



Matthew 20

Matthew 20
Tape #8019
By Chuck Smith

Let's turn in our Bibles now to Matthew's gospel chapter twenty, as we continue our journey through the Word, and we realize that chapter twenty is really tied very closely to the nineteenth chapter and to the question of Peter, when they saw the rich young ruler who had come to Jesus seeking eternal life, they saw him going away because he wasn't it seems willing to pay the price. And Peter said to Him, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?"

What's in store for us? What's the future for us? And Jesus said, God will not be a debtor to you. You which have followed Me in the regeneration, "when the Son of man will sit in the throne of his glory, you will sit on the twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (19:28) "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or land, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold in this life but inherit everlasting life." (19:29) And then the statement, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first." (19:30) We find this statement repeated in verse sixteen, so that this little parable that Jesus gives in the first part of the chapter is definitely related to this statement, "But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first." (20:16) So the last shall be first, and the first last, for many are called but few are chosen.

We have then between these two statements this parable of Jesus concerning the kingdom of heaven,
... is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. (20:1)

And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day,

Whatever that penny represented, it was a day's wage for a laboring man; the standard salary for a laboring man for a day's labor.

he sent them into his vineyard. (20:2)

And he went out about the third hour, and he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, (20:3)

And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. (20:4)

And he went out again the sixth hour and the ninth hour, [noon, and then three o'clock in the afternoon] and he did likewise. (20:5)

And about the eleventh hour [five o'clock in the afternoon] he went out, and found others standing idle, and he saith unto them, Why stand ye idle here all the day long? (20:6)

They said unto him, Because no man has hired us. He said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. (20:7)

So when the even was come, and the lord of the vineyard saith unto the steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. (20:8)

And when they came that were hired at about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. (20:9)

But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; but they likewise received every man a penny. (20:10)

And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, (20:11)

Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and you have made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and the heat of the day. (20:12)

But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: did you not agree with me for a penny? (20:13)

Take what is yours, and go your way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. (20:14)

Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is not your eye evil, because I am good? (20:15)

So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen. (20:16)

We need to be careful that we do not misinterpret this parable of Jesus and to say, Well, you can just slack off and doesn't really matter. Just make a last minute repentance because the last shall be first, first last. You just come on in, slide in at the end. When the doctor puts on the life support system and says there's not much we can do, then it's the time to say, Lord, forgive me of everything I've ever done, want to serve You.

Notice when Peter said, Lord, we have left all to follow You, what do we get? Jesus said, No one has left houses or homes, brethren, family for my sake, but what he doesn't receive a hundredfold and in the world to come everlasting life. The gift of God is eternal life to those who believe in Jesus Christ. And when you come to believe is a matter of God's choice and in God's hands. And there are people who have received Jesus Christ at the eleventh hour, so to speak. There are many people who on their death bed have repented and received Jesus Christ as their Savior. And I am not going to argue the merits of death bed repentance, God knows the heart. But if a person on his death bed does receive Jesus Christ, genuinely accepts Him as his Lord, he will receive the same eternal life that you and I have received. Though he has come in last, he's going to get the same as we who came in first; that is, God's glorious gift of eternal life.

There is another parable of the householder or the lord who gave unto his servants a certain amount of money. To one he gave five talents, to another four, and to another one. Went away to a far country and when he returned he required of the servants an accounting of what they had done with what the master had given to them. The one that was given five talents said, Lord, I took the five, I gained another five, here's ten. He said, Well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful in the little things, now I'll make you ruler over many, enter into the joy of the Lord. The one that received the four talents said, Lord, your four has gained another four and I give you eight talents. The Lord said, Good job. The one that received the one talent said, Lord, I know that you're an austere man, you prone to reap where you haven't sown and all, so I was very careful, I took and hid the talent in the napkin and buried it and now that you've come back, I've dug it up and here is your talent back.

And the Lord cast him out. He said, You've judged yourself. You know that I am an austere man, you know that I want value for investment. And his failure to use the opportunities that God had given him put him on the outside. So we mustn't play loosely with this parable and say, Well it really doesn't matter what you do. What the parable is actually illustrating is faithfulness to the covenant that you've made with the Lord and the Lord has made with you.

And here is a fellow in the beginning of the day. He offers him a decent day's pay. Go out in the vineyard and work. Now notice those at the eleventh hour. He said, How come you're still standing around idle at the eleventh hour? They said, No one has hired us. They had not had the opportunity of working. He said, Go out and I'll pay you what is right. They went out and labored for an hour. Faithful to the opportunity that was given to them. And that's basically through the parables the main emphasis that the Lord seems to make is the faithfulness to use the opportunities that God gives to us. That's what we're going to be judged by. That will be the judgment for the measure of reward and all that we receive. It is our faithfulness. The Bible declares that it is required of a steward that he be faithful. So if God has called me at the beginning of the day and I am faithful, that's what counts. If God calls me at the eleventh hour and I am faithful, that's what counts. God counts the faithfulness to the opportunities that have been given.

There are some people that it seems that God has given to them vast opportunities and they have ministries that are well known. I think of Billy Graham, this class one evangelist that God has used in such a tremendous way. And the thing that really strikes me concerning Billy Graham is, here he is, faithful still to the calling of God. Though he's up in his seventies now, Parkinson's Disease and all, has difficulty... yet he is there, gets in the pulpit and he is as strong as ever, just a magnificent servant of God, faithful, faithful. And God has given him the opportunity to minister to millions of people, to minister unto important people through the world. And he's been faithful.

But way out in the back woods of Kentucky, there may be some mother out there raising two sons, and just filling them with the knowledge and the understanding of God, nurturing them, loving them, teaching them the ways of God, and she is faithful to her calling that God has called her in the ministry to her own two sons. Now when we get to heaven, because she was faithful to the opportunities that God gave her, she will receive equally with Billy Graham who was faithful to the opportunities God gave him. It isn't how famous

you become in your service to God, it isn't how many people you minister to, it is your faithfulness in the ministry and in the opportunities that God has given to you that really counts when it comes down to the final accounting. So that many who are prominent first in the view of the people will not really receive any more than some of these people who you've never heard of and will never hear of until you get to heaven. And you'll discover here they are on the front row, still faithful unto God. And they've been faithful to whatever it is that God has called them.

The important thing is to know what God has called me to do. And then be faithful to the calling of God. And at this point,

Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart

Now he leaves the multitude, they've been thronging Him, we read in the previous chapter that He is on His way to Jerusalem, He's on the other side of Jordan, the area of Perea, but He's on His way to Jerusalem, multitudes have followed there bringing their sick, He is healing them still. And now He gets alone with His disciples,

and he said unto them, (20:17)

Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, (20:18)

And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he will rise again. (20:19)

Jesus knows exactly what is going to happen to Him when He gets to Jerusalem. He is telling His disciples exactly what is going to happen. At one point, Jesus said, I have told you before it has come to pass so that when it does come to pass, you might believe. And so often the purpose of prophecy is to reveal the fact that God has declared certain things and to affirm that it was God who spoke because He knows the end from the beginning and thus, He can speak of the future, as well as the past and with the same clarity, He can tell you exactly what is going to happen. I believe that Jesus is telling this to His disciples to help prepare them. The whole issue now is that of greatness and that of, Lord, what are we going to get? We followed You all the way and what's in store for us? And they are still expecting Him when they get to Jerusalem to maybe set up the kingdom. Maybe we're on our way now. Maybe soon I'll have this great, important position. And so He is trying to correct their false thoughts. We're going to Jerusalem. I'm going to be betrayed unto the chief priests, scribes. They're going to condemn Me to death. They'll deliver Me to the Romans, to the Gentiles, who will mock Me and scourge Me and crucify Me. But the third day I will rise again.

It is interesting that they somehow still didn't believe this. Though Jesus is speaking very plainly, there's no cryptic message, He's very plain, what's going to happen. But yet, it is so opposed to what their concept of the Messiah is, somehow it's not penetrating.

There's a very dangerous thing about presuppositional ideas and positions because when you're faced with the facts, it's awfully hard to accept something that is in disagreement with your presuppositions. And we are prone to just ignore certain facts, as the disciples did. Though Jesus is speaking very plainly of His being betrayed, condemned to death, turned over to the Romans to be mocked and scourged and crucified, but when He gets that far, somehow their minds turn off. And they never hear the final clause. They never hear that I'm going to rise again.

As we notice in Luke's gospel today, how slow of heart they were to believe in the resurrection. When the women came back and said the angels told us He was risen, the tomb is empty, they didn't believe them. And the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they expressed some of the women said they saw a vision of an angel and all but, they didn't see Jesus. He said, O slow of heart to believe, the resurrection. Now somehow when Jesus talked about His death, it was so opposite of their concept of the Messiah that they were so shocked that they never did pick up on "I'm going to rise again the third day." And it said, it wasn't until after He rose and appeared to them, and then they remembered how He said He would rise again. But during the three days they have forgotten all about it. He's dead, He's gone. It's all over. It wasn't until after they had seen the risen Lord. And then, remember He said He was going to rise again and He has.

But look at Thomas. I won't believe unless I can put my finger in the print of His hand and thrust my hand into His side. Slow of heart to believe. And so Jesus is telling them very plainly now what is awaiting Him in Jerusalem in order that He might prepare their hearts. But try as He may, they are so dull to accept

something that is so vastly opposed to their preconceived concepts of the Messiah. And here he is talking, I'm going to go on, I'm going to be crucified, and even at this,

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children, [that is, the mother of James and John, she came with her sons, come on boys, want to talk to the Lord] worshipping him, and desiring a certain favor from him. (20:20)

Oh Lord, I love you and I have a favor to ask of you.

And he said unto her, What do you want? She said unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one at the right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. (20:21)

Put my boys, Lord, up there at the top, one on your right and one on your left.

But Jesus answered and said, You really don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

Notice James and John, they're into this whole thing full hearted, Oh yes, yes, yes, we are! Don't bother asking mom, we'll tell you, sure. We're ready. They didn't know what they were saying. They didn't know what Jesus was saying.

He said unto them, You shall drink indeed of my cup,

James was one of the first martyrs in the early church. Herod had him beheaded. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he put Peter in prison intending to also execute him but God delivered Peter. Yes, Jesus said, you will drink of the same cup,

...you'll be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but [as far as your request] to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. (20:23)

Those are the issues that the Father has in His hands.

Now when the ten [that is, the other disciples] heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. (20:24)

These guys, trying to get ahead of us, trying to get special favors. They were moved with indignation. There was this competition going with the disciples. There was this controversy, they were ambitious, but not necessarily for the right purposes. Sometimes I fear that our service to God is not always with the right motive. Paul said the love of Christ constrains me. That's the true motive. Lord, I just love you. And I'm going to serve You because I love you and if I just get in, Lord, I'll be happy. Not looking for a place of prominence, of position, of power; but just thrilled and blessed to have the opportunity of serving the Lord.

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, You know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. (20:25)

This is the worldly scheme, this is the way the world operates.

But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him become your servant, your minister; (20:26)

Somehow this word "minister", through usage, has undergone a radical change of meaning. The word "minister" literally means to serve, to minister to another person's needs. And yet the way it has been incorporated within the church, it signifies usually within the church a position of power and authority, rather than of service. So I arrive at an airport and they are there to meet me and I say, There are my bags, you can carry my bags, I'm the minister. No, I carry your bags 'cause I'm the minister. I'm the servant. Jesus said, the Gentiles, they love this business of authority, power, exercise it, ordering people around they say; not so among you. Whoever would have the place of leadership, let him learn to be the servant.

You remember when Jesus had that last supper with His disciples and He took the towel and He went around the room washing their feet, the job of a servant and not... we won't go into this little side scene with Peter. But when Jesus finished the task of washing the disciples' feet, He said, You see what I have done? You call me Lord and Master, and that's correct because that's what I am. But if I, being your Lord and Master, wash your feet, take the place of ministering to you, serving you, then surely you ought to minister to one another. Or serve one another, and that is what is meant basically by washing each other's feet. It doesn't mean that I'm to bring a basin and wash your feet when you get here, that's not done anymore. Not necessary, we wear shoes, we don't have open sandals and dusty pathways. But that was the idea is you are serving and you're taking the position of a servant. And thus, today it would be translated in a different way

in that we seek to minister and to serve the needs of one another. And that's what Jesus intended for those who would have leadership within the church. That they would recognize that as the leader, you are actually the servant of the people, there to minister to them.

And whosoever [He said] will be chief among you, let him be your servant: (20:27)

Even as [and He points to Himself as the example] the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (20:28)

I didn't come to be served. I came to serve. I came to give My life as a ransom to many. There are many ministries whose sole function, it would seem, is to be served by the people. And they are constantly... well they are called ministries...but they are constantly asking you to minister to them. Now please send in your offerings this week. Minister to us. And then there are other ministries that exist solely to minister to people. The whole idea is to give to the people, to minister to the people. And that's the kind of ministry that Jesus acknowledges and He encourages. Don't seek to be ministered to but seek to minister, seek to serve. It's so beautiful when people catch this concept. And they are open to just serving the Lord by serving others within the body.

And so as they departed from Jericho,

There is a supposed contradiction here in Matthew's gospel and in the other gospels concerning the healing of the blind man at Jericho. Matthew tells us there were two, other gospels speak of one, even names him, Bartimaeus. Matthew tells us it happened as He was departing from Jericho, the other gospels say that He was entering Jericho. And so a contradiction has been supposed in the scripture and Bible critics have made a big deal over this supposed contradiction. But in recent years, they have discovered the Jericho of the time of Jesus.

Interestingly enough, the Jericho at the time of Christ, was not on the same site of the Jericho of the time of Joshua. But the Jericho at the time of Christ is about three miles south of the Jericho of the time of Joshua and in the discovery of the ruins of Jericho, which they are presently excavating and they have found that Herod built quite a winter resort down there, replete with gymnasiums and swimming pools and all, but they found something quite interesting, that there was an upper Jericho and a lower Jericho. There were actually two, so that you could be leaving the lower Jericho coming into the upper Jericho, so that both gospels are correct. He was leaving the lower Jericho, He was entering the upper Jericho, so between the two is where He met these blind men. No contradiction. The Bible again is right, as it always is.

They were sitting by the way side,

Great multitudes were following Jesus, they no doubt heard the crowds, the tumult, the excitement, what's going on? Jesus is passing by.

and when they heard that it was Jesus, they cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David. (20:30)

And the multitude rebuked them, [told them to shut up]: but they cried out all the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David.

These men knew that they needed help and they were aware that Jesus could help them and they were not about to be deterred. It is interesting how that so many people today are needing help and sometimes when it is suggested that they go to Jesus for help, there are always those that say, Oh no, we wouldn't think of doing that, would you? Come on, let's be real. There'll always be those who will seek to discourage you from coming to Jesus even though it is only in Him and through Him that you can find help. And thus the crowd was discouraging, be quiet, hold your peace. But they were so desperate, they were going to press on. They cried all the louder, Jesus, have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And I love this verse thirty-two,

And Jesus stood still, and He called them, and He said, What will ye that I do unto you?

An artist has drawn a picture of this scene. The picture is very graphic in that he paints the picture of these two men, blind men, getting up to come to Jesus and they leave their canes in the picture. Today, blind people quite often have a white cane and they use the cane to walk and to discover objects that might be in front of them, they use that cane to help them get around. And the artist sees them having faith, Jesus called us. And having faith that I'm not going to need this thing anymore. And so leaving the canes as they come to Jesus, that's an artist's concept but I like it. Not scriptural but it's neat to think of. And He said, what will ye

that I should do unto you?

They said unto him, Lord, that our eyes might be opened. (20:33)

And Jesus had compassion on them,

Our compassionate Lord, how many times we read, “And Jesus had compassion.”

He touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him. (20:34)

It’s interesting that in the Bible we have other stories of blind people being healed by Jesus. We remember the one case where Jesus spit on the ground, made mud out of His spittle and put it in the guy’s eyes and said, Now go wash in the pool of Siloam. We remember another case where Jesus just touched the fellow and he said, Oh, I can see men look like trees walking around. And Jesus touched him the second time and he got the 20/20. But the thing that I like is that there wasn’t a single pattern but a variety of ways in which Jesus ministered to people. It was never by just a pattern. We so often want to make a pattern. We pray for someone and they’re healed, and we’re surprised. Wow, now what did I say? Where did I touch them? We’re looking for some kind of a formula, a pattern to follow.

But Jesus isn’t bound by formulas or patterns but He works in a variety of ways. And I love that. You can’t bind the Lord to some man-discovered pattern. The Spirit is still sovereign in the bestowing of the gifts. And still divides to each man severally as He wills. God is still in control of the healing and of the gifts of healing, and imparts as He wills. And never let man tell you that if you can just discover the right patterns by his books and take his courses, that you can learn how to command the Lord in a formulized way. It’ll never work. God always has worked in a variety of ways His wonderful works in the hearts and lives of men.

That’s one drawback to testimonies because in our testimonies, we relate how God related to me. The sensations that I had, the way I responded, and people begin to think, that’s the way God does it. You begin to see flashes of light or you feel tingling down your back or various ways by which people express their response to the working of God’s Spirit in their lives. And you begin to look for the experience of some sensation or some emotion. But God is going to work with you as an individual personally according to your own temperament, and your own needs and it’s always a personal touch from God because He doesn’t deal with you as a mass of people, He deals with you individually because of His intense love for you and His interest in you.

So don’t worry if it doesn’t happen to you like it happened to Brother Tom who gave his remarkable testimony last week because God reserves the privilege of operating in a variety of ways as He manifests His love to us.

Father, we thank You for our Lord Jesus Christ who has such compassion upon our needs and for us in our time of need. Lord, we pray that you’ll help us to be totally open for the working of Your Spirit in our lives in whatever way Lord You design or You deign to work with us. And Lord we do just pray that You will work, that’s the main thing. Work in our hearts, work in our lives Your perfect work as You draw us to Yourself, and as You minister in love to us. And then Lord help us to go out and share that love and to serve others, following the example of our Lord. In Jesus’ Name we pray, Amen.