

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