

How Do You See the Lord?

☹ **Cross-eyed despot?** (vv.1-5, 10-12)

‡ **Generous Landlord !!!** (vv.6-9, 13-16)

In the name of Jesus, our gracious Lord and Savior, dear fellow servants of God:

If you took your microphone on the street and did your own version of “Jay Walking,” how do you think people would react if you asked, “Why are you so angry at God?” My guess is that most folks would look startled: “I’m not angry at God.” But if you started telling them some of the things God says in the Bible, they would be angry: “God didn’t say that!” Or another favorite, “That’s only your interpretation!” As a young pastor I was rather naïve that if I only explained kindly and clearly the Biblical practice of Close Communion, everyone would agree. But one woman argued, “My God would never say that!” You see? Maybe people are not angry with their god, but the God of the Bible is another matter. If the LORD is the only God as the Bible says, and if God hates the sin as well as the sinner – also what the Bible says (Hosea 9:15; Psalm 5:5f; 11:5f), then our rising blood pressure proves God right when He says, “*The law works wrath.*” (Romans 4:15) Microphone on: **How Do You See the Lord?**

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To a world of cross-eyed people, the straight-eyed look strange. And whole lot of church people, see the God of the Bible as a **Cross-eyed despot**, i.e., tyrant or dictator. In fact, the more active we are, like pastors, teachers or officers, the more likely we see God the way the workers did in Jesus’ parable.

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard....¹⁰ 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 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.’”

Isn’t that how Peter and the rest of the disciples felt? They argued who was the greatest when Jesus told them He would suffer and die on the cross. And right before our text lead disciple Peter asked a very natural question. Jesus had just noted how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, “*easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.*” (19:24) Wouldn’t you ask with Peter, “*We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?*” We would say, “What will I get out of church?” Or, “Why support the church?” Basically it all boils down to, “What’s in it for me?”

Most of us know better and really try not to ask such questions. It sounds selfish, but our hearts don’t always follow our faith. In fact, as the LORD says through Jeremiah, “*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*” (17:9 NIV) So we’re upset if people don’t seem to appreciate our ideas. Giving up time should at least get some thanks every once in a while, don’t you think? But a little criticism can weigh us down with too many burdens and spiritual sunstroke besides.

Here again Jesus proves to be the kind and generous God. He wants His servants to see their duty to serve, but He also promises great blessings for all who leave behind earthly wealth and relationships to put Christ first. Jesus told Peter and the Twelve, “*Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.*” (19:29) The holy writer to the persecuted Jewish Christians wrote: “*God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.*” (Hebrews 6:10 NIV) Does that sound like a **Cross-eyed despot?**

Then Jesus throws in this: *“But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”* Is that as **cross-eyed** as it sounds? The first hired are the last paid; the last hired get paid first the same amount as everyone else? If you worked hard all day, wouldn't you think, “I'd better get a whole lot more for all my sweat than those “shlubs” who hardly did anything!” But Jesus' *Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard* shows us we were spiritually born worse than **cross-eyed**. Jesus wants to give sight to the blind. **How Do You See the Lord?** There is only one right way. The God of the Bible is a...

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Have you ever served jail time for your faith? Ever suffered for Christ? A Christian teenager in Pakistan refused to marry the son of her Muslim boss who beat her and sent her home. When the girl's mother came over to complain, he poured gas on her and set her afire. The Muslim authorities thought she deserved it. We live in a country that guarantees religious freedom. But sometimes we wimp out on our faith in the heat of the day. If we have to choose between work or worship, we tend to ignore God's blessings and choose work. Then if we're fired or laid off, we wonder why God is treating us so bad. Our worries for our health, our bills, our relationships come from blindness to God's generosity.

There's something here we rarely notice. We were not the first ones hired. Others worked in the Lord's vineyard long before us. Who carried you to be baptized and taught you your Bible stories? Someone else started that long line of Christians serving the Lord. Somewhere back in your family tree was the first Christian who paid a heavy price for being the only one in the family. We find very few like that in America. But first-family Christians are quite common in China, India, Africa and other parts of the world. So put down your shovels and rakes a while and marvel at our **Generous Landlord!!!**

Everyone is looking for the job with higher pay and fewer hours. But the landowner in Jesus' parable, obviously God, does not even wait for workers to apply. He goes looking for them. Hour by hour as the day rolls on the **Generous Landlord** hurries to the market to find those standing idle and put them to work. *“I will pay you whatever is right,”* He promises. But who would have guessed what He had in mind? You see, a “denarius” was a day's pay. As a laborer you might expect \$10 / hour, or \$120 for twelve-hour day. But what if this boss found you about 5:00 PM, hired you for *“whatever is right,”* then paid you a full \$120 to work from 5:00 – 6:00 PM? Didn't you just earn \$120 for one hour?

That's essentially what God is doing with all of us, and we have to admit we didn't really earn it. Instead of money which is such a weak and miserable god it can't even guard itself from thieves and inflation, God almighty, merciful and gracious, washes away our sins of selfishness and greed, then gives us eternal life as a free gift of His grace. He heals our eyes so we can see true riches in joyful, thankful hearts that appreciate real blessings like these. We can finally see how far too many Americans keep pursuing worldly wealth behind a batch of prosperity preachers. But we are richer by far to know Jesus as our Savior who gives us eternal life by faith in Him as our inheritance from God above. “First” Christians get the same as “last” Christians. Freedom from sickness, sorrow and death in an everlasting kingdom of bliss and rest – what more could anyone want than eternal happiness with God?

When I was two years old, the doctor had to take his scalpel and cut the tiny muscles of my eyes so I wouldn't look cross-eyed anymore. God does not want us to see Him as a **Cross-eyed despot** either. His sharp scalpel is this Word of God that cuts back our pride like over tight muscles. But this same Word of grace heals our eyes to see and love and truly appreciate our **Generous Landlord!!!** When you see God with the eyes of faith trusting in Jesus as your Savior, every day serving Him is one more day you're eager to go to work. His vineyard is a great place to be. His wages are wonderful. But His retirement plan is out of this world. I never want to work for anyone else. How about you? Truly our **Generous God** wants to bless you – for Jesus' sake. Amen.