A Study of Matthew 20

I. Outline.
1. PARABLE of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20.1-16).
2. For the 3rd Time Jesus Tells of His Death (Mt 20.17-19; cf., Mk 10.32-34; Lk 18.31-34).
3. Request of James and John through their Mother (Mt 20.20-28; cf., Mk 10.35-45).
4. Healing Two Blind Men (Mt 20.29-34; cf., Mk 10.46-52; Lk 18.35-43).

II. Summary.
One great principle of rewards is laid down in this parable. It is that they will be given, not according to length or amount of service, but according to fidelity to opportunities. The Master was now taking the last journey to Jerusalem, fully conscious of its deep significance in His mission. Beyond the Cross He saw the glory of the new life. He called His disciples to Him, and told them of His coming death and resurrection. Here as in every case during the last sad days His account of His own suffering to come is broken in on by some little question of precedence among them. We are tempted to be angry with them. He was not. Patiently He laid down for them the principles of true greatness, service even unto sacrifice. In the neighborhood of Jericho He performed a gracious act. While on His way to ratify in actual word and deed what, in effect, has already taken place—His rejection as King—two needy men sought a favor of Him as "the Son of David," a manner of address that signified their acknowledgment of His Messiahship. Straightway His compassion was touched, and He exercised His wondrous power to answer their prayer, and gave them sight.
---G. Campbell Morgan, Exposition on Bible, An e-Sword Module

III. Chronology.
BIBLE PERIOD: The Period of the Christ.
If you are not familiar with the 15 Bible Periods, please click here: http://bit.ly/Rvd8qW

IV. Aids in Exposition.
Matthew 20.1... FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE UNTO A MAN THAT IS AN HOUSEHOLDER, WHICH WENT OUT EARLY IN THE MORNING TO HIRE LABOURERS INTO HIS VINEYARD—"This parable is actually a continuation of the discussion in the previous chapter. Peter had asked the Lord, 'Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?' (Mt 19.27). Jesus replied: 'Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye shall also sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Mt 19.28). However, He also gave a warning against thinking that their position was 'set in stone.' He said, 'But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first' (v 30). This point had to do with those who had spent themselves in the Lord's service, placing themselves and their comforts last in order that He might be first in their lives. All of this was to the effect that such sacrificial service will result in spiritual/eternal benefits from God beyond anything man can imagine. To further illustrate this principle, Jesus told the PARABLE of the laborers in the vineyard" [Jimmy Ferguson, “The PARABLE of the Laborers in the Vineyard,” in The Parables of Jesus, Edited by B.J. Clarke, p. 468-469].
Matthew 20.4... WHATSOEVER IS RIGHT I WILL GIVE YOU—"Since the Jewish day was divided into twelve hours that approximated sunup (6 AM) to sundown (6 PM), the 'third hour' after sunup
would be approximately 9 AM. The Jewish market was the center of business and community activity and it served as the first-century equivalent of a temporary employment agency; it was a place where the unemployed would loiter in hope of finding work. Either the owner did not get all the workers he needed initially or he decided to take on more to finish the harvest sooner. Finding additional workers, he hired them and promised them fair pay” [Kenneth Chumbley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 352].

**Matthew 20.6-7...** AND ABOUT THE ELEVENTH HOUR HE WENT OUT, AND FOUND OTHERS STANDING IDLE, AND SAITH UNTO THEM, WHY STAND YE HERE ALL THE DAY IDLE... GO YE ALSO INTO THE VINEYARD; AND WHATSOEVER IS RIGHT, THAT SHALL YE RECEIVE”—“One of the mysteries is why these men were not hired earlier. If, as the householder suggested, they had been standing around all day, why had they not been hired already? The householder was then on his fifth trip to the marketplace; laborers were urgently needed; and it may not be supposed that the householder had deliberately passed them by without an invitation; and yet they alleged that the reason for their unemployment was their lack of opportunity to work, or lack of an employer. Difficult as that may appear, however, the analogy Jesus sought to convey in this situation, and as it applies to spiritual things, is far easier to understand. God is calling people all the time; but, through the influence of Satan, some do not hear, or hearing do not believe, or believing yield to various seductive deterrents. Therefore, we reject the view that those eleventh hour workers were justified in their day-long idleness on the grounds that they had had no chance to work. True, that is what THEY said the reason was; but we appeal to the words of the householder as a complete refutation of their flimsy alibi. It is quite easy to believe men rather than God, as witnessed by the commentators who accept the paper-thin alibi of those late workers. Would the wise and generous householder (standing here for God Himself) have charged those men with idleness unless he in fact had seen them on his repeated trips to the marketplace?” [Burton Coffman Online, [https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/matthew-20.html](https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/matthew-20.html)].

**Matthew 20.8...** GIVE THEM THEIR HIRE, BEGINNING FROM THE LAST UNTO THE FIRST”—“At sunset the householder instructed his steward to call the workers in and pay them off, beginning at the last hired unto the first. The point of the story required that this order be followed or else those longest in the field would not have had occasion for their complaint, which in turn, brought forth the Lord’s lesson. The men who had worked only from the eleventh hour received a penny, the amount which the owner had promised those who had worked all day. The first group hired supposed that they would receive more than the owner had promised them, since these late comers had been paid a full day’s wage. Man often gets into trouble when he ‘supposes.’ The householder in the story was following the Law of Moses by paying his workers at the end of the day (Lev 19.13; Deut 24.15).” [Bob Winton, *Book of Matthew*, p. 240].

**Matthew 20.9...** THEY RECEIVED EVERY MAN A PENNY”—“Up to this point, nothing extraordinary has appeared in the story. But Jesus now inserts several atypical elements ‘that [are] intended to shock the sensitivities of just about everyone’ (Garland, 204). The first of these is that those who worked one hour (v. 7) receive a full day’s pay” [Kenneth Chumbley, p. 353].

**Matthew 20.10-11...** WHEN THE FIRST CAME, THEY SUPPOSED THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE RECEIVED MORE ... THEY MURMURED AGAINST THE GOODMAN OF THE HOUSE”—“That the human race needed this parable is perfectly evident from the fact that most people can find a feeling of sympathy for the viewpoint of the “firsters”! There are many in all generations who would have been just as
outraged as were they. And why were they angry? The householder had interfered with and upset their petty schedule of ranks and values. The inflated evaluation of themselves as compared with the latecomers had been unceremoniously kicked in the teeth. They had no case, but their spiteful anger flared just the same” [Burton Coffman].

Matthew 20.12... **THESE LAST HAVE WROUGHT BUT ONE HOUR, AND THOU HAST MADE THEM EQUAL UNTO US**—“Thou hast made them equal to US!” There is the bull’s eye of the trouble. WE are the people. WE have done the work, shouldered the load, borne the heat, and carried the mail. Those latecomers ought to be away down on the scale compared to US! Every church on earth has the US problem. It existed among the sacred numbers of the twelve apostles. But wherever the problem exists, nothing solves it like getting things in the proper perspective. That is what Jesus sought to do with this parable. The FIRST ones became last by their very bitterness and pettiness and their self-righteous preferment of themselves above others; and those LAST became first by their loving trust of the householder. That is the principal point Christ himself drew from the parable. See Matthew 19:29 and Matthew 20:16.” [Burton Coffman].

Matthew 20.13... **DIDST NOT THOU AGREE WITH ME FOR A PENNY?**—“The owner’s defense is twofold. First, he addresses one of the grumblers as ‘friend’ ... and reminds them that there was nothing unjust about his actions. None of them received less than they expected and many received more. Second, the fact that he chose to pay some a wage that exceeded their productivity gave those who had worked all day no new rights. He was not an American capitalist contractually bound to a union, but a sovereign lord who had every right to distribute his money as he pleased. If his generosity aroused their jealousy it was their problem, not his. ... They were objecting to an act of sheer generosity that he had displayed toward other people” [Kenneth Chumbley, p. 354].

Matthew 20.15... **IS IT NOT LAWFUL FOR ME TO DO WHAT I WILL WITH MINE OWN? IS THINE EYE EVIL, BECAUSE I AM GOOD?**—“Having shewn that no injustice was done, the employer now justifies the gratuity which he had given to the others, on the ground of his right to do as he would with his own, to bestow his gratuities where and when he chooses. He also traces the complaint of the murmur to its true source by demanding, ‘Is thine eye evil because I am good?’ AN EVIL EYE is a synonym for jealousy, and it acquired this meaning from the malicious leer with which jealousy regards its object (cf. Mk 7.2; 1 Sam 18.9). These laborers were jealous of the others because of the unmerited favor which the latter had received” [J.W. McGarvey, *New Testament Commentary, Vol I*—Matthew and Mark, Gospel Light, p. 172].

Matthew 20.16... **SO THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST, AND THE FIRST LAST**—“Because God acts in grace and we so easily think in terms of merit, there will be many surprises for us all in the end when God’s will is seen in its final working out. Human rankings will avail nothing at that time, and there will be those we have made last who will be first, and, of course, the reverse phenomenon will also take place” [Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (p. 505). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press].

Matthew 20.18–19... **THE SON OF MAN SHALL BE BETRAYED UNTO THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND UNTO THE Scribes, AND THEY SHALL CONDEMN HIM TO DEATH**—“This third passion prediction is more explicit than the first two in that it states that the Jewish authorities will condemn Jesus to death (26:66), but that the Gentile authorities will actually carry out the execution (27:2; cf. John 18:31). This is the first time crucifixion has been mentioned in the passion predictions (cf.

Matthew 20.20-21... Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping him, ... grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and other on the left in thy kingdom—“Christ had not yet succeeded in eliminating the ‘me first’ virus from the hearts of the Twelve. James and John, aided by their mother, pressed him for a decision that would leave out Peter and the others. Repeated announcements of Christ's impending death (and resurrection which they continued to ignore) only kindled greater enthusiasm on their part for solving the problem of 'head man' in the church after Jesus' death. The wife of Zebedee did a noble thing in worshipping Jesus; but her request was founded in ignorance of what his kingdom would be. The request of the wife of Zebedee meant that she wanted James and John to be the first and second ministers in the coming kingdom, envisioning such offices, no doubt, as those of Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer! Some have found a mystical fulfillment of her request in the fact that James was the first apostle to die and John was the last. If one wonders why the apostles thus behaved, it should be remembered that they were still sold under sin. The great redemption had not yet taken place.” [Burton Coffman].

Matthew 20.22... But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?—“The Lord first informs them that they have no idea as to what they are asking. They thought in terms of a literal, earthly kingdom, and in terms of a king sitting upon a throne, and in terms of the men of rank and power sitting in those special places beside their king. They knew what they were asking in those terms, but did not realize that what they were asking would be impossible because it could not be realized in the kingdom that Jesus would head” [Bill Jackson, “The Workers in the Vineyard; Jesus Again Predicts His Death; Ambition of James and John; Blind Men at Jericho,” in A Homiletic Commentary on the Book of Matthew, Editors: Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren, Spiritual Sword Lectures, 1988, p. 520].

Matthew 20.23... Is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my father—“Christ is not saying He doesn’t have the power to assign places in His kingdom, but that the places have already been assigned and will be given to those for whom they have been prepared. In the world, men are often promoted on the basis of friendship, nepotism, seniority, etc. But in the kingdom, men are assigned places of greatness based on character (vv. 25–28). Christ is telling James and John that He would not dole out favors arbitrarily, but in keeping with their moral fitness and the will of God” [Kenneth Chumbley, p. 362].
Matthew 20.26... **IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU: BUT WHOSOEVER WILL BE GREAT AMONG YOU, LET HIM BE YOUR MINISTER**—“The one who would be great, in the Lord's system, is one who is servant to the others. He does not point to some exalted title or position as the proof of greatness. The means of obtaining greatness in God's sight lies in the humble service which one does in behalf of one's fellowman. The way to greatness is in humility. No wonder Christ has forbidden the exalted titles (Matt. 23:1ff) which men are wont to wear!” [Bob Winton, p. 245].

Matthew 20.27... **AND WHOSOEVER WILL BE CHIEF AMONG YOU, LET HIM BE YOUR SERVANT**—“To counter such pride Christ repeats Himself. ‘Chief’ (protos) means ‘first’ and ‘servant’ (doulos, a stronger term than diakonos, v. 26) refers to a slave. In the first century no one was lower than a slave. Here were twelve poor men willing to be rich, and one rich man willing to be poor (Php 2.5-8). Only those willing spiritually to occupy the lowest position will be accorded the highest. This doesn’t mean there are to be no leaders in a church, but that those who lead do so, paradoxically, through serving” [Kenneth Chumbley, p. 362].

Matthew 20.28... **EVEN AS THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, BUT TO MINISTER, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE A RANSOM FOR MANY**—“This line of reasoning is clinched by an appeal to what Jesus himself was doing. He uses his title ‘Son of man’; his messianic function is involved; this is the climax of what he came to do. He did not come (the words do not prove that Jesus was conscious of existing before he appeared in this world, but that is the natural way to understand them; cf. 5:17, etc.) **to be served but to serve.** This is the very antithesis of what the sons of Zebedee wanted. They viewed themselves as the kind of people who would be right at the top in the kingdom. Jesus is saying that he sought no such place for himself. He sought the path of lowly service. He underlines this by saying, ‘**and to give his life a ransom for many.**’ The word ransom took its origin from the practices of warfare, where it was the price paid to bring a prisoner of war out of his captivity. It was used of sacral manumission of slaves, a process wherein the slave went through the solemn rigmarole of being sold to a god ‘for freedom.’ In effect this meant that, while the slave technically belonged to the god, as far as people were concerned he or she was free. This forms a vivid illustration of one aspect of Christ’s saving work. Sinners have become the slaves of sin (John 8:34), and they cannot break free. But Christ has paid their ransom price, and now they are free indeed. ‘The ransom saying undoubtedly implies substitution’” [Leon Morris, pp. 512–513].

Matthew 20.29-34... **Blindness Healed.** “Skeptics have often cited this story as an example of a contradiction that disqualifies the Gospels as reliable testimonies to Christ. The charges have primarily focused on two difficulties. First, did Jesus heal one blind man (Mk 10.46; Lk 18.35) or two (Mt 20.30)? The obvious explanation is that Mark and Luke chose only to mention Bartimaeus, the more conspicuous one of the two (Mk 10.46). They didn’t say Jesus healed **ONLY** one blind man; their lack of reference to the second man in no way precludes is presence (cf, the parallel accounts of the demoniacs in 8.38, the blind men in 9.27, and the donkeys in 21.2-7). Second, did the healing occur before Jesus reached Jericho (Lk 18.35) or after He left it (Mt 20.29)? Various solutions have been offered to explain this discrepancy (see Culver, 212), but the simplest is that in the time of Jesus there were two Jerichos: the mound of OT Jericho and a newer city built by Herod the Great about a mile south of the old (Josephus, Wars, IV, viii.3). Jesus likely encountered the blind men after passing the old city (referred to by Matthew), but before reaching the newer city (referred to by Luke)” [Kenneth Chumbley, pp. 364-365].
V. Lessons & Applications.

Matthew 20.4, 7... WHATSOEVER IS RIGHT I WILL GIVE YOU ... WHATSOEVER IS RIGHT, THAT SHALL YE RECEIVE—“Just now, we are reminded that, for a thousand and one questions any might have, beyond what God has revealed in His Word, we are to have confidence in what God has said, knowing that in all things He will ‘do that which is right.’ The child of God, of all things to be considered, is fully confident in the justice and rightness of all of God’s actions. We must apply ourselves to His will in fullness and resting assured that He will ‘do that which is right’ ” [Bill Jackson, p. 520].

Matthew 20.15... IS IT NOT LAWFUL FOR ME TO DO WHAT I WILL WITH MINE OWN? IS THINE EYE EVIL, BECAUSE I AM GOOD?—“The general rule for parables is that they are true-to-life stories (Notes, 13.1), but this one is an obvious exception. Equal pay for unequal work did not reflect normal business practice in first-century Palestine. By endorsing this radical departure from the norm, Christ vividly teaches that standard operating procedure in His kingdom is radically different from that of the world’s. ‘Jesus’ story makes no economic sense, and that was his intent. He was giving us a parable about grace, which cannot be calculated like a day’s wages. The employer in Jesus’ story did not cheat the full-day workers. No, the full-day workers got what they were promised. Their discontent arose from the scandalous mathematics of grace. They could not accept that their employer had the right to do what he wanted with his money when it meant paying scoundrels twelve times what they deserved. Significantly, many Christians who study this parable identify with the employees who put in a full day’s work, rather than the add-ons at the end of the day. We like to think of ourselves as responsible workers, and the employer’s strange behavior baffles us as it did the original hearers. We risk missing the story’s point: that God dispenses gifts, not wages. None of us gets paid according to merit, for none of us comes close to satisfying God’s requirements for a perfect life. If paid on the basis of fairness, we would all end up in hell’ (Yancey, *What’s So Amazing about Grace*, 61-62). No matter how much we may sympathize with the complainers in verse 12 (1 Sam 30.21-25), the kingdom of heaven runs on grace, not merit. Being first according to human yardsticks—as was the ruler (19.16ff)—places no lien on God. If those in ‘first place’ resent God for not paying according to services rendered, it is because they are evil (v. 15), not because He is unfair” [Kenneth Chumbley, pp. 354-355].

Matthew 20.17-19... The Third Prediction of His Death. Jesus endeavored to prepare his disciples for the coming ordeal in Jerusalem; and in doing so, he uttered one of the most remarkable predictions to be found in the Bible. (1) He was to be delivered, not into the hands of the Romans who were the ruling authority but into the hands of the Jewish leaders, the chief priests and scribes. (2) He was to be condemned by these religious leaders. (3) He was then to be delivered to the Gentiles to be mocked, scourged, and crucified. (4) He would be raised from the dead on the third day. This minute prophecy furnishes strong proof that Jesus fully understood that which was before him, and that the death which he was about to accomplish would be voluntary; and if voluntary, then vicarious. Luke adds, in spite of the plainness of the words of Jesus, ‘And they understood none of these things; and this saying was hid from them, and they perceived not the things that were said’ (Luke 18.34) [Leslie G. Thomas, *Teacher’s Annual Lesson Commentary*, 1959, p. 183].

Matthew 20.27... AND WHOSOEVER WILL BE CHIEF AMONG YOU, LET HIM BE YOUR SERVANT—

“Eminence in the Kingdom is attained through humble service. Our text says that those who
would be first or eminent in the kingdom must become the servants of all. It should be noticed that neither rank nor position is essential to the performance of this service that makes us great in the kingdom. Some have the idea that, if they could just be an elder or a bishop in the church, they could perform a great service. Others think that, if they could be a preacher of the gospel and devote their whole time to preaching and teaching, they could render a great service. Others think that, if they could be a song leader or a teacher of a class, they could render a great service. These positions afford opportunities for service, but they are not essential to the service that brings one to the eminence of which Jesus speaks. And one may hold one or more of these positions at the same time, and yet not attain that eminence of which our Lord speaks. Serving the Lord humbly and faithfully to the extent of our ability in whatever position we may occupy is the road to true eminence in the kingdom of the Lord” [Roy H. Lanier, Sr., Teacher’s Annual Lesson Commentary, 1953, p. 291].

VI. Questions.

True or False

01. _____ The 11th hour workers had no reason for being idle.
02. _____ Jesus came to minister.
03. _____ We read in this chapter about ten indignant disciples.
04. _____ In this chapter Jesus once again speaks of His coming death.
05. _____ The 11th hour workers received less pay than the others.

I Found it in Verse(s)

06. _____ Payment of the labourers was based upon whatever is right.
07. _____ Jesus touches the eyes of two blind men.
08. _____ Jesus tells the disciples who will be great.
09. _____ Jesus asks: IS THINE EYE EVIL BECAUSE I AM GOOD?
10. _____ Some workers only worked one hour.

Short Answer

11. The household agreed to pay workers what:

12. Who rebuked the two blind men:

13. Jesus says this to whoever wants to be chief:

14. What the mother of Zebedee’s children was doing when she came to Jesus:
15. In what order were the workers in the vineyard paid:

Each Question is worth 7 Points
My Score is: _______
Answers will be found on next week’s handout

ANSWERS to Matthew 19 Questions... 01—False (13); 02—True (21); 03—True (29); 04—False (5); 05—True (8); 06—15; 07—24; 08—25; 09—1; 10—10; 11—Of such is the kingdom of heaven (14); 12—What lack I yet? (20); 13—Peter (27); 14—put asunder (6); 15—Jesus (1, 18, 21, 26, 28); Moses (7, 8); Peter (27).
VII. Seek-A-Word Puzzle. The words may be backwards, diagonal, upside down, etc. See if you can find them all. The more you use the words of the Bible, the greater blessed you will be! You might be surprised at how much this little exercise will help you retain important truths. THANK YOU for the good effort you are putting forth in Bible study. –DRL

The words may be backwards, diagonal, upside down, etc. See if you can find them all. The more you use the words of the Bible, the greater blessed you will be! You might be surprised at how much this little exercise will help you retain important truths. THANK YOU for the good effort you are putting forth in Bible study. –DRL

![Seek-A-Word Puzzle Image]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>BAPTIZED</th>
<th>BECAUSE</th>
<th>CALL</th>
<th>CAME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DRINK</td>
<td>EVEN</td>
<td>FIRST</td>
<td>GIVE</td>
<td>HIRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOUR</td>
<td>IDLE</td>
<td>JESUS</td>
<td>LABOURERS</td>
<td>LAST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LORD</td>
<td>MINISTER</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>PENNY</td>
<td>RECEIVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIGHT</td>
<td>SAID</td>
<td>SAITH</td>
<td>STAND</td>
<td>VINEYARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WENT</td>
<td>WHEN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VIII. Crossword Puzzle.

Matthew 20 (KJV)

ACROSS
01) Many be called but ____ chosen.
05) The mother of Zebedee’s children was ____ Jesus.
08) He was told to call the workers and pay them.
10) Jesus knew He would be ____ in Jerusalem.
12) Where people were standing idle.
13) Exercised by those who are great.
14) Jesus knew Gentiles would ____ and scourge Him.

DOWN
02) Some complained: “These have ____ but one hour.”
03) Jesus knew on the 3rd day He would ____ again.
04) Blind men called Jesus his son.
06) How quickly the blind were made to see by Jesus.
07) Son of man gave His life a ____ for many.
09) City from which Jesus departed.
11) Some workers had borne the ____ of the day.
IX. EXTRA CREDIT FOR “SUPER” Bible Students...

Will you please consider answering these three SIMPLE questions based on the Bible text of this chapter? I will try to make use of your answers. Bring them with you next week. Tear out this last sheet from the Study Guide and be prepared to put it in a basket. I think it will be a great help to all of those in the class if you will do so. Thank you in advance for your marvelous cooperation!

W O R D: What word would you like to know more about in this chapter?

W O N D E R: I wonder what this phrase, verse, or series of verses means...

W I S H: I wish myself—or others whom I know or even don’t know—would understand this fact, principle, or concept from this chapter...