

# Gospel of Matthew



## *Suggested responses to questions about Matthew 20:1-34*

**Note: Be sure to respond to all the questions yourself before reading the suggested responses in order to make the most of this study.**

1. In the parable about the laborers in the vineyard, Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is like a householder. Jesus teaches the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel, who've been toiling in God's vineyard from the beginning, that the kingdom of heaven is intended to represent a covenantal fulfillment for all peoples.
2. Those who've been working in the vineyard since the beginning of the day represent the Israelites. At noon, tax collectors and sinners will be called to work in the vineyard. Then at 3 p.m., Samaritans will be called. And at 5 p.m., all the Gentiles will be called. The householder has decided that all the laborers will receive the same wages.
3. In Matthew 20:10-12, Jesus says that the first laborers were expecting that they'd receive more pay than the ones hired later, so when they received the same wage they grumbled at the householder, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." In Matthew 20:13-15, Jesus says regarding the householder: "But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?'"
4. It's significant that the householder in Jesus' parable doesn't address the grumbling man as "worker," "slave," or "boy," but as "friend." Equally significant is that the boss in the parable is a "householder" and not a master, slave owner, or employer. The householder represents God, and he uses language of friendship and not of a master-slave relationship. The parable forces listeners to move out of a contractual, legalistic, and individualistic way of thinking into a covenantal and relational way of thinking. Aristotle defines a friend as "another self." A person who sees a friend succeed also feels successful. A person who sees a friend blessed also feels blessed. In Matthew 20:16, Jesus concludes his parable by saying: "So the last will be first and the first last"—calling the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel to rejoice in all these laborers who share friendship and who all have been called into covenantal relationship with the divine householder. The workers in the kingdom of heaven are members of a royal family—and they all share the same inheritance.
5. In Matthew 20:17-19, Jesus predicts his Passion, death, and Resurrection a third time. This time Jesus adds that he will be "delivered to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged, and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day." Jesus now is specifying that crucifixion is the means by which he'll be put to death.

## **Matthew Lesson 20 Suggested Responses**

6. Jesus doesn't rebuke James and John—or their mother—for their ambition to have special honor in his kingdom. This is because Jesus knows that they don't fully understand what they're asking. In Matthew 20:22, Jesus says to James and John: "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" Jesus knows that his entrance into the kingdom of heaven won't come about with parades and pomp but through mockery, scourging, and crucifixion. Jesus implies that all of his disciples need to step back and take stock of just what their requests entail. Jesus never is critical of those who exhibit sincere zeal for things pertaining to the kingdom of heaven.
7. In the Old Testament, the image of a cup is used to signify punishment and suffering. In Psalm 75:8 it's written: "For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, with foaming wine, well mixed; and he will pour a draught from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs." Isaiah 51:17 includes these prophetic words: "Rouse yourself, rouse yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath; who have drunk to the dregs the bowl of staggering." And in Jeremiah 25:15, it's written: "Thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: 'Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.'" In the New Testament, the image of the cup takes on the added dimension of a symbol of the sacrament of the Eucharist through which life in the kingdom of heaven is nourished and sustained.
8. Jealousy seeks to have what another person has, while envy seeks to destroy what another person has. Paragraph 1866 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that certain sins "are called 'capital' because they engender other sins, other vices. They are pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth or acedia."
9. Paragraph 2235 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "Those who exercise authority should do so as a service," just as Jesus taught in Matthew 20:28. "The exercise of authority is measured morally in terms of its divine origin, its reasonable nature and its specific object. No one can command or establish what is contrary to the dignity of persons and the natural law." Paragraph 2236 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "The exercise of authority is meant to give outward expression to a just hierarchy of values in order to facilitate the exercise of freedom and responsibility by all. Those in authority should practice distributive justice wisely, taking account of the needs and contribution of each, with a view to harmony and peace. They should take care that the regulations and measures they adopt are not a source of temptation by setting personal interest against that of the community."
10. In Mark 10:46-52, Jesus heals Bartimaeus, a blind beggar. In that account, Jesus asks Bartimaeus: "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus replies: "Master, let me receive my sight." Mark continues the story: "And Jesus said to him, 'Go your way; your faith has made you well.' And immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way." Hebrews 11:1 teaches: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." The glossary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines faith: "Both a gift of God and a human act by which the believer gives personal adherence to God who invites his response, and freely assents to the whole truth that God

has revealed. It is this Revelation of God which the Church proposes for our belief, and which we profess in the Creed, celebrate in the sacraments, live by right conduct that fulfills the twofold commandment of charity (as specified in the ten commandments), and respond to in our prayer of faith. Faith is both a theological virtue given by God as grace, and an obligation which flows from the first commandment of God.”

*Responses to the Questions for Reflection will vary.*

**Matthew Notes**