

JESUS CAME TO SERVE AND TO GIVE

Matthew 20:1-34

Key Verse: 20:28

“...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

This chapter is composed of four different parts: Jesus tells the parable of the workers in the vineyard (1-16); Jesus predicts his suffering, death and resurrection (17-19); Jesus teaches his disciples to serve and to give (20-28); and Jesus heals two blind men (29-34). These events are woven together by a common theme. Jesus wants us to accept his grace of the cross, and to follow his example in serving and giving. Let's learn of Jesus who came to serve and to give.

First, our God is sovereign and generous (1-16).

In the previous passage Jesus had assured his disciples that they would receive great reward. Jesus promised that anyone who sacrificed job, family or possessions to follow him would receive 100 times as much in this life, and eternal life in the age to come. Then Jesus said, “But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.” To explain what this meant, Jesus told a parable.

Look at verses 1-2. “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.” When it was time for the grape harvest, a landowner needed many temporary workers. So he would hire

harvest workers on a daily basis. The agreed upon wage—a denarius—was fair pay for one day of work, maybe equivalent to \$100. Those hired were lucky and happy.

Look at verses 3-7. “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ ‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’” The Jewish work day began at 6:00 a.m. and ended at 6:00 p.m. The third hour corresponds to 9:00 a.m., the sixth hour to 12 noon, the ninth hour to 3:00 p.m. and the eleventh hour to 5:00 p.m.

Look at verses 8-12. “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’” It is interesting that the landowner arranged payment in such a way that the workers hired first saw with their eyes that he paid those who worked only one hour a full denarius. When they saw this, they lost their joy of life and their appetites. They began to grumble “unfair” against the landowner. How did he answer? Look at verses 13-15. “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you.

Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

Though there are many details in this parable, the point is that the landowner seems more generous to some workers than to others. And he wants the workers to realize this and to deal with it. In the same way, when God dispenses his grace to people, he may seem more generous to some than to others. When God gives grace to someone, we must not grumble, but thank and praise God, overcoming our jealous feelings. However, like the workers hired first in the parable, sinners want to exalt themselves based on their labor or seniority. Sometimes God's servants work in a mission field for many years without seeing much visible fruit. Then another servant of God works in the same place and miracles happen. Those who were there first must not think God is unfair. They must recognize God's grace and give thanks to God. Sometimes a servant of God labors faithfully, hoping to be entrusted with a position in God's work. But it is given to someone seemingly less qualified. He must not grumble against God, but thank God for his grace. In any case, we must recognize God as the sovereign Ruler in his work and history. We must remember that we have received God's one-sided grace. We must learn to rejoice in knowing God, who is so gracious to sinners.

This would have immediate application to the people of Israel. Shortly, God's grace would be poured out on the Gentiles. Gentiles—who did not know anything about the law or the prophets, who had not suffered at all for God's redemptive history—would suddenly be given the same privilege and blessing as the Jews: salvation by faith in Christ. Jesus wanted Jewish Christians to overcome their jealousy and accept the Gentiles as brothers and sisters in the family of God.

This was a parable that the disciples had to keep in mind. At the present time, they were in first place in gospel work. However, in the future, God, in his sovereign grace, would raise and use other servants according to his purpose, like Paul who became the most fruitful missionary, and Stephen, who became the first martyr, and James, the brother of Jesus who actually became the leader of the Jerusalem church. God delights in pouring his grace on undeserving people. Jesus' parable encourages us to appreciate God's grace, recognizing his sovereignty and generosity in his salvation work.

When we consider this parable, there is another striking point. Those who received a denarius had one thing in common. It was that they answered the call to go and work in the vineyard. Some answered early, and some answered later. But all who answered received the same pay, one denarius. Some people follow Jesus from a young age. Some follow Jesus from an older age. In the end, all receive the same blessing of salvation in Christ and eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. Some do the work of God for many years after being called. Some do the work of God for only a short time. In the end they receive the same blessing. The thief on the cross, who believed in Jesus just before death, was the last one called by Jesus on earth. But he was the first one to go into heaven with Jesus and was welcomed as a heavenly prince. The Apostle John followed Jesus from a young age and served the church for many years. According to tradition he was the last of the disciples to die and go to heaven. When he arrived, the thief on the cross greeted him. God's grace is freely given by the generosity of God. No one deserves it. We who have received his grace must be thankful; we must recognize his sovereignty; we must work hard in his vineyard; we must rejoice when his grace is shed on others.

Second, Jesus predicts his suffering, death and resurrection (17-19).

Though Jesus' grace is freely given, it was costly for Jesus. Look at verses 17-19. "Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!'" Jesus predicted his suffering, death and resurrection for the third or fourth time. Jesus persisted in talking about this even though it was difficult. The first time, Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. The next time, they were all filled with grief. Still, Jesus persistently talked about his suffering, death and resurrection. It was main point of his coming into the world. It was the most important matter for his disciples to understand and accept.

As Jesus predicted, he was betrayed to his enemies. Jesus was publicly condemned to death. Jesus suffered agonizing pain. He was tortured by cruel soldiers. The flogging tore flesh from his body and caused him to lose much blood. Finally, Jesus was nailed to a cross and died. It was to save us from our sins. Isaiah 53:5 says, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." Only in this way could Jesus save us from our sins. On the third day, God raised Jesus to life. Jesus' resurrection destroyed the power of death and opened the way to eternal life for all who believe in him. Jesus solves our sin problem from the root. Jesus solves our death problem from the root. Though we seem to have many problems and struggles, they all ultimately stem from the power of sin and death at work in us and the world. What we really need is to believe the gospel with absolute faith. By this gospel we are saved.

Third, Jesus came to serve and to give (20-28).

Those who really believe the gospel of Christ experience a great transformation in their inner lives. They begin to think and act like Jesus did. This is what Jesus wanted for his disciples, but they were not yet changed by the gospel. They were still dreaming of an earthly messianic kingdom in which they would reign. Each one wanted to be the greatest and to exercise authority over others. This time, the mother of James and John came to Jesus asking, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.” They were dreaming of glory without suffering. Jesus asked them, “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” Suffering precedes glory. Were they willing to suffer with Jesus? They said, “We can.” It might have been bold ignorance. Still, Jesus accepted their answer. They would suffer with Jesus. However, Jesus did not promise them the positions they sought. All things considered, Jesus obtained from James and John an agreement to share in his suffering. But when the other disciples heard what had happened, they were indignant with James and John. The yeast of selfish ambition spread among the disciples.

Then Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus taught his disciples not to be like the rulers of the Gentiles. When Gentile rulers obtain power, they use it for their own benefit and glory. They crush others to advance their own cause. King Herod instilled fear in his subjects by crushing any threat to

his reign. Once he even killed many innocent baby boys in his megalomania. Though his case may be extreme, it characterizes the way fallen man rules over others.

Jesus taught his disciples that they must be different. They must learn how to serve others. This is not natural for fallen man. It must be learned. We can learn from Jesus. Jesus is the Son of God. He deserves to be honored and served by all people. But he was not born in a palace and seated on a throne. He was born in a manger and lived among men as a servant. He healed many kinds of sick people and taught the word of God to perishing souls. Jesus served his disciples to heal their sinsickness and restore the image of God in them. Jesus loved, instead of trying to be loved. Jesus served, instead of trying to be served. Finally Jesus gave his life as a ransom for our sins.

One young lady married a nice man of God. However, he was not as mindful of her as she expected. Then she felt sorry. But she began to think about Jesus who died for her. Jesus' love and grace filled her heart and brought deep satisfaction. She began to change from wanting to be served to serving. These days she is truly happy and is growing in the grace of Jesus. Jesus changes us from people who want to be served to people who can serve others. As Jesus' disciples we must all go through this basic transformation until our natural sinful tendency is changed and we become servants like our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we are preparing to begin a new fall semester. We must follow Jesus' example and serve students on each campus. Actually, there are people from many organizations who are interested in recruiting young students for one cause or another. But our attitude and approach must be different. Based on the grace of

Jesus we have received we must have a godly desire to serve them with the love of Christ. This builds them up for their good. How can we serve them? Most of all, they need to hear the truth of God. In the sea of modern relativism, many are harming themselves beyond remedy because they do not live by truth. But Jesus is the truth. When we share Jesus with them, they can find their way to salvation and true life. They have other urgent needs as well. Some need healing from a broken heart. Some need healing from a pleasure-seeking lifestyle. Though there are many things to do, the most urgent is for each of us to learn to serve and give like Jesus did.

Fourth, Son of David have mercy on us (29-34).

As Jesus was leaving Jericho, two blind men cried out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” They believed Jesus’ power to heal and his messianic compassion. They depended solely on Jesus’ mercy. Their cry was a cry of faith and it was from their hearts. However, the crowd rebuked them to be quiet. They shouted all the louder, “Son of David, have mercy on us!” Then Jesus stopped and asked them, “What do you want me to do for you?” “Lord, we want our sight,” they answered. Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes and they received their sight. After doing so, they too followed Jesus.

From these men we learn how to come to Jesus for his mercy. We want to learn the inner life of Jesus who came to serve and to give. But we find in ourselves innate selfishness and a bent on self-exaltation. The ugliness of our inner man sometimes makes us shudder. But we must come to Jesus as we are. We must cry out for his mercy. Jesus who gave sight to the blind can change our inner persons into his

glorious image. Jesus can change each of us into those who serve and give as he did.

Today we learned that God pours out his grace upon mankind according to his sovereignty and generosity. So we must thank God for his grace to us and recognize his grace upon others. To give us this grace Jesus had to die on the cross for our sins. As Jesus served and gave, he wants us to serve and give. Jesus can change us into servants like him when we cry out for mercy. May God bless each of us to overcome the culture of selfishness and learn the mind of Christ so that we may be useful workers for him in this new school year.