

***Grace, greatness and service...***

**Matthew 20**

This chapter follows on from Chapter 19. In verse 27 Peter asked Jesus, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” Jesus’ reply comes in stages: first a promise of reward (v 28, 29); second a warning that God’s way of distributing rewards is not necessarily man’s way (“many who are first will be last, and the last first” v 30); and finally the parable of the labourers in the vineyard...

***Labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20 v 1 to 16)***

The denarius (δηνάριον) was the principal silver coin of the Roman empire – it was basically a day’s wage. The “third hour” was 9.00 am, the “sixth hour” 12.00 noon and the “eleventh hour” was therefore 5.00 pm. The master of the house went to the marketplace to hire day-labourers. A man who wanted to work came there first thing in the morning carrying his tools, and waited until someone hired him...

- When the owner of the vineyard hired the labourers, what did he promise to pay them (v 2, 4)?
- Why do you think the owner of the vineyard decided to pay the wages of the last-hired labourers first (v 8)? What did those who were hired first think (v 10), and why? Why did they grumble (v 11)?
- Was the master of the house being fair to the labourers who were hired first?
- In v 16 Jesus reiterates the point he had made in Matthew 19 v 30 – how does the parable illustrate this point? Who are “the first” and who are “the last”?
- How does this parable illustrate God’s generosity and grace?

***Jesus foretells his death a third time (Matthew 20 v 17 to 19)***

Note the precise details of Jesus’ betrayal, passion, crucifixion and resurrection predicted here – how does the next section (v 20 to 27) indicate that the disciples did not understand or appreciate Jesus’ words here? What did the disciples expect would happen? See Luke 18 v 34.

***A mother’s request (Matthew 20 v 20 to 27)***

- “We are able” (v 22) – do you think James and John really understood what Jesus meant by ‘drinking the cup’? “You will drink my cup” (v 23) – what happened to James? See Acts 12 v 1, 2. What ‘cup’ is Jesus talking about? See Matthew 26 v 39, 42.
- How does Jesus contrast worldly hierarchy (v 25) with his ideal principles of leadership within the Church? How does Jesus himself set us an example of such leadership? See John 13 v 12 to 15.
- So, what do these verses teach us about (a) the meaning of true greatness; (b) true service?

***Jesus heals two blind men (Matthew 20 v 28 to 34)***

- Why were the blind men so desperate, and how do they express their desperation, and yet also their devotion and faith?
- “What do you want me to do for you?” (v 32) – why do you think Jesus asks them such a question? See James 4 v 2. What was the result? What happened to the two blind men?

***[MORE OVER...]***

*Prayer – Lord, thank you for the amazing truths contained in Matthew’s gospel, and in this chapter.*

*Thank you for your generosity and grace, and that it is by grace that we are saved through faith, and not because of our works.*

*We are so grateful, Lord – but help us to show our gratitude by humble service. Help us to serve, and to lead by serving.*

*Help us to follow your example, Lord, for you came not to be served but to serve and give your life as a ransom for many.*

*Thank you, Lord Jesus! Amen.*