

Fair is Fair, Just is Just: Don't Confuse Them. Matthew Ch.20

Yet they seek Me day by day and (pretend to) delight to know My ways, as (if they were) a nation that has done righteousness, and has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions (as if) they delight in the nearness of God.

Isaiah 58:2, with parenthetical editorial additions

The Hebrew word for ordinance, *mishpat*, as used here refers to the historical body of Jewish law, and has at its foundation the concept of “justice,” which is blind to the world’s notion of “fairness” and preferential treatment.

Regarding Fairness, the parable of vineyard laborers, v.1-16.

- The vineyard owner.
 - His need: to either have his vineyard tended or harvested.
- His agreed upon obligation: a “denarius,” the standard wage for a day’s labor.
- The labor force.
 - The first workers, contracted at an agreed upon amount.
- The second group, worked without a contract, but with the hope of reasonable compensation.
- The third group, hired near the end of the day, with the hope of some small payment.
- The problem: dissention over wages.
 - All the laborers were paid the same, and those who worked hardest were angry that they weren’t paid more.
 - *Hey, that’s not fair!*
- Kingdom justice: *The last shall be first, and the first last, v.16.*

“After all” vs. “nevertheless.” The argument goes “after all, because of my greater contribution, I deserve more.” The response, though, is “nevertheless, we agreed upon this. If I choose to treat others equally, what is that to you?”

Jesus predicts his crucifixion and resurrection, v.17-19.

- As in previous chapters, Jesus sandwiches a core doctrine between the discourse of two secondary issues.
- This literary device points at a glaring human failure: the promotion of petty selfish desires over universal good.

Two disciples ask for special (preferential) treatment, v.20-28.

- James and John hide behind their mother.
 - Jesus challenges them “*can you suffer what I am about to?*”
 - He had just described his coming fate.
 - Yet their response “*we are able,*” reflects a lack of seriousness and understanding.
 - His next statement should have come as a shock to them.
 - “*My cup you shall drink, but the father decides who is given extraordinary authority in heaven.*”
 - And the other disciples, **in all “fairness,”** were indignant.
 - Again, Jesus restates the axiom that *the last shall be first, and the first last.*
 - This time with a little twist, “*whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant.*”
 - And, he compares it to his role.
- ### **Jesus’ last act before his final entry to Jerusalem, v.29-34.**
- He healed two blind men sitting by the side of the road.
 - “*Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David.*”
 - In their physical blindness, they recognized him.
 - And the crowd, having missed all the points Jesus was making, told them to be quiet.

Wow, we today, professing Christians who have the written record of Jesus words, still behave the same. Though we hear and read these words we still skip over them as if they don’t matter in our case. We desire special blessing and gifts and expect a leisurely walk in God’s grace. What Jesus described was the role of a servant, feeding others and waiting until last to be fed, sacrificing comfort and rest in order that others may have some, and doing it quietly, in love and grace.