

Kingdom (Part 8) The Kingdom of Heaven is Like

3/30/2025

I recently watched a video in which a rather famous podcaster of Jewish faith was asked why he could not accept Jesus as the Messiah. His answer - because in all of the writings the Messiah had been portrayed and expected to be an earthy king like David. Jesus didn't do that, rather Jesus died on a cross at the hands of the Romans.

John's Gospel account opens with these words - *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness **comprehended** it not."*

The above translation is from the KJV and NKJV. The ESV uses the word **understand** and some others translations say **overcome**.

The Greek word that John uses here is katalambanō pronounced kat-al-am-ban'-o. It is defined as I seize, take tight hold of, overtake, comprehend, arrest, catch, capture, appropriate.

A few verses later in John 1:10-11 we read this - *"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own **received** him not."*

Received = paralambanō pronounced par-al-am-ban'-o. admit, acknowledge; I take with me. to receive near, i.e. associate with oneself (in any familiar or intimate act or relation); by analogy, to assume an office; figuratively, to learn.

In these few verses John makes the point that the Jews could not comprehend or understand or overcome the fact that their expectation of the Messiah was not met in Jesus. Jesus was not going to be an earthy king like King David had been, and therefore could not be the Christ.

All four gospel writers record the account of Jesus feeding the 5,000 but only John includes the following detail in his account. John 6:14-15 *"Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived **that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king**, he departed again into a mountain himself alone."*

Last week we looked at the parable of the unmerciful servant from Matthew 18. In that lesson we began in chapter 17 in an attempt to include the whole account recorded by Matthew from the time Jesus and his disciples had arrived in the city of Capernaum. In that lesson we found a common reoccurring theme or subject in each of the scenes there. That theme was 'stumbling'. A serious problem having dire consequences.

This morning we will be looking at another parable spoken by Jesus recorded in Matthew chapter 20. This one we may recognize as 'the parable of the workers in the field'.

The Jews, those of the nation Israel, had long awaited the Messiah that was to come from them. Scripture in a number of places speaks of those who would stumble over this Messiah. For example from Psalm 118:19-22 19 *"Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord: this gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter. I will*

praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.”

*And 1st Corinthians 1:18-24 “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a **stumblingblock**, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”*

Paul often pleaded with those of his nation to recognize this error and to accept Jesus as The Messiah. But again like the Jewish podcaster I spoke of earlier the Jews had invested so much time and effort in searching and preparing for The Messiah they could not accept Jesus on the cross as being that outcome. Nor could they accept that Gentiles should receive this salvation that they themselves had so long awaited and worked for. This 2nd point of waiting and working so long is found in today's parable.

Consider the following from Paul's letter to the Romans. This is a long section of Scripture, but bear with me, and hopefully we will see this point being made by Paul of which I have just spoken of. Note* I have included the passage references which Paul quotes from.

Romans 9:1> “I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” (Genesis 21:12) In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: “At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.” (Genesis 18:10,14) Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” (Genesis 25:23) Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” (Malachi 1:2-3) What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,

and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” (Exodus 33:19)

It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” (Exodus 9:16) Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?” But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” (Isaiah 29:16; 45:9) Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for

common use? What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea:

“I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people;
and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one,” (Hosea 2:23)

and,

“In the very place where it was said to them,

‘You are not my people,’

there they will be called ‘children of the living God.’” (Hosea 1:10)

Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

“Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea,
only the remnant will be saved.

For the Lord will carry out

his sentence on earth with speed and finality.” (Isaiah 10:22,23 (see Septuagint))

It is just as Isaiah said previously:

“Unless the Lord Almighty

had left us descendants,

we would have become like Sodom,

we would have been like Gomorrah.” (Isaiah 1:9)

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They **stumbled over the **stumbling** stone. As it is written:**

“See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to **stumble**

and a rock that makes them fall,

and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.” (Isaiah 8:14; 28:16)

I have included this chapter from Romans to remind us as Paul did those of his day that God has the sovereign right to all matters in His creation. That His offer of mercy to mankind as displayed to Israel time and time again throughout their history is just that Mercy and Grace - unmerited favor. In this chapter of Romans Paul cites several examples from Israel’s history to demonstrate both the intent and working out of God’s plan of salvation for mankind. Then Paul makes the point that despite all that God had done for Israel they stumbled over the very one through whom that salvation would come.

We often spend much time trying to figure out what a parable means and little time as to why Jesus would say what he does in the parable.

We begin today’s lesson on the parable of the workers in the field by observing the scene in which this parable is spoken. For this we turn to Matthew chapter 19.

This chapter opens stating with Jesus left the west side of the lake of Galilee where he had been speaking to large crowds like the ones in Capernaum (chapter 18). Jesus now arrives on the East side of the lake and begins to speak to crowds of people there. For this morning’s lesson we will begin in the middle of that teaching, beginning with verse 13 of Matthew chapter 19.

“Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.”

It is interesting that the disciples spoken of here should object to the little children coming to Jesus. Especially if these are the same disciples who had come with Jesus from the other side of the lake as recorded in Matthew 18. For there much was said about the kingdom and the little ones (children). In the scene depicted here in chapter 19:13-15 it sounds like Jesus simply stopped what he was doing in order to pray for these little ones and then proceeded with his message to the crowd. Jesus, the one who created the universe, stopped to take time to notice and care for the little ones. Demonstrating the care and concern for the little ones he had spoken of earlier.

Moving on - Matthew 19:16-22

“Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.” “Which ones?” he inquired. Jesus replied, ““You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.”” “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.”

Here we have an adult asking Jesus for something. What must I do to get eternal life? Notice the answer Jesus gives. It contains two parts 1. If you want to enter life 2. Keep the commandments. This is followed by some specific commands and confirmation by the individual that he has complied with those commands. But then he asks what do I lack. Paul in his writings goes to great lengths to show that the Law (Nomos) does not and cannot save mankind. Rather Paul describes the Law as being what makes us aware of the fact we do need to be saved. Perhaps this man realized what Paul was later to write of. In the end the cost to this individual was higher than he wanted to pay and therefore he refused the offer from Jesus and went away sad. He had worked but the price to be paid was too high.

This lead to the next conversation -

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

I think most of us when reading this account have our minds go to the passage in 1st Timothy 6:10

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (NIV)

The KJV says 'love of money is the root all evil' The Greek word used here for 'all' is 'pas'. It appears in Scripture over 1,200 times and is used or defined in a couple of ways. 1. All - as in every case. 2. All kinds - as in all kinds of situations.

Here in this account of Matthew the young rich man's 'money' his wealth is the issue. This is important to notice in consideration of the parable which Jesus is about to tell.

These statements by Jesus are followed by a response from Peter as follows -

"Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

It appears Peter has some questions. Is Peter asking a question about the impossibility of achieving the goal of salvation or is he asking what is at the end of the road for us as your disciples? As in treasure, payment or reward.

Notice Jesus gives an answer to both of these questions -

"Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."

There are two types of rewards spoken of here -

1. One hundred times as much as it cost you
2. You will inherit eternal life

Question - If love of money was truly the root of all evil as in 'all' cases why would Jesus reward people with 100 fold. It comes down to what we love or don't love more that is the issue here. Remember these words? *Peter do you love me more than these?* (John chapter 21)

Then Jesus says this -

"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. "About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. "He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' "Because no one has hired us," they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' "The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' "But he answered one of them, 'I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' ***"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."****

Just a quick note here - This is an example of where the dividing of God's Word into chapters and verses can cause us to miss an important point. Notice the **highlighted** words at the beginning and the end of the above parable. This is often referred to as bookending. Where a point is made, followed by an example of that point, and ending by repeating that point. The first sentence of this bookend appears in Matthew 19 and the rest is in Matthew 20.

What was important to the workers in this parable was the amount of pay they received for the time and effort they had put in. In a similar way this may be why Peter asked the question "*We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?*"

Many in Israel were expecting a literal earthly king in the Messiah. And generally with kingship come wealth. Just as in another case where the mother of the sons of Zebedee asked that her sons be put in a high position within the kingdom Jesus had spoken of.

Notice the answer Jesus gives Peter here in Matthew - you will be rewarded 100 fold for your work **and** eternal life. Which is more valuable 100 fold or eternal life?

Once again Paul's words from Romans - *What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They **stumbled** over the **stumbling** stone.*

Thus entrance into The Kingdom of God does not come through our effort (work), but rather through the working of God Grace and Mercy by sending His Son to die on a cross for the sins of the world.

May we respond appropriately -

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
(Ephesian 2:8-10)

We all are being called to be workers in God's field (vineyard) . And our pay is salvation, be it that we work a day or 100 years in the field. For it is by Grace that we have been called into the field. A field in which we can do the good works of our Heavenly Father. Being thankful to be a part in God's plan of salvation for mankind.

In Romans chapter 10 Paul continued to express his concern for those of his nation who had rejected Jesus as being The Messiah (Christ). In that chapter we find these words - *For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."*

Paul was willing to go into the field and work. In his letters Paul expressed in many ways and at various times that it was through God's Grace that he had been called. And this despite considering himself to be the chief of all sinners and the least among God's people.

Are you ready to answer God's calling for you?