



## The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Twenty

### **XI. Matthew 18:1-20:34 - The Community of the Messiah Revealed (Fourth Discourse) (continues/concludes)**

#### **XI.b Matthew 19:1-20:34 - Valuing the Kingdom community (continues/concludes)**

##### Summary of Chapter Twenty

Jesus discourse continues with another Kingdom parable, this time using an illustration of a vineyard owner who was not only trustworthy and true, but was compassionate and generous, showing the same grace to all who came to work in his vineyard, irrespective of the time that they served, or what they had achieved.

Following this, Jesus took a third opportunity to inform his closest disciples that he would face betrayal, suffering and death in Jerusalem, but that he would be raised back to life on the third day.

The mother of James and John made a personal request that her sons be afforded special privileges when they came into Jesus' Kingdom. Jesus taught that such positions would require suffering and even death; even so, only the Father could allocate such rewards.

The chapter ends towards the final leg of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, when he healed two blind men in Jericho. The men had recognised Jesus' messianic claim and thus he rewarded them by restoring their sight, leading them into discipleship and eternal life.

#### **XI.b.iv Matthew 20:1-16 - The Labourers in the Vineyard**

Jesus provides literary bookends around this parable in Matthew 19:30 and v.16, for the account is told to reiterate his claim that the first shall be last and the last shall be first in the Kingdom of God. The principle appears at the same point in Mark, although Matthew alone includes this parable of labourers in the vineyard.

Jesus gives a further illustration of the Kingdom in a parable where the owner of a vineyard takes on workers at different times throughout the working day and yet rewards each of them with the same amount of pay, regardless of the hours worked or their productivity. Ultimately, this is an illustration of God calling the Jews as the early workers and then later on inviting the Gentiles in to receive the same glorious reward.

This is an account of amazing grace on the part of the owner, i.e. God the Father, but also shows that some of the recipients of grace, the Jews here but it could easily relate to the modern church, can be less than magnanimous towards others who receive the same grace they did.

**<sup>1</sup> 'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard.**

### Matthew 20:1

The Kingdom of Heaven is like. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has used similar phrases to describe the Kingdom. Matthew records seven such parables in Matthew Chapter 13 and then four more in his Gospel, including this one.

Went out early in the morning. The workday was typically divided into four three-hour increments, running from approximately 06:00 to 18:00, and the landowner probably went out just before the start of the working day in order to hire the labourers he needed.

As with farming throughout the ages, there are periods of peak demand such as harvest where the landowner needs additional casual labour to boost his retained workforce.

Vineyard. Grapes were one of ancient Israel's most important crops, and thus Israel was often referred to as the vine or vineyard of God: <<Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watch-tower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!>> (Isaiah 5:1-7), <<Yet I planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock. How then did you turn degenerate and become a wild vine?>> (Jeremiah 2:21), and: <<Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars>> (Hosea 10:1).

Vineyard represents the activity of the Kingdom in this world. Refer also to the comments made on the Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32), and the Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matthew 21:33-46).

As stated in the introduction, these early workers allude to the Jewish people called by God to be his treasured possession and to keep his statutes. There appeared to be nothing so upsetting to the Jews than the idea that God would extend his grace to the Gentiles. This was demonstrated as Paul offered a defence to his own people after being arrested in Jerusalem by the Romans: <<Then he said to me, “Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.”’ Up to this point they listened to him, but then they shouted, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live’>> (Acts 22:21-22). What would further antagonise the Jews came when they were told that many of them were being rejected in favour of the pagan Gentiles, who received equality with the Jews who were accepted: <<and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel>> (Ephesians 3:3-6).

<sup>2</sup> After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.

#### Matthew 20:2

The usual daily wage was one denarius as recorded in a different translation of this passage: <<He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard>> (v.2 NIV).

<sup>3</sup> When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; <sup>4</sup> and he said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went.

#### Matthew 20:3-4

Standing idle in the market-place. Market places served as meeting points for all types of commerce, including taking on casual labour. It was also referred to the place where wisdom could be sought: <<Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice. At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks>> (Proverbs 1:20-21).

I will pay you whatever is right. The owner is a man of integrity promising to pay these workers their due in return for the commensurate proportion of their day’s labour, or at least that is what they would have assumed he meant. So they went to work for him in faith.

<sup>5</sup> When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. <sup>6</sup> And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, “Why are you standing here

idle all day?” <sup>7</sup> They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard.”

#### Matthew 20:5-7

Why are you standing here idle all day? Ultimately, God does not need anyone for anything, but he desires all to be actively engaged in his Kingdom. There may be little benefit in taking them on for the last hour other than to display his mercy and to allow their families to eat, for these men were not unwilling to work: *<<For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat>>* (2 Thessalonians 3:10), they had simply not yet had the opportunity.

He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard”. Five o’clock was near the end of the working day. These workers were desperate enough to continue waiting for work, although they would not have been very hopeful of being taken on so late in the day, and if they were needed they would expect only the minimal payment for the time worked.

The vineyard is also an analogy for the church as well as the Kingdom. The work of the church is vineyard-work, planting, pruning, dressing, digging, watering, fencing, weeding, etc. There is always plenty of work for all, no matter how late they arrive or in what capacity they serve.

<sup>8</sup> When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, “Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.” <sup>9</sup> When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.

#### Matthew 20:8-9

When evening came; give them their pay. It was a requirement in the Law of Moses that daily paid labourers should receive their pay promptly: *<<You shall not defraud your neighbour; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a labourer until morning>>* (Leviticus 19:13), and: *<<You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy labourers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt>>* (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). In Kingdom terms, the payment will come at the end of time, when Christ shall return to judge all people. Those who are faithful to him will receive their reward; those who chose not to work in his vineyard will receive an entirely different yet deserved reward!

Beginning with the last and then going to the first. This upholds the principle that Jesus had been teaching, which he will repeat in v.16.

Each of them received the usual daily wage. Surprisingly, the last labourers to be hired are paid a complete denarius, the same as those who had worked all day. This shows the grace of God in treating all the same when they come into the Kingdom through faith in Jesus. Those who have worked all day lost nothing;

justice was served, but grace and mercy abound. Jewish hearers would have considered it pious to give wages to those not expecting it.

<sup>10</sup> Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. <sup>11</sup> And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, <sup>12</sup> 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.” <sup>13</sup> But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? <sup>14</sup> Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. <sup>15</sup> Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

### Matthew 20:10-15

Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more. There will always be those who expect more than others for the work they do, missing the whole point of the Kingdom. Sadly, this is seen of too many in churches who like to be seen for what they do, building their own ministries rather than serving simply in love and faith. They need to be careful that Jesus will not say of them: <<*Truly I tell you, they have received their reward*>> (Matthew 6:2b).

Each of them also received the usual daily wage. God is no man’s debtor but every person is his debtor for they owe him everything.

They grumbled against the landowner. Jesus’ hearers may have been shocked that the workers would openly react so negatively to a benevolent landowner from whom they might need future favours. After all, they could so easily have been the ones taken on late in the day. However, the landowner puts them in their place, politely shaming them by reminding them that they are objecting not to injustice but to his grace and generosity.

You have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. The men were jealous because they had worked harder for their due than had many of the others. On a human level this may seem unfair and that the man had a point. What he failed to realise, and what the Jews also failed to realise in many generations of being favoured as God’s chosen people, is that they had been under grace all along. They may have worked through the heat of the sun but not in the flames of hell: <<*Is it not from the Lord of hosts that peoples labour only to feed the flames, and nations weary themselves for nothing?*>> (Habakkuk 2:13).

Matthew Henry wrote: ‘There is a great proneness in us to think that we have too little, and other too much, of the tokens of God’s favour; and that we do too much, and others too little, in the work of God. Very apt we all are to undervalue the deserts of others, and to overvalue our own’.

Matthew offers a polite title friend, which he uses to shame one who has arrogantly presumed on another’s grace: <<*But when the king came in to see*

the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth">> (Matthew 22:11-13), and to his faithless apostle Judas: <<Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him>> (Matthew 26:40).

Friend, I am doing you no wrong. The landowner addresses the worker gently, explaining the fairness of his actions: <<*But if our injustice serves to confirm the justice of God, what should we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world?*>> (Romans 3:5-6). He had fulfilled his promise in full by paying the man what they had agreed at the start of the day. God will always fulfil the promises he makes. It is possible that Jesus is offering a mild rebuke to his disciples in response to Peter's concerns over their own sacrifice for discipleship: <<*Then Peter said in reply, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?'*>> (Matthew 19:27).

The offer of eternal life is made to all yet only a few accept it. They receive their reward in this life, like the wealthy man: <<*But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony"*>> (Luke 16:25). Like everyone else, he had a choice to make and then had to live with the consequences. God did him no wrong either.

Are you envious or do you begrudge is literally, 'Is your eye evil?' The labourer failed to be thankful for his own pay because he was blinded by his self-interested lack of compassion for his fellow worker.

I am generous clearly alludes to the free grace of God that is given to all those who turn to him through Jesus. In fact, his generosity goes much further by means of common grace, which is the favour that he gives to all people and not just to believers, showing his love for all of his creation. These blessings are intended to lead unbelievers to repentance: <<*for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous*>> (Matthew 5:45b), <<*yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good – giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy*>> (Acts 14:17), and: <<*Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realise that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*>> (Romans 2:4).

In later rabbinic parables, a landowner provides one who laboured two hours with pay equal to that of others who laboured all day because he had accomplished more in his two hours than they had all day; or he pays a hard worker, symbolising Israel, much extra. By contrast, the image in Jesus' parable is of unmerited grace; the owner realises that one hour's pay would not sustain a family. But a parable of grace also challenges those who operate only on the principle of merit, despising the showing of mercy because they feel it unfairly raises others to their own standing. Those who oppose grace are often selfish and most in need of grace themselves.

<sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’

Other ancient authorities add ‘for many are called but few are chosen’.

### Matthew 20:16

So the last will be first, and the first will be last. A disciple of Jesus should not measure his or her worth by comparing it with the accomplishments and sacrifices of others, but should focus on serving from a heart of gratitude in response to God’s grace. Jesus is not denying degrees of reward in heaven but is affirming that God’s generosity is more abundant than anyone would expect: all the labourers except the very first, or arguably including the very first, got more than they deserved. It is probably correct also to see here a warning that Jesus’ early followers, such as the Twelve, should not begrudge those who would come later the same saving faith. A prime example would be the way that many in the early church viewed the status of the apostle Paul, even if he did not see it that way: <<*For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God*>> (1 Corinthians 15:9).

In commentaries on versions that do contain the concluding clause, there are those that take it to refer to the Jews, all of whom were part of a called nation and yet rejected their Messiah when he came, just as they had so frequently rejected God the Father: <<*Because I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded*>> (Proverbs 1:24), a consistent call that was put out through the prophets, yet went unheeded. In fact, many chose to go in the opposite direction: <<*The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols*>> (Hosea 11:2).

Others take it to refer to election and predestination: <<*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified*>> (Romans 8:29-30), and: <<*Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble*>> (2 Peter 1:10).

### XI.b.v Matthew 20:17-19 - A Third Time Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

This was the third out of four recorded occasions where Jesus informed his disciples that he must face death but that he will be raised to life on the third day. With all that was going on, Jesus wanted to keep his disciples focused on where this was all heading. They may have already made sacrifices but ultimately they must come to realise that martyrdom for the Gospel is a distinct possibility for it is the price paid by Jesus and many would pay a similar price in obedience to him.

<sup>17</sup> While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, <sup>18</sup> ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to

death; <sup>19</sup> then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised.'

### Matthew 20:17-19

While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. Since the city was in mountainous terrain, high above the surrounding land, people always went up to Jerusalem. It was the place where Jesus knew he was destined to be sacrificed: <<*In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!*>> (Luke 13:33).

He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves. Jesus did not want his impending crucifixion to be broadcast widely at this stage; he didn't want it to come as a surprise to his inner group either. Had the wider group of disciples known what was to happen they may either have fallen away, discounting Jesus as being the Christ, for his death would not fit with their perceived understanding of a Messiah. Alternatively, some may well have rioted in defence of their Lord, causing widespread and unnecessary bloodshed, completely missing the point of the need for a single sacrificial offering. This was not to be martyrdom, but the fulfilment of God's will.

The Son of Man will be handed over. This is the third of four predictions of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. The others are Matthew 16:21, 17:22-23 and 26:2. On the first occasion Jesus spoke of his suffering in general; the second revealed that he would be betrayed. On this occasion it gave further revelation that he would undergo the shame of being mocked: <<*Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!' In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.'*>> Those who were crucified with him also taunted him>> (Mark 15:29-32), and the agony of a flogging: <<*Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged*>> (John 19:1), before being crucified: <<*There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them*>> (John 19:18), fulfilling the prophecy of the Messiah's death: <<*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed*>> (Isaiah 53:5 NIV).

The reference to Jerusalem, the chief priests and scribes, and the Gentiles heightens the drama; for the first time in the narrative, Jesus gave additional clues about his betrayal and who would carry out his arrest and crucifixion. Both the Gentiles and the Jews had to be involved in Jesus' death as he was called to reconcile both groups to God: <<*He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it*>> (Ephesians 2:15-16).

Despite the horror that lay ahead for him, Jesus was resolute in fulfilling the will of his Father and the prophecies about the Christ: <<*he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope*>> (Isaiah 42:4 NIV).

On the third day he will be raised. Once again Jesus teaches his disciples, then and now, to look beyond the pain of what may be facing them in this life in order to see all the glories that lay beyond, for these are certain in the promises of God.

#### XI.b.vi Matthew 20:20-28 - The Request of the Mother of James and John

This passage shows us that the disciples had misunderstood both the preceding passion predictions and Jesus' teaching concerning the Kingdom's nature. Hearing Jesus' promise of a special place for the Twelve, James and John wanted to establish their own special place among the Twelve.

The mother of two of Jesus' apostles came to him to request a special favour - that her sons should have a place of special honour in his Kingdom. Jesus alludes to the fact that such an honour will include suffering and even death. He also states that such an honour is something that only the Father can bestow, showing that all must simply bow to God's will and serve faithfully, regardless of reward.

**<sup>20</sup> Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favour of him.**

#### Matthew 20:20

The sons of Zebedee had already been identified as James and John: <<*As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them*>> (Matthew 4:21).

Salome can be identified as the mother of the sons of Zebedee: <<*Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee*>> (Matthew 27:56), <<*There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome*>> (Mark 15:40), and: <<*When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him*>> (Mark 16:1). She was also in all probability the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother: <<*And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene*>> (John 19:25), so that James and John were in fact Jesus' cousins. She was among the women who stayed with Jesus at the Cross and later witnessed the empty tomb.

With her sons. Mark 10:35-37 focuses on the sons themselves and reports her request as their words. Two solutions to this apparent inconsistency are possible:

1. Based on the principle that an agent of a person counts as the person himself, Mark may be reporting the mother's words as the words of James and John, who had told her to ask this.

2. Matthew and Mark may be reporting different aspects of a longer conversation, in which the mother first asked Jesus the question and then Jesus asked the brothers if that was actually what they wanted. In either case, beginning in v.22, the plural 'you' shows that Jesus was speaking directly to James and John, as well as to their mother.

Kneeling before him. Salome shows respect to Jesus as her messianic master, but she also evidently hopes to use her and her sons' earthly kinship with Jesus to her sons' advantage, for she asked a favour of him. Yet it would not be granted on this occasion: <<*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures*>> (James 4:3), <<*And you, do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them*>> (Jeremiah 45:5a).

<sup>21</sup> And he said to her, 'What do you want?' She said to him, 'Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.'

#### Matthew 20:21

These two sons of mine will sit. Salome's petition was likely inspired by Jesus' earlier remarks: <<*Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel'*>> (Matthew 19:28), where he had announced the Twelve's rule with him in his future Kingdom.

Your right hand is the place of highest honour: <<*So Bathsheba went to King Solomon, to speak to him on behalf of Adonijah. The king rose to meet her, and bowed down to her; then he sat on his throne, and had a throne brought for the king's mother, and she sat on his right*>> (1 Kings 2:19), <<*You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures for evermore*>> (Psalm 16:11), <<*The Lord says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool'*>> (Psalm 110:1), <<*The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath*>> (Psalm 110:5), and Stephen's vision shortly before his martyrdom: <<*But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God*>> (Acts 8:58).

<sup>22</sup> But Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?' They said to him, 'We are able.'<sup>23</sup> He said to them, 'You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.'

#### Matthew 20:22-23

You is the plural pronoun which indicates that Jesus addressed the mother and the brothers directly.

Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? Paul's words bring this sharply into focus: <<*This is evidence of the righteous judgement of God, and is intended to make you worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering*>> (2 Thessalonians 1:5), and: <<*if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us*>> (2 Timothy 2:12).

They said to him, 'We are able' has a ring of confidence similar to that of Peter when he rejected the notion that he could ever deny his Lord. What they should have perhaps said is that 'we are able by the will and grace of God'.

The cup in Scripture is symbolic of one's divinely determined destiny, whether blessing: <<*The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot*>> (Psalm 16:5), or disaster: <<*For 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*>> (Jeremiah 25:15); salvation: <<*I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord*>> (Psalm 116:13), or wrath: <<*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*>> (Isaiah 51:17). Here it refers to Jesus' forthcoming suffering: <<*And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want'*>> (Matthew 26:39).

You will indeed drink my cup. James became the first apostolic martyr: <<*He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword*>> (Acts 12:2), and John suffered persecution and exile: <<*I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*>> (Revelation 1:9).

For whom it has been prepared by my Father. They must submit to the Father's will for their future, just as Jesus does. If their faith in Jesus is worth anything then it is worth everything, and it is worth nothing if it is not worth dying for!

**<sup>24</sup> When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers.**

#### Matthew 20:24

They were angry or indignant. They were perhaps not as upset by the immodesty of the request as by the brothers' attempt to use their possible family relationship to Jesus to gain an unfair advantage in obtaining what they themselves also wanted. Their anger perhaps showed their own desire for status, showing a worldly competition within the group rather than an adherence to Kingdom principles. Although levelled at the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus' comment: <<*Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets*>> (Matthew 23:31), could be labelled against any disciple who puts self before their Kingdom responsibilities and devotion to Jesus.

**<sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. <sup>26</sup> It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be**

great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave;

#### Matthew 20:25-27

The rulers of the Gentiles. Not only those in Jesus' day but all the tyrants and empires of history confirm his point: absolute power always corrupts precisely because the desire for power over others, to whatever extent it may be achieved, shows that many people are slaves to self-centredness.

It will not be so among you. To what extent would Jesus serve? Fulfilling the servant's mission, he would lay down his life on behalf of his people; of disciples he expects no less. Jesus would not let worldly standards rule in his church: <<**Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock**>> (1 Peter 5:3), something exemplified by Paul: <<**I do not mean to imply that we lord it over your faith; rather, we are workers with you for your joy, because you stand firm in the faith**>> (2 Corinthians 1:24).

A servant was a hired worker who maintained the master's household, and a slave was someone forced into service. These were two of the lowest positions in Jewish society, yet Jesus reverses their status in the community of disciples to indicate prominence and greatness.

<sup>28</sup> **just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'**

#### Matthew 20:28

Son of Man is Jesus' favourite self-designation. Refer to the comments made on Matthew 8:20.

Came not to be served but to serve. Jesus himself is the primary example of servanthood, and he would give his life as a ransom, Greek *lutron*, which is the price of release for many, often used of the money paid to release slaves.

For is the Greek *anti* which means 'in place of' and signifies the notion of the exchange and substitution of Jesus' life on the Cross for all those who accept his payment for their sins. Refer to comments made on Matthew 2:24 and 1 Peter 3:18 on the web site.

**It should never be forgotten that the creator and sustainer of all things lived as a servant and died as a sacrifice for all.**

#### XI.b.vii Matthew 20:29-34 - Jesus Heals Two Blind Men

Jesus had arrived in the city of Jericho during the final stages of his journey to Jerusalem. Whilst there, he encountered two blind men who clearly had heard of Jesus and associated him with the long awaited Messiah. They called out for mercy from him and received it when he cured their blindness. Their response was to immediately follow him.

<sup>29</sup> **As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him.**

## Matthew 20:29

Jericho is not the ancient city of OT fame that was first taken by the Israelites as they entered the Promised Land as recorded in Joshua Chapters 5-6, but is the new Jericho nearby, about a mile or 1.6 km to the south. This new Jericho surrounded a huge palace complex first built by the Hasmonæans in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC, which Herod the Great had expanded.



An image of modern day Jericho

Matthew says the healing of the blind men took place as they were leaving Jericho and Mark 10:46 agrees, but Luke 18:35 records that it was: <<***As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging***>>. It is possible that Matthew and Mark refer to the new Jericho and Luke to the old Jericho nearby, or vice versa. Another possibility is that the blind men cried out to Jesus first as he was entering the city thus explaining Luke 18:35, but he did not respond and heal them until he was leaving the city. Since none of the accounts records everything about the event, this may simply reflect the selection of different details of what occurred by the different Gospel writers. The reader should focus on the compassion and power of the miracle, rather than get overly concerned about the minor detail.

A large crowd followed him. Many of these would have followed him all the way from Galilee: <<***But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things***>> (Luke 23:49), but others would no doubt have joined him on the way. If this was their Messiah they may have expected his Kingdom to appear as soon as he reached Jerusalem. The expectancy of freedom from the bondage of Rome and the restoration of their former glorious status as a nation would have been uppermost in their minds. They were seeing history revealed in their midst, but not in the way they had expected.

<sup>30</sup> There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, ‘Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!’ <sup>31</sup> The crowd sternly ordered them to be quiet; but they shouted even more loudly, ‘Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!’

## Matthew 20:30-31

Mark 10:46 and Luke 18:35 mention only one blind man, and Mark gives his name as Bartimæus. This does not mean that Matthew’s report of two blind men is inaccurate, only that Mark and Luke focused on the one. Again, it is the power and love of Jesus that should be the focus of the reader’s attention.

Sitting by the roadside. Jericho was situated on a main pilgrimage route into Jerusalem and would have been extremely busy as devout Jews travelled up to Jerusalem for the Passover. Jews were well known for being generous to disabled

beggars but particularly so at times of national celebration, for the giving of alms was traditionally seen as a gift of mercy. Thus, this was an ideal site for the two men to sit and beg.

**Lord have mercy.** The men did not ask for alms but placed their hope in the Messiah: <<*O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem*>> (Psalm 130:7), and: <<*Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*>> (Hebrews 4:16), knowing that he could show his **mercy** and heal them.

The blind men recognised Jesus as the **Son of David**, as did two other blind men in Capernaum, whom Jesus also healed because of their faith. Refer to Matthew 9:27-31 and the comments made on that passage.

**Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!** Their second cry is one of saving faith, for: <<*no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit*>> (1 Corinthians 12:3b). Once they cry out, Jesus responds: <<*For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy*>> (Psalm 72:12-13).

<sup>32</sup> Jesus stood still and called them, saying, 'What do you want me to do for you?' <sup>33</sup> They said to him, 'Lord, let our eyes be opened.'

<sup>34</sup> Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.

#### **Matthew 20:32-34**

**Jesus stood still and called them.** Once again, Jesus shows that he requires people to make the decision to come to him and he will receive them. This is not a matter of arrogance but one of opportunity. He does not force his Father's will on anyone but leaves them free to make the choice for themselves.

**What do you want me to do for you?** Although the men's need for sight was obvious, Jesus allowed them to voice their needs; then he acted from his compassion. God knows the pain in his people's lives. Whether he gives them the strength to endure pain or chooses to heal them in response to persistent prayer, if such is his will, it is not because they have mastered formulas of prayer or have sufficient faith. It is because he cares for his people intimately.

**Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes.** In the face of rejection by his own people and impending betrayal as he headed for Jerusalem, Jesus continued to show compassion for those in great need.

**Immediately they regained their sight and followed him.** As with the two blind men in Capernaum and numerous others who had been healed over the past three years, their restoration was instantaneous and complete. However, the healing was not just physical for they also received their spiritual sight as well: <<*By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace*>> (Luke 1:78-79).