

“Abundant Faith, Generous Hearts - What Have You Done for Me Lately?”

Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16

Graphics: heart, harvest, payoff

Big Truth: When we have abundant faith in Jesus, because we are convinced of his sacrifice and salvation through the cross, our lives become a sacrifice for Him. Abundant faith leads us to generous hearts - to give our time, talents, gifts, and service. This response requires investment into the life of the faith community, giving more than we get (or so we think), investing in others, and committing to generously give as a response to our abundant faith.

Focus Phrase: My Kingdom payoff for giving is far greater than my investment or worldly payoff.

1. Introduction

A. PRAY!

- B. **Abundant Faith, Generous Hearts** is the series we began last week. If you missed that, you can go back and find that on the media page of our website.
- C. This series is exploring how to **steward our resources** - to give our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service to the church so that we can stay on mission and realize our vision.
- D. Our **mission** is to make disciples for Jesus Christ. Our **vision** is to lovingly give every person in our community the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus for life.
- E. When you give your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service, it has a direct impact on the mission and vision of the church...which HAS a direct Kingdom impact on the community and the world.
- F. We began to talk about stewardship last week with the invitation to make a **kingdom investment**. To know the value of the church and kingdom, to take inventory of what you have to invest, and then go all in. This past week, I pray that you've had the opportunity to ask God, "What do I have that you want me to invest for the work of the Kingdom at Panama UMC?"
- G. The answer to that prayer will **guide and direct the ways that you give** to the church. Sometimes it's money. Other times it will be using your spiritual gifts. Showing up is one way to give time. Pray. Serve. All giving. And it's ALL an investment for the work of the mission.
- H. But, maybe there's been a nagging question in your mind after you invest or as you're getting ready to invest. If you've been around this church or another church for a long time, you may have been faithful in giving over the long haul. But there also may be a sense that you'd like to see more evidence or reward for your investment. The question maybe you've asked is, "**What's in it for me, when I give?**" Or we ask God, even sometimes as we're getting ready to give, "God, what have you done for me lately?"

- I. Now, I know that there are times when that COULD BE a snarky question because we think we've somehow been short-changed in the payoff from our investment in the work of the church.
- J. But that's not really what I'm talking about today. When we honestly and humbly ask that question (What have you done for me lately, God?), what we're really asking is, "What's the payoff for my abundant faith in Jesus and my call to generous giving?" And the answer to THAT question motivates us to see where God is working and keep growing in our stewardship.
- K. Today, we'll go to yet another one of Jesus' parables to find out more about the Kingdom payoff we receive for our giving to the church and to the mission to make disciples.
- L. What are our expectations from God, as Christians? And, really, the answers to those questions affects what you and I are willing to invest. But should it?
- M. Grab your bible and let's dive into Matthew chapter 20, starting in verse 1.
- N. The gospel writer, Matthew, places this parable of Jesus directly after one about a rich young ruler who, when Jesus told him what was expected of him in the kingdom, he (as it says in Matthew 19:22), "...went away grieving, for he had many possessions." What was expected was for him to go all in and sell everything for the kingdom. He just couldn't see the payoff in that.
- O. Let's pick this up in chapter 20...verse 1.

2. Scripture

A. READ Matthew 20:1-16

- i. Matthew dove right into the parable about a landowner, a vineyard, some laborers, and a payoff.
- ii. It starts off like we'd expect, except one thing: typically, landowners were not the ones to go out into the marketplace to find laborers. That was typically the job of the manager, who we'll meet later. But, this is a parable and in this parable, Jesus said it was the LANDOWNER who went out to find laborers.
- iii. The landowner went to the market at 6am, 9am, 12 noon, and 5pm.
- iv. Now, the 'workday' in that culture was a 12-hour day that began at sunrise and ended at sunset. So, the setting in this parable was not out of the ordinary for Jesus' listeners.
- v. It wasn't even out of the ordinary for laborers to be hired throughout the day, as work was needed.
- vi. So, at 6am, the first set of laborers was hired, and were promised a 'usual daily wage.' A usual daily wage in that region at that time was **one denarius**. If we put that in context today, it would be sort of like minimum

wage. It was money that you earned, but it was barely enough to sustain a family if earned it every day for a year. But, it was the 'usual' wage. They agreed. They went to work.

- vii. At 9am, the landowner in the parable went back to the market and found MORE laborers. We'll call them **The B Team**. They weren't in the market in the morning, first thing. Maybe they were tired from the day before... maybe they didn't expect to be hired, so they didn't show up. We're only left to wonder. But, they agreed and the landowner said he would pay them '**whatever was right.**' That was different from the A Team, but we don't yet know HOW it was different. Hmm...at this point, some teaching aspects of the parable seem to be taking shape.
- viii. Same thing at noon. **The C Team** was called. Then again at 5p. **The D Team**. Now it seems to be getting a little ridiculous, right? If the work day was 12 hours and they started at 6a, then the ones whom the landowner called to work at 5p, would **only work 1 hour!** Something's fishy here!
- ix. SO...when the quitting whistle finally blew, all the workers were called by the manager (not the landowner) to come and be paid. But, Jesus said, this would be done in reverse order of when they were called by the landowner.
 - a. First, the people that worked one hour. The D Team. Their pay? The 'usual daily pay'. One denarius. Wow! Thanks! Yet, from the back of the line, The A Team must've given a quizzical look towards the front.
 - b. Then, the C Team got paid - one denarius. The B Team - one denarius. From the back of the line, anticipation of good stuff. I mean, if the manager paid the first three - who worked FAR less than WE did - ONE denarius, we can't WAIT to see what WE will get paid for working 12 hours...in the heat of the day...I mean, we took the full weight of the work! What will OUR payoff be? We certainly deserve it...
 - c. Finally, the A Team - the 6a crew - got to the manager. And he handed them their payoff. The usual payoff. "Wait, WHAT!? Only ONE denarius!?!? No way! Objection! Throw the flag! Foul!"
- x. Yet, the landowner simply said, "Didn't I promise to pay you 'the usual wage'?" "Yes, but..." (grumble grumble) The landowner then said, "Take what I gave you - which you agreed to - and go. Am I not free to do with what I choose that which belongs to me?"
- xi. "Or, are you envious because I am generous?", said the landowner. That phrase in the Greek actually means, "Do you have an evil eye because I am good?" Basically, are you mad because I did what I said I would do as far as a payoff?

B. Jesus ended with this, like he did the parable of the rich young ruler, in the previous section, “The last will be first and the first will be last.”

3. Application

A. What does all this mean to us as we’re increasing our awareness of giving our prayer, our talents, our gifts, and our service in the local church and Kingdom?

B. Well, as we give those things, what is it truly that we expect in return? What do we expect as a payoff?

C. I wonder if we aren’t sometimes tempted to have an evil eye towards God because He is good and his goodness sometimes seems to be unfair to us. We don’t like it when the person in charge makes the last first and the first last... unless WE’RE last.

D. The 6am A Team wasn’t grumbling to the B, C, and D Teams. **They were grumbling at the landowner** - who in this parable represent Father God. They wanted their payoff to be greater than the others...not because the others didn’t deserve it, but because they assumed they deserved more because they gave more.

E. I wonder if we sometimes think that God should reward everyone in this life for her or his kingdom investment on generally a one-to-one basis...all while multiplying our input for His greater kingdom output.

F. You and I are tempted - and we sometimes give in to it - to question God’s sovereignty and the ways that God chooses to apply his will in the world and in our lives.

G. And if we apply that to ourselves, isn’t that what we’re getting at when we ask, “What have you done for me lately, God?”

H. “I’ve made the investment of prayers, presence, gifts, and service to the church - to Jesus - because I have faith IN Jesus and who he is. I’ve made the investment to the kingdom work happening here because I believe in the mission and the leaders and the vision. Is that it?”

I. I think your answer to that questions depends on what you expect the payoff to be for your investment. Do you expect a payoff in some worldly term - what you get from the church?

J. Or, is the payoff you and I get from our kingdom investment something far far greater?

K. I think it’s something far far greater...and, ultimately, that something - that payoff - is **God’s grace**. Grace that **woos you** to Jesus. Grace that **saves you**. Grace that **sanctifies you** - changing you into the image of Jesus more and more. And, grace that **perfects you in love without sin** and ushers you into everlasting life.

- L. That's the promise of the payoff. That's the gospel hope! God's grace!
- M. And we see that grace at work in our lives and in scripture. If we look at the life of Job, we see this. Everything was taken from him. Livestock, wealth, even family. Yet, Job remained faithful to God. He had to learn some powerful lessons along the way, but in the end Job needed to come to the place where he fully understood that God is sovereign...and God is loving and gracious.
- N. The payoff for Job's faith was not immediate restoration of all the things that God had allowed to be taken away. The payoff was not about the worldly possessions or status or power or wealth.
- O. The payoff for Job's investment in the kingdom was a **changed heart and a renewed faith** in God's grace in his life.
- P. You and I know that God is sovereign, which means He has the power and authority to enact righteousness in the kingdom and in His people - the church. He also has the power and authority to do what He wills in all things.
- Q. What God wants to give you the most - the payoff for your abundant faith and generous heart - is his grace, which leads to everlasting life.**
- R. In a very practical sense, as it relates to giving of prayers, presence, gift, and service to the church, your kingdom investment is less about what the payoff might be right here, right now. The payoff for abundant faith and a generous heart is way more about the impact that your giving has for your eternity and that of others. And that's because through an abundant faith and generous heart, you are changed...and the world is changed for Jesus.
- S. So, how do we do that? How do we reorient our expectation of the payoff of our investments?
- T. First, **Release to God your expectations about the payoff** you think you should receive now from your giving.
- i. You may not have ever thought about that in those terms, but when you pray for the church, let God answer those prayers the way HE wants to.
 - ii. When you show up to worship or engage in one of our discipleship groups, let God teach you, grow you, and use you, without an expectation that the payoff will not be all about you.
 - iii. When you use your spiritual gifts, it's to edify the church and glorify God. That's the payoff.
 - iv. When you serve, the payoff is not that someone will thank you - even though I'm positive and confident they will. The payoff is that someone will have been blessed by your service...and God will be pleased. And someone may just experience the grace of God and be saved!

- v. That's why an investment that seems costly now, may not seem as costly to you in the future because the outcome. Said another way, your investment will seem 100% worth it as you realize the impact it had - after you realize the Kingdom payoff. Maybe even one life changed for Jesus.
 - vi. Parenting is often like that. It may seem costly and our expectations are that our children learn, grow, behave, make good choices, etc. And when they sometimes don't, we wonder what's truly in it for me? Yet, when they mature and make good choices in the future, we look back and know that God was working on it. The payoff is far greater than we expected.
 - vii. The same for the investments we make in the church and our faith. The real payoff is what God gives to us in the future...not about what we get today.
- U. One caution from this parable - **Don't let your eye get evil about the immediate payoff.**
- i. The A Team was tempted to question God about their immediate payoff... and they were tempted to get discouraged and angry at God and others.
 - ii. Yet, God is always good and God always has the whole picture in mind.
 - iii. When you invest in the church through giving, let God's goodness and sovereignty be the motivation...not what you hope to get from that investment.
 - iv. Now, the leaders of the church must always strive to be the best stewards we can be of the investment people make. We **MUST** be praying about, discerning, and transparent about how that investment is used - prayers, presence, gifts, and service.
 - v. But, as we invest together, and as the Holy Spirit guides and directs us, we come to understand and believe that our kingdom payoff is far greater than any worldly payoff...and far greater than our investment could ever be.

4. Conclusion

- A. Jesus met his disciples at the Last Supper table, right before the ultimate kingdom investment was about to be made - his death and resurrection to new life.
- B. That investment led to the payoff that every single person that has and will ever live can be given everlasting life. That's the payoff for your faith in Jesus.
- C. That's the payoff that's eternally greater than anything we could ever ask for or imagine in this life.
- D. And it's for that payoff that we go all in with our investment in the kingdom work that God is doing in our lives and in our church.
- E. As you come to the table today, let the Spirit change you. Let the Spirit move you. Let the Spirit convince you. Let the Spirit bring peace into your life.

F. What in it for you? This (table)...and the grace of God poured into your life so that every sinner is saved by grace through faith...and every lost sheep is found...and every wage is paid...and every life redeemed.

G. Let's pray...

H. PRAY!