

## Matthew 20B

- Last week's teaching began a discussion of how the Lord assigns us rewards in the Kingdom
  - We learned that every believer will receive a share of Christ's inheritance, referring to the eternal treasure of the Kingdom
    - That treasure may be land, homes, other possessions...wealth that we will use and enjoy for eternity
    - Every believer receives a share of that inheritance
  - But we also learned that we can earn a greater share based on how we use our time, talent and treasure here to serve Jesus
    - When Jesus evaluates our work at the Judgment seat of Christ, He will take into account our opportunities
    - He understands that each of us had a different starting point in life of service to Him
    - Some of us become Christians sooner, some live longer, some receive greater gifts & more resources, some have higher callings
  - So our reward will be based on what we did with the opportunities we received
    - Those with more opportunity are called to greater service while those who received less opportunity will naturally serve less
    - But the point is to run the race that God sets before you as well as you can and until you reach the end
  - Now, if you're like me, you think about this concept every day
    - You consider whether you've organized your life and your use of your time, talent and treasure to optimize your reward
    - And if so, that's good, because that's the reason Jesus placed this truth in the Bible for us to know
    - He wants to motivate us to live with eyes for eternity, knowing there is a far greater life waiting for us in the Kingdom
    - And He incentivizes us to do what's necessary now to make the most of the time He's given us

- From there, Matthew returns briefly to a recurring theme from earlier chapters: Jesus' prediction of His death in Jerusalem
  - Nevertheless, we haven't left the topic of reward behind entirely, as you will see as we move forward in the chapter today

**[Matt. 20:17](#)** As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them,

**[Matt. 20:18](#)** "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death,

**[Matt. 20:19](#)** and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up."

- Let's remember where Jesus is at this point...earlier He traveled south from Capernaum eventually reaching an area east of the Jordan river
  - He stopped in Perea, a territory controlled by Herod Antipas, and while he was there, He taught on marriage and on serving children
    - Then He addressed the rewards of the Kingdom, and now Jesus is on the move again toward Jerusalem
    - This will be Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem, because His final Passover is quickly approaching
  - And it's for that reason Jesus has been repeatedly telling His disciples what will happen when they reach Jerusalem
    - And now for the third time, Jesus gives His most detailed explanation yet
    - Jesus says when He reaches Jerusalem, He will be taken into custody by the religious leaders
    - He will be tried, convicted, sentenced to death, tortured by Gentiles (meaning the Romans)
    - And then He will die and finally resurrect after three days in the grave
  - Jesus has said essentially the same thing twice before, but here He spells it out plainly and in complete detail
    - Still, like the two earlier times, the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was saying

- The problem was they didn't realize their generation of Israel had already lost the opportunity to receive the Kingdom
- They couldn't appreciate that the kingdom wasn't going to appear in their lifetimes
- They were expecting the exact opposite...they expected the Kingdom to appear any day
- And all the recent teaching on the Kingdom, including Jesus' recent teaching on Kingdom rewards, had only increased their anticipation
  - And now He's moving steadily toward Jerusalem and there's a growing anticipation that something was going to happen
    - So in their minds, Jesus was only a few days or weeks away from setting up the Kingdom
    - They're like children excited as the end of the school year approached and summer vacation was right around the corner
    - And as we'll see later, crowds will gather to welcome Him as King when He enters the city, laying palm branches before Him
  - But Jesus continues to remind the apostles that the Kingdom isn't coming right now, at least not in the way they expected
    - Jesus is going to Jerusalem to die, not to rule
    - And He's explains this to them here in so much detail so they will understand that this plan was Plan A for God
    - Genesis 3:15 foretold the death of the Messiah, as did other prophecies in Isaiah and the Psalms and elsewhere
    - So Jesus was entering Jerusalem willingly to die on a cross as had been planned from the beginning
  - But once more, Jesus' words do not make sense to these men
    - How is it that they could hear these things and not at least understand them enough to ask follow up questions?
    - In fact they are so ignorant that even after Jesus' death they do not put the puzzle together
    - They are devastated after the cross, and they believe their movement has failed and they are lost

- But at that time, the Holy Spirit will bring Jesus' words back to mind
  - And as they consider what they heard in that earlier day, it will all begin to make sense to them
  - And this was exactly what the Lord wanted
- If we look at Luke's account of this same moment, we read this:

**Luke 18:34 But the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.**

- Luke tells us that as Jesus spoke these words to the men, the meaning of Jesus' statement was hidden from them
  - Specifically, the Lord chose not to overcome their ignorance in that moment but to leave them in the dark
  - He could have brought them understanding in that moment, but this wasn't the right time
- So why tell them something yet not allow them to understand it in the moment?
  - Because any understanding of these things at that time would have been useless to them and even counterproductive
  - If they had understood what was about to happen, they probably wouldn't have gone with Jesus into the city
  - They might have even tried to stop Jesus or to stop Judas when he leaves to betray Christ
- Jesus wanted them to be there with Him so they could experience all that happened without interfering in it
  - But then He alerts them to these things in advance so that later He can bring that knowledge back to their minds
  - And in that moment of recall, they can finally make sense of God's plans
- Luke describes the moment when the Lord finally lowers the scales from their eyes and allows them to understand

[Luke 24:36](#) While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you."

[Luke 24:37](#) But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit.

[Luke 24:38](#) And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

[Luke 24:39](#) "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

[Luke 24:40](#) And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.

[Luke 24:41](#) While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

[Luke 24:42](#) They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish;

[Luke 24:43](#) and He took it and ate it before them.

[Luke 24:44](#) Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

[Luke 24:45](#) Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

- Only after the Lord open their minds to understand the Scriptures could they understand what He had been telling them
- Meanwhile, they remain in the dark, and perhaps the best proof of that ignorance is found in the next scene in Matthew's Gospel

[Matt. 20:20](#) Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him.

[Matt. 20:21](#) And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left."

[Matt. 20:22](#) But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able."

[Matt. 20:23](#) He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father."

[Matt. 20:24](#) And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers.

- Two of Jesus' apostles were James and John, and their father was a man named Zebedee

- This James is not to be confused with James, the half-brother of Jesus, who also wrote the eponymous New Testament epistle
  - And John, of course, is the apostle who wrote the Gospel of John and the three epistles of John and the book of Revelation
  - Their mother is present with them at this time, and we know from the Gospels that their mother was Salome
  - Salome was related to Mary, which means James and John were cousins of Jesus, humanly speaking
- So Salome bows before Jesus and requests He command that her two sons sit on either side of Jesus in the Kingdom
  - In this context, to sit on the left and right refers specifically to positions of authority in the government
  - A ruler traditionally assumed a seated position when holding court
- And the ruler's most trusted advisors would stand very close, one on either side so the ruler could seek their counsel quickly
  - The most honored position was to the right hand and the second most trusted position is to the left
  - So this woman is asking that her sons be awarded the highest positions in Christ's government in the Kingdom
- Now it would be easy to criticize Salome's brazen effort to advance her sons' religious careers
  - There is a stereotype of Jewish mothers in that regard, pushing their sons to accomplish great things
    - There was a Jewish mother pushing her twin boys in a baby carriage one day when she encountered a friend on her walk
    - The friend asked her what were the names of the two babies
    - And the mother replied, this is Solomon the lawyer, and this is Eli the doctor
  - But every parent can identify with the desire to see their children succeed, and typically we do anything we can to help them
    - So Salome should not be blamed in this situation

- Salome is a devoted disciple of Jesus herself, accompanying Jesus in His travels, just as we see here
- Later, Salome will be one of a handful of women who remain with Jesus throughout His entire ordeal on the cross
- And she accompanies the two Marys who bring spices back to the tomb and discover it empty
- So we can't question her sacrifice and devotion to Jesus...and moreover, we can't blame her for initiating this request either
  - Because we learn from Mark's account that the sons themselves were the ones who actually initiated this request
  - It was their idea to ask Jesus for this honor, but they had their mother put the question to Jesus to hide their arrogance
- Now where did they get the idea they should ask for this honor? Because Jesus just taught them that the Kingdom will feature two kinds of rewards
  - We learned last week about the material rewards of the inheritance, but Jesus also mentioned receiving positions in Christ's government

**Matt. 19:28** And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

- He told them that His government in the Kingdom will have positions that His disciples may occupy
- This is the second half of the reward system that will exist in the Kingdom
- Apparently, when these men heard about this reward, James and John thought they saw an opportunity to climb the ladder
  - They figured that if they asked Jesus for this privilege before their peers thought to do so, they might get a step up on them
  - And as they put this question before Jesus, can you imagine the looks on the faces of the other disciples?
- Well, we don't have to work very hard to imagine the scene, because Matthew tells us exactly how they responded
  - In v.24 we're told the other disciples were indignant

- Indignation is anger at what is perceived as unfair treatment
- So these disciples were angry at the idea that their two friends would throw them under the chariot
  - I must imagine that the one most indignant at that time would have been Peter, who Jesus had already said would be the Rock
  - So the other guys resented their power play and saw it for what it was: a shameless attempt to take honor for themselves
  - So no doubt they were watching to see what Jesus would say in response
- And in response, Jesus first teaches them what the true criteria will be for assigning the reward of authority in the Kingdom (and it's not who asks first)
  - In v.22 Jesus tells them they do not know what they are asking
- Jesus is saying two things
  - First, these men did not understand what criteria will be used to assign positions of honor in the Kingdom
    - Because if they had understood the criteria for receiving authority they never would have been asking this question
    - Their request and the heart behind it, actually disqualified them from such a reward
  - Secondly, if they had understood the criteria for receiving honor in the Kingdom, they probably wouldn't be seeking for the top positions
    - Which is why in v.22 Jesus goes on to ask them if they were able to drink the cup that Jesus was about to drink?
    - Of course Jesus was referring to His death on the cross, which was the moment Jesus received the wrath of God in our place
  - The Bible speaks of God's wrath as something that is stored up, held in cups or bowls to be poured out at an appointed time
    - So drinking the cup refers to receiving God's wrath for sin, and this is a very difficult thing to do
    - In fact, Jesus Himself asks the Father to remove that cup from Him when He prays to the Father the night before He dies

- After Jesus asks these men can you receive this same cup, they quickly – and ignorantly – answer yes
  - Now this wasn't a trick question, because just a moment earlier Jesus explained in detail what He would soon experience
  - He was now asking them if they were prepared to do the same, and they say they are, so Jesus confirms it will be the case
- They would share in His cup, meaning these men would know persecutions and suffering just as Jesus did
  - In James' case, he was the first of the apostles to die for the faith
  - While John was the longest living apostle, which meant he suffered in a different way by enduring persecution the longest
- But even though they would know persecution, nevertheless Jesus says in v.23 that He could not promise them those high positions
  - Jesus says that decision is reserved for the Father alone, Who has prepared places of honor for specific people in the Kingdom
    - So why did Jesus tell them they would share in His sufferings if He couldn't guarantee them the reward they requested?
    - Because the criteria for receiving honor is not whether we experiencing suffering but whether we have a heart to accept it
    - And right now these men were missing that heart...but in time their sufferings would show whether they had gained it
  - This is the criteria for assigning the reward of honor in the Kingdom government...do we have a heart like Jesus to do as Jesus did?
    - In the case of material rewards, we obtain greater reward by giving Jesus greater service and sacrifice now
    - But for the reward of greater honor, we will receive a greater place in the government by being more like Jesus now
    - Or said another way, our material reward will be determined by what we *do for Christ*
    - But our position of authority in the Kingdom will be determined by who we *become in Christ*

- And Jesus sums up what it means to become like Christ by pointing the disciples to His example

[Matt. 20:25](#) But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.

[Matt. 20:26](#) “It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant,

[Matt. 20:27](#) and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave;

[Matt. 20:28](#) just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

- In explaining how to qualify for honor, Jesus starts with a negative example to serve as a contrast
- The world sees honor and authority in the opposite way that leads to Kingdom honor
- The rulers of Gentiles see positions of authority as opportunity to lord over their subjects
  - To lord over someone means to take full advantage of your authority and power to serve yourself at the expense of those under you
    - The rich and powerful of our society all think this way
    - And in fact the main appeal of power is its ability to allow us to do what we want and to have what we want
    - And it’s the way Roman Caesars and virtually all leaders of that day operated, the great men of the Gentiles, as Jesus calls them
  - But lording wasn’t limited to Caesars...it was also the way of the Pharisees and other religious leaders of Jesus’ day
    - They lorded over the people of Israel too, using their power and influence to enrich themselves at the expense of the people
    - It’s what we see today among religious elites and powerful false religious institutions
    - And it’s also the way the world sees honor, and sadly it was the way Jesus’ disciples were also thinking
- But Jesus says that is *not* the way to receive authority and honor in the Kingdom, nor is it the way honor is found today in the Church

- Let's ask ourselves who among us do we honor? Who in the church do we hold up as a great person in our midst?
  - What kind of person deserves to have everyone else take note of them as they enter a room?
  - Who should receive our admiring glances and our words of praise? Who should draw a crowd and an invitation to lunch?
  - Who should we model ourselves after and who we admire the most?
  - The elders? The pastor? The wealthiest among us? The most attractive among us? The smartest among us?
- No, Jesus says, but rather the one who is the greatest servant in this body, the one who seeks to serve others before his or herself
  - It's the one who wants you to be lifted up, the person who makes sure you have the best seat and the best parking space
  - The person who notices you need a comforting word or a quiet prayer
  - The person who say they will clean up so you can go home early, the person who offers to do that chore so you can relax
  - Do we even know who that person is in this body?
- The greatest among us is the one who acts the most like Jesus in this regard
  - Specifically, in v.27 Jesus says we honor the one who has made his or her goal serving others
  - And they do so not for the sake of receiving attention or even reward but simply because that's what Jesus did for them
- And the ultimate example of Jesus serving others was His willingness to drink that cup of wrath, to lay His life down for us
  - Jesus says in v.28 that Jesus did not come to earth to be served, and yet that is exactly what He could have expected
    - For if there was ever anyone Who could rightly deserve to lord over us, it would be Jesus, the Lord of lords and King of kings

- But Jesus chose humility and obedience over power and privilege
- He came to ransom His life for others, which is the ultimate form of service, the ultimate slavery, to lay your life down for another

[Phil. 2:3](#) Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

[Phil. 2:4](#) do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

[Phil. 2:5](#) Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

[Phil. 2:6](#) who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

[Phil. 2:7](#) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

[Phil. 2:8](#) Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

[Phil. 2:9](#) For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

[Phil. 2:10](#) so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

[Phil. 2:11](#) and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- Paul says we should do nothing out of selfishness or conceit, which means thinking ourselves and our desires more important than others in the body
  - And don't look out for your interests merely or only, but also consider the interests of others in what you do, how you act, what you say
    - And the standard or mark we should strive to meet is the example set by Christ
    - He existed in the form of God, and you can't get more powerful, more honored, more important than that
    - Jesus was literally at the top of the ladder, the highest point in the Universe's Organizational chart
  - But He set all that aside, leaving the right hand of the Father, giving up His equality with God for a time, being made in the likeness of man

- Then He moves further, humbling Himself to accept an incredibly painful death He didn't deserve to suffer
- So Jesus moved from a place of supreme and unequalled honor to the lowest place a human being can occupy
- He became a slave of everyone and everything to reconcile us to the Father
- To the question, "What would Jesus do?" there is only one answer: become a slave
- And what was the result of that humility? Paul says that as a result of what Jesus did in becoming our slave, so to speak, He was exalted
  - He was given the highest name, meaning He will be granted the most supreme position of honor among all God's Creation
  - No one will possess more power in the Kingdom, no one will possess more fame, no one will possess more wealth
  - Every single living being who has ever lived will recognize His authority and honor Him for Who He is in a day to come
- That's the formula, that's our model...the one who is most humble now will be most exalted later
  - And humility isn't merely an act of sacrifice...it's a heart that wants to see others raised up and works to make that possible
  - When we truly see ourselves as a servant, we are truly content to see others honored now
  - Because we know we will receive our honor in the Kingdom like Christ
  - In the words of John the Baptist: I must decrease so that He may increase
- And why did the Father choose this criteria for awarding positions of honor in the Kingdom?
  - Because it advances the goal of the Kingdom program: it glorifies the Lord as we serve others in His name
    - Those who serve others in humility are also those who gain the most spiritual maturity, who are the most sanctified

- And those who are the most sanctified, exhibit the most godliness in their lives and reflect the most glory upon Christ

[2Tim. 2:19](#) Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."

[2Tim. 2:20](#) Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor.

[2Tim. 2:21](#) Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

- We're called to be humble and to be a servant like Christ, to become a vessel of honor, sanctified and useful to the Master
  - And in the meantime, they will also be the ones who do the most good works now working to sanctify others in the body of Christ
  - And when you serve others by teaching or praying or feeding or healing others, you are also helping them obey Christ better
  - You strengthen them for service, and you set a good example, which may inspire them to do the same
- So it makes sense that the criteria for receiving honor in the Kingdom should be based on who is the most Christ-like now
  - Those who pursue spiritual maturity and purity are those who prove themselves best prepared to rule with Jesus
  - And those who demonstrate they have a heart like Jesus will be those best qualified to represent Him in the Kingdom
- And conversely, when we act like the world and like these two brothers, we tear down the work of Christ in the hearts of other people
  - Remember how the other disciples felt when they saw this power grab taking place...they were indignant
    - That's how other believers feel when they see us trying to make ourselves more important or more privileged than they are
    - Especially if we are attempting to make more of ourselves than is truly deserved

- We are undermining our own sanctification, and we are inspiring discord, jealousy and divisions within the body
  - Jesus says recognition and honor in this church must always be based on who serves the most in humility
  - And if we seek to lord over others or to elevate ourselves at the expense of others should be corrected in love
- The standard for seeking honor is exactly the same as for seeking wealth: make sacrifices now to receive your reward in the Kingdom
  - We use our resources now to serve Jesus sacrificially trusting that we will be rewarded with greater things in the Kingdom to come
  - And we seek to serve others now, without claims to privilege and honor, knowing that service now will lead to honor in the Kingdom