

Matthew

Chapter 20

By

Don Stewart

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MATTHEW CHAPTER 20

Matthew continues to record Jesus speaking in parables.

THE PARABLE OF THE WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD (20:1-16)

We now see how the last person can become first (19:30)—by pure grace. The parable begins with a typical scene but ends with elements that are anything but typical. These facts surprise the reader and make a powerful point. If God’s generosity would be compared to a man, such a man would be different than anyone they had ever encountered.

Matt. 20:1 The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner, The example will now be a man who owns some land.

who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. The normal working day was ten hours long, not counting breaks. The landowner would have found his first men at 6 a.m.

Matt. 20:2 And after agreeing with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.

And after agreeing with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. This was the normal wage for a foot soldier or day laborer (Tobit 5:14; Tacitus *Annales*, 1,17; Pliny 33:3).

Matt. 20:3 And he went out around the third hour, and saw others standing idly in the marketplace;

And he went out around the third hour, and saw others standing idly in the marketplace; There were twelve hours from dawn to sundown. The third hour would be about 9:00 a.m.

Matt. 20:4 and he said to them, “You yourselves also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right, I will give to you.”

and he said to them, “You yourselves also go into the vineyard, Why the landowner kept returning to hire more men is not spelled out. Suggestions have been: lack of foresight, not finding enough workers earlier, or the poor work of the first laborers. However, since we do not know the reason why he kept hiring men, this fact cannot be the key to understanding the parable.

and whatever is right, I will give to you.” The men that came out the third hour trusted in the landlord’s integrity.

Matt. 20:5 And they went away. He went out again around the sixth and ninth hour and did the same thing.

And they went away. He went out again around the sixth and ninth hour and did the same thing. He repeats the process.

Matt. 20:6 About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around; and said to them, “Why have you been standing here idle all day?”

About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around; and said to them, “Why have you been standing here idle all day?” These people have been waiting all day.

Matt. 20:7 They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You yourselves also go into the vineyard.’

They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ They were standing around because no one had hired them.

He said to them, ‘You yourselves also go into the vineyard.’ He sends them out also.

Matt. 20:8 And when it had become evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give to each of them their wages, beginning with the last until the first.’

And when it had become evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give to each of them their wages, beginning with the last until the first.’ The manager was told to pay each laborer the standard day’s wage. Laborers were customarily paid at the end of the day (Leviticus 19:13).

Matt. 20:9 And when those hired around the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.

And when those hired around the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. The normal pay for a day.

Matt. 20:10 And when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received one denarius.

And when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more; More than they bargained for.

but each of them also received one denarius. The agreed upon wage.

Matt. 20:11 And when they received it, they began grumbling against the landowner.

And when they received it, they began grumbling against the landowner. They grumble because he had been generous to others, but only fair to them.

Matt. 20:12 saying, ‘These last ones worked only one hour and you made them equal with us, the ones who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’

saying, ‘These last ones worked only one hour and you made them equal with us, the ones who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ They bore the heat of the day which could drive workers from the field, and though fairly paid, they feel unfairly treated because the others that worked less received the same amount. There is nothing in this parable that implies the Jews have borne the burden of the law and now Gentile outcasts are made equal to them.

Matt. 20:13 And he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. You agreed with me for one denarius did you not?’

And he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. You agreed with me for one denarius did you not? He is not being unfair to him.

Matt. 20:14 Take what is yours and go. For I choose to give to the last one the same as to you.

Take what is yours and go. For I choose to give to the last one the same as to you. It’s his business what he does with his money.

Matt. 20:15 I am allowed, am I not, for me to do what I choose with what is mine? Or is your eye evil because I am good?

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts do not have the word *or*

I am allowed, am I not, for me to do what I choose with what is mine? Or is your eye evil because I am good? He asks, “Why are you envious about my goodness?” This shows that God’s gifts are not based upon our merit, but rather upon His grace and goodness. In the world, the one who does the most work receives the most pay. However, in the kingdom of God the principles of merit are set aside so that grace can prevail.

Matt. 20:16 So, the last will be first, and the first last.

Note on a variant reading: After *and the first last* some manuscripts read the following words *many are invited, but few are chosen* (see 22:14)

So, the last will be first, and the first last. Grace makes some who are last first.

A THIRD PREDICTION OF JESUS’ DEATH AND RESURRECTION (20:17-19)

Jesus takes the disciples aside and predicts His death and resurrection for a third time.

Matt. 20:17 And while Jesus was going up unto Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way,

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts do not have the word *disciples* after twelve.

And while Jesus was going up unto Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, Again this message is only for the twelve, not for the multitudes.

Matt. 20:18 “Behold, we are going up into Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death.

“Behold, we are going up into Jerusalem; Jerusalem was the focal point of Jewish worship.

and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death. This is the third major prediction of Jesus’ death.

Matt. 20:19 And they will deliver him over to the Gentiles to be treated shamefully, flogged, and crucified, and on the third day he will be raised.

And they will deliver him over to the Gentiles to be treated shamefully, flogged, and crucified, and on the third day he will be raised. Mention of the resurrection is brief and apparently not understood (cf. Luke 18:34). They probably think that His language is hyperbolic.

TWO OF JESUS' DISCIPLES SEEK STATUS (20:20-23)

The mother of James and John request special status for their sons.

Matt. 20:20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him, with her sons, kneeling before him, and making a request of him.

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him, with her sons, kneeling before him, and making a request of him. That the mother would approach Jesus is likely because she may be His aunt on His mother's side.

Matt. 20:21 And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one on the right hand, and one on the left, in your kingdom."

And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one on the right hand, and one on the left, in your kingdom." Again the question of rank returns. Right hand and left hand suggests proximity to the King's person and so a share in His prestige and power.

Matt. 20:22 Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? And they said to him, "We are able."

Note on a variant reading: After *about to drink* some manuscripts have the phrase *or to be baptized with the baptism I am to be baptized with* (see Mark 10:38,39).

Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you are asking. It is often ignorance that seeks after leadership, power and glory: the brothers do not know what they are asking.

Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? The cup refers to His suffering.

And they said to him, we are able. They have no idea about what is going to happen to Jesus.

Matt. 20:23 He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is to the ones prepared by my Father."

Note on a variant readings: Some manuscripts have *and the baptism which I am to be baptized with after My cup you will indeed drink*.

Some manuscripts do not have the word *this* before *is not mine to give*.

He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, He first answers on their own terms. In a sense they will drink from His cup of suffering (James was the first apostolic martyr (Acts 12:2) and John would suffer exile (Revelation 1:9).

but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is to the ones prepared by my Father.” It is not Jesus’ role to determine who sits where. His authority is derived from the Father (11:27; 24:36; 28:18; John 14:28) and Jesus cannot assign these positions at a mother’s request.

JESUS SPEAKS ABOUT SERVANTHOOD (20:24-28)

After this episode and the jealous response of the other disciples, Jesus speaks about true servanthood.

Matt. 20:24 When the ten heard this, became indignant with the two brothers.

When the ten heard this, became indignant with the two brothers. The indignation probably sprang from jealousy. They were afraid they might lose out.

Matt. 20:25 But Jesus called them to himself, and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

But Jesus called them to himself, and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Jesus contrasts the greatness of the heirs of the kingdom and the greatness among the nations.

Matt. 20:26 It will not be so with you; but whoever wishes to be great among you, let him become your servant,

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *it will not* be some manuscripts read *it is not*.

It will not be so with you; but whoever wishes to be great among you, let him become your servant, Let us never forget these truths.

Matt. 20:27 and whoever wishes to be first among you, will be your slave.

and whoever wishes to be first among you, will be your slave. A revolutionary way of looking at greatness.

Matt. 20:28 Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Note on a variant reading: At the end of this verse several manuscripts read the following: “But seek to increase from that which is small, and from the greater to become less. When you enter into a house and are invited to dine, do not recline in the prominent places, lest perchance one more honorable than you come in, and the host come and say to you, “Go, farther down”; and you will be put to shame. But if you recline in the lower place and one inferior to you comes in, the host will say to you, “Go farther up” and this will be advantageous to you.”

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, Jesus came to this earth to be a servant, not to be served by the people. His coming, however, was much more than that.

and to give his life a ransom for many. This is the key verse in Matthew for it clearly states the

purpose of Jesus' coming. See 1 Peter 1:18.

THE HEALING OF THE TWO BLIND MEN (20:29-31)

Jesus heals two blind men while on the way to Jerusalem (There are some differences between Matthew's account and Mark's that have caused some to see a contradiction. See the question at the end of the chapter).

Matt. 20:29 And as they went out from Jericho, a great crowd followed him.

And as they went out from Jericho, a great crowd followed him. Jericho was one day's journey from Jerusalem and the home town of His ancestor Rahab.

Matt. 20:30 And behold two blind men were sitting by the road, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they began to cry out saying, "Have mercy upon us, Lord, Son of David."

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts do not have the word *Lord*.

And behold two blind men were sitting by the road, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they began to cry out saying, "Have mercy upon us, Lord, Son of David." Though physically blind, they have spiritually sight, they recognize that Jesus is the Son of David.

Matt. 20:31 But the crowd rebuked them that they should remain silent; but they shouted out all the more saying, "Have mercy upon us, Lord, Son of David,"

But the crowd rebuked them that they should remain silent; but they shouted out all the more saying, "Have mercy upon us, Lord, Son of David," They would not be shut up.

Matt. 20:32 And Jesus stood still and called them, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?"

And Jesus stood still and called them, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" He wants a specific request from them.

Matt. 20:33 And they said to him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened."

And they said to him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." They wish to see.

Matt. 20:34 And Jesus, being moved with compassion, touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and began to follow him.

And Jesus, being moved with compassion, Jesus is again moved with compassion and heals them.

touched their eyes. This is another of the cases where Jesus touched the sick person and made them well.

Immediately they regained their sight and began to follow him. There is no command to keep silent about their healing, for the events that are about to occur in Jerusalem cannot be stopped. They followed Jesus to Jerusalem and the expected Passover celebration, they would also experience something unexpected—the cross.

SUMMARY TO CHAPTER 20

Jesus continues to address the disciples in parables. The parable of the workers in the vineyard shows that God's rewards are based upon true grace, not our human effort. Those who come in last will receive the same as those who came in first. The sons of Zebedee, James and John want a special place in Jesus' kingdom but Jesus tells them that this is for His Father to give, not Him.

When the other disciples get angry at the brothers, Jesus then launches into a discussion of true greatness. The chapter concludes with another account of Jesus healing two blind men.