

Jesus: No Spin

Matthew Chapter Twenty: The First Shall Be Last

personal / group study for use with the message of February 21st and 22nd, 2009

"So the last will be first, and the first will be last" Matthew 20:16.

There is no favoritism with God. He is generous with all! We are the ones who keep score and worry about power and position. Praise God that He offers His grace to each of us.

Remember the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18? Forgiven of a debt he could never repay, he angrily refuses mercy to a man who owes him a little money. Now in Chapter 20 of Matthew we see another parable of grace. Eugene Peterson calls it the Great Reversal – the first shall be last and the last shall be first. No matter when we come to serve Jesus, He rewards us all the same. Eternal life with Him forever, for each and everyone! What a wonderful message of love He shares with his disciples right before He goes to the cross to pay for their sins and ours.

Introduction.

"The notion of God's love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of karma, the Jewish covenant, and Muslim code of law—each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional."—Philip Yancey

Read.

Matthew 20

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. 2He 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. 4He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' 5So they went.

"He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. 6About 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. 10So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. 11When 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? 14Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15Don'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. "

17Now 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 19and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life! "

20Then 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."

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."

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.

**All scripture taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.*

Questions.

"People are prepared for a God who strikes hard bargains but not for a God who gives as much for an hour's work as for a day's." – Frederick Buechner

Think About It...

1. What do you think true greatness is?
2. Do you want God to give you what you deserve?

Reflect On It...

3. Why do the workers who were hired in the morning resent the employer paying the same wage to those who started late in the day?
4. What does the employer say in response to their complaints? How does this demonstrate God's grace?
5. Compare what Jesus tells His disciples in 20:17-19 and in Matthew 16:21. Does He give any more information about what is going to happen? What does He tell them?
6. In Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus tells the disciples why He came and how they can be great. What does He tell them?
7. This comment Jesus makes about greatness is part of His response to the mother of James and John. What does she ask and why? (Jesus tells her that she doesn't know what she is asking, James was the first of the apostles to be martyred see Acts 12:2)
8. As Jesus is leaving Jericho, two men call out to Him. What do they call Him? Why is this significant to the Jewish people that Matthew is writing to? (see Psalm 72, Isaiah 9:7, and Matthew 9:27) How does the crowd respond to these men? How does Jesus respond to them?

Respond To It...

9. How does it feel to know that Jesus came to give His life for you?
10. Do you come to Jesus with your requests expecting His grace and mercy for your needs? Why or why not?
11. What evidence of God's grace is He asking you to show to others?