



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew

Chapter 20

Bishop Youssef

Introduction



Chapter Main Points:

- Gospel obedience
- The danger of a mercenary spirit
- The importance of humble service



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- This parable is only told in Matthew's Gospel
- This parable is about the coming Kingdom of Heaven that He has come to establish; therefore this parable is about the new Israel and the New Covenant Church
- To explain His statement *But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first*, Jesus tells another kingdom parable, this time about a vineyard
- The householder is our Lord Himself



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- It was indeed a title which He seems to have, as it were, delighted in, and which He applies directly to Himself in Matthew 10:25; Matthew 13:27; Matthew 13:52
- The “vineyard” is primarily, as in Isaiah 5:1, the house of Israel, which the Anointed of the Lord had come to claim as His kingdom
- The “early morning” answered accordingly to the beginning of our Lord’s ministry; the “laborers” He then called were the disciples
- A denarius, about sixteen cents, the usual full price of a day's labor at that time



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- At that time the Jews divided the day between sunrise and sunset into twelve equal parts, the length of these divisions varying according to the season
- The third hour - Nine o'clock in the morning
- Market-place - Where laborers usually stood till they were hired
- The market-place, represents also the world



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- The absence of a definite contract in hiring the laborers who did less than the day's work obviously involved an implicit trust in the equity of the householder
- At noon, and three in the afternoon; and did likewise — Sent others to work on the same general promise of giving them as much as they could reasonably expect



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- The working day, which did not commonly extend beyond twelve hours (John 11:9), was all but over, and yet there was still work to be done in the vineyard
- The laborers who had been first hired were not enough
- We must observe here, says St. Chrysostom on the words, *because no man hath hired us*, that this is the voice of the laborers only, in excuse for their not having entered upon their work before this late hour; for the master of the vineyard had shown his willingness to hire them all, by going out early for that purpose
- Though the fault was their own, he does not upbraid them, but abstains from all harshness and severity, that he may the more easily engage them. (Hom. lxxv.)



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- Many workers are needed in the season of the harvest, which is symbolic for the harvest of believers into the Church
- This was one of the humane rules of the Mosaic law that the day-laborer was to be paid by the day, and not made to wait for his wages (Deut 24:15)
- The householder kept this law
- Beginning from the last unto the first.—The order is not without its significance
- It was a practical illustration of the words which had introduced the parable, that the last should be the first



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- They had worked longer - they had been in the heat; they supposed that it was his intention to pay them, not according to contract, but according to the time of the labor
- It may point to the calculating, greedy and acquisitive spirit which had been indicated—though perhaps very slightly—in Peter's question (Mt 19:27), and which this parable was designed once for all to put down among the servants of Christ



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- They murmured: Those who had worked all day
- Like the elder brother (Lk 15:28-30)
- *Who have borne the burden and heat of the day*, This may be regarded as man's estimate of his own merits, which is not the divine estimate
- The words echo the tone of "what shall we have?" Matthew 19:27



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- He has fully complied with the contract
- They had an agreement: The householder has paid all that he promised
- If he chooses to give a penny to another man if he labors little or not at all if he chooses to give all his property away to others, it would not affect his contract with the laborer
- The householder gave them all he had agreed
- They had no ground of complaint but envy



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- *Take what is yours*, It looks as if this particular worker had refused the penny, or was saucily handing it back
- An evil eye among the Jews meant a malicious, covetous, or envious person
- Envy/jealousy was the reason for the first murder when Cain killed his brother Abel (Gen 4:3-8), and it is the same reason the chief priests and Pharisees were seeking to condemn Jesus to death (see Mt 27:18)



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- It was the same sin that prevented many Old Covenant Jews from welcoming the Gentiles into the covenant (Acts 15:1; 21:18-22)
- The hours from dawn to the end of the day probably refer to the progress of salvation history
- Those called first (the Israelites of the Old Covenant Church were called at the dawn of the corporate covenant) complained about the hardships of their length of service
- Some interpreters say that the day is commonly illustrate all the time from the creation to the end of the world



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- Other interpreters, by the day understand human life; and by the different hours, infancy, youth, the age of manhood, old age, and the last hour man's old age
- God is master and disposer of all, who by his grace calls some sooner, some later
- The design of this parable was to show that the Gentiles, though called later than the Jews, should be made partakers of the promises made to the Jews
- This first part of this saying opens and closes (in reverse order) the parable and provides the reason the last workers are paid first



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- Christ seems to speak here of his *militant* than his *triumphant* Church
- The Jews, after bearing the yoke of the Mosaic law for so many ages, received nothing more than what was promised to the observance of that law
- Christians receive a more plentiful reward for their more easy labor under the sweet yoke of the gospel
- In which sense Christ says to the Jews, *They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.* ³⁰ *And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last,* Luke 13:29-30



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

- Hence the Jews may be supposed to murmur, that they who are first in their vocation to be the people of God, and first in the observance of His law, should not be preferred to others, who in these respects have been far posterior to them
- The last part of the statement, *For many are called, but few are chosen*, links the parable to the encounter with the rich young man who was called to a more intimate relationship with Christ as a laborer in the harvest of souls, but it was a service that required sacrifice, a calling he was not then prepared to accept
- Those who did not come at the invitation of the householder to work in the vineyard did not receive the denarius, or wages, so those who do not obey the call of the Gospel, and believe in Christ Jesus, shall not inherit eternal life

Jesus a Third Time Predicts His Death and Resurrection (19:17-19)



- For six months, ever since the confession at Caesarea Philippi, the Lord had been trying to prepare the twelve for His death, Mark 10:32-52; Luke 18:31-43
- He was now east of the Jordan, on His way
- They had gone to Jerusalem oftentimes before, but never on such a mournful task
- Jesus here, for the third time, foretells His death
- Notice that in this prediction of His Passion that Jesus gave more detailed information than in the other two predictions

Jesus a Third Time Predicts His Death and Resurrection (19:17-19)



- But He speaks with them "apart," necessarily; for it was not fitting that His discourse about these things should be published to the many; neither that it should be spoken plainly, for no advantage arose from this
- He had previously declared it in public, but in ambiguous terms, saying: *destroy this temple, A sign shall not be given, but the sign of Jonas the prophet*
- Like the rest of the Jews, the apostles were so fully prepossessed with the idea that the Messiah would be immortal
- They could not understand what Jesus Christ said to them
- St. Luke, indeed (as if he had gathered from some of those who heard them what had been their state of feeling at the time), reports that, (Lk 18:34)

Jesus a Third Time Predicts His Death and Resurrection (19:17-19)



- He, however, did reveal these things, that, on a future day, recollecting how their Lord and Master had foreseen and foretold to them the most material circumstances relating to His passion and death, they might believe more firmly in Him
- The punishment of the cross was Roman not Jewish; but the chief priests condemned Him to it, and the Romans executed the sentence
- How little did they know that they were, by this process, jointly offering up that sacrifice which was to make an atonement for the Gentiles and for the Jews; an atonement for the sin of the whole world?

Greatness Is Serving (20:20-28)



- Upon Christ's informing his apostles that He should die and rise again, they conceived that He would immediately reign in Jerusalem with great glory and power
- In the preceding chapter, Matthew 19:28, our Lord had promised them, that they should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes
- Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, probably hearing of this, understood it literally
- She came and asked that her sons might take precedence, and be honored by the other apostles
- They should have learned from the parable they had just heard

Greatness Is Serving (20:20-28)



- However, they still expected that they should receive more than others, and sought that they might be nearest to their Lord in that “regeneration” which seemed to them so near
- In Mark 10:37 we find that the sons themselves made this petition
- Sts James and John did not know what commitment they were making when they expressed their willingness to "drink" from Jesus' "cup"
- They supposed that it would be attended only with honor and happiness if the request was granted, whereas it would require much suffering and trial

Greatness Is Serving (20:20-28)



- But Christ answers them that they knew not what they asked, for honors were to be bestowed not on relationship, but on merit
- The Zebedee brothers were thinking of prophecies like the heavenly banquet in Isaiah 25:6: *On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines ...*
- But Jesus is speaking of His cup of suffering "the cup of God's wrath that He will accept in His sacrifice for the sins of the people, (Isa 51:17,23)
- For some Scripture references to "cup" (Isa 25:6;51:17,23; Zech 12:2; Mt 26:39,42; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:20,42; Jn 18:11; 1 Cor 10:16,21;11:25-28; Rev 14:10;16:19;17:4;18:6)

Greatness Is Serving (20:20-28)



- They cannot drink the cup now, but in due time they shall follow Him; they shall rise to their calling, and bravely meet all its risks and hardships
- St. James was the first apostle that suffered martyrdom at Jerusalem, (Acts 2)
- And St. John at Rome was put into a cauldron of boiling oil, and banished into Patmos
- Baptism is an ordinance by which we are joined to the Lord in covenant and communion; and so is suffering for Christ, Ezekiel 20:37; Isaiah 48:10

Greatness Is Serving (20:20-28)



- Our Lord does not say that it does not belong to Him to give what the disciples asked, but that He could only give it according to His Father's will and the laws which He had fixed
- *Is not mine to give*, The words in italics are, of course, not in the Greek, and they spoil the true construction of the sentence
- Christ answers them, it is not mine to bestow, because you are not yet deserving, on account of your pride in seeking to have yourselves preferred before my other apostles
- But be humble, and heaven is prepared for you, as well as for all others, who are properly disposed

Greatness Is Serving (20:20-28)



- *Is not mine to give you*, The Arians objected these words against Christ's divinity
- St. Augustine answers that the words are true if taken of Christ, as He was man
- The easier answer is, that it was not *his* to give *to them*, while they were in those dispositions of pride and ambition
- So that the distinction made, is not between the Father and His eternal Son, as if the Father could give what the Son could not, but between persons worthy, and not worthy of such a favor

Greatness Is Serving (20:20-28)



- The other disciples are angry that the Zebedee brothers should aspire to such an honor
- The other ten apostles were as much wrong in their anger and jealousy as the former two were in their untimely petition
- Evidently their jealousy and anger had been outspoken, but not in the immediate presence of the Lord
- Our Lord wishing to extinguish the anger conceived against the two brothers, He pointed out the nature of Gentile rule
- The princes lorded over the people
- However, superiority in the Church is neither to be sought for by him who is not possessed of it, nor too eagerly loved by him who has it

Greatness Is Serving (20:20-28)



- Ecclesiastical rule is founded in humility and brotherly love: it is derived from Christ, the great Head of the Church
- In His answer to both, we cannot sufficiently admire the wonderful meekness of our blessed Savior's character
- Jesus returns to the theme of the last goes first and the importance of humility and service
- The question of rank among the Apostles began in 18:1 with the question: *Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*
- After the disciples experience their "dark night of the soul" in the crisis of Jesus Passion and crucifixion, the issue is never raised again

Greatness Is Serving (20:20-28)



- Certain Puritans, old strict English religious group of the 16th and 17th centuries who wanted worship to be more simple, pretend from this part of holy Scripture, that all superiority is forbidden
- But it is merely pride, ambition, and arrogance, not superiority, that is here proscribed
- Jesus points them to His own example
- Jesus again identifies Himself as the prophesied "suffering servant."
- The ransom Jesus pays with His life will bring about the liberation of many and recalls the prophecy of Isaiah 53:12

Greatness Is Serving (20:20-28)



- He was in the form of God in heaven, Philippians 2:6
- He came to people in the form of a servant, Philippians 2:7
- He came not with pomp and glory, but as a man in humble life and since He came He had not required them to minister to Him
- The word "ransom" means literally a price paid for the redemption of captives

Two Blind Men Receive Their Sight (20:29-34)



- Having crossed the Jordan River into Judea, Jesus and His disciples are on the west side of the river near Jericho
- This next encounter is given in contrast to the persistent "blindness" of the disciples in their failure to fully comprehend Jesus' teaching on service and humility and His coming Passion
- Mark and Luke mention only one of them, blind Bartimeus, who, it seems, was far the more well-known of the two, and spoke for both
- The multitude rebuked them - Whenever a soul begins to cry after Jesus for light and salvation, the world and the devil join together to drown its cries, or force it to be silent

Two Blind Men Receive Their Sight (20:29-34)



- The faith of the blind men had saved them
- The blind Bartimaeus
 - (1) asked about Jesus as He passed
 - (2) cried to Him as the Son of David, the Messiah
 - (3) asked for mercy
 - (4) kept on crying when they tried to stop him; they cried out as men in earnest
 - (5) when permitted, sprang up and hurried to Jesus
 - (6) asked of him to receive his sight
- This is faith in action

Two Blind Men Receive Their Sight (20:29-34)



- Jesus stood still, He does not object now to this title, Mt 9:27
- He is now about to proclaim himself the Messiah
- In this miracle not only were the physical eyes of the blind men "opened" but they also had the opportunity to have their spiritual vision "opened" in recognizing the Messiah
- Two blind men in 9:27 and the Canaanite woman in 15:22 called Jesus the Messianic title "Son of David"
- It is ironic that the blind who cannot see Jesus' miraculous acts and a Gentile woman who is not a member of the covenant people are the only people outside the disciples who acknowledge Jesus' identity as the Messianic son of the Davidic kingdom

Two Blind Men Receive Their Sight (20:29-34)



- We may here consider, if the blindness of the body be looked upon as a very great misfortune, how much greater must be the darkness of the soul
- The former is only a privation of the light of day, though a great blessing, it serves only to distinguish material objects
- The other is a privation of the light of grace and glory
- The light which Christ communicates to the soul, enables us to know God and His sacred truths
- But let all such remember, Jesus is now passing by; that the souls must perish everlastingly, if not saved by Him, and one may never have so good an opportunity again



Two Blind Men Receive Their Sight (20:29-34)

- Christ is at all times infinitely willing to save sinners: when the desire of the heart is turned towards him, there can be little delay in the salvation
- *What do you want?* If it be a good one, God will surely fulfill it
- When they had received sight, they followed Him
- None follow Christ blindly
- He first by His grace opens men's eyes, and so draws their hearts after Him



Conclusion

- What does the "vineyard" represent in the Old Testament prophecy?
- What are the times the workers are hired?
- How many hours were there in Jewish daytime hours?
- Why are more and more workers hired and brought into the vineyard by the master/lord of the vineyard?
- Why did the eleventh hour laborers receive as much as those who began early?



Conclusion

- What is the root cause of the envy of the first hired laborers?
- Using the hours of the day in the parable as an analogy for the time in your life when you first responded to Jesus Christ, where do you think you would fit?
- The parable talks about what the workers get paid; what is Jesus offering you?
- What was Jesus' reply to the Zebedee brother's petition and the acceptance of His "cup"?



Conclusion

- What is the “cup” to which Jesus refers? How is it fulfilled in reference to the sons of Zebedee?
- List the three passages in which Jesus foretold His death and resurrection.
- What quality is considered great in the kingdom?
- When have you ever grumbled at God because of his generosity toward others?