

## Matthew Lesson 20

Matthew Chapter 20

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Memory verses for this week: *Psa 90:14 O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*

**Introduction:** In last week's lesson, Christ taught that God never wanted man and woman to divorce, but gave the commandment of divorcement due to the hardness of their hearts. Later, he showed the self-righteous young ruler that he had not truly kept all of the commandments. He had broken the first one in having no other gods before the Lord when he put his money before his dedication and service to God.

In chapter 20, Jesus taught a lengthy parable pertaining to the kingdom. He again clearly spoke of his impending death and resurrection. He dealt with ambitious requests of his disciples. And, He healed two blind men.

### I. Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard

*Mat 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.*

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

The first ones who came to work agreed to work for a full day at a fair wage in their day for one penny. The second group that were hired at 9am were told that he would pay them "Whatsoever is right." Whenever we work for our employers, we should give a fair days work for the pay. If we agree to work for minimum wage, we should give our all as if we were paid a high wage. It glorifies the Lord when we work hard. We should work as if we are working for the Lord.

*Col 3:23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;*

*Col 3:24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.*

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

*Mat 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.*

It is sad that the householder found many standing idly about in the marketplace. However, in this day and time, it was common for people to work for one days wage at a time. We have grown accustomed to having jobs that last months and years at a time, but back in this day, people were hired to work by the day.

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

*Mat 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?*

*Mat 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.*

Our Lord in these first 16 verses taught another kingdom parable. The story is of day labor of the first century. One of the major, agricultural industries in Israel of that day was the production of grapes and their byproducts.

Throughout the growing season, laborers were needed to work the vineyard, particularly during harvest. The householder mentioned was the owner of this vineyard. It was customary for such a husbandman to go to the local town-market early in the morning and hire day-laborers as he had need. Men needing work would loiter around the marketplace, hoping area landowners would come and hire them for the day.

The standard day's wage of that era was a penny. The word so translated was (dhnarion) denarion (or, denarius) which was a silver Roman coin. The field workers agreed to do a day's work for such. So far, the story is typical of middle-eastern practices. However, as this story further developed, Jesus added features which were not typical.

At about nine o'clock that particular morning, the husbandman determined that more help was still needed. Therefore, he went back to town and hired more men with the comment, "whatsoever is right I will give you." He repeated this process at noon and again at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Finally, at five 'o clock, he hired still others. He asked them, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" They answered, "Because no man hath hired us." However, the end of the work day was only one hour away. At six that evening, the husbandman directed the steward, his foreman, to call it a day and to pay the hired help. Moreover, he directed that the order of payment to be made from the last to the first.

What was astonishing was that everyone was paid the same wage, one penny (a denarius). Some had worked all day for that wage while others had only worked for one hour for the same. Those who had put in a twelve-hour day immediately

grumbled that their pay was no more than those who had toiled only one hour. The landowner however reminded them that they had agreed to work all day for one penny (a denarius). He directed them to go home, commenting that he could do with his wages as he so chose.

His final comment, "Is thine eye evil because I am good," referred to envy on their part. He had dealt kindly with those late in the day. Why should the others be envious thereof. Jesus concluded the parable again with the comment, "So the last shall be first, and the first last." He added, for many be called, but few chosen.

The third set of laborers came on at around noon and the next group at 3 p.m., and were also told that they would be paid fairly also... whatsoever is right I will give you. Then the last group is hired in the 11<sup>th</sup> hour which would have been around 5 p.m., and were also told to be paid a fair amount. All were hired at different intervals, and it appeared it to not be their fault. All seemed willing to have worked the whole day, but were just hired at a later time. The first group was hired out at an honest and fair wage, and the others trusted that they would be paid fairly by the householder.

*Mat 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.*

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

The pay-off began with the last group hired, on down the list to the first ones hired. Through the goodness and mercy of the householder, they all received a 'full day's wages.' Those hired last were paid first, and those hired first paid last.

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

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

*Mat 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.*

*Mat 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?*

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

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

*Mat 20:16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few*

*chosen.*

The parable once again is of the kingdom. A major key to understanding is to see it through the perspective of Israel and their position in the kingdom. Someday, all Old Testament saints (redeemed Israel) will be resurrected into the kingdom. And yet, there will be Jews who were saved in the waning days of the Tribulation. They too will be afforded all the privileges of their Old Testament counterparts, though they will have been converted only a short time.

The implication is that some in that day will consider that they should have a higher reward or rank than those only recently converted. It should not be inferred that there will be open covetousness or discord in the kingdom. However, Jesus used an analogy typical of life. It illustrated how even the Jew converted at the last will also be accorded full rights in the kingdom.

Jesus applied His proverb “the last shall be first, and the first last” in this context. Evidently, those saved at the last will have the same rank of those who were saints from the first. Moreover, followers of Christ of New Testament times will have higher rank in the kingdom than ordinary Jews of Old Testament times.

Indeed, “many be called, but few chosen.” Many are called to salvation, but only a fraction respond to that call. Those are Gods chosen. Many have been called to serve the King, but only a few are chosen for positions of leadership because of their prior faithful service in this life.

The first group murmured because they had a greedy heart. The thought because they worked all day, they should have received ‘more’. But why should they? Did they not agree to work for a fair price? They had agreed to work for a fair wage, and they were being paid as agreed. The householder was just being over generous to those who had less coming... not being unfair to pay what was agreed to be paid. This parable pictures the rewards given by the Lord to ALL His servants in life. Some will live a long life of service... some may only work a few days if none at all. But whether we live long or short lives after experiencing salvation—All will receive their due reward according to faithfulness.

## **II. Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection**

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

*Mat 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,*

*Mat 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.*

From the vicinity of Jericho, which is in the Jordan River valley, Jesus for the fifth time in Matthew's gospel again prophecies of His impending death and resurrection. Jesus added additional details to His impending passion.

It would happen at Jerusalem.

He would be betrayed unto the chief priests.

They, along with the scribes, would condemn Him to death.

He would be delivered to the gentiles (Romans) to be mocked, scourged, and crucified.

The third day He would rise again.

Jesus gave His disciples remarkable detail in foretelling His death and resurrection. Curiously, it was not until after He had risen from the dead that they remembered how He had foretold in detail exactly what was going to happen. In the final months prior to His death and resurrection, Jesus sought to prepare them for what was approaching.

Christ had attempted several other times to make the disciples understand about how he would die and be resurrected. This was something they had a hard time understanding. He reminded them constantly that He was going to die and be raised from the dead. Apparently this was a difficult doctrine for them to believe. Even after his death, they had troubles with this and seemed to lack the faith to believe that Jesus was coming back from the grave. Most likely, had we have been there, we would have had this same lack of faith.

Jesus was to be betrayed and handed over to the chief priest and scribes. These were to condemn him to death, and later deliver him to the Gentiles who would mock, scourge, and crucify Him. The third day God would raise him from the dead. We all need to remember that it wasn't just those people in that day that caused Christ to die... we all because of our sins nailed Christ to that cross. One of my favorite songs we sing in our quartet "When He Was on the Cross, I was on His Mind." That is so true... I believe Jesus would have come and laid down His life for just me.. or for just you. If we had been the only ones in need of a Savior, Jesus would still have died just for us.

### **III. A Mother's Request for Her Sons**

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

*Mat 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.*

This request by James and John's mother was a selfish request. When we start looking to the Lord for personal gain or for position or honor, something is wrong with our desires. She wants one son to set on the left of Christ and one on the right. I guess every parent wants the very best for their children, but this was going a bit far. We know from our earlier studies that the 'sheep' and 'goat' nations are to sit on the right hand and left hand at the time of the judgment of the nations.

*Mat 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.*

*Mat 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.*

James' and John's mother (the wife of Zebedee) came to Jesus asking that her two sons might have the privilege of high rank in His coming kingdom. Some have assumed that James and John put their mother up to this. However, there is no direct indication in the text of that. It is clear however, that this woman had no doubt who Jesus was and that the kingdom of God was at hand. She correctly perceived that her sons already were very close to the Lord .

Jesus implied however that James and John were privy to this self directed request by replying to them in the plural. He essentially said that they didn't know that for which they were asking. This makes me think that James and John at least knew of this plot or perhaps spoke of their desire in their mother's presence. Jesus pointed out how they would indeed drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism. This no doubt speaks of how the disciples of Jesus would face fierce persecution and martyrdom in the following decades.

The mother did not realize what she was asking them. He questions if they could drink of the cup which he was about to drink of, and to be baptized with his baptism. They think nothing of saying that they could. I doubt that they realized the full impact of what they were saying, and had surely forgot what Christ had told them about not being able to do anything without Christ.

*John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.*

Jesus tells them that they might could partake of the cup and be baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with, but it was not for him to give the seats to his left and right. It was prepared for certain ones, and God would dictate who sit in those seats.

J. Vernon McGee points out that we must work for the Lord if we want to receive rewards.

When these two verses are read with omissions, the sense becomes clear. My friend, don't miss the meaning here because it is so important to Christians today. Our Lord is not saying that there is no place at His right hand and left hand for somebody. He is saying that He will not *arbitrarily* give the positions to James and John or to anyone else. Rather, the places are for those who prepare themselves for them.

*Note this very carefully: Heaven is for the asking. You do nothing, nothing, for salvation. You are saved by faith in Christ through His marvelous grace. However, my friend, your position, your reward in heaven is determined by what you do down here on earth. That is very important, and Christians seem to have lost sight of it. What kind of a place are you preparing for yourself? Personally, I have no ambition for the places on Christ's right or left hand—I'm sure I have missed those—but I am working for a place. All of us should be doing this. In Philippians 3:14 Paul said, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The trouble with Christians today is that too few are even trying to win anything. We need to recognize salvation as a free gift, but we need to get on the race course in order to receive a reward.*

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

*Mat 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.*

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

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

Jesus pointed out, however, that rank and position in the kingdom would be the prerogative of His Father. Our Lord, though the Son of God and Deity Himself, clearly remained in submission to the will of His Father, in even such details as who would someday sit at His right hand in His kingdom.

Though the ten resented this imposition upon Jesus, it should be noted that it was the mother of James and John who made the request. Mother's at times can be vicariously ambitious for their children. Such self directed ambition more often than not backfires and creates animosity which was the case here.

Jesus went on to reply upon how the gentile world routinely operates. In the world at large, those in places of rank often 'lord over' those of lesser degree. However, in the kingdom of God, rank and position will be granted on the basis of having a servant's heart.

In God's Kingdom, greatness is exemplified by service and humility. That is the paradoxical antithesis to how the world operates. The greatest example of true, spiritual greatness is how Jesus Christ Himself came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

(1) Jesus came to serve others.

(2) A simple choice of life is to live for others and not for ourselves.

(3) Therein is the highest level of happiness and fulfillment.

(4) Ironically, such a choice is the opposite of the world's formula for success and happiness.

When a person was redeemed, the purchase price was called the 'ransom.' Jesus in effect said, I came to not only serve others but to redeem them. The word translated as ransom (lutron lutron) is a corollary word used along with redemption. The sterling character of our Lord shines forth while at the same time manifesting the proper attitude for His disciples.

*Mat 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.*

The attitude of the other apostles was not good. Instead of seeing the request in a negative way humbly, they are moved with indignation towards James and John. That makes them truly no better than the other two because they were selfish in their feelings also. Jesus tells them that the Gentiles authority was exercised among them, but Jesus would not have it this way among his disciples. Those who will have honor will become a servant to others. If Jesus did not want us to have the heart of a servant, He would not have come as a servant to all mankind. We are to look at Christ's example and be a servant in our life if we want honor in the next life.

I loved what Matthew Henry said on these verses. Here is but a short portion of his comments.

How then shall it be among the disciples of Christ? Something of greatness among them Christ himself had intimated, and here he explains it; "He that will be great among you, that will be chief, that would really be so, and would be found to be so at last, let him be your minister, your servant," v. 26, 27. Here observe, 1. That it is the duty of Christ's disciples to serve one another, for mutual edification. This includes both humility and usefulness. The followers of Christ must be ready to stoop to the meanest offices of love for the good one of another, must submit one to another (1 Pt. 5:5; Eph. 5:21), and edify one another (Rom. 14:19), please one another for good, Rom. 15:2. The great apostle made himself every one's servant; see 1 Co. 9:19. 2. It is the dignity of Christ's disciples faithfully to discharge this duty.



The way to be great and chief is to be humble and serviceable. Those are to be best accounted of, and most respected, in the church, and will be so by all that understand things aright; not those that are dignified with high and mighty names, like the names of the great ones of the earth, that appear in pomp, and assume to themselves a power proportionable, but those that are most humble and self-denying, and lay out themselves most to do good, though to the diminishing of themselves. These honour God most, and those he will honour. As he must become a fool that would be wise, so he must become a servant that would be chief. St. Paul was a great example of this; he laboured more abundantly than they all, made himself (as some would call it) a drudge to his work; and is not he chief?

Do we not by consent call him the great apostle, though he called himself less than the least? And perhaps our Lord Jesus had an eye to him, when he said, There were last that should be first; for Paul was one born out of due time (1 Co. 15:8); not only the youngest child of the family of the apostles, but a posthumous one, yet he became greatest.

#### **IV. The Healing of the Two Blind Men**

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

*Mat 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.*

*Mat 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.*

The account here parallels that of Mark 10:46-52. In Mark's account, one of the blind men is named Bartimaeus. Here, he along with his consort desperately cried out, "*Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David.*"

There is an obvious manifestation of faith in these poor men. Even when rebuked by others, they all the more pled His mercy. God is honored when His people plead with Him all the more. It evidences deep faith.

They realized and acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus. Submitting to the Lordship of Christ is not only a humbling of oneself before Him, it also is a tacit form of repentance. They addressed Him as the "Son of David." Even in the vicinity of Jericho where Jesus had not long been, the common people realized He was of the royal line of David and in fact the Messiah.

These blind men cried out for the mercy of God. When they were told by the multitude to hold their peace, they cried out the more. They must have had a lot of

faith, because they did not give up but kept on crying out. Notice the question Jesus had for them in verse 32.

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

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

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

As Jesus perceived their intense faith in Him, He had compassion on them and touching their eyes, they were immediately healed. Though Jesus undoubtedly performed miracles to authenticate His ministry, He also reacted in compassion to human need and misery, particularly as men would evidence genuine faith in Him. Notice also how these former blind men in turn followed Him. A lesson remains to this day. We who were formally blind spiritually ought to follow our great Savior and Lord even as these two men did.

Their request was that their eyes be opened. Oh that the lost man or woman might see their need and cry out that their spiritual eyes might be opened. Jesus, as was always the case, had compassion upon them and healed them both. These men were grateful, and it says they followed him. Oh how we all need to do this.

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*Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

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