

Matthew 20

Continuing the discussion of 19:30, Jesus told the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. What did the owner of the vineyard do (vv. 1-2)? He hired men to work in his vineyard for the day. These men contracted to work for one denarius..... the normal day's wage for a day laborer in Jesus' day.

What did the owner do later in the day (vv. 3-7)? At 9:00 a.m. the farmer hired some other unemployed workers in the market place. In this case there was no labor-management bargaining agreement. They went to work with only his word that he would give them whatever was right. He hired more men at noon and again at 3:00 p.m. on the basis that he would give them a fair wage. At 5:00 p.m. he found more unemployed men. He sent them into the vineyard without any discussion of pay even though they would not work very long.

How did the owner pay his workers (vv. 8-9)? At the end of the day, the farmer instructed his paymaster to pay the men, beginning with the last hired and working back to the first. (In this way the earliest men hired saw what the others received). He paid each of them one denarius.

When those who were hired first, who had worked the entire day, came to be paid, what did they expect (v. 10)? They thought they would receive more than one denarius..... more than those who had been hired later in the day. After all, they had labored all day and borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day. They were bitterly resentful. It wasn't fair. They had agreed, however, to work for a stipulated amount and that is what they received (v. 13).

How did the owner address their complaints (vv. 13-15)? The landowner argued that he had the right to do what he chose with his money. The lesson, of course, is that God is sovereign. He can do as He pleases. And what He pleases will always be right, just, and fair. Many of us have to admit that it seems a bit unfair to us, too. This only proves that in the kingdom of heaven we must adopt an entirely new kind of thinking. We must abandon our greedy, competitive spirit, and think like the Lord.¹

What did Jesus mean when He said, "The last will be first, and the first will be last" (v. 16)? This parable, a continuation of the discourse on rewards at the end of chapter 19, illustrates the truth that while all true disciples will be rewarded, the order of rewards will be determined by the spirit in which the disciple served. Some who *thought* they would be first will be last because their service was inspired by pride and selfish ambition. Others who served out of love and gratitude will be highly honored.²

What was the lesson of the parable? Jesus was teaching that the matter of rewards is under the sovereign control of God, the "Landowner" in the parable. God is the One before whom all accounts will be settled. Many who have prominent places will someday find themselves demoted. And many who often find themselves at the end of the line will find themselves promoted to the head of the line: In the final accounting, the Lord's analysis will carry the greatest and only important weight.³

The first workers bargained for a denarius a day and got the wage agreed on. The others cast themselves on the owner's grace and got grace. Grace is better than justice. It is better to leave our rewards up to the Lord than to try and strike a bargain with Him.⁴

One could never say Jesus did not prepare His disciples for His death. What did Jesus do next (vv. 17-19)? At least three times already, He had announced to His disciples that He was going to die (12:40; 16:21; 17:22-23). He was now on the road to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. He took the twelve disciples aside to explain what would happen after they reached the Holy City. Once again, He told the disciples that death awaited Him in that city. Here, He specifically spoke for the first time of His betrayal, mocking, flogging, and crucifixion. But He also reminded them that death was not the end for Him, for He would rise again on the third day (cf. 16:21; 17:23).⁵

Who approached Jesus at this point (v. 20)? The mother of James and John came to Jesus with her two sons.

What request did she make of Jesus (v. 21)? She asked that her two sons might be granted places of favor in His kingdom, one seated at His right hand and one at His left. She, with typical motherly pride, felt her sons deserved the two best positions.

Note: The natural human concern with status and importance is clearly one of the most fundamental instincts which must be unlearned by those who belong to God's kingdom.⁶

How did Jesus respond (v. 22)? Jesus answered frankly that they did not understand what they were asking. They wanted a crown without a cross, a throne without the altar of sacrifice, the glory without the suffering that leads to it. So He asked them pointedly, *"Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"*⁷

What did Jesus mean by "the cup?" The cup represented the wrath of God that He would have to endure in order to pay for the sins of humanity—including its accompanying suffering (cf. 26:39). Since they did not know what that involved for Jesus, they could hardly appreciate what it would mean for them.⁸

When they answered Jesus question in the affirmative, how did He respond (v. 23)? Jesus indicated they would indeed share the cup of suffering and death with Him. James suffered death early in the Church Age at the hands of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-2), and John was persecuted and exiled to the Isle of Patmos. Robert Little said, "James died a martyr's death; John lived a martyr's life."⁹

Then Jesus explained that He could not arbitrarily grant places of honor in the kingdom; the Father had determined a special basis on which these positions would be assigned. They thought it was a matter of political patronage, that because they were so close to Christ, they had a special claim to positions of prestige.¹⁰

When the other disciples heard about this verbal exchange, how did they react (v. 24)? The other ten disciples were greatly displeased that the sons of Zebedee had made such a request. They were probably indignant because they themselves wanted to be the greatest and resented any prior claims being made by James and John!¹¹

How did Jesus address their concerns (vv. 25-28)? He called the Twelve together and reminded them of some important principles. While some people (rulers and high officials) lord it over others, the disciples were not to do so. Greatness in the Lord's kingdom does not come through rulership or authority but through service.

There was no greater example of this principle than the Lord Himself. He did not come into the world to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

As Jesus was leaving Jericho, who did He encounter (v. 30)? Two blind men shouting out to Him, *"Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"* Their use of the title "Son of David" means that, though physically blind, their spiritual vision was so acute as to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.¹²

How did the crowd react to them (vv. 31-33)? The crowd tried to hush them, but the blind men cried after Him more insistently asking for Jesus to restore their sight.

How did Jesus answer their request (v. 34)? Their specific request received a specific response. Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes. And immediately they received their sight, and they followed Him.

¹ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1279.

² Ibid.

³ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 66.

⁴ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1279.

⁵ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 66.

⁶ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Matthew*, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 523.

⁷ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1280.

⁸ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Matthew*, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 524.

⁹ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1280.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.