

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
11-1-23

Matthew 20

The Parable Of The Workers In The Vineyard – Verses 1-2

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

20:1-2 Jesus further clarified the membership rules of the kingdom of heaven: Entrance is by God’s grace alone. In this parable, God is the landowner and believers are the workers. This parable speaks especially to those who feel superior because of heritage or position, to those who feel superior because they have spent so much time with Christ, and to new believers as reassurance of God’s grace.

Through The Day, The Landowner Continues To Hire Workers – Verses 3-7

³ “About nine in the morning 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 noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶ About five in the afternoon 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.’

20:3-7 And he went out about the third hour: The third hour was about 9:00 a.m.; the sixth hour was about 12 noon; the eleventh hour was about 5:00 in the evening. Through the day, the landowner went to the place where the laborers gathered, found some standing idle in the marketplace, and hired them to do the work in his vineyard.

20:3-7 The picture is that the landowner had an inexhaustible supply of work for those who wanted to work. The impression is that the landowner was surprised to find people idle, because he had plenty of work to give them. “Why is any one of us remaining idle towards God? Has nothing yet had power to engage us to sacred service? Can we dare to say, ‘No man hath hired us?’”

20:3-7 Whatever is right I will give you... whatever is right you will receive: The landowner promised the earliest workers a day’s wage (a denarius a day). The other workers hired through the day were not promised a specific wage, only whatever is right. He promised to pay all the later workers fairly.

The Landowner Pays His Workers – Verses 8-10

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.’ ⁹ “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.

20:8 Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first: These are day laborers, so they are paid at the end of each day. When it came time to pay the workers, the men hired last were paid first — and paid for a full day of work! The men who were hired at the eleventh hour — who worked only about one hour — were obviously elated about being paid first, and being paid for a full day.

20:9 They supposed that they would receive more: The men who worked for the landowner all day saw the men who worked for only an hour come away from the pay table, and they supposed, “If the landowner is paying these guys a full day’s pay for one hour’s work, then we will get far more.” The order of payment was important. If the first workers had been paid first, they would not have had time to develop the expectation of more pay for themselves. “Possibly the first felt their vanity wounded by being paid after the others. They used their waiting time in considering their own superiority to the latecomers.”

20:10 They likewise received a denarius: Yet the men hired first — early in the day, and who had worked all day — got paid exactly what the landowner had promised them (a denarius a day, Matthew 20:2). The landowner did exactly as promised, but their supposition of more pay than promised was disappointed.

The Complaint Of The Early Workers – Verses 11-15

11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. **12** ‘These 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, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’ **14** Take your pay and go. I want to give the one 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?’

20:15 This parable is not about rewards but about salvation. It is a strong teaching about grace, God’s generosity. We shouldn’t begrudge those who turn to God in the last moments of life, because, in reality, no one deserves eternal life. Many people we don’t expect to see in the kingdom will be there. The criminal who repented as he was dying (Luke 23: 40-43) will be there along with people who have believed and served God for many years.

20:15 Do you resent God’s gracious acceptance of the despised, the outcast, and the sinners who have turned to him for forgiveness? Have you ever been jealous of what God has given to another person? Instead, focus on God’s gracious benefits to you, and be thankful for what you have.

The Parable Applied: The Principle Of God’s Reward – Verse 16

16 “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

20:16 So the last will be first, and the first last: Peter and the disciples knew they had given up a great deal to follow Jesus. Peter wanted to know what they would get in return. Through this parable Jesus assured Peter and the disciples that they will be rewarded — but the principle of many who are first will be last and the last first (Matthew 19:30) meant that God may not reward as man expects — even as the parable illustrated.

20:16 Last will be first, and the first last: This is the essence of God’s grace, when He rewards and blesses man according to His will and pleasure, not necessarily according to what men deserve. It is important to see that the landowner did not treat anyone unfairly, though he was more generous to

some than to others. We can be assured that God will never, ever be unfair to us, though He may — for His own purpose and pleasure — bestow greater blessing on someone else who seems less deserving.

Jesus Predicts His Death A Third Time – Verses 17-19

17 Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, ¹⁸“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death ¹⁹and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”

20:17-19 Jesus predicted his death and resurrection for the third time (see 16: 21 and 17: 22-23 for the first two times). But the disciples still didn't accept and believe what he meant. They continued to argue over their positions in Christ's kingdom (20: 20-28).

20:17-19 It is often more agonizing to contemplate the painful future than it is to actually live it. Jesus openly acknowledged the suffering and agony that awaited Him. Jesus thought about how He would fulfill the will of His Father in the future. There was value for Him to look at His coming trial, and to think and say, “I will complete what My Father has given Me to do. I will obey to the end.”

A Mother's Request – Verses 20-21

20 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.”

20:20 The mother of James and John came to Jesus and “kneeling down, asked a favor of him.” She gave Jesus worship, but her real motive was to get something from him. Too often this happens in our churches and in our lives. We play religious games, expecting God to give us something in return. True worship, however, adores and praises Christ for who he is and for what he has done.

20:20 The mother of James and John asked Jesus to give her sons special positions in his kingdom. Parents naturally want to see their children promoted and honored, but this desire is dangerous if it causes them to stand in the way of God's specific will for their children. God may have different work in mind for them— perhaps not as glamorous, but just as important. Thus, parents' desires for their children's advancement must be held in check as they pray that God's will be done in their children's lives.

Jesus Answers James And John – Verses 22-23

22 “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.”

20:22 James, John, and their mother failed to grasp Jesus' previous teachings on rewards (19: 16-30) and eternal life (20: 1-16). They failed to understand the suffering they must face before living in the glory of God's kingdom. The “cup” was the suffering and crucifixion that Christ faced. Both James and John would also face great suffering. James would be put to death for his faith, and John would be exiled.

20:23 Jesus was showing that he was under the authority of the Father, who alone makes the decisions about leadership in heaven. Such rewards are not granted as favors. They are for those who have maintained their commitment to Jesus in spite of severe trials.

The Disciples' Reaction; Jesus Sets Forth True Greatness – Verses 24-28

24 When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. **25** 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.”

20:24 The other disciples were upset with James and John for trying to grab the top positions. All the disciples wanted to be the greatest (18: 1), but Jesus taught them that the greatest person in God's kingdom is the servant of all. Authority is given, not for self-importance, ambition, or respect, but for useful service to God and his creation.

20:27 Jesus described leadership from a new perspective. Instead of using people, we are to serve them. Jesus' mission was to serve others and to give his life away. A real leader has a servant's heart. Servant leaders appreciate others' worth and realize that they're not above any job. If you see something that needs to be done, don't wait to be asked. Take the initiative and do it like a faithful servant.

20:28 A “ransom” was the price paid to release a slave from bondage. Jesus often told his disciples that he must die, but here he told them why— to redeem all people from the bondage of sin and death. The disciples thought that as long as Jesus was alive, he could save them. But Jesus revealed that only his death would save them and the world.

Two Blind Men Receive Sight – Verses 29-34

29 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!” **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!” **32** 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.

20:29-34 Matthew records that there were two blind men, while Mark and Luke mention only one. This is probably the same event, but Mark and Luke singled out the more vocal of the two men.

20:30 The blind men called Jesus “Son of David” because the Jews knew that the Messiah would be a descendant of David (see Isaiah 9: 6-7; 11: 1; Jeremiah 23: 5-6). These blind beggars could see that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, while the religious leaders who witnessed Jesus' miracles were blind to his identity, refusing to open their eyes to the truth. Seeing with your eyes doesn't guarantee seeing with your heart.

20: 32-33 Although Jesus was concerned about the coming events in Jerusalem, he demonstrated what he had just told the disciples about service (20: 28) by stopping to care for the blind men.