



Stories for ears to hear...

IT'S NOT FAIR!

The Workers in the Vineyard, Matthew 21:1-16

Have you ever said ...

- Children ... AND adults
- Sports, pay, life in general
- Fairness is a good thing - right?
- This **parable** ...
 - Rubs us up the wrong way

Isn't God fair? ...





Surely God will be fair?

The labourers

- Labourers worked when there was work
- Waited in the marketplace
- Risky business
No work = no food
- Work was HARD and HOT!
- Pay was same as for a soldier



Surely God will be fair?

The manager

- It's 6am!
- Keeps going back to look for workers ..
- 6am ... 12noon, 3pm, 5pm
- The ones hired last sound like the least promising of all
- Finally, it's 6 o'clock in the evening



Finally, the day's work is done

The wages

- Remember what the ones who started at 6am were promised ...?
- And everyone else ?
- We get **SHOCK** after **SHOCK!**
- What would you have said?
... **“IT’S NOT FAIR”** ?
- The manager’s reply?

The Workers & the Vineyard – Matthew 20 from v1

‘For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the market-place doing nothing. He told them, “You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went.

‘He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, “Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?”

“Because no one has hired us,” they answered. He said to them, “You also go and work in my vineyard.”

‘When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, “Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.”

‘The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. “These 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.”

‘But he answered one of them, **“I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”**

‘So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

(STUDY GROUP!)

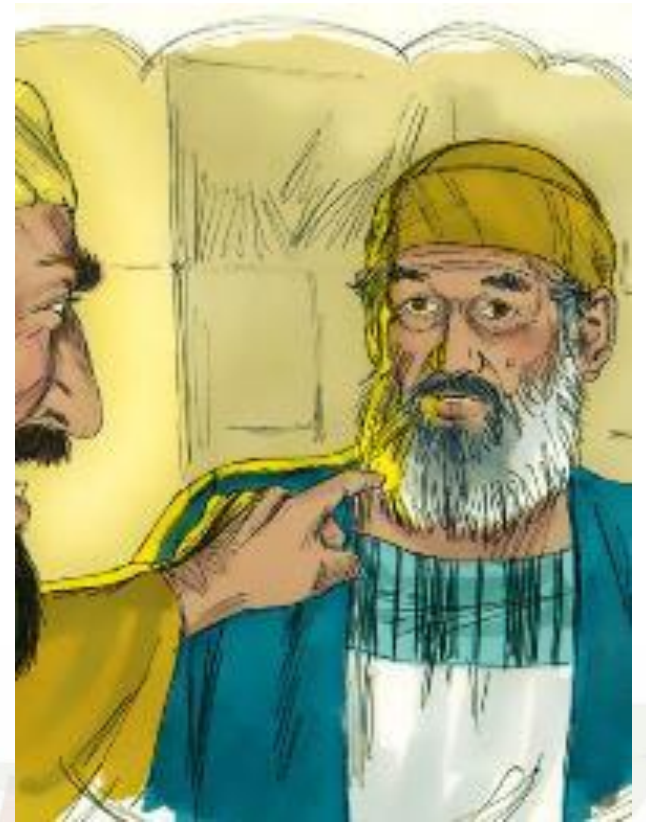
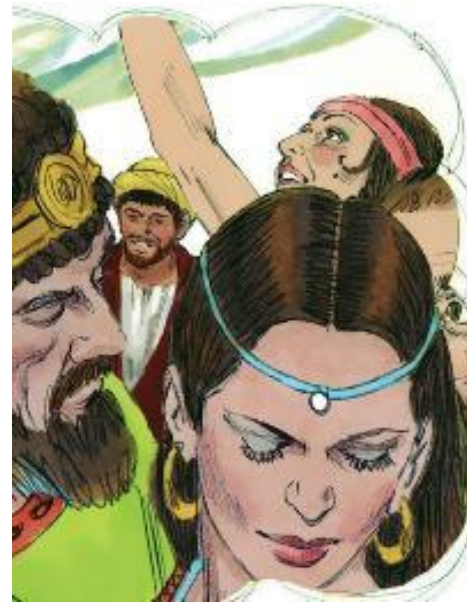
“DON’T SULK!”

- God’s idea of being generous (grace) isn’t the same as our idea of “fair”
- If you were the one who turned up at 6 in the morning *It doesn’t feel good!*
- THINK:
 - The worst person at my office
 - The nastiest person in the street
 - ... gets treated the same as ME?
 - And God’s answer sounds a little off “**don’t sulk?**”
- This “*but what about us Lord?!*” is a theme about prejudice – and it repeats in scripture...



“It isn’t up to you – it’s up to me”

- The Prodigal Son’s elder brother – *a great story!*
 - Young and reckless son gets away with it!
 - *Elder brother ends up sulking*
 - *Father: “Son everything I have is yours but we had to celebrate ... It isn’t up to you” ...*
 - *Elder brother wants **JUSTICE**,
God chooses **GENEROSITY***



“It isn’t up to you – its up to me”

Old Testament example - Jonah

- In this story its Nineveh who should “get it in the neck”
- Another exciting story!
- Jonah waits for ... what God promised
- Jonah ends up climbing a hill and sulking!
- *“Jonah isn’t it up to me what to do with the people of this city?”*
(It isn’t up to you)
- Jonah wants **JUSTICE**, God chooses **GENEROSITY**

..... When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord, ‘Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die

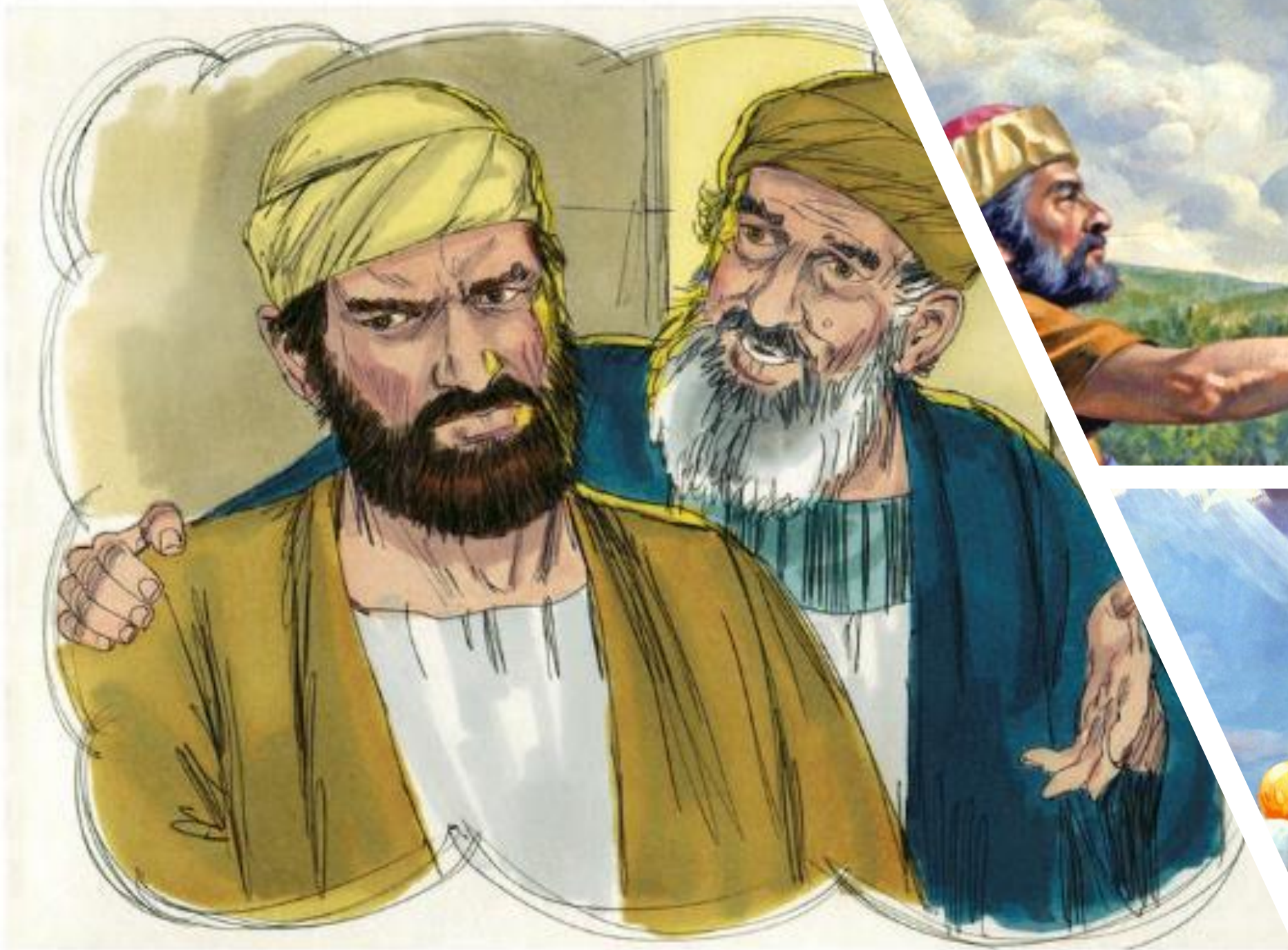
But the Lord replied, ‘Jonah, is it right for you to be angry?’

“It isn’t up to you – its up to me”

The workers in the vineyard

- Interesting story – some workers start at 6 in the morning!
- They end up sulking
- “I haven’t cheated you – everything I promised is yours”
.... *It isn’t up to you*
- They want **JUSTICE**, God chooses **GENEROSITY**







God's grace is not fair

- All 3 stories have the same idea the deserving & the undeserving
- We can't earn God's grace
- It transcends human fairness
- And he might give others more than you



Is God unfair then?

- God IS unfair – and much more than fair
- That is his right
- *If God was REALLY “fair” – what would that look like?*
- Upside down values operate in the Kingdom of God



“It is frightening to realise that our identification with the first workers, and hence with the opponents of Jesus, reveals how loveless and unmerciful we actually are ... (Stein)



The point?

Is NOT that everyone in the end receives exactly the same reward

The point is, when it comes to ***salvation***, that decision depends on God ... and you might not agree with it

HANG ON! Last week didn't we say the opposite?

Parable of the Talents:

- Faithfulness matters!
God cares about our work

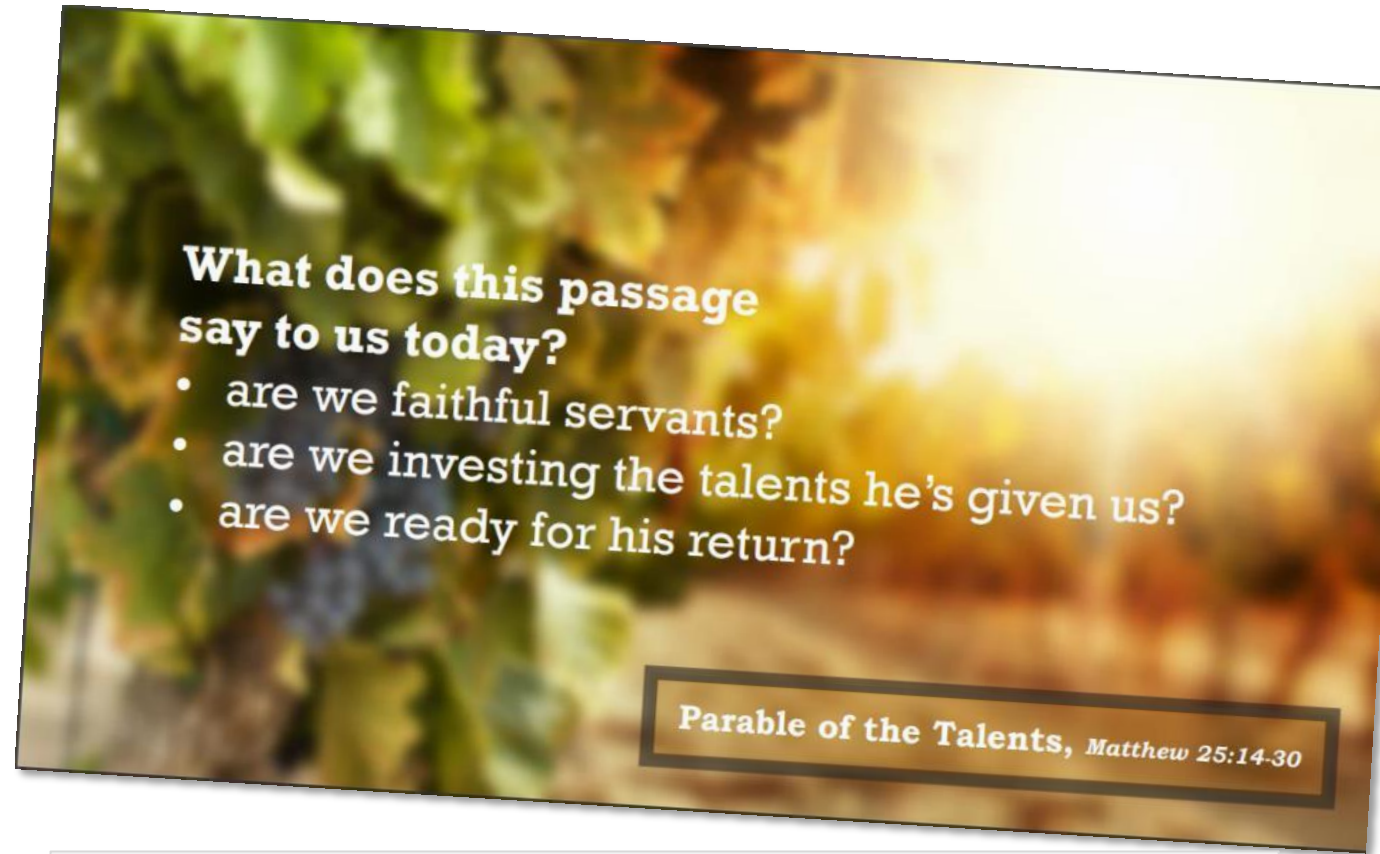
But Parables make 1 point

Talents:

- Followers of Jesus are rewarded according to faithfulness

Workers in the Vineyard:

- Entry into God's kingdom is up to God ... *it's never too late to join the revolution!*



Or as someone once said: *The entry fee to the Kingdom of God is completely free but the annual subscription is everything we've got!*

Who are the people YOU know who rock up at 5pm and don't work hard?

1. People who have lived in an immoral or unethical way?

- **QUESTION:** Do you view people as less deserving depending on their past?

2. People who have a different worldview / lifestyle?

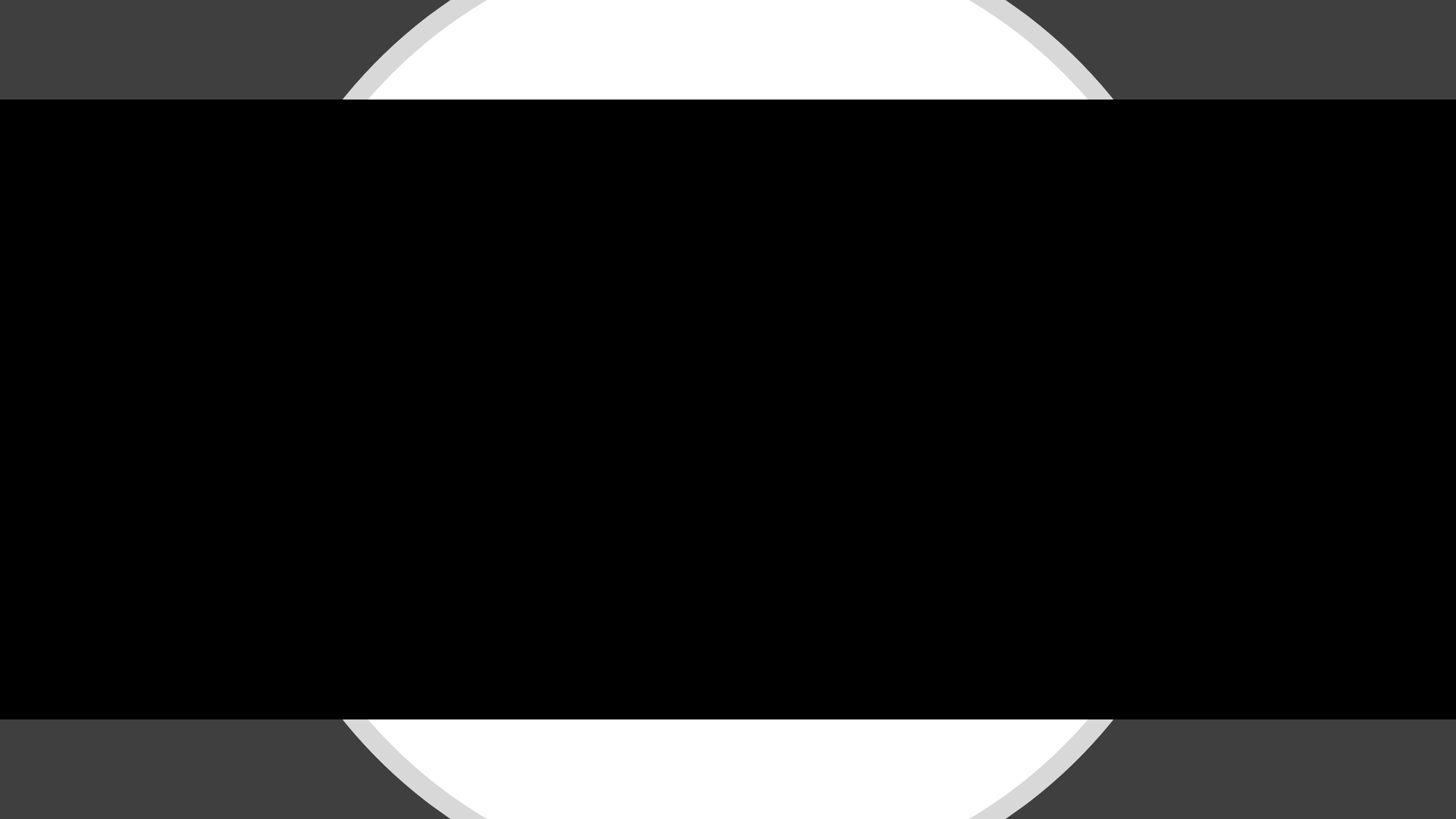
Jesus is the way but we don't always know how he reveals this way

- **QUESTION** Do you eg treat Christians from other traditions differently?

3. Or just people in our work, our street ...?

- **QUESTION** Are you insisting on "justice" when you could show generosity?

*Doesn't mean we approve of any behaviour or any beliefs
It does mean that we accept people, regardless*





“It’s not fair!”

A summary

- Grace isn’t “fair” – thank God for that!
- We must hold back from considering people as “unlikely” or inappropriate for God’s kingdom
- Just as the workers were surprised – there are yet surprises in store for us



Stories for ears to hear...