

## **Lesson #21- Matthew Chapter 20 Questions for Discussion (With Help for Teachers):**

1. In verses 1 through 16 Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a householder that hires workers throughout the day to harvest his field. A householder is a person that is the head of a household, the owner. In this case the householder also owns a vineyard, and it is time to harvest the fruit. He begins hiring laborers first thing in the morning and continues hiring throughout the day as he finds willing workers; even at the very last hour he hires people. Finally, the workday ends. As he pays the workers the agreed upon amount, we see how the householder handles complaints from the labor force.

The most important things we should see from this parable are lessons concerning the kingdom of heaven, because that is what Jesus stated the parable was an illustration of. What do you think are the things Jesus is here teaching about the kingdom of heaven?

### **Help for Teachers:**

Grace. Grace is the undeserved gift that God bestows on people that in no way deserve His compassion. Grace is the antithesis of entitlement. All human rationale screams that it is not “fair” if I work twelve hours, and through the hot part of the day, and get paid the same as the guy that only worked the last and coolest hour of the day. So, let’s look at the idea of “fair” in the upside-down economy of Jesus’ kingdom.

First notice that the householder owns the vineyard and has the money to pay wages. He is under no obligation to hire anyone; he could choose to let every grape in that vineyard rot and every idle person in that marketplace starve. He goes (as God comes to seek and to save us, we don’t, by nature, pursue Him) into the marketplace where men are standing idle, wasting their day, and invites them into meaningful employment. From the context it’s apparent that the terms were explained and agreed upon. Without the Father sending His Son into the world for us, we are wasting away. But in unspeakable mercy, we are called “out of darkness into his marvellous light”, and given purpose to be “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you”. (1 Peter 2:9)

Next, we see that the householder calls people into his service at various times throughout the day, some early, some at the third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hours. The ones sent into the vineyard early are to receive a penny, the ones sent at the eleventh hour are to receive “whatsoever is right”. A “penny”, according to most scholars, was a Roman denarius, the accepted wages for a day’s labor.

The time frame of this parable is a day and makes sense that it equates to a man's lifetime. We are called to submit to the Lordship of Jesus and the reward is the provision of all our need for the day. The question asked to the unemployed in the marketplace at the eleventh hour was "Why stand ye here all the day idle". There is no welfare system in place in this parable. Without the penny, there would be no provision for the need and the idle person that did not accept the offer of employment in the householder's vineyard would be without remedy.

No one deserves God's provision of salvation by the blood of Jesus Christ, so whether early or at the eleventh hour, regardless of how long we "labored" in this life, His provision is completely undeserved and only given because of His mercy. The ones sent into the vineyard at the eleventh received "whatsoever is right", the provisions needed for the day, just as those sent early into the vineyard. The only One that is right (righteous) is Jesus and we desperately need Him.

When payment was made at the end of the day, there was murmuring from those that thought they deserved more. The truth is made evident by the householder's answer to the complainers: God is righteous in all that He does and His decisions to show mercy, when and on whom (or not), are within His power and won't be altered (Eccl 3:14). The perceived wrong is in the heart of man. When inclined to complain to God about "fairness", we should check our viewpoint, "Is thine eye evil, because I am good?"

After the parable, Jesus adds a comment, "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen." It starts and ends with grace. Did you notice that, in the parable, the ones called into the vineyard last were paid first? Our willful sin has separated us from God and put us in the marketplace. God, the householder, has sent His Son into the marketplace and called all men unto Him. But the call to come out of the marketplace and go into the vineyard will only be heeded by those that are chosen. All deserve destruction, but in sovereign grace, God has chosen to save some.

It is also noteworthy that some commentators see this parable as an analogy of the gentiles being called into grace at a time the Jews would consider "the eleventh hour".

2. Read verses 17 through 28.
  - a. Does anything about this text seem strange or inconclusive?
  - b. The mother of Zebedee and her two sons approached Jesus and had a request that resulted in the other disciples becoming irritated and Jesus using the occasion to reiterate a point that they couldn't seem to grasp. Discuss the request and the answer of Jesus.

### Help for Teachers:

- a. The text begins with Jesus making an unveiled prophesy of His suffering and death at the hands of the Jewish religious authorities and the Roman government (this is the third time He has told them, but this time in more detail, Matt 16:21, Matt 17:22-23). Jesus is so specific that He identifies exactly how He is to die, by crucifixion. He states that three days after they kill Him, He will return, bodily, to life. On top of that, He announces that they are going, right now, to Jerusalem for the purpose of doing this. Would you not think that such an announcement would be met by the disciples with at least some level of concern, curiosity, questions... a passionate reaction? Instead, it appears there is silence. Not just silence but it's as if the declaration Jesus made was not even heard, they proceeded right into an argument about who should get the most honor when Jesus establishes His kingdom. Two things come to mind when I think about this. First, how easily we read the words of Scripture or hear the preached Word and don't really listen or take it in, and secondly, how self-absorption, such as we see in this text where the disciples seem too busy worrying about jockeying for position to pay attention to what the Master is saying, causes us to miss something important. Consider what in their distracted state they missed; Jesus just proclaimed to them *the gospel*, that they were about to literally witness the work of God that would bring salvation and deliverance that all creation groaned for, that was the consolation of Israel and the hope of every nation! They were right now walking to Jerusalem to see the pivotal, climactic, central, and most decisive act in all history past, present, and future play out before their eyes. And their response... "Can I have the most honored seat in the house?"
- b. James and John, two of the three closest disciples of Jesus, are the sons of Zebedee. We know by comparing Matthew 27:55-56 with Mark 15:40-41 that their mother is Salome. Salome is identified as a dear follower of Jesus that "ministered to Him" while He was in Galilee. Many think that because of the relationship Salome had with Jesus the brothers, James and John, might have put her up to making this request, thinking that Jesus would surely not deny her. In any case, Salome asks on behalf of her children that they be

granted to sit at the most exalted place under Jesus in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus replies first with a statement (notice a shift, it seems though Salome asked the question, Jesus is directing His response to James and John), *“Ye know not what ye ask.”* Yet not having understanding, and likely anticipating that an earthly kingdom with standards that they had come to expect from earthly kings was soon to follow, they wanted to be given a position of prestige and importance. They wanted to lock in their spot. What they weren’t remembering at that moment was pretty much everything... everything Jesus had taught and everything they had seen in Him. The sermon on the mount was all about the upside-down kingdom of heaven, where the last was first and the first last, where it was more blessed to give than to receive, where we are to do good to those that do wrong to us and love our enemies. Jesus had come from heaven where He reigned sovereign to earth where He took on the form of a servant. He had emptied Himself in the service of the ones He had come to save. Soon He would even die as He suffered the wrath of God to pay for our sins. Salome’s request was out of order, its purpose being to exalt anyone or anything other than Jesus Christ, and it led to a fuss (James 4:1). Christ is exalted when we trust Him for everything... faith (Heb 11:6). When we live by faith, we acknowledge our need and glorify Jesus by our dependency on Him and recognition of His beauty and power, which results in worship (Rom 1:17). True faith will lead to obedience (James 2:14-18) and our being lifted up (James 4:6-10) in His due time (Gal. 6:9). Then he asked a question, *“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?”* Though the disciples request to be exalted was out of order, Jesus affirmed their answer to His question was correct; yes, they could and would drink of His cup and be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with. Only the suffering and death of Jesus could atone for sin and bring salvation, but for those being saved, suffering, maybe even death, is to be expected as we follow our Lord (*“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”* 2 Tim 3:12). The two brothers experienced exactly that. James was slain with the sword by Herod. John was imprisoned and beaten and exiled on the Isle of Patmos. Some say he survived being thrown into boiling oil as he suffered at the hands of the Jewish leaders and the wicked Roman emperors Domitian and Nero. This stark prophesy of the reality they faced perhaps brought them out of their lustful thinking and into remembrance of the principles of the kingdom. It should certainly jolt us back to right thinking. Jesus then says, *“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.”* Perhaps Jesus is again helping them understand that He was not yet establishing a physical kingdom but a heavenly, thus seats at

the throne are a matter of the Heavenly Father's determination. Jesus ends the discussion by pointing out that the wicked and failing kingdoms of this world are ran by tyrants that want to be served and demand to be first, but heaven's kingdom is of a different leadership style... servant leadership, seen in the sacrificial life and death of the King.

3. Chapter 20 ends with a brief narrative of the healing of two blind men. What do you think are important points to be seen?

### **Help for Teachers:**

They departed Jericho with a great multitude following Him. Their destination was Jerusalem, and Jesus had set his face (Luke 9:51) to go there. It was time to complete the mission for which He had come. As they went, they passed by where two blind men sat. The blind men heard that Jesus was passing by and began crying out, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David." The multitude following Jesus, frowning on the distraction the blind men were creating, scolded them, telling them to be quiet. Jesus, on the other hand, abruptly stops and is still. He calls to them, "What will ye that I shall do unto you?" They asked, "that our eyes may be opened", calling Him Lord. Jesus responds with compassion. He touches their eyes, and they can suddenly see. They follow Jesus.

### **Observations:**

There is nothing coincidental in the redemptive plan of God. It was no doubt His design to pass by these blind men, that He may have mercy on whom He will (Rom 9:15-16).

The "multitude" following were oblivious to the point. They saw the blind men as only a distraction to be controlled so that they could get on to whatever they thought was more important. Those that followed Jesus seemed a mixture of curious spectators, opportunists that took advantage of the things Jesus supplied, political or patriotic zealots eager for a leader to emerge to bring the nation back to autonomy, and some real disciples that really adored Jesus but, like us, constantly needed His mercy and reminders of how merciful He had already been to them. Is it possible that the "multitude" in church sometimes "rebukes" the blind that are messing up the program, for which Jesus has stopped and came to deliver from darkness?

The cry of the blind, the response of Jesus to their cry, and the answer of the blind to Jesus' question is the gospel: "Have mercy on us (we are helpless and your grace is all that can change our condition), O Lord (we submit to you as the One that deserves our allegiance and has the right to rule over us, You are worthy) , thou Son of David (You have the authority and the power, you are the One whose kingdom and reign is

eternal).” Jesus hears their cry and then asks them, “What will ye that I shall do unto you?” they respond with, “Lord, that our eyes may be opened.” (a response of faith, Rev 22:17). Notice what they specifically asked for, that their eyes may be opened (“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” 2 Cor 4:3-4).

Jesus, in compassion, opens their eyes. They receive their sight, which results in following Jesus (discipleship).