MATTHEW 20

Mat 20:1 - “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

Mat 20:2 - After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

Mat 20:3 - And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace,

Mat 20:4 - and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’

Mat 20:5 - So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.

Mat 20:6 - And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’

Mat 20:7 - They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’

Mat 20:8 - And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’

Mat 20:9 - And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.

Mat 20:10 - Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius.

Mat 20:11 - And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house,

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

Mat 20:13 - But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?

Mat 20:14 - Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you.

Mat 20:15 - Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’

Mat 20:16 - So the last will be first, and the first last.”

* The first thing to recognize when you read this parable is that it is a continuation of the context of chapter 19.
* The second thing to notice is that the last verse of chapter 19 (19:30) is the same statement made in 20:16.
* This parable is bookended by this statement and it is important we understand this parable based on this phrase.
* Let’s examine the parable, the context, and the interpretation.
* The Parable:
  + A vineyard owner goes out early in the morning to hire some laborers to work in his field.
  + He finds some men and makes a deal with them.
    - They will work a day in his vineyard.
    - He will pay them a denarius.
  + Later, at the third hour (9am) the vineyard owner finds some more men in the marketplace and strikes a deal with them. He tells them he will pay them “whatever is right” for their labor.
  + He repeated the same process at the 6th hour (12pm) and the 9th hour (3pm).
  + He hired the last round of laborers around the 11th hour (5pm).
  + That evening all of the laborers came to vineyard owner for their wages.
  + Beginning with those hired latest in the day, the vineyard owner gave each a denarius.
  + Even though the men worked a varying number of hours, they received the same pay.
  + When it was time for those hired “early in the morning” to collect their wages, they expected to receive extra pay because they had worked the longest.
  + But the master gave them exactly what they agreed to (a denarius).
  + They were upset with the vineyard owner because of this but they didn’t have a case to make because he had been fare to them and they didn’t have a right to tell him if he could/couldn’t be generous to the others who had worked fewer hours.
  + Jesus concludes the parable with the words, “So the last will be first, and the first last.”
* The Context:
  + In order to interpret the parable correctly, I think we need to keep at least two contextual events in mind.
    - The rich young ruler.
    - Peter’s question to Jesus in chapter 19, verse 27.
  + Jesus concludes his discussion with the rich young ruler and His answer to Peter’s question with the statement, “many who are first will be last, and the last first.
  + Jesus concludes the parable of the vineyard owner with essentially the same statement, “the last will be first, and the first last.”
  + In light of the appearance of these statements, it seems only reasonable we interpret the entire context together.
* The Interpretation:
  + The generosity of God may be surprising to men. Those who the world considers “first” or those who consider themselves “first,” may rank further back than men expect when God has the final say on Judgement day.
  + The world’s ranks individuals on a scale much different than God’s.
  + The world may have thought highly of the rich young ruler but God thought more highly of the poor young Apostles.
  + Peter may have been suggesting He and the other disciples deserved reward for their sacrifices. Jesus is warning him that men need to be very careful when they start thinking in terms of “I deserve” or “we deserve.”
  + The men in the parable believed themselves worthy of a greater reward, not because God told them they were, but because of their own assessment of their work compared to others.
  + The parable is a warning about the inaccuracy of the human evaluation of self worth and self deserving.
* As we look through the rest of the gospels, we find this statement about the last being first and the first last in the following contexts:
  + (1) Gentiles entering the kingdom before the Jews
  + (2) Peter asking about their reward for abandoning all
  + (3) Apostles discussing who was the greatest
* The interpretation above is compatible with these uses.

Mat 20:17 - And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them,

Mat 20:18 - “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death

Mat 20:19 - and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”

* Jesus and His Apostles were on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover.
* Only a few days remained before the crucifixion and while travelling Jesus pulls His Apostles aside and explains the coming events as clearly as possible.
* There is not figurative language here.
* The words were perfectly clear.
* Jesus is the walking example of the phrase, “the last shall be first.”
  + Jesus was going to receive the worst mistreatment of all time.
  + He should have been first but people treated Him as if He was last.
  + He would be treated like the lowest of low.
  + He would humble Himself to become the servant of all.
  + But He would afterwards be glorified and be First of all!
* These words appeared to go right over the Apostle’s heads.

Mat 20:20 - Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something.

* Matt 4:21 tells us James and John (2 Apostles) were the sons of Zebedee.
* Here we find them and their mother approaching Jesus to make a request.

Mat 20:21 - And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.”

Mat 20:22 - Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.”

Mat 20:23 - He said to them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.”

* In the last few chapters we’ve started to see the Apostles jockeying for positions of prestige in the Kingdom (Matt 18:1)
* Like most mothers, she wanted to see her sons do well in life and she asks Jesus to give them high places of authority in the coming Kingdom.
* Jesus tells them they don’t know what they are asking.
  + They have an idea what the Kingdom is going to be like but their perception and the true nature of the Kingdom are very different.
  + To be great in the Kingdom is to be the servant of all (Mark 9:35)
* Jesus asks them, “Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? **And to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”**
  + **\****the second half of this verse (in bold) only appears in the KJV. It is not present in the ESV or the ASV.*
  + What is the “cup?”
    - This appears to be a reference to the suffering Christ would endure to accomplish His mission
    - Joh 18:11 - Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?
    - Mat 26:39 - And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.
    - Were they able to participate (“drink”) with Christ in His sufferings to be glorified like Him?
  + What is the “baptism?”
    - When we think about baptism, we generally think about people being dunked in water in a church building.
    - But, strictly speaking, the term baptism means “immersion.”
    - As I understand it, this is essentially a rephrasing of the first question.
    - Can they be immersed in the sufferings of Christ?
* They responded, “We are able.”
* Jesus doesn’t tell them they are wrong, in fact, He confirms the truth of their response.
  + They would suffer with Christ.
  + James would serve the cause of the Kingdom until being killed by Herod in the book of Acts.
  + John, who probably lived longer than any other Apostle, would spend decades in the Lord’s service and encounter no participate in no shortage of suffering.
  + They affirmed Jesus’ question but it is almost certain they had no idea what the cup of Christ contained and how what that meant for their futures.
* They would suffer for the cause of the Kingdom but the positions they requested were not Christ’s to give away.
  + It wasn’t that Christ lacked the authority.
  + They were essentially asking for a political appointment.
  + They knew Christ was going to establish a kingdom and because they were His friends, they asked Him for a high post in His government.
  + But glory in the Kingdom of God doesn’t work like politics.
  + God would give positions of high honor to those who, in His grace, He counted fit for the honor.

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

* We know from verses like Luke 22:24 there was some strain in the Apostles relationship over the question of who was to be the greatest.
* The other 10 Apostles probably thought it was a pretty scummy thing for John and James to bring their mom along to try to gain some favor from Jesus.
* APPLICATION:
  + Even in Kingdom work, there is a temptation to jockey for position.
  + People inside the Kingdom can struggle just as much as those outside with temptations to pride and desires for personal prestige.

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:

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.

* Jesus teaches His Apostles a new definition of greatness in these 4 verses.
* Greatness in God’s eyes looks a whole lot different than greatness in men’s eyes.
* We think great men ought to be served by others.
* Those are considered great in the eyes of the world often have dozens of servants at their beckon call.
* But the one God considers greatest is the servant of others.
* Jesus is the best example life of service.

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.

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.

* While departing Jericho, Jesus came near to two blind men.
* When the blind men heard about Jesus they started yelling, “Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.
* The crowds tried to get them to stop but they wouldn’t stop until Jesus came and healed them.
* APPLICATION:
  + We discussed a similar application when talking about the man with leprosy in chapter 8.
  + Imagine sitting by the road in darkness.
  + All of a sudden you realize you have one chance and one chance only to escape your long imprisonment in the darkness.
  + You would do everything possible to get healing, wouldn’t you?
  + You wouldn’t care about the opinions of other people, would you?
  + You would do everything you could do, make as much noise as you needed to make in order to find healing.
  + Is this our attitude with sin?
    - We are in darkness.
    - Christ is our only hope.
    - Are we desperately seeking Him?
    - Are the opinions of others holding us back?

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