Matthew 20:1-16

How to Spot a Grump :

Do you remember the Care Bears? I loved! them.

I used to have them sitting on my desk at work in a neat little row. Grumpy is my favorite.

I love his little frown and his frumpy little attitude.

My kids got that one for me, it was to remind me of a person that I worked with who was always grumpy, and to not be like them. (I used to look at it and laugh because of what my kids had said. It worked, I would check my attitude and laugh a little.)

If you don’t know whether this applies to you, here are three marks of a Grump.

First, a grumbler is never satisfied.

If it’s money, he never has enough. If it’s his home, somebody else has a nicer one. If it’s his grades in school, an A- is a disappointment. He is an expert in criticism and a Ph.D. in nitpicking. Nothing is ever really enough.

Second, he always has an excuse.

Ask him why he doesn’t buy a new car and he says the interest rates are too high. Ask him again and he says they cost too much.

Ask him again and he says new cars are a rip-off. Ask him why he doesn’t buy a used car and he says you’re just buying somebody else’s problems.

Ask him why he doesn’t fix up the car he has and he says you don’t throw good money after bad.

Third, The Grump overestimates his own importance.

The earliest workers did not complain against the 9 a.m., 12 noon, or 3 p.m. workers but only one group: the last to arrive, the first to leave, the single hour performer.

In their mind, they thought they should receive more compensation, a sizable bonus, or an attractive package.

The pride of working hard for the money, giving value for the buck, and subtracting from the unemployment figures were lost to the workers who were previously unemployed and out on the streets.

After all, didn’t they bear the burden and brave the heat? They were hardened perfectionists, professionals, and performers.

They did not complain about not having enough, but not having more. The disgruntled group confused their personal worth with comparative or relative worth to others.

What’s at the heart of their complaint?

Matthew 20:12

12 ’These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ’and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

Fundamentally it’s in that little phrase “you have made them equal to us.” If you just count hours worked, they aren’t equal.

It’s not that they minded the latecomers getting paid, and it’s not really that they minded the latecomers getting a denarius. Even that would be okay.

Matthew 20:10

10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.

And that’s why they grumbled.

The Steps Down to the Basement of the Grump:

Step One: Observaion

--they saw the latecomers being paid.

Step Two: Expectation

--they assumed they would be paid more.

Step Three: Consternation

--they couldn’t believe what was happening.

Step Four: Detonation

--they blew up when they found out everyone was being paid the same.

Their complaint sounds good on its face, but it is based on a standard of human comparison.

Ultimately, they weren’t complaining against the other workers. Their beef was with the landowner. But he was the man who hired them in the first place.

Without him, they would never have had a job at all.

And for the groups hired at 9 AM and 12 noon and 3 PM, he never promised to pay them more or less than anyone else. He simply promised to give them a fair wage, which he did.

When you finally boil it all down--grumbling is only a symptom. The deeper problem is envy.

But underneath the envy is an even deeper issue. We’ve got a problem with God. We’re mad at God because we think he was better to someone else than he was to us.

In the final analysis, Jesus told this story to teach us something about God. We may think when we look at our life that we are getting justice while someone else is getting all the grace. That’s how it is in this world.

We think we are like the 6 AM laborers who showed up early, worked hard all day and bore the burdens while others stood idle until the last moment and then worked for only an hour.

But that’s not how God sees it. God’s view is that we are like the men who were idle all day until 5:00 P.M. and at the last second find work to do. For those men, their reward is all out of proportion to their work.

Why are we doing what we do? If it’s a straight reward you want, fine, you’ll get it. God will never cheat you.

But that’s all you’ll get. And you’ll go to heaven grumbling all the way, always checking to see how you are doing compared with someone else.

But if you decide to do your work for the Lord’s sake alone, you will never be disappointed.

Psalm 1:1-6

1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

4 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

6 For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Philippians 2:14-15

14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing;

15 that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,

How to Climb out of the Grumpy Seat

1) Thank God for What You’ve Got.

The longer I serve the Lord, the more critical this seems to be. Before you grumble today, thank God first for your blessings.

The men who worked all day and then felt cheated forgot that if the owner hadn’t come along, they wouldn’t have had a job at all.

How much better and nobler to say, “Thank God for the good things he has already given me.”

2) Don’t Judge Yourself by What Someone Else Gets.

Here is the heart of the problem. The grumbler can’t keep his eyes off his more fortunate friends. Looking at others always gets us in trouble.

Remember, God isn’t obligated to treat everyone alike. He isn’t bound by our standards of fairness. If he chooses to bless someone more obviously than he blesses you, that’s his business.

Many people struggle with this concept because they think that because God did something for a friend or a neighbor or a loved one, then God must be bound to do the same thing for them.

3) Remember that God Rewards Faithfulness,

Not Production.

We live in a world that puts a premium on production: “What’s the bottom line?”

“How many new calls did you make this week?”

“How many books have you written?”

“How many degrees do you have?”

"When are you going to get that promotion?"

"How’s your career going?"

It’s easy to bring that thinking over into the church. We tend to reduce the Christian life to a mechanical process--so much prayer, so much Bible Study, so much work in the church equals a certain reward.

We’re very production oriented. That’s the way the world looks at things. You either produce or you’re fired.

But God’s point-of-view is different. The world looks at production. The Lord inspects motive.

The world says, “What did you do?” God says, “Why did you do it?”

The world says, “What’s the bottom line?” God says, “Were you doing it for me?”

The world says, “Show me your stuff.” God says, “Show me your heart.”

Here is the truth. You can’t tell by looking at others where you stand with the Lord. That’s what Jesus means when he says,

“The last will be first, and the first last” (v. 16). Some people who in this life appear to have it all together will be sitting at the back of the class in heaven.

And some who appear to have accomplished very little will shine like the stars. This parable teaches equality-- not of opportunity, but of faithfulness.

It is a wonderful antidote to grumbling to think of it this way:

--God is just. No one will be underpaid.

--God is generous. Everyone will be surprised.

If we want justice, we will have it and grumble all the way. If we want grace, we will have it and remember that we were idle before God called us out of the marketplace and gave us a job to do.

People don’t go to hell because of an accumulation of bad deeds. If Adolph Hitler winds up in hell it won’t be because he killed 6,000,000 Jews and plunged the world into a bloody war that last over half a decade.

If he winds up in hell, it will be because he refused God’s gracious gift of salvation.

Look at the men crucified with Jesus. They were both horrible men. They were rotten to the core. They probably never had done anything right.

They were probably in and out of jail. The only difference between the two is that one believed that Jesus could save his soul. The other did not.

Heaven isn’t the reward for long years of service, like a gold watch is on retirement after 30 years of service to the company. Hell isn’t the reward for a lifetime of bad deeds.

Heaven is the reward for believing that Jesus can save your soul by his grace despite what you’ve done.

Hell is the reward for not believing that Jesus can save your soul by his grace in spite of all the old ladies you help across the street or whatever good deeds you’ve done.

The workers in the field were paid because they showed up to work, not for how long they had worked. Those who didn’t to work got nothing.

It doesn’t matter how long you follow Jesus. All that matters is that you follow him. Where are you? Amen.