

**The Gospel of Matthew**  
**Week Twenty-Three**  
**Matthew 20:1-34**

**Days One and Two**

1 "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. 3 "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.' 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 the eleventh hour 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. 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?' 16 "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

v. 1-15 – I will avoid any attempt to dissect the details of the story that Jesus told. At the same time, I won't separate the verses but rather include the entire parable. Verse one starts with the word "for," which ties this story back to the previous topic where Jesus had finished by saying, "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."

When I read this story, it seems unfair to me that the workers hired at the end received the same compensation as those who started earlier. That is exactly the response that Jesus wanted, for that is just how His listeners felt and would feel about God having mercy on the Gentiles. The Jews felt that they had a special position with God due to the fact that He had made a covenant with them through their forefathers. Now God through Jesus was extending the benefits of the covenant, giving the same covenantal benefits to those who would come to the Lord through Jesus, namely the Gentiles and other "sinners."

Paul wrote about this same phenomenon in Christ, quoting Moses:

For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Romans 9:15).

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

v. 16 – Jesus ended the parable where He began, with a reminder that the last will be first and the first last. This is obviously again a reference to the Gentiles, who would come into the Kingdom after the Jews but would be the most prominent. Is there any group against which you have a bias, that you would not be thrilled to see come into God's Kingdom?

### Day Three

17 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 death 19 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!"

v. 17 – Jesus warned his disciples that His end was near when they arrived in Jerusalem. Of course, it was not the end as for any other human, for Jesus would come back from the dead, which He told them He would. This is the third such mention that Matthew recorded when Jesus predicted His death and resurrection. This was done to prove that Jesus knew about His death, that He was a willing participant and that He knew all along that He would be raised back to life.

There were some in Matthew's time and some today who deny that the death and resurrection actually took place. Yet here we have a reliable, historical account that it did take place and was part of a heavenly plan for it to happen. This is why there has been such a demonic plot, especially in the last 100 years, to discredit the sources in Scripture as unreliable and biased. I have repeatedly pointed out that Jesus assured His listeners many times that He was telling the truth. **Why would Jesus then lie about His death and resurrection?** It makes no sense.

vs. 18&19 – Judas was among those who heard what Jesus had to say. **I wonder if he knew at this point that he would be part of the ensuing drama as the betrayer?** Be that as it may, my love for Jesus increases when I realize that He ministered so consistently and effectively, knowing all along that some of the very people He helped would turn against Him! Jesus did not do what He did for people so much as He did it for His heavenly Father. I am reminded of my favorite passage in Philippians 2:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 0that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on

earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

Here is a checklist for you to consider as you read Philippians 2:

- 1. Is your attitude the same as Jesus?**
- 2. Have you made yourself nothing?**
- 3. How effective are you as a servant?**
- 4. Are you humbling yourself in the settings where you live and work?**

#### Day Four

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." 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."

v. 20 – This good Jewish mother of James and John was zealous for her sons to advance in God’s kingdom. She brought her boys to Jesus and they all knelt down in reverential respect. They asked a favor of Jesus, but it wasn’t to help some afflicted family member or to ask Him for some great miracle. No, they had a different request in mind, something more personal and self-serving.

v. 21 – The mother of Zebedee’s sons asked that her boys would sit on either side of Jesus in His kingdom, that her boys be promoted over the other “boys.” On the one hand, this mother did accept in faith that Jesus would sit on a throne – she at least got that right! Her “prayer” request, on the other hand, was way off target. While you have to smile at her good intentions and zeal, she was confusing the Kingdom of heaven with other earthly kingdoms. In addition, she probably assumed, as most Jews would, that Jesus was going to re-establish David’s kingdom then and there as an earthly kingdom replacing Rome. She wanted her boys to have a place of prominence. She gets an A for faith and an F for application of that faith.

v. 22 – Jesus gave them a quick response to their request – they didn’t know what they were talking about! Jesus asked them a question and they probably didn’t understand the full implications of what He was asking any more than they understood what they were asking Him to do. Answering His question, they indicated that they could indeed drink the cup that Jesus was about to drink. He was referring to His coming suffering and death (we know this from His garden prayer when He asked the Father if there was any way His “cup” could be removed).

The disciples answered that they could indeed drink the same cup that Jesus would drink. They probably had some idea that this cup would be difficult and, to their credit, they

were willing to drink it with Jesus. They were loyal and ready to follow their Master. Yet they later proved, when they fled the scene after Jesus betrayal and when they huddled behind locked doors after His death, that they were not really ready to drink the same cup.

It is important that each of us has a sober assessment of where we are in the Lord. There have been times when I thought I was at one level of spirituality when I wasn't really. That is why God must put us through some trials and tests to show us where we truly are. A test isn't a bad thing, for it shows us the reality of what God has done in our lives and what remains to be done. **Are you in a test right now?** Don't try to get out of it; just learn the lessons that God wants you to learn while you are in it. One of those lessons is accurate spiritual inventory of where you are and what you have and don't have internally.

v. 23 – Jesus indicated that there would be a “right and left” hand throne, but those were not His to give. That was the Father's prerogative. Of course, we are not talking about a literal throne, but rather an indication of Jesus' supremacy in the Kingdom of heaven. The Father bestowed the places of honor in relationship to Jesus. Once again, the disciples had to learn that this Kingdom was not like any earthly kingdom. It had different “rules” and attitudes that were prevalent. They would learn in time what it meant and I am sure that they all have places of honor in that Kingdom now and will have one in the age to come.

**What about you? Do you understand the Kingdom rules and attitudes necessary for promotion and success? Do you comprehend that it is not like any Kingdom we have known on earth? Are you prepared to drink your cup that Jesus has designated for you?**

### Day Five

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."

v. 24 – The other ten men heard about the “end run” that James and John along with their mother had orchestrated, and they were angry! This proves that the move by the family to try and secure a prominent place for their family members was political. The team members were not happy, perhaps because they didn't think of it first! It is a lot of work to build any effective team, even one led by the Son of God! **Of which team are you a part? Which team do you serve as leader? What are you doing to be a better team member? What are you doing to build a better team?**

v. 25 – As was His custom, Jesus used this problem as a teaching opportunity, this time not telling the men a parable but speaking to them in straightforward language that they could understand. Nothing much has changed in 2,000 years, for leaders of the Gentiles still lord it over the people they lead just like in Jesus' day. What's more, church leaders very often do the same thing. Lord Acton, a British historian once said, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Notice Acton said power *tends* to corrupt; he did not indicate that it always corrupts the holder.

v. 26 – Jesus gave the antidote to power and that is service to others. This isn't to be confused with politeness or weakness. Jesus wasn't a leader who opened doors for people and held chairs for ladies sitting down. He may have done those things, but that didn't make him a servant-leader. Servant-leaders make other people and their needs the focus of their work. They don't build their own kingdoms, but they build companies, churches, and organizations that serve the needs of others, not to feed their own egos.

**Are you a servant-leader? How would one know for sure? What evidence is there that you aren't just another leader, leading like the Gentiles do?**

v. 27 – Jesus put Himself forward as a model for leadership. He did not come seeking power and position – we are back at Philippians 2 once again – but to do the will of the Father. Let's look at Philippians 2 one more time to see what attitudes and behaviors you and I should have as leaders:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

**What steps can you take to be like the leader that Jesus was and is, the kind of leader that He wants you to be. One thing that Jesus did was to give His life. Where does the Lord want you to give your life? What can you do to give it more fully and completely?**

### Days Six and Seven

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.

v. 29 – I have visited Jericho, which has the distinction of being the lowest city on earth. Today it is in the hands of the Palestinians, and is not usually included on any tour to Israel. Because the elevation is so low, it is extremely hot and dusty. I am not sure what time of year this took place, but I hope it was winter, for a crowd following Jesus in summer would have been walking in unbearable heat. Yet people were so desperate to be with Jesus and have their needs met that I can see it happening no matter what time of year this was. **How desperate are you to be with Jesus? Will you walk through the desert to have a chance to fellowship with Him?**

v. 30 – There were two blind men who heard that Jesus was passing by. These men could not see, but they could hear, and used what they had, their ears and voices, to get a hold of God. **Are you using all that you have to “get hold of God”? What more can you do?** These men shouted to try and get Jesus’ attention in spite of the crowd and noise. They didn’t just send a request for a meeting; they cried out! Jesus was famous everywhere He went and everyone must have talked about Him for even these blind men to know who He was.

These men shouted and asked that Jesus would have mercy on them. That is a good prayer to utter any time. **Why not make it your prayer today?**

v. 31 – The crowd acted like the disciples when the children tried to gain access to Jesus – they tried to get the blind men to stop shouting! It was making everyone feel awkward and uncomfortable. **Have you ever been with anyone whose love or need for God made you feel the same way?** One man once defined a religious fanatic as someone who loves God more than I do.

The more the crowd tried to quiet the two men down, the more and louder they shouted. They knew their need and were not going to allow the crowd to keep them from their day of help. After all, the crowd didn’t realize what it was like to be blind and they had a chance to be healed. *Lord, help me to identify with others in need, to feel what they feel so I won’t judge or belittle them as they seek You for help.*

vs. 32&33 – Jesus stopped and called back to them, asking what they wanted. It would seem obvious what they wanted, but I would imagine that some don’t want to be free of their affliction and only want help learning to live with it. That was not the case with these men. Yet, Jesus still made them declare what it was that they wanted. **If Jesus asked you that question today, what would you say? What do You want Him to do for you?** These blind men were crystal clear as to what they wanted; they wanted to see, and they said so in no uncertain terms.

You won’t receive anything from God unless you are clear and ask without hesitation or apology. We are all blind and needy when it comes to spiritual things, so there is always something for which we should be seeking God for help. **What is it in your life right now?**

v. 34 – Jesus must have moved closer to them so that He could touch them. He moved closer to them after they had made the effort, even through shouting, to move closer to Him. I think I saw that principle someplace else in the Bible:

Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded (James 4:8).

The blind men were instantly healed and joined the crowd following Jesus. **Can you imagine the joy that they experienced that day? Can you imagine the joy that they had in the crowd, talking about what God had done for them?** There is no joy like a joy that stems from having a need miraculously met by God. What's more, these men did not have to seek God for a long time. He heard their cry and touched them immediately. Don't get into a mindset that you have to seek God for a long time to have a need met. That just isn't necessarily true.