



Chapter 20: Approaching Jerusalem

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

This parable sometimes seems unfair: today no employer would be able to pay his workers like this – the same pay regardless of how many hours they had worked. However, Jesus uses the parable to teach his disciples a lesson. God does not reward people depending on how much they have done for Him; the reward is the same for all who have accepted the offer to work for Him.

When we look at the parable in more detail we see that the verses before and after it give the same message – the first will be last and the last will be first. The 'first' were the only group of workers who made an agreement with the owner about their wages. All the others went to work trusting the owner – that he would give them 'what was right'. The owner graciously gave those who had only worked for a short time the same amount as those who had worked all through the heat of the day, more than their work deserved.

The first group of people to be invited to work in God's vineyard was the Jewish nation. We read of their agreement, or covenant, with God in the book of Exodus. If they kept the Law given by God to Moses they would receive God's blessing. They failed, but God has still been merciful to them.

In New Testament times the invitation to work for the Lord was extended to Gentiles (non-Jews) under the New Covenant. This did not require people to keep fully the Law of Moses in order to receive a blessing from God. Instead God asked for faith in His promise of salvation that He had made through Jesus and, as the parable says, *'whatsoever is right I will give to you'*.

God has promised eternal life (the same 'payment') to all who believe His word and accept His Son as their saviour.

This parable was given to the Jews who still thought they had a privileged position in God's purpose simply because of their birth as descendants of Abraham and that Gentiles were unacceptable to God.

Warnings for the Apostles (20:17-19)

In verses 17-19 Jesus again told the Apostles about his suffering, death and resurrection. For the first time he revealed to them that he would be crucified. Jesus was very careful in the way he taught his disciples about his death. He knew it would be a terrible shock to them and he did not mention his death at all until just six months before it happened.

Here, in chapter 20, he is only a few weeks away from the cross and it is time for the disciples to know the details of the awful death that awaits their Lord at Jerusalem.

The parallel account in Luke 18:31-33 gives more details – these dreadful events were to fulfil the words of the Old Testament prophets. When we read the Old Testament we need to remember to look out for passages that refer to the Lord Jesus. His constant concern was for his followers. He knew the path he had to take, yet he still had time to support his disciples. The risen Lord has this same care for his followers today.

Rewards (20:20-28)

However, the disciples still did not understand what Jesus was telling them. Two of them, James and John, selfishly wanted the best places in the kingdom. They were Jesus' cousins and it was their mother, Jesus' aunt, who came and asked him to give her sons preferential treatment in his kingdom.

We meet this sort of thing in our own lives today. Sometimes a man in a good job or position of authority is expected to look after his relatives and give them jobs, even if they are not the most suitable candidates for the role. It brings jealousy and discontent and that is exactly what happened with the disciples. The two cousins told Jesus that they deserved the best positions in his kingdom as they were prepared to go and suffer with him. When the other ten Apostles heard this they were very displeased with them.

Later we read that the argument about who should be the greatest in the kingdom continued right up to the night before Jesus' death.





Often we might say things which later will have serious consequences for us and our fellow worshippers and it is important that we always think carefully about our words and any trouble they might cause.

Rulers exercise dominion over their subjects but true disciples of the Lord Jesus must be like their Lord and serve one another, not looking for positions of authority in the church. Not long afterwards, at the Lord's Supper, Jesus gave the Apostles a practical demonstration of humble service. He washed his disciple feet before laying down his life for his friends.

"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (John 13:14-17)

Healing the Blind Men (20:29-34)

Jesus now began the final part of his journey to Jerusalem. A great crowd followed him and we know from the next chapter that many of them went all the way to Jerusalem with him (compare Matt. 20:29 and 21:8).

Just outside Jericho they passed two blind men sitting by the roadside. They cried out to Jesus for help and he showed compassion for them, stopping and healing their eyes so that they could see.

Although Jesus was approaching the most important stage of his life's work, he still had time to stop and help those who needed him. In Mark's gospel, one of the men is named Bartimaeus – perhaps this blind beggar was known to Mark's readers as a faithful believer in later life. If so, how glad he would have been for the compassion shown to him on the Jericho road.

Matthew tells us that they also then followed Jesus – what an example for us! The Bible describes people who do not know about Jesus as spiritually blind, they cannot see the truth about him. Those who accept Jesus as their saviour are those who have spiritual sight and understand his call to follow him on the way to the kingdom.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: SON OF DAVID

Why did the blind men call Jesus the Son of David? We know that he is the Son of God and the adopted son of Joseph, the husband of Mary. But Matthew chapter one also showed us that Jesus was descended from King David who was promised a special son who would sit on his throne and reign forever. So these blind men realised that Jesus was the promised king! They 'saw' more than most!