

Septuagesima: Matthew 20:1–16

Don O'Connor

15 February 2004

Some people have made faith a work.

I did want to impart a spiritual gift to you that I have received. Of course, it comes through Jesus, The Word of God. Everything comes to Him. He is. Like Bernie said, we're open vessels. Praise God, that the excellency would be of God and not of us. Nevertheless, he does speak through us, earthen vessels. Amazing the treasure that is hidden. And it is hid from the wise of this world and the prudent. In the world, people like what is useful. But in the Lord, what appears to be un-useful, you know...

I wanted to talk to you a little bit and go over the thing about stories. I know David has been touching on it.

Article by Douglas Wilson on Loving the Story:

One of the principle duties of parents is the inculcation of godly loyalties in their children. One of the principal instruments for accomplishing this is the right use of story. Little children have a hunger to identify, that is, to take sides.

I liked it when they were singing A Mighty Fortress – boldly. It is a story. Hebrews do not shun from stories. They tell little children that Pharaoh kills babies. Pharaoh kills baby boys. And of course, little children begin to take sides. It is very clear that Pharaoh is the bad guy. Stories.

As parents, we are called to continually tell our children the story, which is comprised of many stories so that they would take sides. A lot of children today don't know what side to take. When you bring forth our story they begin to take sides. As they grow older, they should be growing in maturity so they are able to see and identify

The other side of stories is abstractions. A lot of times when we're preaching scripture, if the children don't know the stories that the abstractions are coming out of it is hard for them to

grasp. But if they are nurtured in our story, then they begin to grasp the concepts, even the abstractions.

I'm going to once again open to Luke 24:

I've never heard this chapter. When you say, "Turn to this scripture," a lot of times we say, "Oh that." "I know that." I don't know that.

It is where Jesus has been it came to pass...

Luke 24:15-16 (KJV) And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. [16] But their eyes were holden (blinded) that they should not know him.

Another gospel says that he showed up in a different form. The Lord likes to show up in different forms today, too.

Luke 24:17-21 (KJV) And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? [18] And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? [19] And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: [20] And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. [21] But we trusted (past tense) that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.

Luke 24:22-25 (KJV) Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; [23] And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. [24] And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not. [25] Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

In verse 25 he said "Oh, I can understand your sadness. I know what was happening. You had a lot of hope that he would meet your heart-felt needs, kill the Internal Revenue and the Romans and take care of everything for you." No, this is not what He says. He actually says, (Luke 24:25-26 (KJV))

Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: [26] Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

Luke 24:27 (KJV) And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

So they didn't know the story. They were expecting a triumphant Messiah. A triumphant Messiah who would do some magic; turn rocks into bread and do magical feats. As you follow Jesus' ministry signs and wonders cease at one point. He says, "I'm going to the cross." And, of course, this is not what they wanted. Like Peter, "may it never be that you'd suffer." But He goes and He says, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things." So we have suffering. And then he shows them himself, starting with Genesis, right through to Malachi. And you can see in stories of the persecution of Christ in Joseph, his brothers, all the way through. If you know these stories you begin to have an understanding which they didn't have at this point.

Of course, what are the stories beginning with Moses and all the prophets. These are the stories that nurture our children. Christ is in the Old Testament. Christ is in the Law of Moses. Christ in the beginning of Jesus, the seed, and the promised seed. In Leviticus, what is talking about the priesthood, is pointing to Christ. Everything points to Christ. And suffering, as we have been taught, is a thing that we naturally don't like. In fact, the theologian of glory in us thinks suffering is evil. And like these men, they may as well have said, "I think we'll celebrate Bad Friday this year." It's Bad Friday. But if there is one thing the Church has gotten right all the way from the beginning, even through the dark ages and Medieval period, they understood one thing; it was Good Friday. They got that right. But from their perspective, these men who were sad as they reasoned, it seemed like Bad Friday to them. Their hopes, their dreams... But it was founded on a wrong story, what they thought and expected. It was a wrong story. So they are going back and saying, "Well, we did hope..., but this Christian live is just, you know... So I think I'll just go back to wherever I live, Emmaus, or wherever. You know, I believed he was going to make everything go away. I got saved and I still find some things in my life that are sad. Some hang-ups in me that I just haven't hung up and I just don't know how. Not only that, I'm just not prospering the way I thought, and this and that..." We can go through that whole thing, but it comes out of the wrong understanding, a wrong perspective.

So he expounds to them, he opens up the scripture.

Luke 24:28-29 (KJV) And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. [29] But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them.

But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us. This is amazing. He calls them fools and slow of heart to believe and he talks about suffering and they constrain him. He's talking about a thing we don't like to hear. We don't like to hear about suffering. We think suffering is evil, but as has been noted, if you love someone you suffer. Love causes suffering. Children cause suffering. Suffering is not always evil; oftentimes it humbles us. Other times, it doesn't have to. A lot of people have suffering and they hate God for it. I know, I've done it.

But here, they say, "well, even though you said suffering and fools, why don't you stay." And they constrained him.

Luke 24:30-31 (KJV) And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. [31] And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

As he broke the bread, in the communion, our eyes become opened. And then, of course, what he does is vanish out of their sight.

Luke 24:32 (KJV) And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?

So daily we can be walking somewhere, in the wrong direction, and you don't know how he's going to show up, in what form. He is the living Word, he is in and among us; Christ in and among you – the Word of God – the Living Word.

I just want to remind you of some of the stories. The primal story of Israel, I would say, and Deut. 6 reiterates it, but it's basically, we were slaves in Egypt. We were all slaves of sin. We were slaves. I remember when Bernie was talking about 31 years ago when I got here, my wife and I were separated for two years. We were just separated. It was over, our marriage. But the Lord, he was just getting ready. We were married 16 years without the Lord. But the Lord brought us together. And it was glorious. I was telling Dacie, today, something happened to me as I was watching the children come in, it was bringing back a memory of when I'd go to the Vet's Haul on Sunday, when we used to have services there, and as I walked in on Sunday mornings my face would hurt from smiling. You know, when the muscles hurt so bad that you

can't stand the pain. So I'd go in the men's room and go behind one of the doors there and I'd calm down. But I was getting that same thing today as you were walking in because I felt the presence of the Lord, in you earthen vessels. Some of you may have had a fight on the way to church. It doesn't matter. Somebody might have been mad at their parents, or their children, but none of that matters because of the Lord.

You could start right in Genesis 3 and see that there is a story of the fall of man and the promised redeemer, the seed of the woman, which is the Church. But the whole Old Testament has profound stories in it. I think it is the story about God saving losers; God who seems to become the defender of the impossible situations. That what reminded me when we got here not that we aren't still losers, we are, it has just become more clear to us what we are. We didn't know it for a while; we thought we were winners.

But the primal story of Egypt could be Passover. The story of Passover is an amazing story. God is smart; he knows we forget quick, so he even has a Passover Feast in the Old Testament, which is yearly, so that you have to go through these stories; a man takes a lamb, a lamb for every house. The beginning story – God says, okay I've done nine plagues and I'm going to do one more on Egypt, but I'll tell you what: You take a lamb for your house. Every man is called to have a lamb for his house. Put the blood over the doorpost and when the angel of death comes, when he passes over he will not strike your firstborn. Blood – point to Jesus, the Lamb of God. Everything pointing to Jesus there.

So it goes on with all kinds of stories about losers. You know the story of the lepers; we're talking losers here. Have you ever felt like a leper, an outcast; you've blown it so bad you smell, or something. You know – leprosy. It is a bad disease. It's contagious. Don't come near me. There were the lepers. There were lepers in 1st Kings, the city is in a famine, but the lepers go out – the losers go out and save the city. God chooses the least, the little, the last. He seems to like people in last place. When Israel is weak, God comes. In 2nd Chronicles 20 they are surrounded by a superior enemy, Israel, and Jehoshaphat cries out and says, "Lord, we can't deal with his. Our enemies, the Syrians, are too strong. We don't know what to do. We don't have the strength. But our eyes are on Thee, Lord." And, of course, the Lord sends ambushments and wastes the enemy. In their weakness, in the king's weakness, he cries out.

Stories – women who have no children – Hannah cries out. She is barren. Sometimes in our life we feel barren of peace or joy. She cries out and the Lord hears her and gives her a son. And she gives that wonderful prayer.

Mary continues it in Luke. God exalts the humble and abases the proud. But humble, what's that?

A passive work. Read the story of David. He was a king. He got proud. He got so proud that he entered into adultery, murder, treacherous murder using cunning and deceptiveness to have Uriah, Bathsheba's husband killed. He was the same David, though, who earlier in his life he cuts the garment of Saul in the cave (remember that story?). His heart smote him. He just cut off a piece of Saul's robe and stood on the other side, saying, "Look, Saul, I'm not trying to kill you. When you went into the cave, I was in there, and just to show you I have a piece of your robe. I could have killed you. You were weak, but I didn't do it." But it says that his heart smote him. So there are two David's here. You could say, *Simul iustus et peccator* is here. He is simultaneously righteous, you know, the sweet psalmist of Israel, God's anointed, a man after God's heart, and yet what sin he find in his own heart. It reminds me of another story. After Nathan the prophet tells David a story about a man who stole a lamb out of another man's flock, rich man took the lamb... David rises up and says that that man should die. Of course, if you're judging your brother look out! Those words came to him, "You're the man, David."

If God marked iniquity, who could stand? But He doesn't. And he sends people to us that no longer are imputing sins to us. He sends His living Word, a word of forgiveness. But only if we can acknowledge our sin.

David wrote a psalm – you know this psalm well, Psalm 51, after David went through that experience. The title of this psalm is "To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." That's what this psalm is about. Right off the bat David, when the pronouncement comes, "You're the man," he says, "Forgive me, Lord." Forgive me. And the prophet says, "You won't die – God's mercy has found you."

Psalm 51:1 (KJV) To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Here we have, in this Psalm and many Psalms, and in the Old Testament, we have the Gospel. As you read it, you begin to see the Gospel was always here.

Wash me – baptism.

Psalm 51:2-4 (KJV) Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. [3] For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. [4] Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

Against thee, thee only, have I sinned Have you ever wondered about that, if you were Uriah how you might think about that? But then you bring it into the New Testament and Saul is riding hard to Damascus, a voice comes out of the sky. Saul is persecuting Christians. But the voice doesn't say, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Christians and the brothers?" It says, "Why are you persecuting me?" Same thing. Against Thee and Thee only. When I persecute the least of the brethren I'm persecuting Christ. And if I persecute hard enough, I can even crucify Christ afresh; if I'm thinking evil and speaking evil. That is sin. If I'm thinking evil, I get cut off. Have you ever been cut off?

Old Testament stories: Remember Nebuchadnezzar? It says that he got cut off. The prophet Daniel brought him a word but he wouldn't heed, wouldn't turn. He walked into the palace of Babylon and said, "Look what I built. Look at this great thing I built." And immediately he was smitten and became like an ox. He ate grass. Proud. But God did a work in him. God humbled him.

Every bit of humility we have is passive. I'm not into getting humbled, are you? No way! The natural man is proud. But God, in his mercy, lets us go through sufferings. He let David go through sufferings. One of the sufferings of Nebuchadnezzar was that he lost his counselors when he went and ate grass. Grass is like the carnal mind – all flesh is grass. So he ate grass and became like a beast until he knew that The Host High rules. Only until you know The Most High rules in any situation you're in right now... We get in situations every day. It could be anything; relationships, finances, etc. Do you know in that situation that The Most High rules? That's the way out of it. The way out of the situation is to know that The Most High rules, not the situation or the circumstances; they don't rule – The Most High rules.

So David says, "Against Thee have I sinned and done evil in Thy sight." Many interpreters will tell you that Psalm 32 is also David's response to God's forgiveness. Here, in the Old Testament, is more Gospel:

Psalm 32:1-2 (KJV) A Psalm of David, Maschil.

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. [2] Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

If you bring that over to the new Testament, to Romans 4: Romans 4:6-8 (KJV)

Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, [7] Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. [8] Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

Guess what, you're the man that is blessed. God is no longer imputing sins to us. He has reconciled us. He has blotted out every sin. Blotted out. It is good to acknowledge them, though, because we can go along thinking we don't need forgiveness. This is a dangerous place to be, because forgiveness is here all the time. I think when I wake up every morning I need forgiven. How about you? While you were sleeping an enemy may have sowed seeds, you know, in your mind. Maybe you were dreaming. Sometimes I've gotten up at 2:30, 3:30, you know, the midnight Rambler has been messing with my brain. Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning, because in the morning I am awakened to the Lord, to His voice. His voice may be in the meeting of the brethren, in the daily baptism. Or even in the people you meet in the world. God can speak to you in the people in the world. As you're caught up in someone besides you, or me I'm speaking of, of course.

This is such an amazing thing here, though, being talked about. Look at verses 31 of Chapter 3 while we're speaking of the law. God shows up in the law.

Romans 3:31 (KJV) Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

We establish the law, but we also through faith receive Christ who is the fulfillment of every law. God has already fulfilled every law and has imputed that to your account. See, when the enemy comes he keeps records of everything. And sometimes I've been like the enemy, I've kept records on people. I know some things they did that I didn't think they should do, or whatever. Don't do that. Why? Because Christ has fulfilled the law, and it is Christ who fulfills every single law – no exceptions. Somebody said, "But what about my flesh?" Don't worry about that. God has got that. God let you have it, didn't he? Couldn't he have drowned you and taken to heaven when you got baptized? "Stay down now. Don't get up." But he let you get up, didn't he. And you're here in this world, even with a flesh. But as you are led by the Spirit,

God takes care of the flesh. The flesh and the heart they fail us; that's what David said. But God is our strength. God is the strength of our lives.

There are stories – all kinds of stories. You know, a woman has nothing to eat, a widow woman. There is nothing in her house. A prophet comes to her. She says, “I don't have anything except for me and my son for one more day and then we're going to die.” He says, “Well, make me a cake.” Strange thing, isn't it. Bake a cake. If you knew he was coming you would have baked a cake. It's an old song. Because when the prophet comes, he's a prophet of the Lord. Prophets of the Lord have nothing new to say. They have nothing original to say whatever. And you all have got, right now, the Spirit of Prophecy, which is the Testimony of Jesus, the Word of God, in your hearts to be spoken, given. Your life to be broken bread.

Who hears this? The psalmist says, “The humble hear and are glad.” Who are the humble? Those who God has humbled. Sometimes children are humble, but then they get a little older. You know. They start knowing. But for us, God does that work; the Holy Spirit does that work of humbling us, until we finally... Paul said, we were pressed out measure in Asia, so that we would no longer trust in ourselves, but in God who _____. In Hebrew, God is not just g-o-d. In Hebrew, God is always a god who has done things and does things, and will yet do things. This is a healthy view, among other views of God. Not just “G-O-D.” “We were pressed out of measure in Asia that we would no longer trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.” What's my problem if I have a God who raises the dead? Then what? “Well, I don't know if I can believe that. How can molecules get back together, etc.?” Wait a minute! No one can believe anything except the gift of God. Faith is something outside of us so we always know that faith is a gift, for it comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. So you could say that the Word of God is Christ. The gift of God is the Word, but it comes to us, faith, outside of us. It is not something I would have believed.

Stories:

In Psalm 32 is the gospel. We are the passive receivers of everything that God has given. Everything we received. Our story.

In Luke 24 He goes back and tells them something.

There is something I did want to share. I've seen phenomena. I want to quote this man, because even though you've probably heard it, it doesn't matter. You know how forgetful we get. We need daily remembrance. In fact, in Hebrew one of the things that is important is

called the work of remembrance. God knows. That's why he has so many feasts in a year, because he knows we'd forget. Ok, we're going to have get the lamb together; we're going to have to get the herbs together, we're going to have to do t his thing and that thing, so we remember that we were slaves in Egypt and it wasn't our reason that got us out. That's how we got us there anyway. But God had a plan to humble us for 430 years. Huhhh? God had a plan. You know, when you've been a slave and you're released, there is a jubilee – there's a party. Christ, now, in the New Testament, is our eternal, ongoing Jubilee that was pointed to in Leviticus 25. In the Jubilee year everybody got out of debt. If anybody owed you anything, you'd better collect because you couldn't hold him to anything at the end of 50 years. That points to Christ in you. Does anybody owe you anything? Is somebody indebted to you? Have you let everybody go? Has somebody done something to you that they need forgiven for, or do you still have them in jail – still have them in debtor's prison? Everybody out! It's the Year of Jubilee in Christ. It's the end of the age. The eschaeton (spelling?) has come in now, into the old age. The new age has come in Christ. It's nothing the world calls the new age. It's been here for over 2000 years. Christ is the new age. He is.

But I wanted to get practical for a minute. Remember, we're talking about stories. In James 5 it says to confess your faults one to another. That's simple enough, isn't it? It would be great if you had a list of your own faults and you went around confessing them; everybody confessed their faults to one another every day. You know what would happen? Liberty. Jubilee. But there is a tendency to hide my faults. Who me? So Dietrich Bonhoeffer says:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, Pages 103-112

He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. It may be that Christians, notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer, and all their fellowship in service, may still be left to their loneliness.

Have you ever known a Christian who was left in loneliness? Sure.

The final break-through to fellowship does not occur,

You'd be very busy doing services for God, but in no real communion or fellowship. Why?

because, though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the un-devout, as sinners.

I wanted to talk to you a little bit about the fellowship of sinners. Again, *Simul iustus et peccator*. There are two – one in us who is very sensitive to God and the Holy Spirit, but there is another, a sinner. You're simultaneously, totally justified, stand perfect complete before God, incapable of sinning (whatever is born of the Spirit cannot sin). But there is another one. This is the one who gives us trouble.

though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners. The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner

Have you ever been in a place where no one is allowed to be a sinner? You got a list on them. This is a daily experience. You can totally be unaware that you are holding a list, or get into a bickering, picking place of you didn't do this, or you didn't do that, or why did you do that? But the minute you allow everyone to be a sinner, fellowship can occur.

The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous.

I guess this man, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, knows what he's talking about here.

So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we are sinners!

That part of us in a sinner – not the new creature.

But it is the grace of the Gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that it confronts us with the truth and says: You are a sinner, a great, desperate sinner; now come, as the sinner that you are, to God who loves you. He wants you as you are; He does not want anything from you, a sacrifice, a work; He wants you alone.

You do not have to go on lying to yourself and your brothers, as if you were without sin; you can dare to be a sinner. Thank God for that; He loves the sinner but He hates sin. Christ became our Brother in the flesh in order that we might believe in him. In him the love of God came to the sinner. Through him men could be sinners and only so could they be helped.

He didn't come for the godly. He didn't come for the righteous. He came for sinners, and he's still coming. Like Luther said, he comes daily, hourly and minutely for us. But if we're hiding; maybe you need a prophet to show up and tell you a story, like David. Imagine, David is going along for a whole year in a pious façade. He's probably, totally unaware of it. He's got the

affairs of the kingdom to deal with. This person is here. Dispatches from over here. The war is going on. Wait a minute, David, you're a murderer, an adulterer, and worse yet, you're a Pharisee. You heard somebody else did it and you want to kill him for doing less. David.

Jesus is of the tribe of David and called Son of David. He's not ashamed to be called the Son of David.

So our fellowship, breaking through to Community. This can happen, even in a pious community. Once sin is acknowledge it has lost all its power – once you confess all your faults. You don't have to confess it to everyone. You can confess it to one brother and you're restored to everyone, or one sister. This should be our ongoing life. Rather than being defensive and say, "Well, I didn't do that. There were extenuating circumstances." We can say, "It's true. Forgive me."

The expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power. It has been revealed and judged as sin. It can no longer tear the fellowship asunder.

When will this happen? When there's that grace of God operating. When we allow one another, in all of our human frailties, to be human, to be that part of us. Stop and think of how many times people are separated over some thing someone didn't do, or some little look someone didn't give you, or that they gave you a look. Leave your gift at the alter, Scripture says, and get it right if you're offended because you're keeping someone out of the Jubilee. Today is the day everyone is set free – everyone. You're commanded to love one another and he's given us the strength to do that – his strength – his love shed abroad in our hearts. He fulfills every verb he activates. And basically, his commandment is that we love one another, so that your joy will be full. Anybody not feel joyful today? Who have you been thinking about? What have you been thinking about?

Ultimately, this gospel, once you receive it, is total forgiveness for everything. It then leads you into the world of your neighbor. It drives you out of your mind, your thoughts, your cares, and your fears. Cares choke the Word of God.

I was sharing with the brothers yesterday about a song I heard, it's called "Things Have Changed." And the chorus line keeps repeating: "I used to care, but things have changed." "I used to care, but things have changed." It's got other lines too. "I'm in love with a woman that don't appeal to me." Aren't you? I'm in love with you – the Church. Thesis 28. Jesus; there's nothing attractive or comely about him. Look where he's born. Look where he lives. Oh that

our eyes would be open to see beyond the tents – to see beyond the vessels – to see Christ in the least weakest of brethren, even in the brethren that still have sins in their life. I don't know anyone that doesn't. Do you? But why hide it? Because they'll only set me up as a judge.

The expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power. It has been revealed and judged as sin. It can no longer tear the fellowship asunder. Now the fellowship bears the sin of the brother.

We bear one another's burdens.

Now he stands in the fellowship of sinners who live by the grace of God in the Cross of Jesus Christ. Now he can be a sinner and still enjoy the grace of God. He can confess his sins and in this very act find fellowship for the first time. The sin concealed separated him from the fellowship,

You know, it's really hard to confess sin when I don't confess sin. If I'm continually confessing sin...

One advantage you do have as a preacher is that you get to confess before the congregation, all the time. I thank God for that. I thank God that I can stand before the church and say, "I'm sorry. I did these things. I was selfish." It cleanses you. But you don't have to be up here to do it. You can just tell anyone. So we break through to the cross and there is a freedom.

There is a scripture that says, "He that covers his sin will not prosper." And that doesn't mean just money; prospering in your health, and everything. People can actually get sick. Of course, the enemy is always there to maximize and magnify our sins. And Jesus did say a profound thing; if you don't forgive your brother his sins, then God your Father won't forgive yours." It goes even further to say that if you withhold forgiveness from a brother, the Father is going to send tormentors to you. How many of you are happy for tormentors? Well, some of you aren't happy. I know why then. Why wouldn't you? Wouldn't those tormentors lead people to Christ? How many of you have never been tormented? Usually, when we're tormented we don't know why. We couldn't see that we've been holding a little unforgiveness against certain people – distant relatives. I always sit next to my distant relative in church. He does do that. Then you get visits from the tormentors at midnight, or 2:30; you never know.

Why don't you just tell someone, "I forgive everyone all the time." I forgive everyone all time.

"Well, you don't feel like it. You don't know what she did, or he did, or they did." I forgive everyone all the time. You know, there is still something to say about the bold confession. I

know it can be perverted into a hyper-faith thing, but there is power in confessing. But particularly when confession is prophesy – you begin to prophesy things to your children – the men, fathers. The first, I think, duty of a father is to give a name to his children, because every day they may pick up another name. They may pick up the name “Unworthy,” or whatever. But you can put a new name on them every day. You can get those names from the Lord. How does he see, and how does He name us? Beloved, Forgiven. Your name is forgiven. Your name is justified. Your name is righteous. But there is power when that gets on our tongue and we begin to confess that to our children and everyone, and even to ourselves, “I forgive everyone, all the time.”

Jim Durkin made a claim that John Hicks had a hard time with it for a year or so. Jim said, “I don’t have any inner conflicts with people.” Any? None. Now that doesn’t mean that he couldn’t be irritated, but who you really are has no inner conflicts. It is a good thing to confess that. Because in a relationship it only takes one person to make it work – Christ. And He is in you. Somebody else, the other person, it doesn’t matter what they do, say or think. It only takes one person to go to that cross, in Christ.

So stories – we have stories. That is how you’re defined, by the story you believe today. We all brought a story to church today. Maybe some of us had three or four before we even got here. Do you know what I mean? We’re not aware of what fashions, what forms how we think. The stories this world is trying to put on you all the time: Fear – the world has a fear story – whether it’s you’re not going to get enough, you’re not going to get yours, it’s going fast, hurry on down, etc. Not only that, things are really bad – times are getting really dark. But for us, the worse it gets the better. For us, we’re not of the world. We’re not intimidated by the world. We once made up the world. We once were the world. But we’re not intimidated anymore. We’re from a different age than the world is.

So stories. One little story here in Matthew 20. See if you can locate the losers in this story. This is amazing – typically Jesus. And He’s typical in the Old Testament too, in type. There he goes, loading widows up, raising the widow’s son – resurrecting people. There He goes saving Israel, saving Jacob, delivering them. There He goes allowing them to go into captivity for 70 years over in Babylon, but always redemptive. He says, “Yes, I’m going to do this to you, I’m going to chasten you, but after 70 years we’ll let you back into the land.” Seventy years? Yes – that’s the law (10) by seven (7) to the fullness. Law – we’ve been delivered from living under the law. We’re out of Babylon.

Here in 20 He tells a story. When Jesus told stories, a lot of times there were Pharisees around, who thought they had an inside position with God. They were insiders – they were in on it – they knew something that the outsiders didn't know. He starts over in 19 and then carries on through these parables. A lot of times you could think, well, Jesus is interpreting Paul through these stories. No, not so. That's backwards. These stories that Jesus tells. You can forget abstractions much quicker than stories. There is something about stories that stick in you. For Hebrews, and we are grafted into Israel, it is a continuation; one Messiah, one God.

So, He's talking about the Kingdom of Heaven:

Matthew 20:1-2 (KJV) For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. [2] And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

A penny today would be a man's wages; a laborer, a union guy, maybe makes \$120 a day, \$600 per week. Would that be fair?

Matthew 20:3-4 (KJV) And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, [4] And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

Again, I heard a good interpretation. Have you ever been to Santa Rosa, the wine country; how beautiful that is down there? There is this guy and he has a good vineyard. All of a sudden it is harvest time but he gets a weather report that a heavy storm is coming that is going to last for a week. He was going to wait a week or to harvest, but the harvest is ripe right now. So he goes out looking for some laborers.

Matthew 20:5-6 (KJV) Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. [6] And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

You know, some of us are going to get here at the 11th hour and 59 minutes. But see, it doesn't matter. You may be into the story, but there's more to the story than we know.

Matthew 20:6 (KJV) And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

He said, "Why are you all standing here idle?" Try to imagine a scene in Downtown Santa Rosa, down at the employment office. The other vineyard owners have found out that this

storm is coming and they beat him to the punch. They've taken up all the laborers. He's getting desperate, this guy, because if he doesn't get it in; in two days he's got to get it in, but then there's an update on the weather and it's going to come in a day. If I allow the storm to come with my crops not harvested, my whole crop will be ruined and I'm dusted – I'm out of business. I've got everything in this crop and it's perfect – the grapes are ripe. It's time to pick those grapes and make some grape jelly, right? Isn't that what grapes are for?

Why are you standing around? Nobody's hired us. Have you ever known anyone like that? Try to imagine the scene down there. Some of our brothers, Hispanic brothers down in that area that pick grapes. But there are some low riders that are still left over and their chicks. And they're hanging around with their boom boxes blazing. They don't have any hope – they're losers, as far as the world is concerned. But they're having a good time, unlike some of the hard laborers. You have to wonder at one point. They didn't even get up till noon. So he comes into this scene. It's like us. It's just like us, right? What are you going to do? He says, I'm going to hire you now, just get to work. He says whatever's right I'll give you.

Matthew 20:6-8 (KJV) And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? [7] They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. [8] So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

He decides to do switch-a-roo Matthew 20:6-8 (KJV)

And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? [7] They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. [8] So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

oo here. I'm going to do something backwards. The Lord does things backwards: The last first the first last. Jacob, sometimes the second born that totally goes against the law that He made.

There is only an hour left for you. So the workers say, "All right, what can we lose. We've got an hour and he'll pay us what we're worth - \$10-\$20, maybe. Maybe two six-packs and some burgers? You never know. So they go and their girlfriends go with them. They go out and they work.

Now, it's pay time. All of a sudden, everything is backwards. He gives them this envelope. Maybe he gives this girlfriend one. And he tells his steward to put in a full day's wages - \$120, six \$20's. And she says, "Thanks for the paycheck." And as she's walking away she opens the envelope and sees 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 20's. She walks back and says, "Hay, you overpaid me." Her boyfriend opens up his envelope and what do they do? Human nature being what it is, they go out. They broadcast it to all the other people that came at the 3rd hour, the 6th hour and the 9th hour, and the 1st hour, right? "Hey, check it out man, what are you doing working all day long? Look, we got \$120." That's what we're supposed to do.

But maybe the people that came earlier, might have been thinking something else. "The master is good. I've been here three hours, \$120 per hour, that \$360 dollars I'm going to get." Right? The guy that came at the 9th hour thought he was going to get \$740. "The master is good."

But, verse 10:

Matthew 20:10-11 (KJV) But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. [11] And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,

They started murmuring. You could see how the Pharisees would murmur at the people who...

"What? This men eats with sinners. This man cavorts with all kinds of riffraff." But what is this story about? There are a lot of sub-stories in this story.

Matthew 20:12-13 (KJV) Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. [13] But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

That word "Friend" in the Greek is interesting; it's like "Pal.." and it's the same word for when the man gets kicked out of the wedding feast for not having a wedding garment. "Friend, where's your wedding garment?"

Matthew 20:14-15 (KJV) Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. [15] Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

Consider it, because we're called to go to the harvest. What's that about, that harvest? I've got some notes here from Forde. It is another, interesting perspective on it.

This is a typical theme through scripture. Joseph gets a coat and his brothers are angry. A man gets an anointing and God blesses someone, etc. Have you ever been jealous or envious at someone because God gave them something and not you?

“Hey, buddy! I paid you what you’re worth.”

Am I not Allowed to do What I Choose With What Is Mine, in Forde’s new book

This reminds me of Romans 9, when God is saying, “Jacob I loved; Esau I hated.” You would say that maybe God is unfair. Who could judge Esau? If Esau didn’t do anything in the womb and God already hated him, why hold him responsible? But who are you, Oh man, to judge what God is doing? If God wants to harden Pharaoh’s heart, God will harden Pharaoh’s heart. Then why find fault with Pharaoh; God’s the one who hardened his heart? Who are you, O man? God has ways.

“Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what’s my own?” This is the unsettling word that closes in upon us in a familiar parable. It seems to be all about rights. We hear a lot about rights these days; inalienable rights to life, liberty, pursuit, justice. We hunger for rights; human rights, civil rights, right to live, right to bear arms, gay rights, gray rights, minority rights, women’s rights, children’s rights, animal rights - you name it, someone demands it or is demonstrating for it.

“But we worked the heat of the day, and you treat these losers that come at the last hours the same as us. Why all these years we’ve sacrificed for you.”

Sounds like the older brother - same story; different setting.

Look what we’ve done; cast out devils, worked hard, healed the sick, prophesied in your name, and you treat these the same as us?” “In all these years I’ve worked for you, father, never once have I transgressed your commandment. And this son of yours, this loser...” You know the story.

They have all these rights, but now, what Jesus is speaking is like a bolt from the blue, a comet from some undiscovered realm. Another right announces itself, projects itself smack dab in the middle of the payday line of their life.

What is this? A new right? Yes – it’s called God’s rights. God has a right? Yes. God’s rights. Some came early and some later and they all got the same.

Is it not preposterous? Whoever heard of such a thing? And if that was not bad enough, the protest just gets out of hand. God says, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what's my own?" How can we possibly accept that? Does God have a right to intrude, to butt into our affairs like that? For that matter, does anyone believe in God anymore, at least a God like that?

God said to Joseph, through his father, "I'm giving you a coat of many colors and not to your brothers." "The rest of you – no coat. I'm giving Joseph a coat." Why? He's drawing something out of the brothers, isn't he? He's actually beginning a work, a passive work of humility to where Judah will go beyond Joseph. You know the end of the story. It's a great story and I've never heard it. The story of Joseph is profound and I've never heard it. You could spend a year on it. It has so much for us, right there in Genesis, beginning in 37 and goes right on through 50. It's the longest story, I think, in the book.

How can we possibly accept that God is allowed to do what he wants? Does God have a right to intrude – to butt into our affairs like that? For that matter, does anyone believe in God anymore, at least a God like that? Yes, we tell ourselves we do. We tell ourselves that God is, in general, love. And as such, he can be safely filed away in the back of the drawer. God actually does intrude, but here it's otherwise. God plants himself squarely, looks us straight in the eye and declares, "Am I not allowed to do as I choose with what is mine?" God's rights, the creator's rights, what rights, we are not left to wonder. Do you begrudge me my generosity?

Yes. Oftentimes I've begrudged God's generosity. For instance, look at all the people that God forgives that I might withhold from. Look at them. You don't have to look far. God is always so generous with his forgiveness, his grace, and his mercy. "Wait a minute! You don't know what that THING did to me – said of me – thought of me – the way they act."

God claims the right to be generous, to intrude, to butt in; if you will, not only to be generous, but to give everyone the same. The whole joke of the story is; everybody gets paid the same, whether you come at the 1st hour or the 11th hour. But the people that came at the first hour didn't like that. You'll find workers never do like that.

Romans 4:4-8 (KJV) Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. [5] But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. [6] Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, [7] Saying, Blessed are they

whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. [8] Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

If it came down to David's works – they were works of evil. But he got a gift. Blessed, blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Christ died once and for all, for everyone in the whole world. He saves really bad, wicked people – justifies them and makes them righteous.

And He'll do what He wants.

When you walk down the street any day of your life and anywhere you're at and realize that the one you're talking to is someone Christ wants to be generous to, through you. He wants to be very generous to them in any situation. You might not say, "Your sins are forgiven," or "I love you and forgive you," but there is a generosity that comes out of Christ in you. There is a generosity to everyone, everyone you meet. We don't want to begrudge God being generous, even if He's being generous in us.

He says, "Do you begrudge me my generosity?" God claims a right. He has a right to be generous, wouldn't you say? God has a right to be generous, to intrude; not only generous, but to give everyone the same. He does it. We don't like that sometimes if we've been working hard. What does it say there?

Romans 4:5 [5] But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness

Is that you? To him that worketh not but believes, God justifies. He justifies the ungodly because his faith is counted for righteousness. Do you remember where faith comes? From outside of us. It comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of God. It is kind of crazy. You could see Cain's perspective. He is sweating his head off to bring a sacrifice; an offering – a worship offering to the Lord. And all that Abel does is bring the lamb that he got from God anyway, and God says, "Oh, I like that lamb, but I don't like your offering, Cain." Cain then kills Abel.

What God is interested in is that we would receive something from him. That we would receive into our own selves, his very generosity. If we would look at it, you'd have to say that if you took different people... Let's say we're here in the vineyard today. There would be two classes of people, basically, if I could generalize: Some would be mad and some would be glad.

Question: Who do you think would be glad? The losers who really had no hope because they had been so bad. But they are trusting, and their trust ends up in fruit. They open the pay envelope and it's like... Remember when you were running out and telling everybody? Telling everybody!

Psalm 51:12 (KJV) Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Remind me – bring it back to remembrance, what I got when I was saved. Everybody got saved the same. The older brother never heard that in the parable of the “two prodigal sons”. What did the father do? He went out to the brother and he says, “Son, everything I have is yours and I am with you always.” It was inconceivable to the older brother. He was angry and would not go in to the party – the celebration. But everything was legitimately his, everything there is – all things are yours in Christ.

There is a new Target Store going up. That's yours. You probably won't be managing it, though. Someone does a better job of managing our goods. God appoints stewards until we grow up. But everything is God's. The earth is the Lords and the fullness thereof, the gold, the silver, and the cattle are all the Lords, and he is our Father, and all things from our Father belong to us now. This is crazy talk, huh? But the father says to the older brother, “Everything I have is yours.” But the older brother wouldn't hear. All he could think about is that brother that came at the last hour, after wasting his life, and “You accept him on the same basis as me?” Yes!

Now the people in the parable who would be happy about this are what we could call The Eleventh Hour Folk. Me. It's now the eleventh hour and finally, by the grace of God, I'm beginning to get here. Maybe it's 59 minutes until, but it doesn't matter if you get here.

“Well, you don't know what I've been doing, or what I've been thinking, or what I've been saying, or just how short I've been falling in my walk, Don. You don't understand my situation, my circumstances.” Right. But all things are yours and you are Christ's.

And so in this metaphor, the story that Jesus is telling, Jesus is saying, “I'm generous. I pay everyone the same. Some folks don't like that, but others, the humble – those I've humbled – the humble, the children will hear and they will believe it – and they will be glad. They will believe it. There's the paycheck. They will believe it and they will be glad.

Now I'm generous, he's saying, and am I not allowed to be generous? Is your eye evil because I am good? Generosity is a nice idea. We are all for that as long as it remains an idea. If God would just stay in Heaven with the idea, or at least be fair about it and give payment where it's due, or at least be universal or love in general, we could live with it. But actually to come to intrude and to be generous to someone in particular – to give those lazy ones...

Maybe they are lazy in faith or love or things. I can't judge anyone. God is too generous.

To give those lazy ones the same as me? And just claim the right to do so? This is too much! Yes, it is indeed preposterous, except, of course, it's our only real chance. But it is true, and if it is true, if we are honest, what chance do we have other than the generosity of God, or the unfairness of God.

Remember the unjust judge? He's unfair. He just goes around canceling debts. He is a type of Christ.

God's unfair. He pays these people the same thing who came late. The last shall be first.

This is good for us. If you think you were first it might not be so good. Where would we be? It is a daily thing. I finally get here around the eleventh hour.

Where would we be if we got what we deserved? What chance do we have if God doesn't assert his rights, if he remains in heaven, or is just love in general?

He doesn't remain in heaven, he's here in and among you. And he wants to be generous through you, through me – through us. He wants to be generous to the whole world. He wants to be generous, but like I said, when you meet someone daily, that may not take the form of saying, "You're forgiven," or "I love you," or "God loves you," or telling them the four spiritual laws. It may just take something coming out of the heart – a generosity towards sinners. It shouldn't be that hard being generous to sinners knowing what we are.

What chance do we have if God doesn't assert his rights and remains in heaven? But God said, "Am I not allowed to do what I want with what is my own?" Could it be this is our only chance, our only real chance? But where does that leave us? What is it that God who claims such a right actually chooses to do? It would be a cruel trick after all this talk about God's right to do what he chooses with what is his, that God actually does nothing at all. So we come to the heart of the matter – one last preposterous move. God has chosen that a word could be spoken to you, a word that levels everything and puts an end to the old game

You know, the old – where people think God has some insiders and some outsiders, and we're insiders because we've been doing this or we know that or we believe that or whatever. That's all over!

So God levels everything and puts an end to the old game and starts something new. It was a great risk when he did that. The world did not approve of this parable. He was so generous, he gave his son. This is not strange, for it is indeed awful. It meets no need of ours so that we killed the one who told this parable.

It meets no need. The God who stays in heaven doesn't meet any needs. He's just an abstract god.

But God approved and raised Jesus from the dead, so the word should again be spoken and activating his kingdom. "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what is my own?" It is wild! It's God who has brought us to this and now there is no way around it. I must say it. You are God's own. You were claimed as God's own in baptism. God did what he wanted – did what he chose with you. And if you've forgotten that, hear it again! Come and taste it! God claims the right to butt in, here and now and permits his word of grace to be said to you, "I declare unto you the forgiveness of all your sins."

God says that through me to you and through you to me, and he's given you that power on earth to forgive, to let God's generosity flow through you, here and now.

Now perhaps you may be a little disappointed. Is that all there is? Should not there be something more? Have we not heard that before? (As we like to put it now and then.) Do we always have to be talking about salvation here? Is there not something beyond that? Particularly since we've gotten ourselves off into the holy ministry, we might like to think that grander things are in store. Well, we need to recall that this parable was told particularly for religious folk.

The offence is that they all got the same, you see. There isn't any more. When he give you everything, there is nothing more. It is just a question of receiving it, and that is grace. You mean total forgiveness? Unilateral forgives? You mean he has saved us, he has healed us and he has delivered us and is healing us, is delivering us and he will yet deliver us? Yes! You mean he has forgiven us? Has forgiven us, does forgive us and will yet forgive us? Yes! In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, I forgive you your sins.

God has invested everything just to arrange this sort of meeting – to intrude, to break in, to do a new thing, to speak to you, to make new beings called into life from that which was not – creature who actually rejoice at this seemingly unjust arrangement. God is not out just to be generous in himself, but to do this to us – to make us new out of his generosity. That generosity spells the end of the old, kills the old protestor, and brooks no resistance. Thus it saves and makes us new.

Isn't that fantastic? Is there anything more? There is perhaps only that parting warning shot across the bow for those who don't see so that the last will be first and the first.

There is that little shot, you know.

We might comfort ourselves that being last is better than nothing, but that is a dangerous slight. So we end where we started; God's rights. "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what is my own?" And you are God's own.

You are God's own. There is a safe place to be forever. Lord, no matter what happens, I'm yours. I remain yours.

You are God's own. Think on that. Isn't it wild? Don't you see? All of our schemes and projects are over. And maybe, just maybe, if we catch a glimpse of what that means, all those other arguments about rights will begin to fall into place.

So, anyone for the vineyard? Anyone for the vineyard? Losers. God can do what he wants with losers. In this life as a Christian, only the winners temporarily lose. When they die, they go to heaven if they're Christians. But it is such a wonderful place, where the losers win.

The reconciliation cannot work out any other way. Evil cannot be gotten out of the world by reward and punishment.

That just points out the shortage of God's grace, of his generosity. The people who were there at the first hour had some books they were keeping.

But the only way to solve the problem of evil was for God to do what, in fact, he did. To take bookkeeping out the world by taking it to himself, down into the forgettery(?) of Jesus' dead, human mind and close the books forever. That way the kingdom of heaven is for everybody. And hell, well, that is reserved only for idiots who insist on keeping non-existent records in their heads.

You don't keep any non-existent records in your heads, do you? God has burnt the books. The enemy has books on everyone. When you open his books you'll find all that black ink is splattered with red blood, on every page of his books.

So there is nothing left. Because he has given us everything. When he gave us salvation we didn't understand it. We did not understand that.

Consider this: Anyone for the vineyard? Today is the day of the vineyard and we're the people down there at The Eagles Hall, or wherever people hang out – strange people. Consider your calling, my brethren. Not many wise, not many noble. God has chosen the weak things, the base things, the despised. Halleluia! He has chosen us. And He's not ashamed. When He gave you everything, it was everything. For instance, your situation right now, he is sufficient for, if you'll do what 2 Chronicles 20 says. Even though you're being surrounded by all these things and you don't know what to do, just look to him for your sufficiency because He is your sufficiency. And he's never withholding any forgiveness, mercy, or grace. Never! He's no longer imputing to us. Therefore, we are those upon whom the ends of the world, who go around as the non-imputers. We show up as the non-imputers every day. Every day no longer imputing. That is you! Why? Because everything is yours. The pay was the same.

As you go away from the vineyard today, you might tell everyone! Wave those \$20's – the joy of your salvation – everything! And who is left to judge? No one, not even you! Who is left to judge in the Jubilee? Not if you're a sinner! Wouldn't it be ridiculous? How could a sinner judge anyone for sinning? I don't know, but somehow I manage to pull it off on any given day. Whenever you're judged by a sinner, you just want to give them a big kiss. "Frank, darling! Forgive me! Forgive me for all I did and didn't do. Frank, darling."

Anyone for the vineyard now? The day is over. It's now time to receive, by faith.....

(Tape ended here.)