

## Matthew 20A

- As we begin a new chapter in Matthew, we continue in a topic that I introduced last week: the rewards the Lord assigns to believers in the Kingdom
  - At the end of chapter 19 Peter hears Jesus say that wealth is not an assurance of the Kingdom and can make entry harder
    - But Peter assumed Jesus was repudiating wealth under any terms
    - And since Peter and the other men had left behind all their earthly wealth to follow Jesus, he gets worried
    - In v.27 Peter asks Jesus what will there be for him and the other apostles as reward for their sacrifices?
    - Peter imagined himself empty-handed at the start of the Kingdom and he was greatly concerned
  - So Jesus reassures him in v.28 that in the Kingdom they will receive many times more of what they have sacrificed in the present age
    - And by His answer, Jesus revealed there are types of reward assigned to believers in the Kingdom
    - First, in v.28 Jesus said believers will be rewarded with authority to rule over people and nations in the Kingdom
    - The Lord rules the earth as King and in His government there are positions of authority for believers to occupy
  - Jesus even reveals to the apostles that they will hold positions ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel in the Kingdom
    - Those are very senior government positions, and that hints at the criteria Jesus will use in assigning positions
    - We will come back to this topic in Matthew 25 where we get confirmation of this grading system
- Secondly, in v.29 Jesus says we will also be rewarded with material rewards

**Matt. 19:29 “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.**

- As we consult Mark's version of this same moment, we find a slightly different wording

**Mark 10:29** Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, **Mark 10:30** but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.

- Mark indicates that these material rewards will happen in the "present age" rather than in the Kingdom
- And in the present age, those rewards come in the context of the Church itself
- For example, following Jesus may mean leaving behind family who oppose your faith and even disown you for pursuing it
  - You may lose relationships with your parents or siblings Jesus says
  - In the west today, these sacrifices are not as common, but in first century Israel, a Jew who professed faith in Jesus lost everything
  - They were disowned by family, made pariah's in their own culture and eventually persecuted to death
- Even today in Israel or among conservative Jewish families, becoming Christian is taken very seriously and often divides families
  - And among some non-Jewish cultures, especially muslim and Hindu, believing in Jesus can involve real sacrifice and danger
  - So Jesus' words ring true in our day as they did in that day
- But Jesus says as we make those sacrifices for the sake of the Gospel, He will grants us new and better family relationships in place of what was lost
  - We will find a new spiritual family in the church, one that is eternal and bound together by the love of God
    - And those new relationships will take priority over the old ones, as Paul explains

[2Cor. 5:16](#) Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.

[2Cor. 5:17](#) Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

- After we come to faith, we are to give priority to the new relationship established by our faith in Jesus
  - Paul says the spiritual relationship we have with a person takes priority over any earthly relationship we may have with them
- So if you have a boss or family member or spouse who is a believer, then that Christian relationship is more important than the earthly one
  - Your boss is a brother or sister in the Lord before he or she is your supervisor
  - You obey and serve them well because of that spiritual relationship more so than because of the earthly relationship
- And that same priority applies for parents, siblings, and spouses
  - You believing family members are your brothers or sisters in the Lord *before* they are mother, father, sister, brother, husband, wife
  - Because the spiritual relationship will last into eternity while the earthly relationship ends at death
- So the family relationships we lose in the course of following Jesus will be replaced in the present age and into eternity by spiritual relationships
  - And likewise, Jesus says we may also lose farms, and if we do, we will receive new farms many times over *in the present age*
    - Now as we consider that statement, we face a dilemma
    - Because we know that believers today do not automatically lose farms as they join the Church, much less gain new farms
    - If that were true, we would certainly find it much easier to grow a church! Join our church and get your farm!
    - No, this is clearly not what Jesus meant
  - So what did Jesus mean when He said we may lose farms and receive many more farms in the present age?

- In that day, families typically lived together in small communities and worked the land together sharing in its production
- As sons grew up in the home, they eventually took wives and built additions onto the father's house
- In the course of time the father died, and his sons inherited the family estate
  - They then continued working the farmland and preserving it for the next generation
  - So that over generations, families would grow larger and as they gained more wealth, they might acquire more land
- So Jesus is using the term farm in that context to represent the family inheritance, the wealth a son enjoyed in serving the family
  - But what if that son was to be cut off from his family because of his faith in Jesus?
    - He then lost not only his parental and sibling relationships, as Jesus said, but he would lose his inheritance
    - He will lose the farm, so to speak, which meant losing everyone he owned
  - You may remember back in Matthew 8 when Jesus was confronted by a man reluctant to follow Him

**Matt. 8:21** Another of the disciples said to Him, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.”

**Matt. 8:22** But Jesus said to him, “Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead.”

- The man was asking for a delay to allow him time to receive his family inheritance before choosing to follow Jesus
- He didn't want to forfeit that wealth by leaving his family
- That was Peter's concern...he walked away from the family business, so now he wants assurance that he hasn't given it up for nothing
  - And Jesus responds by saying He will not only replace family relationships, He will also replace the lost inheritance
  - If you lose your earthly inheritance as a result of following Jesus, don't worry because Jesus has an even better one waiting

- The Bible says that as we come to faith in Jesus, we qualified by that faith to share in Christ's inheritance

**[Col. 1:12](#) giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.**

- That Father qualified us to share in Christ's inheritance by causing us to be born again into God's family
  - Because we are born again into Jesus' family, we are spiritually related to Jesus, we are His heirs and share in His inheritance
  - That's why Mark wrote we have these farms in the present age
  - Jesus meant we have received the promise of an inheritance now as a result of our faith
- Moreover, we have already received a portion of that inheritance even now

...in Him **[Eph. 1:11](#)** also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

**[Eph. 1:12](#)** to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

**[Eph. 1:13](#)** In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, **[Eph. 1:14](#)** who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

- Paul says we "have obtained" our inheritance, in the sense the it has already been assured to us
- And as proof of that, the Lord gave us a downpayment of that inheritance
- Our downpayment is the Holy Spirit, Who is our assurance that we have something waiting for us after death
- So the Lord has promised us and inheritance and has already given guys a downpayment of it in the form of the Holy Spirit
  - That future inheritance is worth many times more than whatever earthly inheritance you might have coming now
    - And if following Jesus cause you to leave that earthly inheritance behind...

- Or maybe it cause you to walk away from that big bonus or that investment opportunity or that richer retirement plan...
  - You have already received in this age the promise of a much better inheritance to come
- But we won't receive the fullness of the inheritance until we leave this age and enter the Kingdom
- Because like any inheritance, we can't possess what it promises until a death takes place...

**Heb. 9:15** For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

**Heb. 9:16** For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.

**Heb. 9:17** For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.

- Jesus died to establish a new covenant in His blood, and by His death, we received the promise of an eternal inheritance
  - And like Jesus, we can't receive what's promised by that inheritance until after we pass through death
  - That's why we call this inheritance our eternal rewards because we won't see until we reach the Kingdom
- So an eternal inheritance has been reserved for you, and you've already received a downpayment on it in the Holy Spirit
- In that sense you've already received many "farms" in the present age
  - Your inheritance is currently reserved for you in Heaven, and once you pass through death you will receive the balance of it

**1Pet. 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

**1Pet. 1:4** to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

- Meanwhile, you have opportunity to increase your reward in the Kingdom

- All believers will share some of the inheritance, a minimum share if you will
  - Remember in chapter 19 Jesus told Peter that all who receive eternal life will also receive an inheritance
  - So all believers will have something waiting in the Kingdom...we all have somewhere to live, something to possess and enjoy
- But some will receive a proportionally greater share than others as a reward for good service and sacrifice now

**Col. 3:23** Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, **Col. 3:24** knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

- And the parable we study to end today demonstrates that principle

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

**Matt. 20:2** “When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.

**Matt. 20:3** “And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place;

**Matt. 20:4** and to those he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ And so they went.

**Matt. 20:5** “Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing.

**Matt. 20:6** “And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day long?’

**Matt. 20:7** “They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’

**Matt. 20:8** “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.’

**Matt. 20:9** “When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius.

**Matt. 20:10** “When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.

**Matt. 20:11** “When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner,

**Matt. 20:12** saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.’

**Matt. 20:13** “But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?’

[Matt. 20:14](#) 'Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you.'

[Matt. 20:15](#) 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?'

[Matt. 20:16](#) "So the last shall be first, and the first last."

- Let's make some observations about the parable...we start with the comparison being made
  - Jesus says this is a parable about the Kingdom, so He's explaining an aspect of the reward system for the Kingdom
    - The story starts with a landowner who hires day-laborers to work in his field
    - Altogether he hires four different groups of workers, starting with the first group at about 6AM
  - For that first group, the landowner settles up front on a fixed amount, which was the minimum wage of the day
    - A day laborer in Jesus' time was typically paid one denarius, which was a bronze coin, for a full day of labor
    - To receive less than a denarius was being cheated, though it might be possible to earn more on occasion
  - Then later the landowner hires more workers at the third hour which would be 9:00 AM
    - Though part of the work day had already gone, still the landowner wants to get as much done as he can
    - But notice these workers are not told what they will earn for their labor
    - And this makes sense, since they are working less than a full day, therefore they couldn't expect to receive a full days' pay
    - They simply trust the man to pay them as he desires
  - And again at the sixth hour (noon) and the eleventh hour (5:00 PM) the landowner hires additional workers
    - And once again, there is no agreement for how much will be paid for their labors

- Hiring people so late in the day automatically limited how much work they could do, so naturally one might expect to be paid less
- Finally, when it came time to pay each worker, the landowner began by paying those who had come to the field last
  - Much to the surprise of the other groups of worker, the landowner pays the fourth group a full denarius
    - They worked less than 25% of a full day and yet they received a full day's wage
    - We don't hear what he pays the second and third groups, because they aren't important to the point of the parable
    - The emphasis in the parable is between those who came to the field first and those who came last
  - And when those who came into the field first saw how much the landowner paid those who came, last they made a wrong assumption
    - They assumed that if the fourth group earned a full denarius for working barely three hours, then they would get much more
    - After all, they worked four times longer in the field, so certainly they deserved four denarii or more!
  - But when it came time to receive their pay, the landowner paid them exactly what was customary for a day's labor: one denarius
    - And as they see this, they are disgruntled and accuse the landowner of dealing unfairly with them
    - To which he replies, I gave you exactly what I promised
    - And if I desire to do more for others, what business is that of you?
  - Notice the landowner also calls them out for being envious
    - They weren't seeking justice, for the landowner had not been unjust with them
    - They were being envious and greedy wanting for themselves what someone else had rightly received
- So now, let's understand what Jesus is teaching us about the Kingdom beginning with some basic questions

- First, why did the landowner pay the late workers so much? A denarius was the way for a full day of labor, so why did this landowner overpay?
  - It's not enough to say he was generous, because parables are grounded in real-life situations
  - The characters in parables always act in rationale ways, which is important to understanding and applying parables
- And it's not rationale for a successful businessman to pay more for labor than is required unless there is a good business reason to do so
  - Even a generous landowner wouldn't throw his money away
  - So we need to ask what rationale reason would a landowner have for overpaying his workers in this way?
- Think back to the arrangement this man made with these later workers
  - He didn't set the amount of their pay, and they knew they would work less than a full day
  - So they immediately realized they had better work harder than usual in the hope of gaining a full day's wage
  - They assumed that if they impressed the landowner, they could earn more
- That's the only rationale reason you pay a full day's pay for a partial day of labor
  - The men who worked only 3 hours accomplished nearly as much as those full day-laborers because they hoped for a better reward
  - And since this was a fair and generous landowner, he was willing to reward their extra effort
  - Meanwhile, the first group received the minimum wage they deserved and expected
- That's a picture of the material reward system in the Kingdom to come
  - Everyone receives a minimum share of the inheritance
    - In a sense, we could say that when you were saved, Jesus hired you to work in His field and guaranteed you a share of reward

- No matter when you entered service, whether early as a child or late in life as a senior citizen, you will receive a share
- No matter how hard you serve or what you make of your opportunities, you will receive a share
- Everyone will receive a minimum amount of the inheritance of the Kingdom...no one will be homeless or destitute
- So there is a minimum wage, so to speak, and there is also opportunity to earn more through greater service to Jesus
  - We can work harder than others, making the most of the time we have been given in Christ's field
  - And if we do so, we do it knowing we work for a generous Master Who is willing to reward that labor
  - Ultimately, all reward is a matter of God's grace, not something God owes us
  - But He makes it available according to our service to Him
- Notice at the end, Jesus repeats that the first shall be last and the last first
  - In the parable, the last group was rewarded proportionally greater than the first group
    - Yet that final group had only a very small window in which to serve
    - Because those in the last group served so well, they were rewarded first and proportionally greater than the first group
    - The landowner took their limited opportunity into account and rewarded them based on what they did with what they had
    - So in that sense, they were last in opportunity but first in effort and therefore first in reward
  - So, Jesus' reward system takes into account the amount of opportunity each believer has to serve Him and what we do with it
    - Those who make the most of their opportunity will be rewarded proportionally more than others
    - It's a system that is both generous and fair and it's intended to motivate our good service

- For example, I think we can all agree that Billy Graham worked hard for many years in service to Jesus
  - But he also had a lot of opportunity to make a major impact for the Kingdom
    - He lived for decades, he was a talent speaker, he had powerful friendships with world leaders, he preached to stadiums, etc.
    - So we might assume that his reward will be considerably greater than the minimum
    - But at the same time, we should expect a man in his position to make a big impact
  - But what about someone at the other end of the spectrum? Someone like the thief who hung on the cross next to Jesus
    - Let me remind you of what transpired between them

**Luke 23:39** One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”

**Luke 23:40** But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”

**Luke 23:41** “And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”

**Luke 23:42** And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”

**Luke 23:43** And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

- One thief was insulting Jesus even as that man was dying in the same way
- But the other thief was believing in Jesus, as evidenced by his request of Jesus to receive him into Jesus’ Kingdom
- But we know this man wasn’t believing when he first hung on that cross
  - Matthew reports that at the beginning of the crucifixion, both thieves were hurling abuse at Jesus
  - But at some point, one of these men had a change in heart, likely because of what he experienced in that moment
- So he was like those workers who entered the field at the eleventh hour

- He barely had any time to serve Jesus, and moreover he was nailed to a cross, so he couldn't go anywhere
- He knew he would die in a few hours at most, so we might assume he couldn't have received more than the minimum
- But the parable teaches that our reward will be based on what we did with the opportunity we received
  - And clearly this man received a far lessor opportunity than did someone like Billy Graham
    - So we should ask what did this man do with his opportunity? He did all that he could do...
    - He worshipped and glorified Jesus and he witnessed to the only unbeliever within reach
    - And unlike Billy Graham, the thief's story is recorded in the pages of Scripture, so clearly the Lord views his ministry as important
  - Obviously, I don't know how the Lord will reward either of these men
    - But I won't be surprised to discover they were equally rewarded
    - Billy Graham did many great things, but he had a lot of opportunity
    - The thief had only a brief moment of service, yet he too did a great thing with it
    - Each had to run the race set before him, and since both ran well, we assume both received their denarius
  - Similarly, we all have a share in the inheritance of the Kingdom, but we also have an opportunity to gain more by serving Jesus better
    - And service always involves sacrifice
    - Jesus will call us to sacrifice our time, talent and treasure to pursue a Kingdom agenda
- In another parable in Luke 16 Jesus explains the value of sacrifice now, and at the end of the parable, Jesus sums up His point this way

**Luke 16:9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings."**

**Luke 16:10** “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.

**Luke 16:11** “Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?

**Luke 16:12** “And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?

**Luke 16:13** “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

- In speaking about how we use our wealth while on the earth, Jesus says we ought to prioritize it for Kingdom purposes
  - We should make spiritual friends with our wealth, He says, so those friends will welcome us into heavenly dwellings
  - In simple terms, He means putting our resources to work now to bring people into the Kingdom and to build them up in the body
- And then when we enter the Kingdom, Jesus says those sacrifices will be remembered to our credit
  - Those we helped will welcome us into eternal dwellings, which is a reference to our Kingdom home and the rewards we receive
  - And then notice what Jesus says...He is watching to see how faithful we will be in the very little He’s given us here
  - And if we are faithful in the use of our resources now, then He knows we can be counted faithful with true Kingdom riches
- This is the Bible’s true prosperity teaching...
  - We all will share in Christ’s inheritance, and if we’re faithful in that which we’ve received here, we may receive an even greater reward
    - Christ is fair and generous, taking into account the degree of opportunity and rewarding us on that basis
    - Therefore, knowing we serve a kind and fair Master, we should make it our ambition to please Him
  - In the future, we will return to this topic in chapter 25 to learn about the other half of the reward system: our place in the government