

Matthew 20:17-34

The Petition for Two Sons and Pity on the Blind Man

Alright we are finishing up, at least we are going to attempt to finish up Matthew 20:17-34. Last time we met, we took verses 1-16, so now 17-34.

Remember that in Matthew chapters 19 through 22 we have the theme, The Ministry of Relationships. These all support the Lord's teachings on relationships in chapter 18.

So as we go through these various relationships that Jesus is ministering to as He is going along - remember that in chapter 19 verses 1 and 2 is the pivotal point of the Lord's public ministry. That is to say He is now on His way to Jerusalem, on His way to die. He is on His way to lay down His life for the sins of the world, and for you and for me. So verses 1 and 2, He is on His way to Jerusalem.

And while He is on His way to Jerusalem, in verses 3-9 of chapter 19, He is faced with giving the proper interpretation of divorce; and then in verses 10-12 the proper interpretation of marriage. And I encourage you to go over these messages while we have all this time off, because these are the major teachings and ministries on these relationships.

Then, verses 16-22, we have the poverty of the rich man. It sounds like they are opposites, but it is true. We found out that the rich man indeed was poor. Because the rich man asked Jesus what he had to do to be saved and He says to the rich man, "Well your god is you are serving your wealth and your material goods. So sell all your goods and give it to the poor and come and follow Me." But the rich man left grieving because he did not want to give up his wealthy material goods and he left grieving.

And so the disciples in response to this, the philosophy of the culture in their day is the same as the philosophy of the culture in our day, people are rich because God has blessed them, they say. If you are poor or in financial trouble, it is because you are in sin, and you need to repent. But when the rich man left, Jesus said, "How hard it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. As hard as it is to thread a camel through the eye of a needle." In other words, it is impossible. So the disciples in response they said, "If it is impossible for rich people to be saved, then who can be saved?" Who is it possible to save?

And Jesus, in verses 23-26 of chapter 19, presented the provision of salvation, that with God all things are possible. With man it is impossible. It is impossible for a human being to save himself or herself. You cannot do anything. It must be all God giving your spiritual birth, making you one of His children. And by His Spirit coming into your life, cleansing you of all of your sins. So Jesus said, "Oh it is possible, but only with God." That salvation is not earned. It is not purchased. Salvation is given by God.

And then in verses 27-30 of chapter 19, the promise of rewards and the provision of rewards. Because the disciples came to Jesus and said, "We have given up everything for You. The rich man could not give up his possessions and his wealth, but we have given up everything for You. What is in it for us?" And He says, "You, you twelve," He is talking to the twelve

apostles, "you twelve will sit on twelve thrones with Me in My kingdom." And concerning this rich man who walked away and you thought he was supposed to be the one saved and not, let Me just tell you, "The first shall be last and the last shall be first."

See, with the things of God everything is opposite. What we think is a success is a failure to God. What we think is good, good works, earning our way into God's grace, is actually failure. So the Lord's answer to the disciples is that the first shall be last - you will be last here on earth, you will lose everything here, but you gain Me. And when I come and set up My kingdom, you will be rewarded with more than what you lost.

So last time we took verses 1-16 of chapter 20, The Parable of the Vineyard, which is actually an example of the last verse of chapter 19, when Jesus said, "He who is first will be last and last will be first." The parable of the vineyard workers where the boss went out and hired different workers at different times of the day, and told them, "I will give you a denarius," that is a day's wage, "if you go out and work in my vineyard." Starting at 6 o'clock in the morning. Went out again at 9 o'clock in the morning, hired workers. Went again out at noon, out again at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and went out again at 5 o'clock, one hour before quitting time. And told them all, "I will pay you what is right, just go." So at quitting time, the vineyard owner had the supervisor go out and round up all the workers and he paid all the workers the same, a day's wage. No matter how many hours they worked, he paid them the same. And, of course, those who started work at six in the morning thought they were going to get more, and they complained, "We should get more. Some of those guys only worked an hour and they still got a day's wage like we did."

And that is when Jesus said in verse 16, "He who is first will be last, he who is last will be first." That His grace is equal to everyone. You do not get more at the beginning and less at the end. That person who surrenders his life to Christ at the end gets just as much grace as the person who is at the beginning. Just when you think the person is last, he will be first. He will get just as much as the first guy. And just when you think the first, he says, "I ought to get more than everybody else," he will be last. But if you notice how this parable works, even the first who is last, they are all equal, they all get equal, the first and the last get all equal.

So then right in the middle of going up to Jerusalem, we have verse 17 for today. Verses 17 through 19 Jesus is walking with the disciples after He gives this parable, and He is giving a confirmation of His sufferings. **While going up unto Jerusalem, Jesus took the twelve disciples privately in the way, and said to them, "Behold, we are going up into Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be given over to the chief priests and the scribes. And they will condemn Him to death. And they will give Him over to the Gentiles to mock, and to whip, and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again."** So right in the middle of all of the miracles, and all of the teachings, Jesus, while He is walking with them, stops to remind them that we are on our way to suffer. I am on My way to suffer and die. This is now the third time. Two other times Jesus told them He is going to Jerusalem to suffer, and to die, and to rise up on the third day.

Now you remember the first time He told them back in chapter 16 verses 21-23, you remember Peter's response? Just to show you how it fits in to what we are studying here. In

Matthew 16:21-23 it says, **Jesus began to show His disciples, how that He must go into Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took Him - Peter takes Jesus - and began to rebuke Him - Peter rebuking Jesus, correcting Him - saying, "God have mercy on You."** That is the literal translation of chapter 16 verse 22. **"God have mercy on You: this shall never happen to You,"** Peter telling Jesus. **But Jesus, when he turned, He said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan: you are an offence unto me: for you savourest,"** and the word *savourest* means *to think*. **"You think not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men."** The word *think* means *frame of mind*. Peter your frame of mind does not think the things of God, they think the things of man. So when man in his normal human state thinks about suffering and difficulties, he thinks that is bad. We cannot let that happen. Jesus going to suffer and to die, that cannot happen. And the Lord says, "Satan is influencing you, because you are thinking the things of man and not the things of God." *Suffering* and *death* are not in the vocabulary of most believers, as Peter shows us.

God's ways are not our ways, and our thoughts are not His thoughts. It says that in Isaiah 55:8-9. God says, **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," says the LORD. "For even as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."** In other words, it is opposite. The first will be last and the last will be first in our evaluation. What we think is first will not be first, it will be last. And the things that we think are not important, the things that are last are going to be first. The Lord's ways are opposite of our ways.

And so we evaluate life, we evaluate ourselves, we evaluate other people, we evaluate life itself based on the philosophy that our culture has ingrained in us. Not God's ways, which is why we have so much trouble with God. We have trouble with God. Why is God doing that to me? Why is He doing that? I do not understand. We must be reminded of the difficulty and sufferings that are along the way. See it is interesting that in everything else in life we can pretty much accept it that struggles and difficulties are just part of life.

If you have ever played athletics, you have to know that if you decide you are going to go for the football team in high school, you have to know there are going to be some hard practices, right? The coach is not going to say, "If you want to do these things, just go over there and sit down and wait for us to get through and then you can join us." He is going to put you through some very hard drills and some very hard practices. For what? To get ready for the game. To get ready to play so you do not get hurt and that you can do well.

People go to school to learn, go through difficulties. Why? To learn how to do a job skill or to be trained. Everything takes training. Everything takes difficulty. Not to mention having children. It is nice having children, but it is difficult. Maybe you do not think so, but maybe I am making the confession for you. There is difficulty along the way to produce the right thing.

But we think when it is with the Lord - and the Lord is prepping us and getting us ready to do battle with Satan when Satan attacks us in life - we complain because of how difficult the training gets, the trials get. But life has prepared us for it. We have to be ready for the contest

when Satan strikes. So we must be reminded of the difficulty and the sufferings that are along the way.

So then after He reminds them, not that it really penetrated. The other two times it did not even penetrate. They are on the way to Jerusalem thinking that they are going to go and enter into Jerusalem and the Lord is going to set up His kingdom and He is going to rule as King, not that He is going to suffer and die. So they are anxious to get to Jerusalem.

Then we read in verses 20 through 28, the petition for two sons, the competition among the disciples. Would not you know it. We have seen it so far. **Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him.** This would be James and John, the two sons of Zebedee. **She came with her sons, worshiping, and asking.** This is a good time to tell you that the word *worship*, **προσκυνέω** (*proskuneo*) in Greek in the New Testament, does not have anything to do with singing. It literally means *to bow down in submission*. That is what it means. That is what the word means. You cannot imagine her coming up, and worshiping, and dancing and singing, and then say, "I have a question for you, Lord. Hopefully my performance will influence You to answer my question right." Worshipping, she came and she bowed down to Him, and she was asking something from Him.

Now in chapter 18 the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who is going to be the greatest?" You can see where their mindset is. "Who is going to be the greatest?" And Jesus brought a little child in their midst and says, "He who humbles himself like this little child, he will be the greatest." You see how that is progress [compared] to *the first will be last and the last will be first*. In chapter 19 verse 28 Jesus said that even the disciples themselves would sit on twelve thrones and rule when He sets up His kingdom. But pride is still functioning here, only now we see a mother getting involved. She heard about the twelve thrones. She heard Him say that. She heard about Him going to Jerusalem, obviously the suffering and dying did not penetrate anybody. So she comes and she says, "I have a question to ask of You."

And He said to her, verse 21, "What do you desire?" She says to Him, "Speak in order that these two sons of mine may sit, one from out of Your right, and one from out of Your left in Your kingdom." So she says, "You told us about the thrones, but You did not say where everybody is sitting. So I am asking You a favor. Can you pick one of my sons to sit on Your left side and the other son to sit on your right side, when You come into Your kingdom?" It would be funny if it was not so sad. In fact, the disciples were not laughing at all, we will see in a minute, they got mad. You can imagine the other ten standing there listening to two being asked by mother for preference. And they are standing there saying, "You know, what are we? Chopped liver? What is going on here?"

So verse 22, **Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup which I Myself am about to drink?"** And then the manuscript for the King James translation adds, **"And to be baptized with the baptism with which I am being baptized with?" And they said to Him, "We are able."**

First of all, let us identify this cup. It is not communion, and the baptism is not water baptism. The cup and the baptism are suffering. In Luke 22:42 when Jesus was praying before

He suffered on the cross, He said, "**Father, if it is Your will remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless not My will but Thine be done.**" This cup of suffering, Father, if it is Your will, remove it; but if it is not Your will, let Your will be done. The baptism that He is being baptized with, notice the verb tense, I made a special note of the translating the verb literally: *this baptism which I am being baptized with*, not *will be*, but I am being baptized with. This whole saga of going, being mistreated, being opposed, going into Jerusalem and die, to suffer and to die, all of this is My baptism. All of this is My cup. Are you able to drink My cup? The disciples, unbeknownst to what they are thinking, they are probably thinking religiously, they said, "We are able."

Look at verse 23, **And He says to them, "On the one hand you will drink My cup,"** that is a promise, **"and you will be baptized with the baptism with which I am being baptized with; but to sit from off of My right and from off of My left is not Mine to give, but for whom it has been prepared by My Father."** He says, "Oh you will drink My cup alright, yes you will. You are not ready for it, but You will drink of My cup."

You see right here - and I have been trying to emphasize this to you for months if not years - that Jesus calls people not into a religion but into a personal relationship with Him. Not to just be a believer but to be a follower of Jesus Christ. To enter into that personal intimate relationship with Him.

But when you enter into a relationship with someone you take on their characteristics. That is why it is so important that we realize to use wisdom when we are choosing people to hang out with or be with; because we wind up talking like them, and we wind up acting like them, we wind up going to the places that they go to, and we find our life really not for the better but for the worse. Paul said in I Corinthians 15:33 that corrupt people ruin good manners, watch out who you hang out with. You will take on some of their characteristics. That is what relationship is all about. Whether you really get into a relationship with someone for that purpose or not that will happen, you will take on their characteristics in some way, shape, or form.

That is why Paul said in Philippians 3:10, **That I might know Him** (meaning Jesus) **and the power of His resurrection**, (yeah, love that power) **and the fellowship of His sufferings**. Participating with His sufferings. See, when you come to know Jesus, it is not just coming to know His power, but it is also coming to know His sufferings. *His* sufferings, not ours. **Being made conformable to His death**. We are being shaped right now, being conformed to His death. So yes, there is going to be difficulty, hard times.

Peter said in I Peter 2:21-23, **For even in this you were called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps: Who did no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, did not revile again; when He suffered, He did not threaten; but He committed Himself to Him that judges righteously.** He did not respond to people with vengeance when He was treated unjustly. And yet Peter says, "And we follow His footsteps." Because the reason why we are treated unjustly - even though people do not realize it - is because we have made that decision to follow Christ. So we suffer the Lord's sufferings. We suffer the Lord's difficulties when we participate with Him.

And notice at the end of this verse, "**For whom it has been prepared by My Father.**" The Father already has the assignments for the seating arranged. So Jesus says, "You have been appointed to walk in My steps, and to drink My cup, but who is going to sit where? That is not Mine to give. That is up to the Father."

So in verse 24, The Conduct of the Ten, **And having heard this, the ten became angry concerning the two brothers.** And then Jesus relates the condition in the body of Christ in verses 25 to 28. **But having called them to Himself, Jesus said, "You know the rulers of the Gentiles, they lord it over people."** He is talking about anybody that is not Jewish, He is talking about the leaders of the world lord it over people. You and I, in case you have not noticed the news in the last few days, weeks, months, years, whatever the case may be, we are being lorded over. And we do not like it. **"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles, lord it over the people, and the great ones have authority over them. But this will not be among you. But whoever should desire to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever should desire to be first among you, let him be your slave."** You see, *the first will be last.* You want to be first in God's kingdom, you want to be important? Become a slave. Serve people. **"Just as the Son of Man,"** that would be another name for Jesus, **"did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom in place of many."** So He came to serve people, not to be served.

I get that all the time. When people come, they bring their families to the church, and they come for the first time, and their attitude is when they first come in the door, "How are you going to treat me? How are you going to serve me? What are you going to do for me?" And my answer is, "I will show you a seat. You can join us. We worship the Lord and we learn about Him." And there are a lot of people that leave here not very pleased by the way they were treated. They complain there is no love. And the I remind them, just as I have reminded you over the years, "Love is not for the person who receives, love is for the person who gives." We are supposed to love one another. It does not say, "Go get love from one another." No, you be the one that loves. It does not matter how much you are loved or not loved. You are at the bottom. You are last. When you look at yourself that way then you will see things in proper perspective.

In verses 29-34, the pity on the blind man. In verse 29, **While they were going out from Jericho** (and heading towards Jerusalem) **a great crowd followed Him.** And there was a calling of two blind men, verse 30, **And behold, two blind men sitting along the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, saying, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!"**

Now Mark and Luke in their Gospels they did not mention the two men, they only mentioned that there was one. And they said that one's name was Bartimaeus. Matthew gives us two men sitting alongside the road blind and they cried out to Jesus, "Have mercy on us Lord, Son of David." Three things:

- 1) Notice they cried for mercy. The weak, the ones who are last, cry for mercy. Not calling out asking them to get what they deserve. You do not want what you deserve.

2) Then they called Him *Lord*, which is interesting, expression of submission: "Have mercy on us Lord."

3) And the third thing is, *Son of David*. That is a messianic title. They are calling Him *the Messiah*.

So they are saying to Jesus, "**Have mercy on us Lord, Messiah.**"

Verse 31, **But the crowd rebuked them, in order that they might be quiet. But they were crying out the more.** The verb tense shows they were *continuously crying out the more*. **Saying, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!"** Notice that they were shouting louder over the crowds. They were going to be heard by Jesus. They were not going to let the crowds keep them from being heard.

The compassion of Jesus in verses 32-34, **And when Jesus stopped...** So He stops in the road. He has all these crowds around Him. He stops because He is dealing with blind men, they cannot see Him, they do not know where He is at in the crowd. So He stops so the blind men can hear His voice and locate Him.

And when He stopped, Jesus called them, and said, "What do you desire that I should do for you?" Now Jesus knows what they want but He always wants confession. He always wants people to tell Him what they want. What the need is.

Verse 33, **They say to Him, "Lord, in order that our eyes might be opened." And having compassion...** there is His motivation, Jesus had compassion on them. He was not looking for them to perform some kind of religious formula or ritual in order to get His compassion. He has compassion on them, the blind. **And having compassion Jesus touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him.**

Four different instances in the Scriptures it says that Jesus healed blind people. This is one of the signs and one of the miracles that tells us in Isaiah's prophecies that the Messiah was going to do when He comes to show that He is the Messiah. So He, as the Messiah, opens the eyes of the blind so they can see, like the Messiah is supposed to do to proclaim that He is here. And notice the end result, the last phrase of this section, and they followed Him. They *followed* Him, not *they believed* in Him, but they *followed* Him. They got up. Their eyesight was now used for something, to see Him and to follow Him.

So the three things that we see threaded through these instances today:

1) Suffering difficulty is not the way the world thinks it is. The world says, "It has to be worth it," the difficulties and the sufferings. If you understand what the trials and difficulties are for, it will be worth it. It is come to know Jesus. I am getting to know His sufferings. I am getting to know His path. I am following His way. So the world does not understand that in suffering and difficulty, the last will be first. The ones who are

suffering and have it difficult, they are the ones who are being enriched. The ones who have it good, they are in poverty. They do not know what good is.

2) And then the dealing with each other as far as competitiveness and how the world thinks. The world thinks, "I have to be first, I have to be the greatest. I have to be the head of my company. I have to be tops. I have to be the best in my field. I have to be best in my family. I have to be best, better than anybody." Competition. Everything is built around competition and people wanting to get to the top. But as we saw, the top is the bottom in God's kingdom and the bottom is the top. In order to be at the bottom, you have to give up all that time and effort that you are giving to make it to the top, and spend time learning about Jesus and following Him.

3) And the blind men. The blind men, the sick and the weak, they are the ones who are pushed into the back. They are the ones that the crowd says, "Be quiet, we cannot hear Jesus, we are following Him." Yet those are the ones that Jesus is focused on. He sympathizes. He has compassion for those who are weak and those who are sick, for those who are going through difficult times.

Hebrews chapter 4 tells us that we do not have a high priest that is not able to sympathize with our weaknesses. So come to the throne of grace, to get grace in time of need. Jesus sympathizes with the weak. He sympathizes with those who are going through difficult times. It is up to us to come to Him and say, "Lord, have mercy on me. I need Your grace for today and I am entering into this certain situation, and I need grace." And God's grace will be given one hundred percent, not any different than He would give His favorite son.

This is a side of Jesus that we need to see. He is not looking for people to perform religiously and reward us for the best performance. It is for those who call for mercy, for those who need His grace. He sympathizes with us and pours out His Spirit upon us if we should ask, when He says, "What would you have Me to do for you?"

Let's close with prayer.