

The Gospel According to
Matthew

Lesson #24 – Ch. 20:1-34

Parable of the Laborers – Matthew 20:1-16
Instruction about Jesus' death – Matthew 20:17-19
Instruction about ambition – Matthew 20:20-34

God is Your Keeper:

Psalm 121 (He is on your side)

*I lift up my eyes toward the mountains—from where will my help come?
My help is from the LORD, maker of heaven and earth.
He will never let your foot slip, nor will your guardian become drowsy.
Look! The one who is guarding Israel never sleeps and does not take naps.
The LORD is your guardian; the LORD is your shade at your right side.
The sun will not ravage you by day, nor the moon by night.
The LORD will guard you from all evil, preserving your life.
The LORD will guard your goings and comings, from this time on and forever.*

I have a little book titled “From the Father’s Heart” by Charles Slagle. In it are written letters meant for Christians from our heavenly Father. When you read through them you can sense the heart of God towards His children. I have posted one below. Hope you enjoy it. Read it as if God were speaking to you as His child.

Child,

If anyone wants you to succeed, I do. If anyone is on your side, I AM. There is no one more committed to your success than I, and no one even begins to love you like I do. And I want to clarify something. My love for you is more – far more – than a patronizing concern for your welfare. I like you. I love you. I enjoy you.

I realize you find all this hard to believe, but I want you to believe Me. You'll have to sooner or later, so why not now? I think about you all the time, and I will stop at nothing to remind you of My presence. Haven't you noticed?

*Entreatingly,
Your Dad*

Pray and thank the Lord for His unwavering, undying, unending love and concern for you. Worship Him this morning for His steady stream of love and grace in your life. When others fail you, God is there. Scripture declares that His eye is on the sparrow; how much more will He watch over the children He loves?



Read Matthew 20:1-16

The main point of this parable is that salvation is not something you can earn with hard work or purchase with money. Salvation is a gift from God given to those who trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. In the previous chapter, Jesus proved that point with the rich young ruler who attempted to try and earn his way into the Kingdom of God. His question to Jesus if you will remember was, “What good thing shall I do to have eternal life?” Jesus’ answer came as He revealed this man’s inner heart through a challenge to give away his wealth, and the treasure of his heart proved to be money. The young ruler left the presence of Christ very disappointed and sorrowful because he was unable to earn his way to salvation and he was unable to give up his material possessions in order to follow Christ.

Just a couple of days later, we find one of Jesus’ best friends and followers, apostle Peter, asking Jesus where he would stand in His new kingdom. Peter assumed that since he had left *everything* to follow Jesus (fishing business, family etc.), his reward would be far greater than others. Jesus was quick to point out to Peter that in the eternal kingdom “the first shall be last and the last first” (Matt. 19:30). This is a principle we find mentioned all over the New Testament.

I believe Jesus was teaching this parable because of these past two incidents. He understood that there was something in the heart of all men that yearned for worldly recognition and greatness. Jesus was well-acquainted with man’s sinful desires to want to be compensated and openly recognized for the laborious work we do. He didn’t want to move on in the disciple’s training until He could be clear on this issue of service for the Kingdom of God – service for the sake of serving God and others, period. Our attitudes and motives must be right in serving or we should not be serving at all!

Think about it: no matter how poorly men serve Christ after coming to Christ, they all receive the same salvation. The person that has served Christ since the time they were a young child and the worldly thief on the cross that accepted Him just seconds before he took his last breath will all enter into the same glorious heaven. They will all stand before God as His most precious children, ruling and reigning with Him. We will all enjoy the same treasures of heaven and worship the holy God of heaven.

Now I know that Scripture promises rewards which come to those who walk in the will of God for their lives. I understand Scripture states that there is a joy that comes to those in His will and that we benefit from being under the umbrella of His blessings, but when it comes to standing in the glorious presence of the King, we will all be standing on equal ground. The gold paved streets are traveled by all who live there. Everyone will have his room in the Father’s house.

You see, we all have been forgiven from the same deadly sickness, and that is the disease of carnality and sin. Whether you have committed many or few, a few is enough to bar you from heaven, but the blood of Jesus is enough to cover the many that would send you to hell! We all enter into salvation through the same marvelous gate of GRACE provided by our Lord.

1. After reading this “Parable of the Laborers”, let’s see if we can name all the figures and symbols in this story. It’s important to know what each figure symbolizes in order to fully understand Jesus’ point in the parable.

I am going to list all the figures and symbols and will you write next to them what you believe they represent. After doing this, look back through the story again acknowledging the spiritual

meaning that is behind each figure or symbol and see if the Holy Spirit doesn't add to your understanding of this parable.

Let the Holy Spirit stretch your mind!

a. The Vineyard =

b. The Landowner is =

c. The Laborers are =

d. The Steward (foreman) is =

e. The Denarius represents =

f. A believer's lifetime of service is represented by =

Since you have turned the page I will give you one answer to get you on your way. The Landowner is God the Father. What a beautiful picture this parable is of pure grace and unconditional love!

2. Why were the laborers frustrated with the Landowner (v.10, 11)?

3. How much did the laborers get paid that were hired first (V.1-2)?

4. How much did the laborers get paid that were hired at the end of the day (V.6-7)?

5. When the owner told the steward to pay the men, who got paid first (V.8)?

6. I think the men who worked a full day were probably thinking to themselves, "Oh boy, if the Landowner paid those guys a whole denarius for just working an hour or so, I bet we will get 10 times more than what we agreed to!" Why do you suppose they were disappointed (V.10-12)?

7. What emotions do you think they could possibly be dealing with inside?

8. What clue do you find in v.15 about the attitude of their hearts? _____

The CEV version of Matt.20:15 says this: “Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money?” “Why should you be **jealous** if I want to be generous?”

Jealousy and envy are nasty cousins and often go hand-in-hand.

9. Have you ever battled jealousy in your heart toward someone who just got something you wanted? _____

How did the Lord move you beyond those feelings? Share with your group if you can. Your experience may help someone else.

10. Here is another silly question because I’m sure for every one of us can answer “yes”. Have you ever coveted something someone else was blessed with? **Envy** is the name of that sin. Let’s see what God’s Word tells us about these two evil cousins.

a. When you feel the pangs of envy coming on, just know that you are operating in the flesh. Scripture says it’s evident when our flesh is out of control. What can you point to in Galatians 5:19-21 that describes sin out of control?

Circle the ones you have committed in the recent past.

If you haven’t already, take the time to confess them to Father God.

Now, continue on in reading Galatians 5:22-23.

Pray the Holy Spirit will help you in turning things around and helping you exhibit these new spirit-filled characteristics.

According to Galatians 5, it’s hard to keep envy a secret for long. V.19 states that the works of the flesh are **evident!** They show up in places where you never want them to appear! Envy and jealousy show up in how you treat others. Sometimes we can be standoffish toward someone or just plain rude toward them for no apparent reason. Often times, the root of that is a heart filled with envy. We think we have it so under control, but then at the worst moment it raises its ugly head and bursts out in an ugly moment of critical words we can never take back.

b. Have you ever experienced jealousy or envy to a point that it was affecting your relationships?

c. James tells us that these emotions of envy and jealousy are demonic! Yes, *demonic* is the word James uses! Well, you say, that sounds so horrible! Well, we need to understand that you yourself are not demonic, but that the devil loves to use envy and jealousy to ruin relationships.

He is at the core of the whole problem of jealousy and envy. He just loves to stir up that stuff between people, and in a sense that is a demonic work stirred up by Satan.

Write out James 3:14-16

d. Jealousy can ruin relationships if it is allowed to go unchecked. What does Solomon tell us out of the Book of Proverbs 27:4 about the power of jealousy?

Solomon describes jealousy worse than wrath or anger.

I believe that half the battle of getting over jealousy and envy is admitting that you feel those things. The power they have over your soul seems to diminish as soon as you are completely honest and confess your feelings. Even better: confess it out loud! Watch how that sucks the power out of that detrimental sin over you.

I remember a time that I had to confess to a dear friend that I was jealous over her and another relationship that she had with another mutual friend of ours. It was so embarrassing to admit out loud, although I knew she knew it down deep already. As Galatians 5:19 says, it truly had become evident by my attitude. Anyway, as soon as I humbled myself to the point of confessing it to her, the power of that thing over my life was broken! I was able to embrace her and her other friendships. In fact, I believe our relationship was strengthened in the end because I knew she still loved me even though I wrestled with such things in my heart. How good is God that He can take evil and turn it to good! Jealousy once threatened to end a great friendship, but God intervened and our friendship has lasted well over 30 years and going strong. Thank you, Jesus!

Proverbs 28:13 –

James 5:16 –

***If these issues have been a struggle for you, take a few minutes to share with your group and have then pray over your situation (no need to share names).**

The field laborers here in Matthew Ch.20 were envious of the graciousness of the Landowner to the men who just worked a short time for him. He had been very generous in giving them a full day's wage when they had only worked about an hour.

Their human reaction was, well, human. Although the Landowner had done nothing wrong, He had kept their agreement, they thought it was very unfair. In reality, the Landowner can pay whatever he wishes to whomever he wishes. It could be possible that the eleventh hour, laborers were needier. Maybe the reason they weren't picked in the first group of workers was that they weren't the strong ones. Scripture does say that they were there all day in the Market Place. They weren't just hanging out. The Market Place is where men would come to find work.

A denarius a day was just enough to keep a small family alive in that day. The Landowner may have just been gracious to them out of the kindness of His heart, knowing that if they didn't bring any money home their families would go hungry.

11. The Landowner represents God the Father in this parable, and the act of giving to those who haven't earned it sounds just like something HE would do. Many believers serve Christ out of the desire to serve His people. They aren't looking for pay or for recognition or any great reward for their service. They are the diligent, hardworking unknowns. They just want to serve the Lord through serving His people. This is the person Jesus was talking about when He said, "So the last will be first and the first last" (v.16).

Jesus' point was that those who serve Christ out of a pure heart behind the scenes where nobody notices might be the very ones rewarded first in the Kingdom of God, and the famous, popular, up-front Christians who everybody would assume have many rewards might be last to receive a reward. God will determine the reward system, and who are we to say it is unfair? Fair would be all of us going to everlasting destruction for eternity for our sins, so we need to be very careful about accusing Father God about being unfair!

Job probably suffered more than most men/women ever will. What did our Old Testament friend Job discover about the righteousness of God? Did Job find God to be a just God, even after he suffered great loss?

a. Job 37:23-24

b. Job 36:22-23

12. Do you feel like others have taken advantage of you? That's a horrible place to be in. It's so hurtful to feel like others are using you for their end. Take that sorrow to the Lord and don't try to defend yourself. Allow God to be your defender, and He has a way of setting things in order the way they should be.

What justice do these Scriptures promise to those who call out to God for redemption?

a. Psalm 103:6

b. What will the oppressed speak of when they see the hand of God working on their behalf (Psalm 146:5-9)?

God is a just God and if you have been treated unfairly, He is perfectly able to restore to you all your losses just as He did for Job. He will defend those who walk with Him and call Him Lord.

“The Lord raises those who are bowed down. The Lord loves the righteous.” Psalm 146:8

John Knox said, “A man with God is always in the majority.”

Although everyone that claims Christ as their Savior will have a room in the Father’s house, and on that level we all receive the same salvation, there is mention in Scripture of rewards that will come to those who serve Him here on earth. No one comes to Christ with more or less merit, but He will bring rewards for those that serve Him out of a pure heart with unselfish motives.

13. What rewards will we receive for our faithfulness?

a. How will the Lord judge the works of service that we have done here on earth?

1 Corinthians 4:5

He will praise us for our good works!

Can you imagine God the Father giving you a standing ovation? Can you imagine God describing with “words of praise” His approval of your earthly service to Him?

I think we shall be quite embarrassed because we know the many opportunities for ministry that we had dismissed that were put before us!

b. The greatest reward we will receive is just being able to be with our heavenly Father.

See Revelation 22:12.

c. The works we do with pure motives will receive a reward from Father God.

In 1 Corinthians 3:13-14, what will test the motive behind the work or service we have done for Jesus? _____

“The nature of God is the same to all men, but the effects are not the same on all men, because they don’t put it all to the same uses.” Henry Ward

At the end of this group of verses (Matt. 20:1-16) Jesus repeats a familiar principle:

“The last shall be first and the first shall be last.”

Let’s rejoice that our names are written in the Book of Life and serve God and His sweet people any way we can with a pure heart and leave the reward system up to God. Let’s not compare our lives with the lives of others, but keep our eyes on Jesus and what He has set before us to do!

This seems to be the simplest way to stay out of trouble with envy.

Instruction about Jesus’ death – Matthew 20:17-19



Read Matthew 20:17-19

Here we have the third warning to the disciples that Jesus was on the way to the cross.

Jesus knew that beyond the cross was a crown, and that beyond death was life. He had foreknowledge of what He would endure. I wonder if, as a man, He went over and over His crucifixion in His mind. Did He envision the scourging, the pain, and the ridicule? It's not as if He didn't know what it was like to feel the physical pain of an injury; He understood the horrific pain that was coming. He took them aside on the road to Jerusalem and began to describe to them His future death on a cross. He shared with them exactly who would betray Him. Then He described the resurrection. They were quite perplexed.

14. Who would be the ones to betray Christ (Matthew 20:18)?

Isn't it ironic that the tax collectors didn't betray Him or the Mary Magdalenes? It was the *religious leaders of the church* that put Christ to death!

Jesus mentioned a resurrection after three days. Do you think they would understand what it meant for a man to raise from the dead? Do you recall a time in Scripture when some of them might have seen this happen to a man before?

Jesus always tried to lead His followers into trust and belief by giving them living examples of spiritual truths. Most of what He did while here on earth pointed to the power of the cross and the resurrection. The problem was that the Jews were looking for a lion, not a lamb. Many of the Jews missed it, just as many of the Jews have today. They are still looking forward to the arrival of their Messiah. He has already defeated the devil and is waiting for them to embrace Him as the son of God. Pray for the eyes of Jews to be open to the gospel everywhere in our world!

In Jewish eschatology, the Messiah is a future Jewish king from the Davidic line who is expected to be anointed with holy anointing oil and rule the Jewish people during the Messianic Age and World to come.

Why don't Jews today see Jesus as their Messiah?

JESUS DID NOT FULFILL THE MESSIANIC PROPHECIES

What is the Messiah supposed to accomplish? The Bible says that he will:

- A. Build the Third Temple (Ezekiel 37:26-28).
- B. Gather all Jews back to the Land of Israel (Isaiah 43:5-6).
- C. Usher in an era of world peace and end all hatred, oppression, suffering and disease. As it says: "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall man learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4).
- D. Spread universal knowledge of the God of Israel, which will unite humanity as one. As it says: "God will be King over all the world — on that day, God will be One and His Name will be One" (Zechariah 14:9).

The historical fact is that Jesus fulfilled none of these messianic prophecies.

Christians counter that Jesus will fulfill these in the Second Coming, but Jewish sources show that the Messiah will fulfill the prophecies outright, and no concept of a second coming exists. That is the hurdle: Jesus will fulfill all they are looking for at His second coming with the Saints, but Jews are looking for an earthly King that will deliver these promises here on earth today.

Instruction about ambition – Matthew 20:20-28



Read Matthew 20:20-28

The mother of Zebedee's sons was Jesus' aunt, Mary's sister. The Sons of Zebedee were James and John. Read the first part of the dialog between Jesus and these men in Mark 10:35-37.

15. The two disciples had been with Jesus for three years learning His ways. Three times in that time period King Jesus told them of His forthcoming death. After all this time with the Lord, what do they ask of the Messiah?

16. What was Jesus response to their selfish question (V.38)?

17. What do you think He was referring to?

They believed they could endure all that Jesus could.

18. What would at least one of these disciples endure in the future that Christ Himself would (Acts 12:1-2)?

James' brother, John, escaped and lived on until nearly the close of the century when he would write the Book of Revelation from the Island of Patmos from where he was exiled.

19. When the other 10 disciples heard about James and John's mother's request of Jesus, what was their reaction (Matthew 20:24)?

Jesus settles this argument and dissension in a very calming manner.

20. Write out Matthew 20:26-28.

Jesus was the perfect example of this principle in Scripture. He came to serve and not be served. He was about to die on a cross for some of those who didn't even know His name. More significant than that, He was about to be crucified on a cross and bear horrible pain for those who did not believe He was anything important in particular until after He was resurrected.

The most powerful tool of teaching is that of example, and that is just what Jesus was. He gave it all – His very life – so that we could live eternally forever with Him. The King that came in the form of a servant!

21. If you could list someone in your life that you would consider “one of the greatest servants of all”, who would that be? (Besides Christ)

Why don't you let them know that you see this Christ like quality in their life? It's not often that true servant's recognize the weight of their contributions. If they are unknown servants, they most likely receive little applause.

22. Jesus said later on in Matthew that, “He who is the greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matt.23:11-12).

Humility seems to go with servant hood.

23. How would you describe someone with a humble heart?

Share – what character trait of a humble servant would you like God to work in you at this season of your life?

The blind men recognize the King – Matthew 20:29-34



Read Matthew 20:29-34

Jesus was leaving Jericho on His way to Jerusalem. He was just about 15 miles away when He heard a cry that stopped Him in His tracks.

Blind Bartimaeus was crying out for mercy from his seat on the side of the road. Passover was approaching and the roads were jammed with people making their way to the Holy City. Alongside the road were beggars, salesmen, etc. and a great multitude followed Jesus into Jerusalem. The multitude didn't want to be bothered by this insignificant man, but Jesus loved Bartimaeus. In reality, Bartimaeus was a treasure to Christ.

24. What specifically did Bartimaeus call Jesus (V.30)?

This was the first time ever that Jesus had been called this. It was sort of a pronouncement as Jesus comes into the city of Jerusalem. The King was being announced by a blind beggar although many didn't catch on to the significance of this unique moment.

Jesus asked blind Bartimaeus the same question that He asked James and John. What was it (Matt. 20:32)?

The difference between Bartimaeus' answer and the disciples request is the difference between faith and ambition. ***Faith asks for needs; ambition begs for wants.*** Blind Bartimaeus needed sight, but James and John wanted a place of honor in the coming Kingdom of God.

25. Immediately Bartimaeus receives his sight! A beggar becomes a disciple! Isn't that wonderful? Here is one more to follow the Savior. Now, Bartimaeus was just as much a disciple of Christ as the other twelve! God's mercy is so great that the beggar and the King share the same divine grace, the same quantity of value and significance.

Wrapping it up and making it personal

John McArthur said, "Just as sin is the great equalizer that causes every man to 'fall short of the glory of God' (Rom.3:23). God's grace is the great equalizer that removes sin and makes every believer acceptable to Him in Christ."

Some people forget that we have all missed the mark. They act as if because they have been a believer for a long time, served in the church since they were kids, and are known members among their church brethren, that they somehow have seniority.

They would never say that out loud, but they say it with their demeanor. The other disciples got irritated with James and John when they were bartering for positions with Jesus, but a few weeks later they were all doing the same thing (Luke 22:24). And they questioned Christ about the coming Kingdom, probably concerned with what their positions would be in that Kingdom (Acts 1:6).

May we never get to the place that we believe there is a hierarchy in Christ's mind with His Saints. Well, He has already stated His system of evaluation: the first shall be last and the last shall be first. The first shall be the servant of all. May we treat the new believer with as much dignity and honor as we do the Pastor, his wife, or the leadership in the church.

I'm so grateful that our Lord doesn't require my service to Him for my salvation. I'm so thankful that my approval from Him doesn't come by righteous living. Salvation is a free gift of grace and that is the beautiful message of the gospel. I'm so thankful that Jesus didn't favor His twelve over a poor blind beggar. I'm so thankful that Jesus doesn't favor you over me or vice versa. I'm so thankful for His unlimited, unearned grace that carries us through this life right on into the next!

Thank Him with me at the close of this lesson for His undeserved, unmerited favor in your life. Amen!

Have a blessed week, servant of our King!