

Matthew 20

The kingdom of heaven is like... Jesus again speaks in a parable to the people and to His disciples concerning aspects of real life that affect each one of us. The Lord knew exactly what mattered most to the people of this world; what their priorities were and goes on to speak about a subject that, if we are honest, can be a problem to all of us, that is, unfairness or what we call injustice.

Matthew 20 v 1-16

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; 4 and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went. 5 Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. 6 And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?' 7 They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' 8 "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.' 9 When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. 10 When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, 12 saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.' 13 But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. 15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?' 16 So the last shall be first, and the first last."

First of all Jesus speaks of those in authority, the landowners and those under authority, in the case of the workers. The story is a simple one, agreement between *the boss* and the workers is made on an individual basis. It was ok until they realised that there were some getting the same wages as the ones who had only worked for part of the day. On the surface this does seem to be unfair, but if you consider the story more openly you might see that the landowner had only one *fault*, he had not broken the agreement that he made with the workers, he could, however, have been *less generous* with the latecomers, which would have pleased the earlier workers! Who had the right attitude? Jesus answers their complaint in the later verses of chapter 1. The landowner did what he said he would do in verse 2.

We do not always do what we promise to do and often have an attitude of begrudging others their blessing, especially if we think that they don't deserve it. The truth is that if we got what we deserved we would be dead by now! Jesus received what we should have got, although sinless He took the blame, taking our place and even declaring us *not guilty*.

Jonah 3

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days' walk. 4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." 5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. 6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. 7 He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water.

8 But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. 9 Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." 10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

Jonah had displayed a worldly attitude. God saw that the people of Nineveh had repented and so did not give them what they had deserved. He showed mercy and it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. God had to deal with Jonah in the rest of the scripture and got him to see that God's justice is different to human justice. God looked beyond the fault that was on the surface.

Here's some questions: How do I feel when someone else is blessed and I am not? How do I feel when somebody I believe is less deserving is blessed and I am not? How do I feel when someone else is asked out for coffee, or to dinner and I am not? How do I feel when someone else is given promotion and because I believe I know that person's limitations, that I think that I should have got the job? All these questions are asked on the basis of this scripture and the other lessons that God's word teaches each one of us.

1 Peter 1 v 13-20

13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behaviour; 16 because it is written: "You shall be holy, for I am holy." 17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers,

19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Submission and acceptance have similar meanings, I have to learn to accept people and situations as God does, all authority is given by God for the good of mankind at home, at work, in the church and every institution that exists; even in sport and leisure the principle is to be the same. I have to learn how to accept all authority, even undeserving authority. As I learn to do that it releases the Holy Spirit to change the situation.

Returning to **Matthew 20 v 16**

So the last shall be first, and the first last.

This meant that those who worked the shortest time were to be paid the same as those who worked all day! But does it mean that the last shall be as the first?

Matthew 19 v 30

30 But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.

Here Jesus speaks in another context which is to do with commitment. Those who have been Christians for many years have not satisfied the Lord and although they have been serving Him up to a point are not growing or going anywhere. They would therefore be left behind and even overtaken by new disciples. Do notice the difference between **Matthew 19 v 30** and **Matthew 20 v 16** and the context that Jesus speaks in. As someone once said *a text out of context is a pretext.*

Matthew 20 v 17-19

17 As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the road He said to them, 18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and they will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and flog and crucify, and on the third day He will be raised up."

Here Jesus is speaking of His death and resurrection that He is to face in the days ahead. His attitude is of commitment even unto death, showing us an example of what He expects from the true believer. We are to take up our cross daily having anticipated the pain and the injustices that accompany the believer in his or her walk with God. We shall succeed only as we daily put to death the old nature and put on the new garments of praise. Praise only comes when we recognise what Jesus has done for us, putting off this awful garment of emotion, self-centredness and walk in the truth. It will be health to our souls and healing to our bodies. The third letter of John confirms it.

3 John v 2-4

2 Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. 3 For I was overjoyed when brothers came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. 4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

Matthew 20 v 20-28

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. 21 And He said to her, "What do you desire?" She said to Him, "Say that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine shall sit, one at Your right, and one at Your left." 22 But Jesus replied, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able." 23 He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit at My right and at My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." 24 And after hearing this, the other ten disciples became indignant with the two brothers.

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*SCF- Stevenage Christian Fellowship where Dennis Marshall was Pastor

25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles domineer over them, and those in high position exercise authority over them. 26 It is not this way among you, but whoever wants to become prominent among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever desires to be first among you shall 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."

Jesus emphasises the role of each one of us, here we see position and status being sought after, the disciples did not like Jesus' reply. The world has a system of authority where there are always leaders who rule over people. Jesus tells them that even He, the one to whom authority belongs does not behave like this, **verse 26 -28** gives His response *26 It is not this way among you, but whoever wants to become prominent among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever desires to be first among you shall 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.*

The final part of this chapter shows how Jesus practiced what He had preached, the sign of true ministry which showed the difference between human kindness and the heart of God.

Matthew 20 v 29-34

29 As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. 30 And two people who were blind, sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" 31 But the crowd sternly warned them to be quiet; yet they cried out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" 32 And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 33 They said to Him, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened." 34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

In conclusion may our eyes be opened wider, the two blind men heard Jesus passing by them and cried out to Him. Jesus asked them what they wanted Him to do for them and their reply was revealing, v **33-34** *They said to Him, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened."* 34 *Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.* May that word and that experience be yours in the days to come.