

Matthew 20

Jesus is slowly making His way to Jerusalem (19:1; 21:1). He gives a parable to help Peter and the rest of the apostles understand that God has the freedom to bless whom He desires to bless, in the way He desires to bless. After He predicts His death, burial, and resurrection (20:17-19), in that context, James and John ask Jesus if they might sit on each side of His throne in His kingdom (20:20-28). Before He enters Jerusalem, Jesus will heal two more blind men (20:29-34).

TRANSLATION - 20:1-16:

1 For similar is the kingdom of the heavens to a man, a householder, who went together first early to hire workers for his vineyard. **2** After being of one mind with the workers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. **3** And after going out around the third hour, he saw others standing in the marketplace idle, **4** and to them he said, "Go even yourselves into the vineyard, and whatever may be right I will give to you." **5** And they left. Again, after going out around the sixth and ninth hours he did likewise.

6 And around the eleventh [hour] after going out, he found others standing and said to them, "Why here have you stood all the day, idle?" **7** They said to him, "Because no one us has hired." He said to them, "Go even yourselves into the vineyard."

8 And evening coming, the lord of the vineyard said to his manager, "Summon the workers and pay them the salary beginning from the last until the first." **9** And going, those around the eleventh hour received each a denarius. **10** And going those first thought that more they will receive; and they received each a denarius as those. **11** And after taking, they were grumbling against the householder **12** saying, "These last, one hour they did, and equal to us those doing to the enduring of the burden of the day and the heat."

13 And after answering one of them, he said, "Friend, I do not wrong you. Not for a denarius were you of one mind with me? **14** Take yours and go. I desire to this last one to do as also to you. **15** [Or] is it authorized for me what I desire to do by my own? Or your eye evil it is because I, myself, am good?"

16 Thus they will be the last first and the first last."

GREEK WORDS:

"Householder" (ver. 1) was used first at 10:25; 13:27, 52. "To hire" is used only here in 20:1, 7 in the entire NT. "Worker" was used first at 9:37-38; 10:10. "Vineyard" is used first here in the NT, out of 23 times in the NT. In Matthew, it is used here (20:1, 2, 4, 7-8) and in chapter 21 (21:28, 33, 39-41). "To be of one mind" (ver. 2) is all one word in Greek; it was first used at 18:19. It gives us the English word *symphony*. "Denarius" is used 16 times in the NT, first in Matthew 18:28. "To send" was first seen at 2:16. It is the verb related to the noun "apostle."

"Marketplace" (ver. 3) was first seen at 11:16. "Idle" was first seen at 12:36. "Right" (ver. 4) was used first at 1:19; 5:45. "Manager" (ver. 8) is used here; Luke 8:3; Gal. 4:2. "To summon" was used first at 1:21, 23, 25. It can mean to "call" or to "name." "To pay" was first seen at 5:26, 33. "Salary" was seen first at 5:12, 46. "To think" or "to consider" (ver. 10) was used first at 5:17. "To grumble" (ver. 11) is used only here in Matthew, out of 8 times: Luke 5:30; John 6:41, 43, 61; 7:32; 1 Cor. 10:10 (twice). "To endure" (ver. 12) was used first at 3:11; 8:17. "Burden" is used here in Matthew; Acts 15:28; 2 Cor. 4:17; Gal. 6:2; 1 Thess. 2:7; Rev. 2:24. "Heat" or "burning" is used here; Luke 12:55; James 1:11.

"Friend" (ver. 13) is used only in Matthew: 20:13; 22:12; 26:50. "To wrong" is used only here in Matthew, out of 28 uses. "To be authorized" (ver. 15) is used first at 12:2, 4, 10, 12. "Evil" was used first at 5:11, 37, 39, 45. Jesus had referred to an "evil eye" in 6:22-23.

GREEK GRAMMAR:

The “grumbling” in verse 11 translates a verb in the imperfect tense, which portrays continuous action in the past. The questions in verses 13, 15 are worded to expect an affirmative answer.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Israel is often pictured in the OT as a vineyard: Psa. 80:8-13; Isa. 5:1; Jer. 12:10. The imagery is picked up in the NT: John 15; 1 Cor. 9:7. Workers were paid at the end of the day, based on the Law of Moses: Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:15.

An “evil eye” is an OT metaphor for jealousy and envy: Matt. 6:22-23; Deut. 15:9; Prov. 22:9; 23:6; 28:22.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

A “denarius” (ver. 2) was a coin given for one day’s work.

COMMENTS:

Peter had asked Jesus in 19:27 what the disciples would receive from Him because they left everything to follow Him. After giving an immediate answer (19:28-30), Jesus gives an extended answer in the form of a parable.

The kingdom of heaven is “similar” (see 13:31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52 for similar comparisons) to a man, a householder, who called his workers to labor in his vineyard. He agreed with his first worker to serve for a day’s salary, a denarius in Roman currency. That is fair and expected. He sent him into the vineyard. Apparently due to a large harvest, the householder went out at the third hour (9 AM) and saw others standing idle in the marketplace and put them to work and he would give them what is “right.” They went to work.

The householder did the same thing at the sixth hour (12 PM) and the ninth hour (3 PM). Just before quitting time (5 PM), the householder went out and found more, standing idle and asked why they weren’t working. They responded that no one had hired them. So, he hired them.

When quitting time came, in the evening (6 PM), the householder called his manager and told him to pay the workers for their day’s work, beginning with those hired most recently. The manager did so and paid a day’s salary to those who had only worked one hour. Those who had worked the whole day expected, therefore, to get paid more. Yet they only received a day’s wage. So they grumbled against the householder because he had made them “equal” with the ones who had worked only an hour while they bore the burden and heat of the day.

But then the householder, or master of the vineyard, spoke up and chastised those workers. He did not wrong them. They had agreed with him to work for a day’s salary. He had the authority, as the householder, the master, to give what he chose, to pay what he desired. Then he asked them if their eye was “evil,” in other words, were they being jealous? Yet he was being good in doing what he did. In verse 16, Jesus repeated what He had said in 19:30.

APPLICATION:

While some will point to this parable to argue that everyone will receive the same reward in heaven, it seems more appropriate to understand the point of the parable to mean that God (the “householder”) has the right to give to whomever He desires what He desires. Jesus had promised in 19:29 that some would receive “one hundredfold” as well as eternal life. Who receives tenfold? Or fiftyfold? Or one hundredfold? God, alone, has the right to determine the rewards for those who serve Him. As long as we are in heaven, we will be glad to receive whatever He chooses to give us (see Eph. 3:20; Phil. 4:19)! This parable, however, is not about salvation based on grace rather than on merit. It refers to God’s right to bless whom and how He desires.

The “grumbling” recalls the murmuring that occurred among the Israelites (Exo. 16:7-12; Num. 14:27; Deut. 1:27) but God despises grumbling (1 Cor. 10:10; Phil. 2:14) as it illustrates a lack of thankfulness.

TRANSLATION - 20:17-19:

17 And going up, Jesus, into Jerusalem He took the twelve alone and on the way, He said to them, **18** "Behold, we are going into Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes and they will condemn Him to death, **19** and they will hand Him over to the pagans for to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and on the third day, He will be raised."

GREEK WORDS:

"To be handed over" (ver. 18) was first seen at 4:12. It can also mean to "betray" or to "imprison." "Chief priests" was seen first at 2:4; 16:21. "Scribe" was first seen at 2:4; 5:20. "To condemn" was first seen at 12:41-42. It is an intensified form of the verb "to judge." "Pagans" or "nations" (ver. 19) was first seen at 4:15; 6:32. "To mock" was first seen at 2:16. "To scourge" was seen first at 10:17. It will be seen again at 23:34 (also at Mark 10:34; Luke 18:33; John 19:1; Heb. 12:6). "To crucify" is used here for the first time. In Matthew, it is used at 23:34; 26:2; 27:22-23, 26, 31, 35, 38; 28:5. In the whole NT, it is used 46 times.

PARALLELS:

Jesus predicts His resurrection in Matthew twice before: 16:21; 17:12, 22-23. This text has its parallel in Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34. While this is the only example of Jesus predicting His crucifixion in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt-Luke), He will predict it also in John 12:32-33.

COMMENTS:

Jesus has predicted His coming death and resurrection before (16:21; 17:12, 22-23). This is the first time He has specified death by crucifixion. The Jews stoned criminals to death, burning, beheading, and strangling. It will be the Romans who will implement the death penalty on Jesus. Yet, Jesus will rise again on the third day - a prediction His disciples could not grasp.

Of course Jesus had earlier called on His disciples to be prepared to take up their cross (10:38; 16:24). He will, literally, carry His cross.

APPLICATION:

The fact that Jesus could predict His trial, death, crucifixion, and resurrection proves that He was someone sent from God (compare John 3:1-2). The fulfillment of His predictions is seen in 27:29, 31, 41 (the mocking), 27:26 (the flogging), and 27:35 (the crucifixion), 28:1 (the resurrection).

The Law stated that one hung on a "tree" would be cursed by God (Deut. 21:23). Saul of Tarsus understood this to imply that Jesus of Nazareth was cursed by God as He hung on the cross (Gal. 3:13). To Paul, until he understood better, this was a stumbling block to faith in Christ.

TRANSLATION - 20:20-28:

20 At that time, there came to him the mother of the sons of Zebedee, with her sons, bowing and asking something from Him. **21** And He said to her, "What do you desire?" She said to Him, "Say that they may sit these my two sons, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your kingdom."

22 But after answering Jesus said, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup which I, myself, am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able."

23 He said to them, "Indeed My cup you will drink. But to sit on My right and My left is not Mine to give, but to those prepared by My Father."

24 And after hearing, the twelve were indignant at the two brothers.

25 And Jesus, after calling them, said, "You know that the rulers of the pagans lord over them and the great ones exercise authority over them. **26** Not thus it will be among you, but whoever may desire among you great to be, will be your servant, **27** and whoever may desire

among you to be first will be your slave. **28** Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His soul as a ransom on behalf of many.”

GREEK WORDS:

“Zebedee” (ver. 20) was seen first at 4:21; 10:2. He will be seen again in Matthew at 26:37; 27:56. “To bow” is the verb often translated to “worship” (see first at 2:2, 8, 11) but we believe here it simply means to “bow down.” “To ask” was seen first at 5:42. “To sit” (ver. 21) was seen first at 5:1; 13:48; 19:28. “Right” was used first at 5:29-30, 39; 6:3. “Left” is used much less frequently, only 9 times in the NT: 20:21, 23; 25:33, 41; 27:38; Mark 10:40; 15:27; Acts 21:3; Rev. 10:2.

“To drink” (ver. 22) was used first at 6:25, 31. “Cup” was seen first at 10:42. “To prepare” (ver. 23) was seen first at 3:3. “To be indignant” (ver. 24) is used here; 21:15; 26:8; Mark 10:14, 41; 14:4; Luke 13:14. “To call” or to “summon” (ver. 25) was used first at 10:1. “Rulers” was used first at 9:18, 23, 34. “Nations” or “pagans” was used first at 4:15 (and 20:19). The verb “to lord over” is an intensified form of the verb “to lord,” used only here; Mark 10:42; Acts 19:16; 1 Peter 5:3. “To exercise authority over” is one word, used here and Mark 10:42. “Servant” (ver. 26) gives us the English word *deacon*. It is used here for the first time. It is also used at 22:13; 23:11. It is found in the NT 29 times. It is related to the verb “to serve” (found first at 4:11; 8:15) or to “be served” found in verse 28. “Slave” (ver. 27) was first used at 8:9; 10:24-25; 13:27-28. “Soul” (ver. 28) can mean “life.” It was found first at 2:20; 6:25. It is used 103 times in the NT. “Ransom” has rich biblical theology behind the idea but the word is only used twice: 20:28; Mark 10:45.

GREEK GRAMMAR:

“To be prepared” (ver. 23) translates the verb in the perfect tense, suggesting an action performed in the past with continuing influence or availability.

PARALLELS:

This paragraph is found at Mark 10:35-45; see also Luke 22:24-27. Matthew has portrayed Jesus as the Servant Who suffers for mankind in 8:17 (cf. Isa. 53:4) and 12:18-21 (cf. Isa. 42:1-4).

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

The “cup” was a metaphor used by the prophets to refer to suffering, especially suffering the wrath of God: Psa. 11:6; 75:8; 116:13; Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15-17; 51:7; Ezek. 23:31; Hab. 2:16; Zech. 12:2.

The idea that Jesus will stand in the place and be a substitute for His people is found in Isaiah 43:3-4; 52:13-53:12.

COMMENTS:

Again building off the discussion at the end of chapter 19 (specifically 19:28 where Jesus predicted His apostles would sit on twelve thrones), the sons of Zebedee (James and John) came to Jesus to ask, with their mother, if they could sit on either side of Jesus on thrones, when He establishes His kingdom. Their mother’s name was Salome who may have been the sister of Jesus’ mother, Mary (John 19:25; Mark 15:40; Matt. 27:56). If that is the case, it would help explain her (and the boys’) ambitious question.

Jesus responded that they did not understand what they were asking. He asked if they would drink the cup which He was going to drink. This “cup” is an image used by the OT prophets to depict the wrath of God (see above under “Old Testament References”). The apostles, ignorantly but sincerely, respond that they are willing to so drink. Jesus agrees that they will drink of the cup, but to give them the authority to sit at the highest places of honor was not His to give. Only the Father in heaven could give that honor.

Understandably, the other apostles were indignant at the presumption of James and John (just as they did in 18:1-5)! So, Jesus took the opportunity to contrast the leadership style of the pagan world and of His own followers. Rulers of the pagans domineer over their servants. Their leaders exercise authority over others. But, that's not Jesus' leadership style. Instead, among His followers, those who desired to be great should be the servant of others. If someone "desires" to be great, he ought to become the slave of others. Service and humility make one "great" in the eyes of God. The prime example of humility is the Son of Man Himself who did not come to be served but to serve others and to offer Himself as a "ransom" for others. For Jesus to refer to Himself as "coming" implies that He existed before He came to earth!

This word "ransom" has in its background two main concepts, both related. The story of Ruth explains how a widow needed someone to "redeem" her land, assuming her oversight and protection in the process. His payment was a "ransom." Secondly, slaves (especially slaves due to debt) could have their debts paid or they could have their freedom purchased by someone else. That would be a "ransom" for them. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus pictured sin as a "debt" (Matt. 6:12); He came to pay that debt. This ransom will be "on behalf of many;" the Greek preposition "on behalf of" shows that Jesus intended to die *in place of* "many." His death was for everyone living who would be morally accountable and would need a Savior.

APPLICATION:

Jesus refers to drinking the cup in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36). While Jesus is predicting His death and resurrection, He is mainly suggesting Himself as the epitome of service which God expects out of all His servants: Phil. 2:6-8. Jesus will state in 26:28 that the cup of the covenant represents His blood shed "for many, for the forgiveness of sins" (compare these passages with the purpose of His coming in Matt. 1:21).

The apostles will continue to brag about their commitment to Christ in 26:33-35. James will be killed for his faith in Acts 12:2 (about 44 A. D. under King Agrippa I). John will suffer (John 21:20-23) and be exiled for his faith (Rev. 1:9). A widespread church tradition says John returned from exile to the city of Ephesus and died a natural death. Peter and John will be punished by the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:3; 5:17-18, 40. The apostles will also continue arguing over who would be greatest in the kingdom during the Last Supper: Luke 22:24. In that latter context, Jesus will wash their feet (John 13:1-20). Here is another example of Jesus' teaching in favor of humility. How can one seek to have the "chief seats" in the kingdom characterized by humility?

On further NT teaching about "ransom," see Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:7, 14; Heb. 9:12. For passages with related words, see 1 Timothy 2:6; Luke 1:68; 2:38; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 2:24; 3:18. The idea of Jesus taking the place of sinners in receiving the wrath of God is found frequently in the NT: John 10:11; Rom. 4:25; 5:6-11; 2 Cor. 5:15, 21; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; 3:13-14; Eph. 5:2, 25.

The NT writers will often refer to themselves, and other Christians, as slaves and servants of Christ: John 12:23-25; Rom. 1:1; 6:15-23; 1 Cor. 9:19; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 1:1; James 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:22; 5:1-3; 2:18-25; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1; Rev. 1:1. The idea that Jesus offered His life for all mankind is also taught elsewhere: John 1:29; 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 Tim. 2:3-6; Titus 2:11; 1 John 2:1-2.

TRANSLATION - 20:29-34:

29 And as they were proceeding from Jericho, there followed Him a great crowd. **30** And behold two blind men were sitting by the way; after hearing that Jesus came, they cried out saying, "Have mercy on us, [Lord], Son of David. **31** And the crowd rebuked them that they would be silent. But the greater they cried saying, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David." **32** And standing, Jesus called them and said, "What do you desire I will do for you?" **33** They said to Him, Lord, that they may be opened, our eyes." **34** And after having compassion, Jesus touched their eyes, and immediately they received sight and followed Him.

GREEK WORDS:

“Jericho” (ver. 29) is used here for the first time. It is found at Mark 10:46; Luke 10:30; 18:35; 19:1; Heb. 11:30. “Blind” (ver. 30) were found first at 9:27-28. “To cry out” was first seen at 8:29; 9:27. “To have mercy” was found first at 5:7; 9:27; 15:22; 17:15. The phrase “Son of David” is found 10 times in Matthew: 1:1, 20; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:42.

“To rebuke” (ver. 31) was found first at 8:26; 12:16; 16:22. “To be silent” is used here for the first time; also at 26:63; Mark 3:4; 4:39; 9:34; 10:48; 14:61; Luke 1:20; 19:40; Acts 18:9. “To call” (ver. 32) is used here for the first time, out of 43 uses. It is used in Matthew also at 26:34, 74-75; 27:47. “To open” (ver. 33) was used first at 2:11; 3:16; 5:2; 7:7-8. “To have compassion” (ver. 34) was first seen at 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27. “To touch” was used first at 8:3, 15; 9:20-21, 29; 14:36. “To regain sight” translates one verb, used first at 11:5; 14:19.

PARALLELS:

This text is paralleled in Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43. Matthew recorded a prior healing of blind men in 9:27-31.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Luke presents the healing as Jesus enters Jericho while Matthew and Mark state that it happens as Jesus leaves Jericho. The solution to the difference appears to lay in the fact that there were two cities named Jericho. One was the ancient city of Jericho, destroyed by Joshua (6:1ff; 1 Kings 16:34; 2 Kings 2:15); the other was located nearby, built by King Herod. Jericho is about 15 miles (24 km) from Jerusalem. Crowds are already moving that direction for the Feast of Passover. It would take about 6-8 hours of uphill walking to reach Jerusalem from Jericho.

COMMENTS:

Jesus performs yet another healing miracle, again on two blind men outside the city of Jericho. Isaiah had predicted the Messiah would open the eyes of the blind (35:5; 29:18; 42:7) and Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to die as the Messiah (ver. 28). It is appropriate for Him to heal these men at this point. These men had heard or knew something about Jesus, as they designate Him by the Messianic title, “Son of David.” The crowd rebuked the two men because they believed Jesus was too busy or too important to consider their needs. But the men responded by crying out the more: “Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!”

Jesus stood still and called the two men to come and asked what they desired, to be more specific. They responded by saying they would like their eyes to be opened. Having compassion on them (see 9:36; 14:14; 15:32 for other examples of Jesus’ compassion), being moved in His spirit at their problem, Jesus touched their eyes (as He did before: 8:3, 15; 9:29) and immediately they received their sight completely. As a result, they followed Him.

APPLICATION:

Jesus was, in fact, very busy and He was, in fact, about to perform the best important act in mankind’s history. But He was never too busy to stop and serve those who needed to be served. Not only did He teach service, but He practiced it as well.