

Notes for Matthew -Chapter 20 (Page 1 of 6)

Introduction - "Proper Perspective Of Heavenly Rewards" and Servant hood

1. A subtitle of Chapter 20 is, "What's in it for me? ☺"
 - a. That is a question asked by Peter and the disciples prior to this chapter.
 - b. That is the question asked by two of the apostles (James & John) in this chapter.
 - c. The most overriding point of the whole chapter is to humble yourself like the lowest servant and then you will have great rewards in heaven.
 - d. Humility and service comes before power and prestige.
2. Chapter 20 is a "road" chapter. It takes place on the road of Jesus walking to Jerusalem.
 - a. From Chapter 21 to the end of Matthew in Chapter 28, are the events of the last week of Jesus' life on earth and one chapter post-resurrection.
 - b. The reason Jesus focuses on eternal rewards is that Jesus himself will no longer "be around" in a little over a week. Given that, Jesus needed to focus on the fundamentals prior to the events of Easter week.
 - c. Jesus knew he would not be around much longer. Therefore, he needed to prepare the disciples for the future. The disciples were about to set the foundation for the whole Christian church. Jesus' teaching on humility and servant hood is the basis for how the church is to be set up.
3. The final story in this chapter is about two blind men who get healed.
 - a. It is the last recorded miracle before the events of Easter Week.
 - b. Jesus took the time to perform this miracle prior to all of the "big events" and right after Jesus spends most of the chapter teaching on servant hood.

Verses 1-2: "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

1. The first 15 verses of Chapter 20 are a "sandwich" between 2 very similar verses:
 - a. "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." (Matt. 19:30)
 - b. "The last will be first, and the first will be last." (Matthew 20:16)
2. Let me summarize this parable:
 - a. A landowner hires people throughout the day to go work in the vineyard.
 - b. Those hired at the beginning of the day agree to a "normal" day's wage.
 - c. Those hired throughout the day are told that you will get paid "what is fair".
 - d. At the end of the day, everybody gets paid the same amount.
 - e. Those who are hired early in the day say it isn't fair.
 - f. The landowner says to the first-hired, "That is what you agreed to, stop whining" . ☺
 - g. The primary point of this parable is that God is equally as gracious to "latecomers".
3. Remember that the phrase "kingdom of heaven" can refer to either this life or the next life.
4. Also note that a "denarius" was a Roman coin, roughly equal to a day's wage.

Verses 3-7: "About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.'
⁵ So they went. "He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing.
⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing. ⁷ " 'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'

1. Notice that the word "denarius" is only used once, for those hired at the start of the day.
2. The landowner says to everyone else in effect, "I'll pay you what is right".

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Verses 3-7 (cont.)

3. This parable can be interpreted about life in heaven (i.e., salvation):
 - a. Jesus is teaching that one can be saved at any time in our life on earth.
 - b. This parable ends with all the workers receiving the same pay.
 - c. In that sense, this parable refers to Salvation:
 - d. Jesus' point is that God is gracious and still is calling you to follow him, even if you have ignored God all of your adult life.
4. This parable can also be interpreted about Christian life here on earth:
 - a. I take the view that one does not begin to experience what "life" is all about until you have committed your life to Christ.
 - i. "I (Jesus) have come that they (us) may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (John 10:10b, NKJV)
 - b. Some are called early in life to serve Christ. Statistically, more people commit their life to Jesus as teenagers than at any other time. This does not mean that any other age is too late, it just means the older you get, the more the odds are against you.
 - c. Verse 7 says, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?"
 - i. You can read that verse about someone who has spent all of their adult life ignoring God. It is as if a loving God is pleading with them saying, "Why have you wasted your life "doing nothing"?"
 - ii. Whatever we do for God has eternal implications. Our heavenly rewards are based on our service to whatever God has called us to do. I'm convinced that to minister to others on God's behalf brings more joy and happiness in life than anything and everything the world has to offer.
5. Notice that all the workers of the vineyard agreed to work "based on what was right".
 - a. That should be our attitude toward Christian service for God.
 - i. "Heavenly father, I want to spend the rest of my life serving you."
 - ii. "Out of that gratitude for forgiveness and salvation, I want you to run my life. I desire to please you, and the way to please you is to let you live through me so that I can be a witness and or of service to others."
 - b. We also need to have the attitude of: "I'm not going to worry about other people's ministries, but focus on what you have called me to do."

Verse 8: "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'

1. We will learn in a few verses that the reason the landowner wanted to pay the last-guys first is so the first-guys could see that everyone gets paid the same.
2. The purpose of last-goes-first in this illustration is mainly for the benefit of those who have worked the longest. It is to show God's generosity to all.
3. The application is to focus on what God has called you to do (or work toward that goal) and the rewards will take care of themselves.
 - b. "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up." (James 4:10 NIV)

Verse 9: "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius.

1. To those who get saved near the end of their life, God does not say, "Well now old-timer, it's about time you acknowledged me, here's a few bucks for your trouble." ☺

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Verses 9 (cont.)

2. This verse is also not intended to say, "Ok, I can wait until I'm old to become a Christian".
3. I stated earlier that there is nothing greater in life than to commit it to following Jesus. Those who commit later in life miss out on all the blessings of having that personal relationship, that joy and happiness in life.
4. The good news is we still get a "full denarius" whenever we turn our lives over to Jesus. God's grace is infinite and cannot be measured. The bad news is the realization of the missed opportunities to serve God at a younger age.

Verses 10-15: So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' ¹³ "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?' ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

1. Those who were hired first, saw the others get a full day's pay and thought, "Well, we agreed to a full day's pay, but since the landowner is so generous, we should get more".
2. Verse 15 is the key: "Don't I (God) have the right to do what I want with my own money?"
3. God does not want believers be thinking "competitively".
 - a. For example, we should not think, "that Christian is lazy, I'll get more rewards than him/her."
 - b. Another bad example is, "I do a lot of work around this church. This other guy gets saved later and everybody is making a big deal about it. I never get appreciated for all the service I do around here."
4. Whenever we are called, don't worry about others and focus on what God calls us to do.
5. If you are not sure what God has called you to do, ask him!
 - a. It usually involves a combination of your God-given talents and your passions.

Verse 16: "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

1. The last verse of the last chapter says, "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." This whole parable is located between two fairly identical statements.
2. A big purpose of this illustration is that God wants us to watch our attitude.
3. A similar illustration in the bible is the "prodigal son". (Luke 15)
 - a. It is the story of two sons. One takes half of his father's inheritance while his father is still alive and squanders it away. When that son hits rock bottom, he goes back to dad and asks to be one of his servants. His father is excited and makes him a son again.
 - i. The lost-now-found son never lost his "son-ship". He is still the father's son and the father always loved him. The father's love is there when the boy repents.
 - b. The second half of this story talks about the "grumbling" of the other son.
 - i. The second son grumbles to dad how, "He has served you all of his life and I never got a party like the one you're throwing for the returning son."
 - ii. "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'" (Luke 15:31-32, NIV)

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Verse 16: (cont.)

- c. "Long time" Christians should rejoice over latecomers first because they escaped eternal hell and realized their mistakes before it was too late. That is always worth celebrating.
 - i. "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." (Luke 15:7, NIV)

Verses 17-19: Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them,¹⁸ "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death¹⁹ and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"

1. Jesus "happens" to mention the gospel story in-between two separate discussions about who is the greatest in heaven.
2. Jesus mentions He will rise again. Whenever Jesus discusses his death in future-terms he always mentions the resurrection as well. That's a reminder for us to keep our focus on the right place.
3. Jesus as "the Messiah" is also a prophet. That means that he has God-inspired abilities to predict the future. Prophecy is used as validation for the authenticity of Jesus' words.
 - a. Moses once said, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. (Deuteronomy 18:15, NIV).
4. Luke's account of this story says, "The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about." (Luke 18:34, NIV)

Verses 20-21: Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.²¹ "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

1. Here is another story of some disciples asking, "How can I be great in heaven?"
2. "The mother of Zebedee's sons" is James and John (Reference: Matthew 4:21, et.al.).
3. In Mark's Gospel (Chapter 10), it appears asking this question was James & John's idea.
4. Remember Jesus said in Chapter 19 that the disciples would be seated in 12 thrones "Judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Ref: Matthew 19:28)
 - a. These two remembered that. They were asking for the 2 top seats.

Verses 22-23: "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered.²³ Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

1. You can't ask Jesus for special heavenly status. Jesus never "owes you one!"
2. Remember that humility and servant hood is the key to great rewards in heaven.
3. Verse 23 says, "You will indeed drink from my cup". What does that mean?
 - a. The book of Acts records that this James was the first martyr of the church.
 - b. History records that John outlives the rest of the disciples, but it wasn't for a lack of trying to kill him. John survived several tortuous attempts to kill him.
 - c. Jesus point is that both James & John were called to suffer heavily for the Gospel' sake.
 - d. In fact, early church records recorded that most of the disciples were martyred for their faith. Early church historians record the deaths of most, but not all of disciples.
 - e. The disciples paid with their lives their belief in Jesus and the Gospel message. Many critics of the bible accuse the disciples of making up the stories about Jesus. Stop and ask yourself, are you willing to be tortured and killed for something you *knew* was a lie?

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Verse 24: When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.

1. The other disciples were mad that these two “beat them to the punch”.
2. They weren’t so much mad that they asked Jesus as much as they didn’t think of the idea first.

Verses 25-28: Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

1. The word “minister” means to be a servant. Unfortunately, many church denominations put their ministers as someone having top status.
2. Notice the word “must” in Verse 26. Jesus says if we want to be great in heaven, then we must be servants. It is a command for us to be a servant. We are to make a priority of other’s needs over our own. That is what biblical “love” is all about.
3. There is an idea taught by some Christians called “limited atonement”.
 - a. The “Limited Atonement” theory is that Jesus died only for those who accept Him, and not for everyone else. I disagree with this view, but it is there.
 - b. Notice in Verse 28, Jesus says he came to “give his life as a ransom for many”.
 - c. Paul said, “the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men”. (1st Timothy 2:5b-6a, NIV)
 - d. Jesus died for the world. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16a, NKJV). To those who choose to accept Jesus get eternal life.
 - e. Both Paul’s statement (#4c) and Jesus’ statement (#4b) are correct.

Verses 29-30: As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. ³⁰ Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

1. Some people make a big deal about what “seems” to be a contradiction.
 - a. Matthew says here that as Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho (Verse 29).
 - b. In Luke’s Gospel of the same story, it says, they were entering Jericho (Luke 18:35).
 - c. The most likely explanation versions is the fact that archeologists have discovered there was actually two Jericho’s. There was a “new” Jericho that existed around Jesus’ time, and an “ancient” Jericho that existed before. Some people call them “upper” and “lower” Jericho as they are on different elevations.
2. There is another apparent contradiction in that Matthew mentions two blind men and Luke mentions only one (Luke 18:35) and Mark mentions only one (Mark 10:46).
 - a. In fact, Mark mentions the one by name, which was Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46).
 - b. This is not really a contradiction. One guy was probably the more “outspoken” of the two. The fact that Mark mentions Bartimaeus by name may mean he knew the guy personally. If two guys received a miracle, and one was your friend, you might write, “My friend Bartimaeus got healed”. It doesn’t mean there were not two people; you just choose to write about the guy you knew.
 - c. You don’t have to remember the details. Just know that there are explanations for what appears to be contradictions in the bible.

Verse 31: The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

1. The disciples were still looking for Jesus to go to Jerusalem to set up his kingdom.

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Verse 31 (cont.)

2. Maybe that is why when Jesus predicted his death and resurrection, nobody “got it”, because in their minds, they were still thinking Jesus was going to Jerusalem to overthrow Rome. Maybe they were thinking “Jesus must mean we will lose the battle for 3 days, and on the 3rd day, we’ll win and we’ll be ruling from Jerusalem.”
3. So, here were these two blind men yelling out to be healed and being rebuked by the crowd.
 - a. The crowd was probably thinking, “This is no time to be asking for a miracle, don’t you know Jesus is going to Jerusalem to overthrow the Roman government?”

Verses 32-34: Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. :

³³ "Lord," they answered, "we want our sight." ³⁴ Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

1. I always wondered why Jesus asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” Isn’t it obvious?
 - a. The best explanation I’ve heard is that God enjoys us asking for things via our prayers. God knows all things, even those we are going to ask him in prayer. God delights in a relationship with us and wants to hear from us.
 - b. You have to read this sentence like a loving father asking a child, “What can I do for you? How can I be your servant?”
2. These two blind men called out to Jesus as “Son of David”, a messianic title.
3. The next lesson, Chapter 21 focuses on the events of “Palm Sunday”.
 - a. When you study the miracles of the four Gospels, Jesus is constantly saying, “don’t tell anyone” about the miracle. He does this so crowds won’t throng him and He can teach.
 - b. On “Palm Sunday” the opposite happens. Jesus arranges to be worshipped. Jesus organizes an event for people to see him as the promised Messiah.
 - c. Remember the crowd was following Jesus to Jerusalem. They probably had expectations of “this is the moment” that He would overthrow the Roman government.
4. Why is it important (symbolically) for Jesus, on the way to Jerusalem to heal these people?
 - a. Why did Matthew include this miracle, which is the last one other than the resurrection?
 - b. If you remember Jesus parable from earlier in the chapter, Jesus talked about some workers in the vineyard only worked one hour, and Jesus still gave them a full days wage.
 - c. I’m going to argue, that in a “word-picture”, this story of the two blind men is connected to that principal. These two men wanted Jesus to heal them because Jesus is the Messiah.
 - d. Here was Jesus, probably one day before “Palm Sunday” healing two blind men. “Palm Sunday” is the day Israel (corporately) must choose to accept or reject Jesus as Messiah.
 - e. Remember in the parable of the “day laborer’s”, Jesus gave a full day’s wage to those who started working in the “11th hour”. It is about receiving complete grace into eternal salvation despite the fact you weren’t saved until late in time.
 - f. For these two blind men, today is the “11th hour”!
 - g. They called out to Jesus the Messiah right before “crucifixion week” so “they can see”.
 - h. Like the vineyard workers who only worked one hour and received a “full day’s pay”, here were two blind men, near the end of Jesus ministry, yelling out for Jesus the Messiah.
 - i. The application, like those on the “11th hour”, is that one can always come to Jesus for healing. It is never too late.
 - j. Jesus is being an example of “humble yourself like a servant” up to the last moment.
5. Notice the last part of this verse. After they were healed, “they followed him.”
 - a. That is the happy ending. Not that they were healed of their blindness, but out of gratitude for that healing, they followed Jesus. That simple illustration is an excellent model for what Jesus does for us. We are “healed” and then we “follow” as servants.