

Lesson 7

Proper 20

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 20:1–16

This is another of the parables found only in Matthew's Gospel. It offers us a straightforward lesson, the point of which is not hard to determine and understand. It is helpful, however, to see it in context. During His interaction with the rich young man who wanted to know what he had to do to get eternal life (Matthew 9:16–30), Jesus had challenged him to change the whole focus of his life by giving his wealth to the poor and coming to follow Him. The young man had gone away sad, “for he had great possessions” (v. 22). Then Jesus had turned to His disciples to say, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (v. 24). And they had responded, “Who then can be saved?” (v. 25).

Jesus had given the needed direction to His disciples' thinking by responding to their question: “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” Peter then boldly—and honestly—said, “We have left everything and followed You. What then will we have?” Read Jesus' response in verses 28–30.

103. What privileged position did Jesus promise His apostles? How did He expand His assurances to include all of His followers?

Jesus ended His comments with a *mashal*, a pithy, cryptic statement intended for mulling over and chewing on. He repeated it at the end of this parable, so the parable surely is an expansion of what had preceded it.

A denarius was the usual pay for a day laborer, who usually worked from sunup to sundown, 6 a.m.–6 p.m., to earn his pay. Often his ability to feed his family for another day depended on his being hired. The point of Jesus' parable hinges on the landowner's hiring workers at various times during the day and then paying them all the same wage, a denarius.

104. What was Jesus teaching about the Kingdom with this parable? What would be a comparable situation in the life of the Church today?

105. What was Jesus warning against by having the landowner ask, “Do you begrudge my generosity?” (20:15).

106. In the light of the parable, interpret Jesus' *mashal* that "The last will be first, and the first last."

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 55:6–9

Isaiah 55 is the prophet's invitation to the thirsty—his call to the exiles to remember and take seriously the Lord's covenant and to enjoy the wonderful gifts of His grace "without money and without price" (v. 1). If they would, He assured them, "You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace" (v. 12). He wanted them to believe that their restoration to their homeland was assured by the Lord!

Isaiah encouraged decisive action with his "___ the LORD" and "___ upon Him."

107. What thought is added by "while He may be found" and "while He is near"? (See Psalm 145:18; 2 Corinthians 6:1–2.) What was to be a necessary part of their seeking the Lord and calling on Him? What assurance did Isaiah give to encourage the turnaround he called for?

108. What practical application did the Lord's declaration that His thoughts and ways are higher than theirs have for the people of Judah in exile?

109. When have circumstances in your life made God especially near and accessible to you?

110. What gives us assurance that God really is always near and accessible to us? (See Hebrews 10:19–23.)

111. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Philippians 1:12–14, 19–30

Paul wrote to his friends in Philippi while he was under house arrest in Rome, awaiting his first trial in Caesar's court. It is a letter of thanks for their latest gift to him, help with his expenses in

Rome. His letter is called “The Epistle of Joy”—the word *joy* occurring sixteen times in various forms.

Philippi was named after Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great. It became a prosperous Roman colony located on the Via Egnatia, the main highway between Rome and its eastern provinces. Many retired legionnaires had settled there because its status as a colony gave Roman citizenship to all residents. The congregation in Philippi was predominantly Gentile and cultivated a special relationship with Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

In his letter, Paul reported about his situation in Rome and about his expectations regarding continuing his apostolic mission. In fact, he told them that his house arrest had actually ____, and that the whole palace guard had come to know that his ____.

112. Within the Church, what had been the surprising result of Paul’s incarceration?

113. What part did Paul tell the Philippian Christians they played in his anticipation of deliverance and continued service? What was Paul’s main concern for himself as an apostle of Jesus during his incarceration and at his trial in Caesar’s court?

114. How is Paul’s attitude toward life and death an example for us to imitate? What convinced Paul that the Lord had more for him to do in his apostolic ministry?

115. How did Paul show his secure confidence in the love and esteem in which the Philippian Christians held him?

Paul’s only indicates his major concern. Paul was ready to leave his future in God’s hands. If it was not what he anticipated, he did not want his friends in Philippi to be dismayed, but to be strong in their faith and commitment to discipleship. Historians generally agree that Paul was acquitted and released and was able to carry out his planned mission to Spain—and probably was able to visit his friends in Philippi again. A few years later, he and Peter were caught in Nero’s persecution and martyred.

116. What are the key factors in a manner of life that is “worthy of the gospel of Christ”?

117. What did Paul say would be the effect on those threatening them when the Philippians would stand firm in the Gospel and not be frightened when they were put on the spot for their faith? What effect would it have on their fellow Christians? Is this double effect still felt today when Christians stand firm in the face of martyrdom?

118. What worldview strengthens Christians to be able to stand up and be counted in the critical moment?