

Matthew 19:27-20:16

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[0:00] I'm not that tall. Today's scripture reading is in Matthew 19, verse 27 through, or yeah, 27 through Matthew 19, verse 28 through, or yeah, 28 through, or yeah, 28 through, or yeah, 29 through, or yeah, 29 through, or yeah, 29 through, or yeah, 29 through, or yeah, 30 through, or yeah, for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

After agreeing with the laborers for denarius a day, he set them into his vineyard, and going out about the third hour, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, you go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give to you.

So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same, and about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, why do you stand here idle all day?

They said to him, because no one has hired us. He said to them, you go into the vineyard too. And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last up to the first.

And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius.

[2:19] And on receiving it, they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, these last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.

But he replied to one of them, friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go.

I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?

So the last will be first and the first last. Let's pray. Lord, in this passage, will you show us your heart and ours?

We pray that in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Is this Christianity thing worth it?

[3:31] Is the, you know, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me thing worth it? Is the whole, you know, don't do all those fun sins bit worth it?

The whole people must think I'm a simpleton or a bigot to believe this stuff. Is that thing worth it? That's what Jesus' disciples ask him today.

And perhaps you're asking today, right? In verse 27, Peter says in reply, see, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?

Now, this question didn't come out of nowhere. This is Peter's follow-up to a conversation Jesus had last week with a rich young man who came to Jesus last week and in verse 16 asked, teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?

And Jesus answered him in verse 21. And he said, if you would be perfect, go. Sell what you possess and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Come, follow me.

[4:38] And we know how that conversation ended. The man turned and walked away. It's not the end of our questions, right? And so Peter, as the spokesman of the disciples, asks, well, we're following you.

What's really in it for us? And we can see how closely Peter's question mirrors what Jesus has already said to the rich young man. I made a handy chart.

Maybe. Maybe. Maybe. Right? In verse 21, we can see like how Peter's question is patterned right after him, right? Jesus says to him, sell what you possess and give it to the poor. And Peter says, we've left everything. And Jesus says, come, follow me. And Peter says, and we followed you. And Jesus said to the rich young man, you will have treasure in heaven. And Peter asks, what then will we have? What then will we have? Is it worth it? Now, before we look at Christ's answer, let's remind ourselves from last week that Jesus didn't offer the rich young ruler or Peter or us a plan on how we can buy our way into heaven, right?

[5:57] That's not what this is saying. The rich young ruler would not have earned his salvation by giving away money. If that were the case, if we could earn heaven by our generosity, even extreme generosity, then Jesus did not need to die on a cross to pay for our sins.

The cross of Christ would be redundant stupidity on God's behalf, right? If we could earn our salvation any other way, but we can't.

The high king of heaven, if we sin against him, right? We incur a debt greater than all the riches of the world. You don't have enough money to cover even one sin against this God, let alone a lifetime's worth.

So neither the rich young ruler, nor Peter, nor me, nor you, can buy or earn our salvation. God's grace is just that, grace, unearned blessing.

And in verse 28, Jesus begins to answer Peter's question. Here's what that unearned blessing looks like.

[7:07] Look with me, verse 28. Jesus said to them, truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Is that what you expected? Is that what I expected? That's a strange statement. So here, let me make it harder for you.

This promise is really similar to another enigmatic teaching. In 1 Corinthians chapter 6. 1 Corinthians 6, 1 through 3 says, When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases?

Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life? So, exactly, right?

[8:24] The disciples are going to judge the twelve tribes of Israel? That's part of Christ's answer about their blessed reward?

And all Christians are going to judge the whole world? And angels? What? Like, what are we supposed to make of that?

Now, there are two ways we can read these passages. The first is to take that word judge, judging, right? The way that we would normally... For generations.

In fact, centuries before Christ came, the prophet Isaiah, chapter 65, brought this message from the Lord. For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth.

Sound familiar? The Lord says, The former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. Not a whole lot of room there for condemning the former things in the new world if they don't even come to mind there.

[9:35] And be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create. For behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people.

And no more shall be heard the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. Not a whole lot of room in the new world for condemnation if there's no weeping and no distress.

Which means we should probably understand this new world and the positions within it, including judging the twelve tribes, in a positive light, not a negative one.

Which makes sense, really, because Peter's asking about what blessing will we get. Right? And that's the focus, on the treasure, on the blessing, not on cursing. And Jesus is about to follow this up in chapter 20 with a parable about what?

A parable showing off a master's generosity, not his justice. So if we're supposed to understand sitting on twelve thrones, judging the tribes of Israel in a positive light, as a blessing, what does it actually mean for the people of God?

[10:45] Well, there's an entire book of the Bible where human beings judge the twelve tribes of Israel in a positive light. In fact, it's called the book of Judges.

And those judges aren't there to condemn the people of God. They're there to lead them and protect them. And if we join that with its twin, that passage in 1 Corinthians 6, that it's not only the apostles but all of God's people who will judge the world and angels, here's what it means.

If you are found in Christ, you will reign with Christ forever. And that is the united testimony of Scripture from beginning to end.

2 Timothy chapter 2 says, If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him. If we endure, we will also reign with Him.

What does that mean? That we will reign with Christ? It's not fully described and defined in the pages of Scripture because I think it will be something that we can only understand once we've seen Him face to face.

[12:07] But it certainly does cut against our typical understanding and notions of heaven, right? I don't know what your picture of our final glorified state is.

Maybe it's endless, perfect golf courses. Or ceaseless moments with loved ones. I once heard a fisherman describe heaven as a bite on every cast.

Or maybe you haven't really thought about it very much. Jesus says here that we will be with Him and that we will reign with Him.

What does that mean? I'm not sure, but I think C.S. Lewis captured it pretty well. The conclusion of the Chronicles of Narnia is the book called The Last Battle.

It ends this way. And for us, that is the readers, this is the end of all the stories. And we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after.

[13:06] But for them, it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover, the title page.

Now at last, they were beginning chapter 1 of the great story, which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever.

And in verse 29, Jesus gives us a preview of that great story. Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

For everyone who leaves behind anyone, and as you can see there, field, anything, in service of Christ, in the renewal, they will receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life.

This doesn't necessarily mean losing or renouncing forever these things or being renounced by these people forever, if that's the case.

[14:31] Peter says in verse 27, you know, we've left everything, which in that moment includes their families. But we know that that was only temporary. You look to 1 Corinthians 9, the apostle Paul tells us that after Jesus rose from the grave and ascended into heaven, Peter and the other apostles rejoined their families for their missionary work.

And Peter, in fact, specifically, he points out, Peter's wife accompanied him in his ministry. So Peter isn't saying, we've abandoned and renounced our families forever for you, Jesus.

Instead, what we see here is that every Christian who in this life forgoes blessing in service of God's mission in the renewal will receive a hundredfold.

And I don't think that's an exact number. Jesus isn't going to whip out a calculator and, you know, compute a precise blessing score for you. It's a superlative, right? It means overwhelmingly more. It means fantastically more. It means don't bother counting. In the new heavens and the new earth, you won't be counting the cost.

[15:41] And so when Randy Matthews, the missionary that Shoreline supports, travels to the ends of the earth to serve church leaders and forgoes the comforts of home and family and the joys of a brand new

grandson, right, the recompense is not something that he can begin to count.

And when a Shoreline family welcomes a foster child into their home in Jesus' name and forgoes the blessing of peace and quiet and certain measure of stability, they don't need to worry if it's worth it.

They can know from our Lord's sure and certain testimony that they don't need to keep score because they can't count that high. And this moment, right, not just the big things but in the small things, right, this moment, as members of our church family forgo the opportunity to sit under the preaching of the word and serve children next door, pouring into them instead of being poured into themselves, right, in the renewal, they will not count it loss, but a hundredfold gain.

And even as Jesus said back in chapter 10, whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of water because he is a disciple, truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

And what's more, God's people will enjoy these countless blessings forever, without limit and without end because Jesus says they will also inherit eternal life.

[17:24] Not only will we have these countless blessings, but we will have an increased capacity to delight in them and to delight in him.

And so Jesus is saying, friends, don't worry about the cost because you can't count the glory. But then he says, verse 30, but many who are first will be last and last first.

Now, once upon a time, I was a Coast Guard cadet. So when I read this, I can't help but think about class rank and specifically the anchor cadet.

Now, in one sense, all cadets are equal. Everyone who graduates gets the same prize, right? A degree and a commission in the United States Coast Guard with a liking for the sea and its lore. So everybody's equal. But we know they're not all equal. And we can quantify it, right? Cadets, right? Class rank. At the academy, you earn a class rank based on your academics and your military performance and your physical fitness exams.

[18:40] And your class rank is important. It gets a lot of air time from the command. A good rank gets you good assignments both as a cadet and as your first assignment as an officer.

And the low man on the totem pole, the person who has the last, lowest class rank on graduation day is called the anchor cadet. They're the one dragging along at the end.

And in most cases, in a sort of lighthearted way, most classes give the anchor a hard time. So, when Jesus says, many who are first will be last and last first, is he talking about some sort of Christian heavenly class rank?

In the kingdom of heaven, is there some sort of list, some ranking like that? Is there a valedictorian? And worse, is there an anchor cadet and might you be him?

And will we give you a hard time about it? Right? Is that what Jesus is saying? How, and how are we supposed to figure it out? Check this out.

[19:50] Verse 30 has a twin. Matthew 19, 30 says, but many who are first will be last and the last first. and that's the conclusion of Christ's answer to Peter, right?

But it's also sort of its own new riddle, right? Is there an anchor cadet in heaven? An anchor Christian in heaven? And then he begins, or, he begins verse 16 of chapter 20, the last line of the parable, so, the last will be first.

That sure looks like he thinks that he's explained the riddle in the parable. Don't you think? But, many who are first will be last and the last first tells the parable and then says, so, the last will be first and the first last.

Now, Christ's parables each have one main idea. This one, but the laborers in the vineyard, it is not about labor policy.

It's not about how we can work to get in heaven. We can't earn that, right? This parable shows us what? God is a master who gives his people more than they've earned and that doesn't sit well with some of us.

[21:17] Right? And Jesus is so wise here. Right? Not only does he answer Peter's question, he tells Peter what's in store, but he also answers Peter's attitude. Right?

He's countering that subtle, maybe boastful attitude we saw when he asked the question. You know, well, what about us? You know, we've left everyone. We've left everything. We're following you. How about that, Jesus? Right?

The workers who seem to want a special prominence don't get it. Right? And I think that's because that the blessed reward this master gives, Jesus has already told us, is to reign with him and to receive a hundredfold and to inherit eternal life.

is there a greater reward to give? What do you want? Right? To reign with Christ forever and a donut?

To receive a hundredfold of homes and brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers and children and lands and a new toy. like, what do you want extra?

[22:31] To inherit life eternal and something else? Something better? What else compares?

What something else do you want that is not yours already in Christ? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Romans 8. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 1. What can we add? What else is there to want? So, if I have this attitude of expecting God to reward me more than someone else, I've massively underappreciated.

The reward that's coming to those who trust in Christ. And so we, along with Peter, ask, will there be an anchor cadet in heaven?

[23:51] And Jesus answers, who's counting what no eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.

1 Corinthians 2. So friends, let's not be like Peter. Don't focus on other people by way of comparison. Right?

Certainly, pay attention to your brothers and sisters in Christ and pray for them. Bear their burdens, even correct them. Pay attention to them, but not in order to compare. Because in the renewal, there's no point in comparison.

And because we're actually terrible at comparing, aren't we? I found that when I compare myself to others, right, first I'm playing God.

And I'm not very good at it. When we compare ourselves to others and figure, hey, this is what I deserve. And that's what they deserve. Right? I'm assuming that I see both of us objectively.

[25:00] And I, you know, we are normally each the worst judge of ourselves. It's really hard to see myself objectively. Right? I'm also assuming that I see both of us completely.

That I have all the facts to make such a judgment. But friends, when we think that we deserve more than others, it's probably because we have too high an impression of our own good works or because we have too small an idea of our own sin because we don't yet see the glimmer of the hope that's in store for us.

Right? The differences that we see between us, the things that we see as large as far as like how great I am versus how not great that other person is, those things are very tiny in God's eyes. and our sin that seems very small in our own eyes, God sees that as huge. Right? So what if I'm a little better than you in my eyes and even in your eyes?

Right? We both stand at the bottom of a mile deep pit called sin and damnation. And I'm proud of myself for standing just a little bit higher than you because I'm standing on a pebble.

[26:24] The blessing is that he's getting us out of the mile deep pit. That he overcomes the infinite guilt of our sin. That's the blessing.

It overshadows all else. Right? We've moved from counting money one bill at a time and moved to counting our riches by weight. Who cares if I have one extra bill?

Or you do. Will we even notice? When it comes to earning more in God's eyes than the next guy, if someone like me could distinguish myself before God, right?

If I'm all it takes for God to take notice and say, wow, look at this guy. Let's roll out the red carpet. What a lame God.

Right? God who made, and I looked this up, right? The current estimate is that the universe is 46.5 billion light years, light years across.

[27:35] The God who made that should not be impressed with me. So if I can impress God, my God is too small. God is good.

But let's just say for a moment, a moment, what if in a completely objective analysis, you are twice as good as me?

Right? You've sinned half as much, you've done twice as many good deeds, you're twice as generous, and you're twice as good looking. Most of you have me beat on that.

If you're twice as good as me, maybe I've added one to my case, and you've doubled it, you've added two to your case.

Math-minded friends, what is the difference between infinity plus one and infinity plus two? Nothing.

[28:35] If we add our merit, everything we've ever earned, not to mention the fact that what we've actually earned is a negative account, if we take everything we've ever earned and add that to the infinite reward offered by God in reigning with Him, the hundredfold blessing, in inheriting eternal life, the difference between you and me is indistinguishable.

Because you can't get better than the blood of Jesus. And he's saying this not to diminish what he's already said about rewards of grace that God will add to us, in reflection of our service to Him, solely out of His grace.

In chapter 10, he said, the one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones, even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

Right? There will be some form of recompense in the new world based on our obedience, but this is key. What Jesus is saying in the parable is that those rewards of grace won't even move the needle because the meter is already pegged out.

They're infinity plus one, infinity plus two. They won't make me or you any more prominent. We're going to be indistinguishable from each other.

[30:07] They all get rounded off to a nice, even every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, Ephesians 1. Nice and even.

So all at once, Jesus is saying the reward is bigger than you can imagine, to sit and reign with Christ, to receive a hundredfold and to inherit life eternally.

The reward is bigger than you can imagine, therefore there's no use comparing. And that's kind of the answer, right, to the enigma here.

The first will be last, that riddle. The reward is so great that it eliminates our notions of greatness.

One preacher put it this way, the phrase doesn't mean the order is inverted, right, just think about it, what inversion actually happens?

The first don't become last in a prominent sense or a reward sense, the first become last just in order of chronology, they just go through the line first, right, that's the only inversion that happens in the parable. That phrase doesn't mean that the order is inverted, he said, what it means in this context is that the order doesn't mean a thing at all, just put it away.

[31:28] And so friends, is it worth it? Back to Peter's question, is it worth it, this whole Christian thing? Friends, do you want something so great that it cannot be made greater?

The gift that can't be improved? a treasure that you can't add to because it's already immeasurable?

Do you want infinite blessing? Then run to Jesus. He's having this conversation on his last leg of his earthly ministry.

He's literally on the road in chapters 19 and 20. And he's on his way to Jerusalem. He's going there to purchase this very gift that he's talking about for us.

Because we certainly can't earn limitless blessing ourselves. He's going to go and take the wages that we've earned, the outcome we deserve, the death penalty for our sins.

[32:46] He's going to pay that debt. And he's going to purchase for us something more. A hundredfold blessing. All we have in life and eternal life and to sit with him and to reign with him, to have a place and a part with him in his glory forever.

forever. What's on offer in this book isn't nirvana. It's not 70 virgins. It's unending, unfathomable glory seated and reigning with Christ himself.

if you've not yet received that gift, won't you please come talk with me? I would love to share about the cross where Jesus bought it for you and how you might receive it completely free because you can't earn it.

And if you have received that gift and have been indwelt by God the Spirit as a guarantee of that gift, as the down payment for it, first, won't you rejoice, right?

And won't you praise him for it? And will it be for you the end of comparison? And will it be for you the frame in which you look at your sorrows and your sufferings in light of infinite blessing?

[34:28] And won't you begin to make choices about your attitude and your goals and your words and your finances and your ministry involvement like this is actually true? Like you have an infinite treasure stored up, safe and sound, imperishable, everlasting, inexhaustible.

Will you? I'll leave you where the ladies concluded yesterday in their retreat with a reminder of that blessing and how it changes the way we think today.

He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen. O Lord our God we praise you the master who gives his people more than they've earned to sit with the reigning Christ himself blessings a hundredfold life eternal.

[36:17] Lord will you help us not to compare or count as if we could count that high. O steady Lord let us hope.

And Father for those who do not yet have this hope and brilliant expectation in Jesus Christ Lord will you draw them to run to Christ for immeasurable treasure.

We pray that in his name. Amen. Amen. Won't you stand on the table?