

**Lesson 20. . . Understanding the Father's Love
Gospel of Matthew**



Notes From the Podium

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***These notes are intended to augment your own reading and study of the lesson.
Please use as an aid to help document the main message of the lecture.***

Matthew 20:1-34

I. Parables

- A. Jesus' parables often leave us wanting for a better understanding of the kingdom of heaven on earth and in heaven.
- B. It would seem to be better if our Lord would just tell us clearly what heaven is like.
- C. It is not secrecy that keeps Him from speaking more plainly, but because the Son being the word of the Father *is* the fullest expression of heaven.
 1. There is simply no way to say in words what He captures in His own person, being lowered.
 2. In other words, when He says, "eye has not seen and ear has not heard", it's as if to say that you and I have to be changed even to have the capacity to be able to see, hear and understand.
 3. Our Lord takes these infinite realities and cloaks them in parables so that the more we enter into him, the more we begin to see them.

II. Another Parable

- A. The "alpha and omega" rhyme scheme
 1. The book of Revelation refers to our Lord as "the beginning and the end", "the alpha and the omega" and this is the pattern throughout chapter 20 of Matthew's gospel.
 - a. "the first will be last and the last will be first"
 - b. Christ, Himself, is the alpha, the first born son and He's going to make himself the omega, the last.
 - c. Then, by rising, He will make Himself first again, the first born of the new brethren.
 2. A repetitious theme:
 - a. We must first become that "omega", last, before we can become part of the alpha again.
 - b. The emptying of self is necessary for His infusion of Himself into us.
 - c. The closer we get to the omega the better off we are because we are actually moving closer to the Alpha.
- B. "For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard."
 1. The laborers don't go looking for the householder, he goes looking for them.
 2. Our Lord himself is the vine planted by the hand of the Father, to which we will be grafted.

- C. “After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius” which is a day’s wage, “he sent them into his vineyard.”
1. They settle with him, a contract: a denarius (a day’s wage) in exchange for labor.
 2. A *just* wage.
- D. “And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place;”
1. The word used here for “idle” is an alpha privative (word with a negative preface such as “a” or “un”) of “ergon”, (energy) indicating a lack of work.
 2. They’re just standing around with nothing to do.
 3. “...and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’”
 - a. “Whatever is right”? - The demands of justice for those first men are going to be different than for these men.
 - b. These men trust him to give them what is right. - “So they went.”
- E. “Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour, he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’”
1. Now those complaining that “no one has hired us” are most likely the ones at fault.
 2. He hires them nonetheless.
- F. “And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’”
1. Recall that there has been an agreement; the workers had already set limitations on the generosity of the master by agreeing to what was just.
 2. The master’s justice would overflow also with generosity, on top of that which is just.
- G. “Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder.
1. “But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong;’” literally, *I have done to you no injustice.*
 - a. They agreed to accept what was just when they began, a denarius.
 - b. The master *chooses* to give to the last as he gave to the first. I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Surely he may do what he wants with what belongs to him.
 - c. So the last will be first, and the first last.”
 2. “Take what belongs to you...” the word used there for “take” means to take it up off the ground as if they came in thinking he was unjust and threw the denarius on the floor.
 - a. As if they felt that they deserved more.
 - b. The reality is no, they don’t, and those that came late do not deserve what they received either.
 - c. The master did not give to them because they deserved it, but only because of his generosity.

- i. They didn't settle with me on justice, on the contrary I told them that I would give them what I thought was just.
- ii. Those that came last banked on my generosity and the first did not.

H. Justice

1. By desiring only "justice" we set limitations on the possibilities of the kingdom of heaven.
2. By virtue of the natural law, we have a strong sense of justice, and that justice must prevail.
3. We must not only desired justice, justice is fulfilled in Christ; we must also want mercy.
 - a. If we are going to receive only that which we agree upon, only that which we are due, then we will not receive Him.
 - b. He is love, and love is not a matter of justice, it is a gift of generosity above and beyond that which is necessary.
4. By saying to the Jews that they are the firstborn sons, our Lord is revealing to them that though the Gentiles are called in the 11th hour while they were called first, both acts are of His generosity and not justice and are cause to rejoice.
5. We, like the Jews Jesus is speaking to, sometimes think that it isn't fair that there are those who seem to receive our Lord's generosity at the last moment, not having labored for Him their whole lives.
6. So again, we should not ask simply for justice, we want the fullness of His mercy.
 - a. We should let Him dictate the contract for it is Him that we want, all of him, a complete gift, the Son himself.
 - b. "So the last will be first and the first last."

III. "And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death,"

- A. The chief priests are the ones set aside by the Father to offer sacrifice.
- B. Whether they know it or not, the chief priests are fulfilling their ultimate office, they are offering the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, which brings salvation to the world.
- C. All of those years of sacrifices of the Levites were, in a sense, all just a trial run, because they would be the ones to slay the Son, to hand him over to the executioner, their hands laid upon him for sacrifice, to consecrate him unto the Father.
- D. Divine irony: The priests would be the ones to offer the sacrifice that would set us free.

IV. "Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him, with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something."

- A. Recall when St. Peter asked, "...what about us who have left everything?", and Jesus talked to him about the 12 thrones upon which they would sit and judge the 12 tribes of Israel.
 - B. So the mother of the sons of Zebedee, Salome, asks Him for something at the very moment He's describing the handing of himself over.
 - C. She says, "Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."
 - D. Jesus replies, "You do not know what you are asking."
 - 1. The kingdom of heaven in this world is constructed by way of the cross.
 - 2. When He comes into His kingdom the throne he reigns upon is the cross.
 - 3. She's saying *when you come into your kingdom, have my sons, command my sons to sit at your right and your left.*
 - 4. The Lord is asking this mother if she realizes that she is asking for the death of her sons. - Of course she has no idea.
 - E. Jesus says to her sons: "Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?"
 - 1. With certain boldness they respond, "We are able."
 - 2. Indeed they would, James would be the first in Acts 12 to be martyred, and John would be persecuted and exiled to the island of Patmos.
 - F. "He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." (We know them as the good thief and the bad thief)
- V. "And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers."
- A. The other 10 apostles are upset, perhaps they were thinking to themselves *why didn't we ask for it first, he's just told them they're going to get to drink the cup.*
 - B. Jesus tells them "... whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
 - 1. The Alpha and Omega rhyme scheme: Those pushing their way to the alpha position, follow him the way he is going, which is to the end, the omega.
 - 2. He says that He's going to give His life as a ransom for many.
 - a. A ransom is always something that means less to you than what you are ransoming.
 - b. Our Lord is giving His life as ransom. This is a statement of incredible love. The Son finds us so worthy of His love, not worthy in the sense that we deserve it, but that He wants to lavish it upon us.
 - c. What worth we have in His eyes.
 - d. We are worthy because he makes us so, desirable because he desires us. What a statement of incredible love, that he would die for the least, that he would sacrifice himself for a slave.
 - 3. And the exalted sing on the Easter vigil, speaking to the Father, "...to ransom a slave you gave away your son. Oh happy thought. Oh necessary sin of Adam which won for us so great of a deed, the Alpha and the Omega, making Himself the Omega and rising victorious as the Alpha."

4. To be a son or daughter, we must allow ourselves to be ransomed, to have the Son of God pour out His life upon us, that we might be found worthy, in the sight of the Father, of the price of His Love.