

Matthew 20:1 ¶ For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

Matthew 20:2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

Matthew 20:3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,

Matthew 20:4 And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

Matthew 20:5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

Matthew 20:6 And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

Matthew 20:7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, *that* shall ye receive.

Once again the chapter break is unfortunate. With this parable Jesus will continue to build on the events from the previous chapter and truth of the last verse: “*But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.*” It’s a teaching on grace.

Jesus tells the story of the head of a family, the master, who goes out early in the morning to hire people to work in his vineyard. He did so for a penny a day—a denarius, a usual amount for a day of work. About the third hour of the day (9:00 am) he noticed some others standing idle in the marketplace needing work, so he hired them as well promising to pay them “whatever is right”—in other words, they agreed to work on the basis of faith. He did the same thing about the sixth hour (noon), ninth hour (3:00 p.m.) and eleventh hour (5:00 p.m.).

It is significant to note that each time the master went to the marketplace, he noticed men standing idle. It is pointed out that the men hired at 5:00 p.m. had been standing idle all day. Obviously, they had either not been aware of the master’s previous visits or had refused the opportunities he had offered on his previous trips to the marketplace. Still, the master offered them one last opportunity to come and work for him.

Matthew 20:8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them *their* hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

Matthew 20:9 And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

Matthew 20:10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

Matthew 20:11 And when they had received *it*, they murmured against the goodman of the house,

Matthew 20:12 Saying, These last have wrought *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

Matthew 20:13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no

wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

Matthew 20:14 Take *that thine is*, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.

Matthew 20:15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

When the workday was over, the master called his steward and instructed him to call the laborers in and pay them—beginning from the last to the first. The men hired at 5:00 p.m. were paid a penny. After seeing that, the men that had been hired first expected that they would get more, but they didn't; they, too, were paid a penny. They then complained to the master that the men that had only worked one hour were paid the same amount that they had been paid. They felt that because they had worked hard during the heat of the day they should have been paid more. The master pointed out that they had agreed to work that day for him for a penny, so he was not mistreating them. He also explained that it was his prerogative to spend his money however he wanted. He then posed a very pointed question: Are you angry because I am doing a good deed?

As one reads through this parable, I think we have to remember that it is being told to a group of Jewish disciples who are expecting to be rewarded when Jesus established His kingdom. It seems that God is the head of the house and Jesus the chief steward. The workers represent those that have "hired on" to work for Him. Some of these men have "worked" for God since their earliest years and others didn't make that choice until later in life. All, however, received the same pay.

Scripture refers to Israel as God's vineyard.

Isaiah 5:7 "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant...."

In light of the context from the previous chapter, it seems that the payment for services rendered picture entry into the kingdom. If so, Jesus is basically saying (my paraphrase), "Should I keep these people out since they did not serve me as long as you did? If so, salvation could not be a work of grace. Is that what you want?"

There is a verse in Proverbs that defines the evil eye.

Proverbs 28:22 "He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him."

Again, in light of the context from the previous chapter, I believe Jesus is rebuking the disciples and hoping to get them to examine their character and their motives for serving Him.

There is also spiritual application that can be made to the church regarding salvation as the end result of every person's life of service before God in Christ no matter how long or short that time of service may be. I like this quote from

Burton Coffman: "Whatever people do, however long or short their service to God, whatever of sacrifice, blood, or tears, however soon or late they began to serve him, the reward is so fantastically great that the conditions for obtaining it, whether more or less in certain cases, must forever appear utterly and completely insignificant."

I also like the following observations from David Guzik:

"The point isn't that all have the same reward - though all God's people do go to the same heaven (where they will have reward in different measure). The point is that God rewards on the principle of grace, and we should therefore expect surprises. He will never be *less* than fair, but reserves the right to be *more* than fair as pleases Him. God's grace always operates righteously."

"Living under grace is sort of a two-edged sword. Under grace, we can't come to God complaining, 'Don't I deserve better than this'; because God will reply, 'Does this mean that you really want Me to give you what you deserve?'"

Matthew 20:16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

The point being emphasized—The last shall be first and the first last. It's a story of grace—unmerited favor. No Jewish person can earn entry into the kingdom, and no person can earn salvation that leads to eternal life. Both are obtained by grace as a gift by faith in Jesus Christ.

In light of worldly wisdom, Jesus notes that though many are called or invited to follow and serve Him, few will prove to be chosen and receive His favor.

Matthew 20:17 ¶ And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them,

Matthew 20:18 Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death,

Matthew 20:19 And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify *him*: and the third day he shall rise again.

At this point, Matthew notes that Jesus and the twelve disciples are headed "up" to Jerusalem—a journey that would culminate with His death and resurrection. David Stern has an informative comment on this wording: "Jerusalem is located on top of the Judean hills, some 2,500 feet above sea level and higher than most inhabited places in Israel. This particular ascent was being made from Jericho, 900 feet below sea level. But "going up to Jerusalem" has a spiritual dimension which does not depend on altitude — the earth's spiritual geography is such that from the summit of Mount Everest one still "goes up" to Jerusalem. Today when Jews come to live in Israel they do not "immigrate" but "make *aliyah*" (the word means "going up"), even if they plan to live on the shore of the Dead Sea, the lowest place on earth."

On the way He took them aside to talk to them. He informed them that the “Son of man,” a reference to Himself, would be betrayed unto the chief priests and scribes and condemned to death. They would then deliver Him to the Gentiles (the Roman authorities) to mock, scourge and crucify Him; but on the third day He would resurrect to new life. All of this was foretold by the prophets.

Psalms 22:7–8 “All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.”

Psalms 22:14–16 “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.”

Isaiah 50:6 “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.”

Isaiah 53:5 “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

Note that Jesus is telling the disciples this before Judas has made a deal with the religious leaders to betray Jesus. It’s also interesting to note how specific Jesus was about what would occur, yet we will see as the narrative unfolds that the disciples just did not seem to process this truth. Luke makes a point of that truth in his account of this event.

Luke 18:34 “And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.”

Matthew 20:20 ¶ Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping *him*, and desiring a certain thing of him.

Matthew 20:21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

Matthew 20:22 But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

Matthew 20:23 And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but *it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.*

While they were traveling, the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons approached Jesus with a question—a sad question in light of the previous section of scripture. The presence of James and John’s mother alludes to a larger group of followers traveling with them.

An excerpt from my study of John I think is enlightening at this point. Quote:

I was listening to Jon Courson recently, and he mentioned that not only was John the Baptist Jesus' cousin, so was the Apostle John. I had never heard that before and decided to do some research as to scripture that would back up that statement. I found that a pretty convincing case could be made to support that conclusion. John seems to identify four women at the cross:

1. Mary the mother of Jesus
2. Mary's sister
3. Mary wife of Cleopas
4. Mary Magdalene

John 19:25 "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene."

Mark 15:40 identifies three women: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the less and Joses, and Salome. *"There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome...."*

Matthew 4:21 Identifies Zebedee as the father of James and John. *"And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them."*

Matthews 27:56 identifies the women at the cross as Mary Magdalene, Mary wife of Cleopas, and the mother of Zebedee's children. *"Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children."* This would seem to be referencing Salome as Mary's sister when compared to John 19:25.

End quote

In my mind this explains why they would be so bold as to approach the Lord with her question—though they did so humbly by prostrating themselves before Him. She basically asked Jesus if James and John could be given the two highest positions of authority under Him—at His right and left hand—when He established His kingdom.

Jesus let them know that they didn't realize what they were asking. Obviously, He then looked at James and John and asked them if they were prepared to suffer in the same way that He would soon suffer. They didn't hesitate to say that they were. I think they answered with about as much forethought as we do today when agreeing to the terms and conditions of so many of the technology apps that we use today.

Jesus prophesied that they would indeed suffer persecution and death as would He, but the positions they sought were determined by the Father—not Jesus in His humanity.

Note: James was the first apostle to be martyred, and John ended up exiled to the island of Patmos because of his faith. John was also the last of the apostles to die.

Matthew 20:24 And when the ten heard *it*, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

Matthew 20:25 But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

Matthew 20:26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

Matthew 20:27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

Matthew 20:28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

When the other disciples heard what James and John had done, they were angry at the two brothers. Jesus called them together to restore peace. He reminded them that Gentile rulers usually end up abusing their power and authority.

The words of Jesus remind me once again of Lord Acton's quote: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men."

Jesus went on to explain that He would not tolerate that among His disciples. In His kingdom, those who want to be great among them should prove himself a servant to them all. He explained that He, the Son of man, came not to be served, but to serve others and give His life as the promised Redeemer. I am reminded of Paul's words to the Philippians.

Philippians 2:5–8 "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Also noted in what Jesus said is His understanding that through His sacrifice "many" would be redeemed—but not all. Though His sacrifice was sufficient for all, more would reject the gift of salvation He provided than accept it as was declared in chapter 7.

Matthew 7:13–14 "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

Matthew 20:29 ¶ And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him.

Matthew 20:30 And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, *thou*

Son of David.

Matthew 20:31 And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, *thou* Son of David.

Matthew 20:32 And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you?

Matthew 20:33 They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.

Matthew 20:34 So Jesus had compassion *on them*, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

At this point Jesus and the multitude following Him left Jericho. Two blind men sitting on the roadside heard that Jesus was passing by and called out for Him to have mercy on them. They had evidently heard of His miracles of healing and believed Him to be the "Son of David," a term referencing the Messiah. The crowd basically told them to "shut up," but they only cried out louder. Jesus stopped and asked the men what they wanted from Him. They immediately asked for their sight to be restored. Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes; they immediately received their sight. They then joined the multitude following Jesus.

Jesus is always responsive to those who recognize Him as the Savior and are sincere and persistent in their petitions of Him.

I liked Chuck Smith's observation regarding this event: "When a person's ministry gets so great, and they become so prominent that they lose touch with people, and they can no longer minister to people's individual needs, their ministry has become greater than their Lord."