

The Journey to Jerusalem

by John F. Walvoord

John F. Walvoord's sermon explores the themes of God's sovereignty, the nature of true service, and the significance of Jesus' journey to the cross.

Scripture: Genesis 3:15, Matthew 16:21, Matthew 17:22, Matthew 20:15, Matthew 20:28, Matthew 20:34, Mark 10:32, Mark 10:35, Luke 18:34

Topics: "Gods Sovereignty", "Servanthood"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the Parable of the Householder and the Laborers, emphasizing God's sovereignty in rewarding individuals according to His own judgment, regardless of the length of their toil or work performed. He highlights the illustration as a reminder that while some rewards are temporal, the full reward awaits in heaven. Walvoord also delves into Jesus' prediction of His death and resurrection, underscoring the accuracy of His foretelling and the disciples' struggle to fully comprehend the impending events. Furthermore, he explores the incident of the mother of James and John seeking positions of power for her sons, revealing the disciples' ongoing struggle with earthly ambitions and Jesus' redirection towards servanthood in His kingdom.

Transcript

Parable of the Householder and the Laborers, 20:1-16

In amplification of His answers to Peter's question in 19:27, "What shall we have, therefore?" Christ used an illustration, found only in Matthew, of a wealthy man who owned a vineyard. There does not seem to be any significance to selection of the vineyard, except that it was a common feature of life in Israel. In seeking laborers to work in his vineyard, the owner promised them the usual daily wage of a "penny," the Greek denarius, worth about sixteen cents and the normal daily pay for a laborer or a Roman soldier. Later in the day, seeing others idle in the marketplace, he invited them to join his laborers. Apparently, no specific agreement was made as to how much they would receive, except that he would do "whatever is right." Later he found others in the sixth and ninth hour, referring at noon and 3:00 p.m. Finally, at the eleventh hour, or 5:00 p.m., he found still others whom he invited to enter the vineyard to work.

At nightfall, the laborers came for their hire, and to each he gave the same wage. This caused complaint on the part of those who had labored all day, and they said "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day." But the owner of the vineyard replied, "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that

thine is, and go thy way; I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (vv. 13-15).

Complicated explanations of the spiritual meaning of this illustration are not wanting. Melancthon, for instance, made the denarius represent temporal blessings and what is called "good" (v. 15) refer to life eternal, or eternal blessings.⁹⁹ A simple explanation is better. By this illustration, Christ makes clear that God is sovereign. He may not reward according to length of toil or even according to the work performed, but according to "whatever is right" (vv. 4, 7). He chooses those for reward according to His own judgment. Some of the rewards are temporal, but the implication is that the full reward awaits the end of the day, reward in heaven.

Jesus' Death and Resurrection Again Predicted, 20:17-19

All of Jesus' ministry in Perea was relentlessly taking Him closer to the cross. Soon now they would be crossing the Jordan, passing through Jericho, below sea level, and then up the steep winding road to Jerusalem, about 2,550 feet above sea level. As they were walking the hot desert road to Jericho, Christ took occasion to separate His twelve disciples from the multitude and remind them that at the end of the road, there was a cross (cf. Mk 10:32-34; Lk 18:31-34). How cheap was the goal of reward symbolized by the denarius in comparison to what Jesus Himself was going to experience.

This was not the first time that Jesus had mentioned His death and resurrection to the disciples (cf. Mt 12:38-42; 16:21-28; 17:22-23). It, of course, had been announced as early as Genesis 3:15 that Satan would "bruise his heel." The shadow of the cross hung over Christ from the time He was born. He had clearly announced this to the disciples in Matthew 16:21-23, when Peter had attempted to rebuke Him. He had mentioned it again in Matthew 17:22-23, following the transfiguration. Now as they were moving closer and closer to Jerusalem, He said to His disciples, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again." As Morgan points out, Jesus gave accurately the details of His coming death and resurrection, and there is no question about His certainty of it.¹⁰⁰ Morgan states, "There is utmost accuracy in the details, and a calm, quiet knowledge of the actual things before Him."¹⁰¹

Interestingly--although in Matthew 16 Peter rebuked Jesus, and in 17:23 it states, "They were exceeding sorry"-- here, as far as Matthew's record is concerned, they were silent. Mark 10:32-34 indicates that before He gave them this prediction, the disciples were "amazed" and "afraid." According to Luke 18:34, the disciples "understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken." Putting these passages together, it seems that the disciples had a foreboding that the trip to Jerusalem was dangerous, but they could not bring themselves to believe literally what Jesus was saying.

Request of the Mother of James and John, 20:20-24

The unwillingness of the disciples to face the reality of Christ's suffering and death is illustrated in the next incident, in which the mother of James and John, the wife of Zebedee, came to Jesus seeking favors for her sons (cf. Mk 10:35-41). When she bowed before Him, Christ asked her, "What wilt thou?" Her request was abrupt and to the point, "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom" (Mt 20:21). Her ambition was the same as that of the disciples, recorded in Matthew 18:1-14, and the question of Peter in 19:27. Here, their desire for power and position emerges

again in the petition of this ambitious mother. Perhaps she can be excused partially in desiring her sons to have a prominent place in serving the Lord, but it was a request relating to ambitions of earth rather than to the glory of God.

Jesus dealt with her gently. He replied, "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Here, as also recorded in the parallel account in Mark 10:35-41, James and John broke in and answered, "We are able." How little they knew what they were saying. Jesus replied sorrowfully to them, "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with" (Mt 20:23). Early in the ministry of the church, James was to lay down his life as a martyr. Although the evidence is not complete, John may also have died a martyr's death as did some of the other disciples. Although they were to die in one sense as Jesus died, even this did not justify granting their mother's petition. Jesus completed the answer, "But to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father."

The other disciples were furious at this attempt to secure preference for these two. They apparently concluded that James and John had influenced their mother to make this request. As Criswell points out, "The fact that the other disciples were angered at James and John shows that they were in heart and spirit no better than the two brothers... They all wanted the first place,"¹⁰² Both James and John as well as the other ten disciples were far from giving up their attempts to gain the place of power in the kingdom, and their scheming continued, even to the time of the Last Supper in the upper room. How frail and faulty are the human instruments that God must use to accomplish His purposes!

Jesus Comments on Their Ambitions, 20:25-28

Using this incident as an occasion for further discussion of the disciples' ambition to be great, Jesus pointed out some obvious lessons. He acknowledged that in worldly kingdoms, places of power with great authority are sought. But He declared that in the kingdom of heaven, it shall be different, "But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister: And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Mt 20:26-27). The goal in the kingdom is not to rule but to serve. Jesus used His own ministry as an illustration, "Even as the Son of man came not to be to ministered unto, but to minister, to give his life a ransom for many" (v. 28). The road to privileged authority is often paved with lowly service.

Healing of Two Blind Men, 20:30-34

In the journey to Jerusalem, a great multitude had followed them from Jericho. As the company moved along, they encountered two blind men sitting beside the road. When they heard that it was Jesus who passed by, mindful of the stories that they had heard of His healing power, they cried out, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David" (20:31). Rebuked by the multitude, they only cried the more, repeating their request.

Hearing their petition, Jesus stood still, and calling them to Him, He asked, "What will ye that I shall do unto you?" It was a most dramatic situation, as the crowd thronged about, wondering what would happen. The blind man answered simply, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." Jesus, having compassion on them, touched their eyes; they immediately received their sight and followed Christ. The incident, as recorded in Matthew with parallel accounts in Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-43, is significant as emphasizing the title "Son of David," which was to be prominent in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The account of Mark 10 differs from Matthew's account, in that it mentions only one blind man who is named, "blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus," and adds considerable detail to the conversation between them. That Mark omits reference to the second blind man is no serious problem. Luke's gospel represents it as being "nigh" or "near" Jericho, as if they were about to enter Jericho. The variations in these accounts have given rise to the allegation that the Scriptures are in error in some of the details.

Most of the problems dissolve when it is realized that there were two Jerichos: the Old Testament Jericho and the new city, which Herod the Great had built. It may be that Jesus was between the two cities when the miracle took place.

Lenski offers another solution. The order of events, according to Lenski, includes Jesus' having passed through the city (Lk 19:1) without finding lodging. After meeting Zacchaeus, Jesus and His disciples then went back into Jericho and spent the night in his house. On this return to Jericho, the blind men were healed. This permits all the accounts to harmonize.¹⁰³

The problem is not in the details that are given but the details which are omitted. If the full story were told, all of the gospel accounts would undoubtedly be found accurate. As it is, each account adds something to the others. Most significant is the fact that those who sought Jesus earnestly received the demonstration of His miraculous power.

99 Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, p. 767.

100 G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, pp. 244-45.

101 Ibid.

102 W. A. Criswell, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 117.

103 Lenski, p. 796.

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