

## Week 21

### Matthew series: Ministry of Jesus (Who is the greatest Part 3)

#### Matthew 20: Where is the kingdom

In Matthew 13 we have several *"Kingdom of heaven is like"* statements. Here in Matthew 20 we have another one. There are many in this Gospel. The reason I mention it here is that Psalm 110:1 and Isaiah 66:1 mention something about a foot stool. This footstool is not mentioned in this chapter but it applies. The Jewish people had heard these special verses all their childhood. They were burned into their brains like we have the constitution.

We in North America are democracy, freedom, and prosperity. As a continent we believe that. The Jewish nation believed they were the kingdom of God. They were the chosen ones. God did choose this nation to be his children. The only children? No, but his priests to guard the kingdom. Matthew repeats the kingdom over and over because they got it all wrong. The kingdom represents God. The Jewish nation was not God. This nation was representing God all wrong. So, we get teaching of what the kingdom should be like.

It's important to be honest with the Bible or we just get a bunch of questions. Matthew 9 has a healing of two blind men story. So, does Matthew 20. It's almost repeated per word. They call them doublets. I will point this out. All the Gospels are a recount of Jesus. Yet, they all are bent towards a certain view. Is that troubling for you? It's like my wife and me telling people about a trip. It's the same trip but our stories will be different and the same. This doublet might be a retelling mistake. It might be on purpose for intent. We don't know why it's here twice. My point is I see what you see: two of the same story. How would you describe the kingdom of God?

**Matthew 20: 1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard"**

**Deuteronomy 24:4 "The LORD says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."**

**Isaiah 66:1 "Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me and what is the place of my rest?"**

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Jesus mentions his death several times in this Gospel. You will not be fooled by the outcome. Jesus told them point blank. It's interesting that he used parables, yet he was straight forward about his death. I believe it comes back to kingdom talk. Jesus knew the scriptures like the one in Isaiah that told

of the suffering servant. His disciples heard them too. Remember that this study is too big. From page one of this Gospel Matthew has been building a case for Jesus to be the Christ spoken of old. Chapter 20 is no different. Matthew relates these parables and quotes by Jesus to remind the readers of the Christ.

I would also like to point out that this is Christian training talk. We are not to be thinking about over throwing the evil world for Jesus. It's noble and nice but Jesus could have done that but he did not. A Christian is to be like the kingdom of heaven. They are to know the intent of the Lord. Far too often Christians develop into kingdom rulers and kingdom victors. That was not the intent of Jesus or the writer Matthew. What do you expect Christians to do with the power of God?

**Matthew 20:20-21 "Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. 21 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."**

**Isaiah 53: 5 "But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed."**

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If you follow this book like a time line then you see Jesus being born to his resurrection. From a literary point of view Matthew is designing a picture. We have the entrance of the Christ as a baby. This Baby becomes the Christ, Son of man, Son of David, and Emanuel of the Jewish world. All these terms and words are used to draw us forward to the return of the kingdom of God after the fall of Adam and Eve. The Jewish people were waiting.

This kingdom talk and parables point toward a fallen world. The Jewish nation did not get God. They got power. They got religion. Yet, they missed the essence of God. I think that is why the Holy Spirit is not mentioned as directly in the Old Testament. They are plenty of verses if you look. Yet, it's prominent in the Gospels and epistle letters of the New Testament.

Take a look. The Spirit of God is hovering over the earth in Genesis 1. The Spirit of God works within humans to bring forth the Kingdom reign. Jesus dies and becomes Spirit. God is Spirit. I wonder if Jesus spoke in parables because men could not see the Spirit moving. Maybe that's why Matthew repeats the blind men story. For emphasis. As Christians in training, Matthew is moving us from head knowledge to heart knowledge.

**Matthew 20:32-33 "Jesus stood still and called them, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened."**

**2 Samuel 7:13 "He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."**

Read Matthew 20. Also read 2 Samuel 7. There is a reason Jesus and Matthew mention the kingdom so much. It meant something special to the Jews and readers at that time.

1. There are other instances in Matthew where Jesus mentions the kingdom. I feel this chapter is like a gateway because of the coming chapters. Jesus is heading towards the cross. He will mention sacrifice. Jesus will antagonize the rulers to kill him. I feel everything in the remaining chapters are somewhat different. There was a lot of explaining being done for 20 chapters. Who is Jesus, the kingdom, and prophesy. Now, we are moving on to the climax of this story.

“For the kingdom is like”, (Matthew 20:1-16). I enjoy this parable. Jesus is always witty with these words. Is it Jesus words or Matthew? If you believe in the inspired words of God then it’s Jesus. Either way it’s witty. The land owner is God. It’s his kingdom. The laborers are all of us: Jews, religious rulers, and gentiles. In many ways this is a straight shot at this society in the first century.

The Jews expected to be first. They expected to get their reward. The other groups are those Jesus called like the Samaritans and gentiles. In that day, the Jewish community thought they owned the kingdom market. Even today, that land is disputed.

One more thing. Look at the times given. Jesus was arrested early in the morning. He was probably crucified around midafternoon. He probably died near evening. I’m grasping, but am I? Matthew is witty throughout this book. A crucifixion happens about that way time wise. This book is multi layered. The vineyard always represents God and his people. Then we have the first and last thing again. Read this parable again with fresh eyes.

**Matthew 20:15” Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”**

**Deuteronomy 24:15 “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.”**

2. I would invite you to read my Intro to God series. I tried to connect the old and New Testaments through incidents and themes. We see God’s consistent character throughout the Bible. Sometimes Matthew is not writing to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The little story of the sons of Zebedee are a good example. Like I said before, the Jewish people grew up with the Bible. In many instances they knew it inside out. Even fishermen.

In Jerimiah 49:12 it says they will drink from the cup. Jesus mentioning it here is important to this nation. It’s considered prophesy. It’s a connection to the kingdom too. I suppose a right of passage. Yet, Jesus just told them the parable of the vineyard. They just did not get it. I am astounded that Jesus mentions his death and right away two disciples want the kingdom reign. Maybe they just wanted to make sure they were included.

Either way, this story let’s us know that it’s not about infighting. Denominations fighting is ludicrous to this chapter. Again, and again Jesus points out that the first will be last. In plain language it means who cares when, how, or who. Make sure your in by following Jesus. It’s not about us being followed. Although having someone follow our good Christian walk is a good thing.

The message is to stick to the plan. We enter God's kingdom by his grace and goodness. These stories in Matthew 20 remind us that most of the time we get it all wrong.

**Matthew 20:23 "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."**

**Jeremiah 49:12 "This is what the LORD says: "If those who do not deserve to drink the cup must drink it, why should you go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, but must drink it."**

3. Matthew 7:7-8 is a key to the Kingdom. I love the idea of searching for God as he pursues me. Does God pursue us? In the beginning Adam and Eve were tossed out of Eden. The end, right? No, we have a story after that of God entering Noah's life, Abraham's life, and many others. It's not them searching for God, but rather God entering their lives. Was Jesus expected? No, they were unclear after 400 years of silence. Who was this Jesus? Why is he portrayed as the main theme in the gospels?

In this vineyard parable, the workers are not searching. The owner went and asked. He offered. I would also say he noticed them standing there. The owner also noticed that there was work to do. Back we come again to Matthew 9. Matthew is a repeater to make a case. It says the Laborer's will be few. It's also the place where the two-blind man story is again. Somehow this is not a coincidence.

Oddly enough the two blind men ask. Isn't it interesting that they are blind? The kingdom of heaven is like. Yet, these guys can't see it, but, they know what it should be like. They had probably heard about Jesus. They wanted to see the kingdom, savior, and Christ. This chapter was meant to open our eyes to what the kingdom of God was really all about.

**Matthew 20: 1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard."**

**Matthew 7:7-8 "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."**

4. This chapter is also about service. All though this gospel is service. Jesus washes feet. He provides a temple tax. He heals. He dies for us. There are plenty more. We are asked to serve in a church or in the community. Years ago, I saw John 3:16 on a sign in the world series. I was sent to Sunday school years before. I still have a childhood Christian friend. Yet, in all those events I was not a Christian. God was chasing me. In a way God was serving me. Washing me clean, healing my heart, and giving me knowledge. It takes time.

This is our example. We should do the Christian thing free of charge. Free of motive. Free of expectations. John 3:16 is it in a nut shell. Read it below. God gave us salvation and the way back to heaven for free. The only expectation is to believe. In Matthew 20 there are plenty of expectations from the workers, the Zebedee family, to the disciples. In this chapter the only ones not grumbling are Jesus and the blind men. That should be a hint of what the kingdom is like.

Matthew 20:25 **“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.”**

Ruth 3:10 **“The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.”**

## **What it means?**

It’s interesting that I have given several paragraphs on what it means in other chapters. Yet, in the last one and this one the Bible speaks for itself. You get this chapter. I don’t need to give you fancy insights. This is a doorway to the real meaning of the kingdom. From this chapter forward, Jesus is heading for his goal. He will die for you. He will rise for you. The kingdom will not stand unless death cannot win. Within all this is the character of God. Are you one of the few workers called to move the kingdom forward as it has since the beginning?

Matthew 20:32 **“Jesus stopped and called them. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.”**

Psalm 100:5 **“For the Lord is good, and his mercy is never-ending; his faith is unchanging through all generations.”**