sake this morning, *fair or unfair*. And now instant replay even allows for a second chance to get it right ... sort of like “grace.”

“Unfair” means not fair. And anything unfair certainly feels “foul” to us – right? When something is the way we want it, we assume that is “fair” and good. So, what is deserved in your life, and what is not? What is fair and what is “foul?”

You do see the problem! Fairness is a matter of perspective! And what is fair to one might be unfair to another, and *visa versa*. So how then shall we live?

In Ezekiel’s day, Israel complained about unfairness and God’s question to them was: “Have you considered that maybe you are being unfair to me?” God had blessed them so richly, but they felt entitled, they enjoyed their prosperity, and they had grown too accustomed with selfishness to serve God. They wanted to complain every time a cloud came into their lives, but didn’t have time to thank God for every blessing and gift that was certainly not deserved.

In Philippians, Paul wrestles with similar issues. He says, “rather than discuss what is unfair or fair according to the worlds’ standards “let each of you look not to your own interest but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Jesus Christ.”

In Christ we are called to a new perspective, and it has nothing to do with fair and unfair but the first love of a loving God.

Adam and Eve tried to get God to see it their way – they thought that would be fair. Jesus died to get us to see it God’s way. His sacrifice certainly wasn’t fair – but are we going to complain about such a gift? You see life is not about fair or foul but about servant love and eternal peace.

Rather than seeking “fairness,” Jesus surrendered everything and became a servant to sinful, dying people; for no other reason than love! Paul said, “rather than arguing about what is or isn’t fair, learn from Christ, empty your fears and your worries, your bragging and your successes and serve each other!”

What do we achieve or accomplish when we are preoccupied with the standards of someone else? When life seems unfair for us or someone else? As Christians, doesn’t our perspective change with Paul’s advice?

In recent years there have been so many attempts at making everything fair. Some suggest reparations for slavery, or extra punishment if “hate” is part of a crime. Some insist on changing the language of the Bible so translations don’t offend anyone in our culture.

Of course it is only fair to tax those who make more than I do, or ignore forgiving others who really don’t deserve it. All of us can find something unfair in life and suggest how it could be made fair. And yet, would it ever be possible for life to be “fair” for all?

On the other hand, how can we complain about what is “unfair” unless we first talk about a baby in a manger and a Savior on a cross? Is there anything remotely more unfair than that?

Grace is what is unfair! Easter is unfair! Baptism is unfair. Communion is unfair.

What a good deal, that God has treated himself so “unfairly” for us ... so that we who are so concerned about fairness will learn that life isn't about fairness but about grace, in which God offers himself no matter what life throws our way!

For the most unfair thing of all (death) has been erased ... and now dying people become Jesus' lights in a dying world. Isn't the Gospel full of irony?

So when you are tempted, next time, to start complaining about what is unfair, take another look at the cross and empty tomb. There is only one thing perfectly unfair and that is the extent of God's love for me. What great news, despite any other news or facts in life.

And, don't think this means we are to simply roll over and play dead no matter what is going on around us. That is not the message. The tomb is empty and the dead are raised.

We are called, no matter what to grow in our relationship with God and share his love with those around us. It is simply that this changes our perspective and empowers our joy.

The reality is that life is never fair. But the good news is that God is always surrounding us with love, giving us second chances, and calling us, despite our selfish ways to go and work for him and with him each and every day.

No matter what, is there news any better than that!?