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The Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-15

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we thank you for who you are, we thank you for all of the grace that you so abundantly bestowed on us. We thank you, Lord, for the grace of your Son, the grace of the cross. We thank you for the grace of your word and your Holy Spirit. And, Lord, once again we're going to be looking at one of the stories that you told, one of the parables that you told and again, they require wisdom, they require your Holy Spirit's presence and so I pray you would grant us that. I pray you would give us the ability to read your word, take it in and to make it of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are wrapping up our series on the parables of Jesus and we actually went through all of the ones that were in Matthew 13 but I wanted to address one more parable that's not found in Matthew 13. It's the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Let me just read it to you. This is Matthew 20:1-15. It says: *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the workers on*

one denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine in the morning, he saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. To those men he said, 'You also go to my vineyard, and I'll give you whatever is right.' So off they went. About noon, and at three, he went out again and did the same thing. Then about five he went and found others standing around, and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here all day doing nothing?' 'Because no one hired us,' they said to him. 'You also go to my vineyard,' he told them. When evening came, the owner of the vineyard told his foreman, 'Call the workers and give them their pay, starting with the last and ending with the first.' When those who were hired about five came and they each received one denarius. So when the first ones came, they assumed they would get more, but they also received a denarius each. When they received it, they began to complain to the landowner: 'These last men put in one hour, and you made them equal to us who bore the burden of the day and the burning heat.' He replied to one of them, 'Friend, I'm doing you no wrong. Didn't you agree with me on a denarius? Take what is yours and go. I want to give this last man the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my business? Are you jealous because I'm generous?'"

Well, many folks think this is just a parable about coming to Christ at different times in life that you come to Christ. Some

people come to Christ as a child, they would be represented by the early ones, the nine o'clockers or some folks come at middle age, those would be those who come at noon ,and some come as elderly folks, those would be those that arrive at five in the evening. Well, there's actually far more to this parable than that. This is really a peek into God's mind and thinking about the specific area of justice. And what I want to do actually is go back a number of years to a study that I had done on the servant songs in the book of Isaiah because there we find God's reference to establishing once and for all just what justice is.

The first servant song is found in *Isaiah 42*, and in it God says this, he says: *Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will*

give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness."

Well, back then we saw in the servant song that God the Father is prophesying here about the life and ministry of his Son. In fact, those last words that I read, those are the very words that Jesus used to begin his public ministry. We learned how the Trinity expressed its delighted even in this Old Testament song. We see it expressed by the Father who says, *"Behold my servant, whom I uphold."* We see the Son described as -- quote -- *"My chosen, in whom my soul delights;"* and the Holy Spirit, when God says, *"I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations."* You notice in that text "Spirit" is capitalized, that's just referring to God, not just to a human spirit. And so we also learned in that passage that the Son would not -- quote -- *"cry aloud or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street,"* as he would not be someone who's ever tooting his own horn or calling attention to himself or to his ministry. We also saw the expressions of his tenderness, compassion and mercy toward those who were falling, whose spirits were about to be quenched -- quote -- *"a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench."*

All of that notwithstanding, this morning we want to focus in on one line in that scripture which says: *"He will faithfully bring forth justice."* See, justice was God's role for his servant. And we see it emphasized even more in the very next line, verse 4, he says: *He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth.* What it's saying is Jesus, God's servant, will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice. So we want to know, I mean, just what does God mean by that term? What does he mean by "justice"? How do you define, how do you even describe a term that is used to describe the state of this world as it should be but has not been since the fall of Adam? Well, God himself gives one of the best short descriptions of justice that I know of in verse 16 of the very same chapter of Isaiah. He says: *I will bring the blind by the way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, and not forsake them.* So what God is saying here is that justice is basically God making crooked places straight. And that includes people and places and attitudes and systems and governments. I mean they're all in some ways crooked, bent and distorted by the fallenness of mankind. Likewise, our understanding of justice is crooked as well. And we don't realize it because we live in a world where crookedness is completely normal.

Let me just give you some examples of our normal crookedness. There is estimated to be 30 million human slaves in the world right now. So if I'm a slaveowner in India and you're a slave and you run away from me, my sense of justice demands your return because you are property and you belong to me. That's crooked. If I'm an adult of sane mind and perfect health and I live in Switzerland and I'm simply tired of living, I can hire you to kill me and it's perfectly legal. You don't even have to be a doctor. The fact is 25 percent of all assisted suicides in Switzerland are among people with no physical illness. They're just described as "tired of living." So justice in Switzerland now says I can take your life with your permission with no consequence whatsoever. That's crooked. Or closer to home if you're a young, unmarried pregnant female, justice now demands that the biological scales be made even by allowing you the same ability to walk away from a pregnancy that a male has. This justice now demands that you be given the ultimate control of your body through abortion, and that, too, is crooked. You can see that the suffering servant of Isaiah is here to bring justice, and if that's the case, we need to find out exactly what he means by that term, because our standard of what justice is cannot be this crooked world. But we have a problem and the problem is this: We oftentimes have just as much of a struggle trying to understand what God's justice is as well.

Consider these two scriptures. The first scripture describes God's response to a simple sin of disobedience. This is *Numbers 15*. It says: *Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." So, as the LORD commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.*

Let me compare that to another scripture, it describes yet another form of disobedience. This is from *Exodus 16*. It says: *And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: 'Let every man gather it according to each one's need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.'" Then the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less. So when they measured it by omers,*

he who had gathered much had nothing left over, and he who had gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one's need. And Moses said, let no one leave any of it till morning." Notwithstanding they did not heed Moses. But some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them.

So here we have two different sins of disobedience but two very different responses from Moses and God. I mean one sin of disobedience results in execution by stoning. Another sin of disobedience results in spoiled manna. What's up with that? I mean, it certainly looks by these two examples that God's justice is off, God's not being fair here. You see, to be fair is to treat each situation with absolute equality. The simplest definition of fairness is that everybody gets treated exactly the same, the same proportions, the same rewards, the same punishments. It's like when you were a kid, if somebody was to divide a candy bar into two pieces and one is much bigger than the other, you're going to look down and you're going to say what? "That's not fair," right? I mean, both pieces have to be precisely the same size if they're to be equal for you to say that it's fair. Fairness equals identical sizes, identical treatment, identical responses. When we look at God's different response to these two different sins of disobedience, there's something in us that says, wait a minute,

that's not fair, I mean, it's not equal, so it's not fair. And as we look at the scriptures we can find many other instances where God simply doesn't appear to be fair.

Look at Jacob. Jacob's somebody who's known as a liar. I mean, he lies his way into claiming Esau's inheritance but God certainly appears to bless him in spite of that. Well, we fast forward to the New Testament and there's Ananias and Sapphira and they get caught lying. They get struck dead. Is that fair? I mean fairness seems to be almost a foreign concept in scripture. I mean God says in *Genesis 9*: "*Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His image.*" And yet we find both David and Moses appear to get away with murder, literally. I mean David commits adultery with Bathsheba, then he arranges for her husband Uriah to be killed in battle. Moses commits second degree murder by killing an Egyptian soldier. They both go on to be mightily used of God. And we look over and we see this guy named Pharaoh. He's a wicked guy, but his wickedness is treated far different. Instead of being forgiven, his wickedness is used as an object lesson to demonstrate God's glory. The Israelites begin crossing the Red Sea. And God says in *Exodus 14*: "*I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will pursue them. Then I will receive glory by means of Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh.*" Well, the Israelites get

miraculously freed while the Egyptians get miraculously drowned. But it's all set up by Pharaoh's heart which God hardened. So once again you might say, is that fair?

I mean, can we say based on the evidence that it doesn't appear that God is fair? I think we can. But here's the part that I think many people don't fully grasp, and if you're ever going to fully grasp what God's justice is all about, you must grasp this first. God doesn't owe you or me fair. What he owes each of us is not fairness, which is identical treatment to all, but justice, which is absolute conformity to his standard of righteousness. See, there's a reason why David and Moses are spared and Pharaoh is not. It has nothing to do with the goodness of Moses and David and Pharaoh's badness because God says none of us is good, and it has everything to do with God's mercy, which he insists he doesn't owe to anyone. In *Romans 9:15*, it says: *He tells Moses: I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it does not depend on human will or effort but on God who shows mercy. For the Scripture tells Pharaoh: I raised you up for this reason so that I may display my power in you and that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. So then, He shows mercy to those He wants to, and He hardens those He wants to harden. God had plans for Moses and David and he also had plans for Pharaoh. Moses and David would display God's glory*

by being objects of his mercy. Pharaoh would display God's glory by being an object of his judgment. Now, we say to ourselves, okay, is that fair? I mean did they receive identical treatment? Absolutely not. But the question isn't "is it fair," the question is: "Is it just"?

Isaiah's servant song says this: *He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth.*

Understand, God's justice conforms to his standards and not ours, and God clearly differs with our understanding on this. He insists in *Isaiah 55*: *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways." This is the LORD's declaration. "For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."* I mean God is saying you don't get me. Don't even think that you get me. You know, and when it comes to justice, one of the things that we as humans do, we typically conflate justice and fairness and God says he never does. But notwithstanding, I mean, someone can look at Pharaoh, Moses and David, and says well then, isn't selective justice a form of injustice? I mean, if a judge would let some of his loved ones go unpunished for a crime while severely punishing those he had no regard for, we would call that unjust. I mean isn't God guilty of that? Well, what if the judge found all parties guilty and then decided to stand in the place of two of those guilty ones and not

the third? If the judge himself took on the punishment of the two fully paying their debts, would we still call him unjust if he let the debt on the third person remain? God insists he has that right, but he also recognizes that it is part of our thought process to think that's unfair. And so he takes great pains to try to explain himself by way of a story. And it's the story that Jesus told that we were looking at this morning. *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard."* I mean it's a story most of us are pretty familiar with. It's classically taught to represent people coming into the kingdom at varying stages in their lives. Some come first in the morning as children, some come in the afternoon as young people or adults, and some come in the late afternoon as older people. But I believe this is a story that's designed to reveal the heart of God on many different levels and one of those levels is God instructing us on the dangers of making false assumptions about fairness and justice. And as we look at the story, we see in this case it's the workers who are making this faulty assumption. Let me just re-read it.

This is verse 8. It says: *"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard told his foreman, 'Call the workers and give them their pay, starting with the last and ending with the first.'" When those who were hired about five came, they each received one denarius.*

So when the first ones came, they assumed they would get more, but they also received a denarius each." Verse 10 says: "They assumed they would get more." See, the workers are making their assumption based on the understanding that justice and fairness are one in the same thing. I mean they assume that everyone will be treated fairly or, in their minds, equally. That meant that they assume that the denarius that Jesus offered to each was not an absolute figure but some kind of baseline to establish a fair wage for each. And they assumed that fairness would have demanded since the one hour workers get a denarius, then an eight-hour worker should get the equivalent of eight times that. But that's not what the owner had in mind at all. See, a denarius was a just wage for someone who worked an entire day. It was a generous wage for someone who worked only an hour. And the owner claims, guess what? I have the right to give either.

When he gives each worker an identical amount, they instantly react to this unfairness. Verse 11: "When they received it, they began to complain to the landowner: 'These last men put in one hour, and you made them equal to us who bore the burden of the day and the burning heat!" Does that sound reasonable? It sounds reasonable to me. This certainly sounds reasonable to us because it certainly seems to be what's fair. Now in fact I'm sure if you put this story before the EEOC, that's the Equal Employment Opportunity

Commission, or some other government regulatory agency, they probably would have found Jesus in violation of their statutes. He would have gotten a hefty fine for this. Clearly what he was doing, because it was not equal, it was therefore considered not fair. And because they were not treated identically, the workers felt they were treated in a way that was morally wrong, in a way that was unjust and the owner flat out disagrees. Verse 13: *"He replied to one of them, 'Friend, I'm doing you no wrong.' See, Jesus here is directly challenging their assumptions based on fairness. And he suggests that there's a completely different form of reference that he operates from. It is a grace-based frame of reference that states that the owner is required only to give what justice demands. Justice demands a fair wage, and a fair wage is exactly what is offered to each of them at the start. Well, the standard for a fair day's wage in that day was a denarius. And Jesus says: "Didn't you agree with me on a denarius?" Jesus points out that not only was a denarius a just wage but it was also a wage that every one of them had agreed to at the beginning. And so having satisfied the demands of justice by paying each of them a just wage, Jesus then insists I am now free to give a grace wage to whomever I choose. I mean in this case "grace" means that those who only worked one hour get paid the exact same wage as those who worked the whole day get paid. The man says: "Take what is yours and go. I want to give this last man the same as I gave you."*

"But Jesus," we insist, "that's not fair!" Everyone's not being treated identically! And Jesus' response is that his obligation is not to be fair by paying everyone the same rate, but to be just by paying everyone at a minimum a just wage. And having done that, having given a just wage for all, he's then free to give a generous wage to some. Verse 15: *"Don't I have the right to do what I want with my business? Are you jealous because I'm generous?"*

You have to understand these stories that Jesus is telling are designed to give us the opportunity to invite us, as it were, into his mind, into his way of thinking. And clearly God's ways are not our ways particularly when it comes to fairness the difference between justice and mercy. What God says about justice is that the wages of sin is death. And since all of us are sinners, every one of us has incurred the same death sentence. I mean for some, it takes a hundred years to get there, but we all know we're all going to get there. Justice requires that God give to each of us what justice demands, and unfortunately, that's the death penalty. *Ezekiel 18:20* says: *The person who sins is the one who will die.*

Now to apply this to what we were looking at before, just ask the question: Did God have the right to take the life of someone who was gathering sticks on the Sabbath? Well, justice says absolutely. God laid out the standard and the punishment and the

stick-gatherer decided to challenge that. The Sabbath breaker was a man who was sinning with a high hand. He knew what the standard was and he chose to publicly defy it. And God chose to make an example of that man. See, that man wasn't owed mercy. And for God's reasons and purpose, he didn't receive it.

But here's where we depart from God's ways. We genuinely think mercy is owed to everyone. We think it's something we're entitled to. And we're offended that grace isn't extend to everyone everywhere. And we're mistaken. See, God owes each of us only justice. He doesn't owe us fairness and he doesn't owe us mercy. What God says about mercy in this parable is that as long as he satisfies the demand of justice, he is therefore free to give generously to whomever he chooses according to grace. A denarius is a just wage for someone who's worked the entire day. It's a generous wage for those who have only worked an hour. And the owner claims as long as he gives a just wage to everyone, he's then freed to give a generous wage to whomever he chooses. *"Do I not have the right to do what I want with my business? Are you jealous because I'm generous?"*

You have to understand, this is a story and in the story, the landowner's generosity costs him only his wealth. The Son of God's generosity cost him his life. Isaiah's servant song says: *He will*

not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." God is speaking about the covenant and do you know where that covenant was displayed? It was displayed at the cross. I mean do you know when justice was established on the earth, when the straight paths made crooked by the sin of Adam were finally made right again? That was Easter morning. That was the time when the Father affirmed His justice by accepting the sacrifice of His Son on behalf of His sheep. And God the Father who through the Son created the heavens, the earth and the people who walk on it and the life that is in the people of it, that God, God the Father, calls God the Son, and He says this, He says: *"I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people."* There you have the Father saying I will give the Son as a covenant for the people. You know what that means? Each month on the very first Sunday of the month we celebrate a covenant and we celebrate that covenant with these

words of Jesus in *Matthew 26*. It says: *And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

See, there's a reason why God can be generous when it comes to forgiving sin and why no one has a right, a right to his mercy. And it's perfectly illustrated in the seeming injustice in His forgiving David and Moses while destroying others like Pharaoh. I mean, you want to see a glaring example of the disparity between our understanding of justice and God's? It's God's response to David's sin. John Piper points out that God's forgiveness of David's sin left Uriah, who was Bathsheba's husband, who he murdered, left him desperate for justice. I mean think about what happened here. David knowingly impregnates another man's wife and when he finds out that she's pregnant, he takes advantage of the man's loyalty and integrity to set him up to be killed in battle. Nathan the prophet confronts David with his sin and he confesses in *2 Samuel 12*: *"I have sinned against the LORD."* Then Nathan replied to David, *"The Lord has taken away your sin; you will not die."* Piper says this, he says: "David feels the rebuke of Nathan, and in verse 13 he says, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' To this Nathan responds, 'The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.' And he says: "Just like that! Adultery and murder are 'passed

over.' It is almost incredible. Our sense of justice screams out, 'No! You just can't let it go like that! He deserves to die or be imprisoned for life!' But Nathan does not say that. He says, 'The LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die.'" See, there's a reason why God can put away the sin of David. It goes right to the core of the story that Jesus is telling us about the workers in the vineyard. Piper goes on to say: "God saw his glory being despised by sinners (like David). He saw his worth belittled and his name dishonored by our sins and rather than vindicating the worth of his glory by slaying his people, he vindicated his glory with slaying his Son. God could have settled accounts by punishing all sinners with hell. This would have demonstrated that he does not minimize our falling short of his glory. Our belittling his honor. But God did not will to destroy. 'Indeed God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world through him might be saved.'"

I mean David's sin against Uriah was paid for in full. It just wasn't paid for by David. It was paid for by God himself who took on flesh, lived a perfect life and then offered his life as a payment for that sin. But it wasn't just David's sin that Jesus died for, it was your sin and my sin as well. It was the sin of every one of his sheep that Jesus went to the cross to pay for. Again, God says of his servant in *Isaiah 42*, he says: *I will give*

you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I don't know if you remember what Jesus did when he began his public ministry, but when he started it out, he went to his local temple where he had been raised and they all knew him there and he quoted -- he stood up and he quoted from one of Isaiah's servant songs. This is Luke 4. It says this, describing his beginning of his public ministry, it says: He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. As usual, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him, and unrolling the scroll, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on Him. He began by saying to them, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled." He was the one! He was the suffering servant of Isaiah and his message repeatedly stated that he was sent to free the captives and give sight to the blind. And we know his life was spent giving sight to the blind, and at the end of his life the physically blind numbered merely a handful but it was his

death that set the captives free and they now number somewhere in the billions. He made this promise in the same chapter of Isaiah. He says: *I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, and not forsake them.*

Now there was only one way for Jesus to keep us from being forsaken. It was for him to be forsaken in our place. I mean Jesus said: *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."* So my question for all of us this morning is: Are you one of his sheep? I mean if you're within earshot of my words, the chances are decent that you're among those whom God has chosen to give generous justice to. Jesus said in *John 10*: *"My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish -- ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."*

You know it's a fair question to ask at this point if you are one of God's, then why me? Why did he choose me? Awhile back I got an email from my daughter Lydia. It said this, she said: My friend sent me a text message this morning. I thought it was pretty cool.

Her friend said this -- quote -- "I've been thinking more about God choosing us lately. It's all over the scriptures. I just feel confused. Why would he choose me? I'm so glad he did." Well, that's a great question. I mean, why would God treat you or me any different than he treated Pharaoh? I mean according to Jesus's parable, as long as Pharaoh and every other son of Adam receives justice, then God's servant Jesus is free to give mercy to whomever he chooses. And so we see Pharaoh gets justice, why do we get mercy? Well, the only answer I can give you is the answer that God gives in *Romans 9:15*. He says: *I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it does not depend on human will or effort but on God who shows mercy.*

That begs yet another question. That question is for what reason would God's commitment to justice for himself and mercy for me cause him to leave paradise, live among us and die so that we could live? God's got the answer to that as well. It's *1 Peter 2*. He says: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession.* That's an answer but it's only part of the answer. God says you and I are a chosen race that God has raised up for his possession. It's the reason why God's servant song of justice is something that you and I need to take into the very core of our being. God chose us. Right outside of

that door are hundreds of folks to whom this gospel is nothing more than foolishness. For some reason God made it make sense to us, and that's a privilege that will take all of eternity to unpack. I mean again *Isaiah 42:6* says: He gave us his Son: *As a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.* I've got news for you, that job God's now given to us. I mean, God appoints us as priests to a world that is sitting in darkness. He appoints us as the intermediaries between God himself and your family, your friends, and your neighbors. God then makes us into a holy nation by cleansing us with his own blood, making us a people for his own possession. But God doesn't stop there. The Scripture also gives us a why as well. It's the second part to the answer as to why we were chosen and it's in the same verse. It says: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that -- very important -- so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* That's why God chose us. That's why we're here, to proclaim His praises into the darkness he has rescued us from. I think we all know that that darkness has become a lot more obvious in the last ten years.

You know, one commentator described the light of the gospel in our

culture as this one time blazing campfire that has progressively grown weaker and weaker and weaker. And as the light of that gospel fire has dimmed, you can begin to see these glowing red eyes that had been pushed back by that fire and they're advancing and they're coming closer and closer and closer. They're getting more and more aggressive as they see that light grow dimmer and dimmer. Just turn on your TV or open up a newspaper and you see glowing red eyes everywhere. The enemy is clearly advancing because the Christian consensus in our culture has evaporated, and it evaporated because it was never real in the first place. It has left an ever expanding darkness that is obvious to everyone.

So how do we proclaim his praises in that darkness? You know, it's not really rocket science. I mean you do it by being, not doing, being the light in the darkness. Well, it's easy to say but how do you do that? By seeing every aspect of life lived as sacred, as simply life itself lived consciously for the King Himself in a world that is blind to that king. That's how we -- quote -- *"proclaim the praise of the One who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* And God's made it clear that he owes every one of us justice but not fairness. And justice is the judgment of an ever expanding darkness that we're just getting a taste of. I mean our brothers and sisters in the persecuted world know it all too well. We are the recipients of the most generous justice the

world has ever known. God has taken our place, he has borne our penalty and given us the task of restoring justice in this world, of making the crooked straight and the darkness light. We do that simply by being. By being what Jesus told us to be in Matthew 5. He says: *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* Let's pray.

Father God, I do praise you and thank you for the incalculable gift that you have given to us of your gospel, of your grace, of an understanding of what that means. And, Lord, along with that incredible privilege goes that incredible responsibility. We are a called out nation, a chosen nation, a people pulled out of the darkness and thrust into the light, called to speak to those who are still in that darkness. And I pray, Lord, for each and every one of us that we would understand that our calling is to be living a life that is sacred, living a life that sees you and your kingdom as the most important thing in our lives so that we can be those who are still acting as priests, calling out that darkness. I pray for that grace, that wisdom and that power, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.