

Matthew 21-09-26b

We're ready now to resume our study in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 20. We have seen the parable of the workers in the vineyard and its place in this section of the gospel is important. We've seen the preceding context and how Jesus is providing a corrective to the kind of thinking expressed in Peter's question, well, what are you going to pay us for leaving all and following you? What will we have? And Jesus says, well, you'll be on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

And this really sounds great until you think about it. I personally wouldn't want the job of judging any of the 12 tribes of Israel for any length of time. If you look at the history of their obstreperous and stiff-necked nature, this could be quite the ordeal.

Wake up every morning and say, well, I've got to go sit on a judgment seat and settle cases and decide guilt and innocence and penalty. But this is also a reminder in a sideways fashion that there is going to be that which needs judging in the millennium. As great as things will be on Mount Zion and in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem, it will not be perfect.

It is not perfect heavenly glory. There are cases that will need to be settled. There is rulership that needs to be exercised.

And the reason you have rulers and the reason you have laws and the reason you have enforcement is that there are unruly people. And as improved as the environment will be, you still have the function of human volition. You have the opportunity to sin.

There is the need for the rod of iron for the nations, and there will be the need for judges and thrones in Israel. You think about it. If everybody is completely perfected, as will be the case, say, in the New Jerusalem, why would you need government? Why would you need that kind of structure? If everyone does what is perfectly right, then you don't need anybody else superimposing and adjudicating with authority and with sorting good from bad.

But this is in the center of a larger section here. We've seen the beginning of it with the rich young ruler, with Peter's question, with Jesus' comment about the future, and that things that seem to be prevalent and dominant and first in this life, many of those things are going to come in last when God's structure and God's rulership and God's system of blessing and reward and opportunity is in force. And we therefore live in hope.

My two studies are often intermingled in my own mind. And you remember that phrase, we're going to see this coming Thursday, prisoners of hope. Hope does not disappoint.

Our faith results in hope, expectation, confident expectation, but that expectation should not be for specific circumstances. We all want to see our loved ones again. We all have

favorite pets that we hope to see again.

We have human expectations of various kinds, of various shapes and forms. Will I get to do this activity if I worked hard and mastered an instrument or a skill? Will I be able to employ that in any of the kingdoms that are to come, the kingdom of the son or the kingdom of the father? Will these skills and talents continue to function later on? How will things be? What will relationships be like? What will come with me from this life into the next? And John says, we do not know what we shall be like, but we shall be like him. And we shall see him as he is, which we have not yet seen, but we will see him as he is and we will be like him.

And some of it is so indescribable. I can remember, I've told you this before, but I remember when I was a little boy, there were things that I really wished I could have or do. I had a friend who lived up the street and came from a well-off family and he ended up with, for his birthday, a brand new stingray bike.

Had the butterfly handlebars, a banana seat, chrome, could pop wheelies on it. I was guilty of the sin of coveting. I wanted that stingray bike or one like it.

Well, he came from a well-off family. We were an enlisted Marine Corps family, but my dad built me a bike. He found a frame and he bought a banana seat and he bought the butterfly handlebars and he put a bike together for me.

It was no stingray, but I loved that bike and I loved it because my dad built it. A different kind of quality, but I didn't see it coming. He surprised me with that.

I was wanting this shiny store-bought stingray and I didn't realize that there was another kind of gift. In the same way, we can have expectations of what will it be like in the future. Trust your father.

Trust your father. Trust in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Things will exceed our expectations in ways that we cannot even imagine.

But you look at God, you look at his character, you look at his grace, you look at his faithfulness and at his love. That's his name. Don't have to worry about the details.

Jesus is trying to make that point. Don't worry about, well, I can't expect very much. I didn't come to work until three in the afternoon.

This is hardly worth the trip out to the vineyard. I didn't get started until 5 p.m. and they're going to blow the whistle. Sam and Ralph will be coming in from the sheepfold here in an hour.

So my expectations are not that great. What is the one thing that is in common with every different group that the vineyard owner hired? What is the one thing that's

common to them all? When they were called, they responded. Some of them, the first ones, had a contract.

Others did not. They had varying assignments. And all of the ones after the first group trusted the landowner to be fair.

They reposed their confidence in him. They didn't have a contract. They couldn't take him to court.

He said, I'll pay you what's fair. They said, fine. That's the basic faith that is in view.

Now look at verse 17, as we pick up our study in Matthew chapter 20. Now, Jesus going up to Jerusalem, took the 12 disciples aside on the road. Imagine now Jesus is going up to Jerusalem.

It always says going up. Jerusalem is always up. You remember that Jesus is going to Jerusalem.

They're walking down the road. Jesus stops the group. 12 men may have been a few others, you know, that would accompany the disciples from time to time if they were nearby, but he stops the group, takes them off of the road, pulls them aside, sits them down and looks earnestly into their eyes.

We imagine he took the 12 disciples aside on the road. He takes the 12, these same 12, took them aside on the road and said to them, look, behold means look, we are going up to Jerusalem and the son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes. And they will condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles.

They don't have the authority under the Romans to do capital punishment. They can't stone anyone to death. They can't, uh, they can sentence someone to death, but they can't carry out the sentence because the Romans have appropriated all that kind of punishment to themselves.

So Jesus is explicit and clear. The son of man is going to be betrayed. Someone is going to be disloyal.

Someone is going to, uh, in a surprise, unhappy fashion, betray him to the chief priests and to the scribes. They are already in the mode where they are avoiding confrontation with the religious leaders because they're trying to put him, uh, under arrest and, and bring him to trial and find him guilty and sentencing that he will be betrayed. They will condemn him to death.

They will deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify, mock, scourge, crucify, mocking. This is social cancellation. This is social penalty.

This is taking away his reputation, making nothing of his name scourge. This is physical

penalty, physical punishment. This is, uh, something that, uh, costs in the material, physical, painful realm and to crucify the specific manner of death.

Noble death was beheading, uh, even for serious crimes in Rome, you could still have a form of dignity where you were just beheaded. This is what will, uh, happen to the apostle Paul because he is a Roman citizen. He is going to be convicted and executed in, in future years, but he will be beheaded.

We have this from early church fathers that, uh, Paul was beheaded in Rome. He was not crucified. Peter being a lowly Jewish fisherman, uh, tradition says was crucified.

So he says he will be crucified. This was the most ignominious, shameful death. You're typically fully disrobed and held up for, uh, vilification by passersby and as a, as a lesson, as a warning to others.

Uh, and the third day he will rise again. As we talked about in our last Bible class, we have an aversion to information that we don't like, or that we don't immediately understand that doesn't fit our views or our expectations. We find ways to shelve it, to dismiss it, to, uh, not have it enter into our thinking.

Jesus didn't just mention this in obscure terms. He stops the group. He pulls them to the side.

He says, look, we are going up to Jerusalem. This is what's going to happen when we get there. If you look at the parallel passages, you can keep your finger here and turn over to Mark 10 32, Mark chapter 10.

We have this in, in the three synoptic gospels, Mark 10 verse 32, they were on the road going up to Jerusalem and Jesus was going ahead of them. Jesus has separated himself from the group. He's walking ahead of the disciples there in a group behind him.

He's thinking he's praying. He is focusing on what he knows is going to happen. And after he has been ahead of the group for some time on this journey, the disciples are amazed.

They are surprised. This is unusual. Jesus usually travels with them, but he is by himself in front of them.

And there, what is going on? This is very unusual. As they followed, they were afraid. They said, what? Something is wrong.

I've got foreboding. Jesus is really out of character here. He's not the gentle Jesus.

He's not the happy Jesus. He's not the talkative Jesus. He's not the teaching Jesus.

He's not the healing Jesus. He's up by himself. They can tell from his body language,

even from behind that something is wrong.

They are amazed and they are afraid. So Jesus took the 12 aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to him. Notice he doesn't say what people in the movies always say.

It'll be okay. It's all right. Don't worry.

Let not your hearts be troubled. What does he say? You ought to be amazed. You ought to be afraid.

We're going into some deep choppy water here. We're going into the midst of the wicked who are like the troubled sea. This is not going to be a happy occasion.

We're going up to Jerusalem. The son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes. They will condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles.

They will mock him. They will scourge him. They will spit on him.

They will kill him. The third day he will rise again. You notice the variation in language here.

Much of it is the same. A little of it is different. This tells you that Jesus said this multiple times.

He said, they're going to kill him. They're going to crucify him. They're going to mock him.

They're going to spit on him. They're going to scourge him. This was a very emphatic point that he made.

Turn over to Luke 18 31. You can look at the preceding context in Luke. Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or a wife or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who shall not receive many times more in this present time and in the age to come eternal life.

Many times more in this present life, by the way, what sort of reward is this? Many times more of what? What is it that those things can supply? If you've got house and land, that's security. If you've got family, that's relationship, that's comfort, that's encouragement, that's fellowship, right? Receive many times more in this present time. Jesus said, you know, I had a mother and brothers that I left behind.

When they bring his mother, they bring word that his mother and brothers are outside. He said, look around these people next to me. This is my mother and my brothers.

Many times more. If we lose fellowship within a family or lose the initial expectation

many times more in the present time, there will be God will supply all of our needs, our need for comfort, our need for fellowship, our need for security will be supplied. But he took the 12 aside in verse 31.

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem. All things that are written by the prophets concerning the son of man will be accomplished. You should know this because it's in your Bible.

Jesus says to his disciples, this has been prophesied, delivered to the Gentiles, mocked, insulted, spit upon, they will scourge him and kill him. And the third day he will rise again. Look at verse 34.

They understood, they grasped, they internalized none of these things. This saying was hidden from them and they did not know the things which were spoken. They didn't make it a part of their thinking.

Now turn back to Matthew chapter 20, verse 20, right after this, he has made this point. The mother of Zebedee's sons came to him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from him. And he said to her, what do you wish? She said to him, grant that these two sons of mine may sit one on your right hand and the other on your left in your kingdom.

Where does this come from? What did Jesus say before the parable of the vineyard owner? Parable of the workman in the field. You will sit on 12 thrones, Mrs. Zebedee and James and John, remember two of the top three as in terms of privilege and being in the upper room, seeing the transfiguration, the upper room when the little girl is raised, Talitha Kumi, remember Peter, James and John are there. Well, this is two of the three with their mother grant that my sons may sit one on your right hand and the other on the left in your kingdom.

Notice she's leaving Jesus a choice. She doesn't say John at your right hand and James at your left. She says, well, you know, it's up to you, which one sits on which side, but grant that they can sit next to you in your kingdom.

These two have told their mother that Jesus said they're going to sit on thrones, but hey, 12 thrones, 12 tribes. Isn't there something better? Isn't there something higher? These two, look, they've been gone. Zebedee's been having to run the fishing business by himself.

So you talk about abandoning things. They've left their father and mother. They left their business.

They've left their whole family behind. They've been following you for these three years. Shouldn't they have the very top spots second only to you yourself.

You can decide which one's on right and left, but grant that they may sit there on your, when you sit on your throne next time, we will get to Jesus answer. But think about the pain in Jesus' heart. After explaining, after illustrating, after talking about what is coming, they are on the road to Jerusalem.

He has explicitly told them that there is going to be humiliation and suffering and death there for him, not for the disciples, for him. Does anybody ask him, Lord, is there something we can do? Is there a way we can prevent this? Is there any other option? Lord, why? Lord, how can you tell us more self-interest from two of the three most prominent and furthest along disciples? John, who's going to write first, second, and third John and the gospel of John and the revelation is standing here, assenting to this question. When you read the parallel in Mark, it puts the turn back to Mark chapter 10.

Again, Matthew includes Mrs. Zebedee in the same way that he includes the mother of the colt, the mother donkey there that Matthew includes it here in Mark 10 35. It says James and John, the sons of Zebedee came to him saying, teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. He said to them, what do you want me to do for you? Grant us that we may sit one on your right hand and the other on your left in your glory.

They and their mother bring this up. So what is our point of application here? If we genuinely want to live and serve in Jesus name, this cannot be the attitude. This can't be the level of penetration of God's word and God's spirit in our hearts.

We have to be paying attention. We have to be thinking the way God thinks. How can we serve in the future kingdoms? How can we dwell in God's presence in future glory? If we don't learn to think and value as he thinks and values, if we don't understand what constitutes true riches, true fellowship, true service, true love for God, the first and greatest commandment to love God gets edged out by personal expectation, personal goals and desires.

Our estimate of what our personal needs are. Why would someone want to sit at Jesus right hand and his left? This could have been a different request. Grant that we may dwell in your presence.

Grant that we may continue to learn divine truth from your lips. Grant that we may partake of even more spiritual manna. We want to truly understand the father's plan and purpose and your role in it and the work that you're going to do.

Grant that we may understand redemption and reconciliation. Give us understanding of what this means that you are going to suffer and die and rise again. Can you tell us more about the resurrection? It couldn't be more opposite.

It couldn't be more distant. And yet if it's possible for James and John, it's possible for us. Think about what Jesus says.

Think about what the disciples understand. They don't understand it and they actually go in the exact opposite direction. This is essentially the same question that Peter asked before Jesus gave this teaching, before he presented the parable.

We've left all and followed you. What will we have? Jesus says, if you abandon these things for my namesake, you will have plenty now and in the future. Trust the father to know what is right.

The vineyard owner, I will give you what is right. James and John and Mrs. Zebedee are not content to trust that the master will do what is right. They want a specific.

They're going back to promise us a denarius. It could not be more dense and it couldn't be a better illustration for us of what not to do. And yet how easy it is.

Notice they do this in the presence of the Lord Jesus. He has been teaching them personally. This is not a matter of how good is the teaching? How clear is the word of God? How present is the spirit of God? This is pure choice.

What am I going to think about? And as we've been talking about on Thursday nights, we saw it last week. We're going to see it this coming week. We choose what we think about and what we choose to think about shifts the entire landscape.

It creates an entirely different foundation under our perceptions, our evaluations, and most importantly, our decisions and actions. The choices of what we listen to, what we treat as true, what we treat as important is everything. And it boils down to choice.

We're not a victim of circumstance. We're not a victim or we should not be. We shouldn't be.

We have been freed from the law of sin and death. We have been freed. We have been given an opportunity to enter into the truth.

You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. Free from suggestibility, free from anchoring, free from basing decisions on subtle and hidden things that we're not even consciously aware of. God has given us divine power to rise above and beyond those things and to think and to act with objectivity, with justice and righteousness in truth.

And that is the foundation on which all of our future hope is built. It's critically important that we soak our minds in the word of God and not let human ideas of glory, human ideas of hope, human ideas of accomplishment and reward and blessing warp us. But that's exactly what happens here.

And Jesus' answer is going to be critical to our understanding of how to avoid this horrific mistake. Nobody's asking Jesus, if you die, how are you going to sit on this throne?

They've just wiped out the whole death and scourging and spitting and mocking thing out of their calculations. It's not even there.

We're imagining you on a glorious throne and we want to be sitting at your right hand and your left because that's a place of power. That's a place of privilege. That's a place of glory.

As Jesus says, let these words sink down into your ears. And all of us need to do this. This snapshot should jar us loose from faulty expectations.

We have much more to see in this before we finish the chapter, but we're going to pause here in our study and we'll resume it next week. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for its power to slice open our soul and our spirit and expose the thoughts and intents of our heart, not only to expose them, not only to judge them, but to give us the wherewithal to have them corrected, to have them made objective and to conform and comport with your standards and your truth.

We pray that as we reflect on these words of the Lord Jesus, the illustrations that he provided, the illustrations here in the Gospel of Matthew, that the Holy Spirit will use this to shine a light on our own thinking, on our own decisions and actions so that we can truly be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, to follow him in his example of self-sacrifice and self-denial, to follow him in his dedication to fulfilling your plan and your purpose, even when it cost him his glory in the eternal realms, when it cost him reputation and ultimately his life here on earth. We pray that we can be those who are faithful unto death to receive the crown of life and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.