

All That Jesus Taught Bible Study - Part 61

by Zac Poonen

Jesus teaches that true service to Him is motivated by a desire to please and honor Him, rather than by a desire for personal reward or recognition.

Duration: 24:57

Scripture: Matthew 19:24

Topics: "Humility And Service", "Kingdom Of Heaven"

Description

This sermon delves into the teachings of Jesus in Matthew, emphasizing the difficulty for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven due to pride and the importance of humility. It explores the concept of serving without seeking rewards, highlighting the parable of the laborers in the vineyard to illustrate the principle of humility and selfless service. Jesus addresses the disciples' desire for positions of honor, emphasizing the need for a servant's heart and humility, following His example of sacrificial service.

Transcript

We continue our study today in all that Jesus taught, which is the last verse of the Gospel of Matthew, which he told us to practice and teach to people in all nations. And we need to look at a number of things in the Gospels to see what it is that Jesus taught by his words, his actions, and also by the circumstances into which he led his disciples to teach them some lessons. And we've come now to Matthew chapter 19.

There are certain things that we need to emphasize more than others. That's why certain things are repeated in the Gospels, in four Gospels, which means we need to hear it again and again again. So let's turn to Matthew chapter 19 in verse 23.

Jesus said in relation to the rich young ruler who had turned away, saying he couldn't give up all his possessions, Jesus said to his disciples, Matthew 19 23, Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. And by wealth we could refer to material wealth, intellectual wealth, wealth of beauty or position, so many things can make us rich in ourselves and riches within ourselves usually tend to make us proud. Pride makes us big like a camel.

And that's why in the next verse he said, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Why is it difficult for a camel to go through the eye of a needle? Because he's so big. A small amoeba would run in and out of an eye of a needle feeling it's a big 20-foot wide door because it's small.

There's a lot of difference between a camel and an amoeba. And it's smallness that enables us to enter into God's kingdom. When we have high thoughts about ourselves, which is very common among all the children of Adam, it's impossible to enter into God's kingdom because God resists the proud.

God gives grace to the humble. We can say that God gets behind the humble and pushes them forward. And God gets in front of the proud and pushes them backwards.

And that's the reason they can't get into God's kingdom. And that is what any type of wealth tends to make us, to proud because we compare ourselves with others who are not as wealthy as us materially or intellectually or position-wise or anything or beauty-wise. And that self-exaltation comparing ourselves with others hinders us from entering God's kingdom.

And when the disciples heard this they said, how in the world can anybody be saved? Because many of us are rich in something or the other. I mean the disciples could think that they were rich in fishing ability, some of them. And then Jesus looked at them and said, yeah that's right, with men this is impossible.

But with God all things are possible. God can take that huge camel and reduce it to the size of an amoeba that he runs through the eye of a needle. So even though we are so big in our own eyes because of various abilities we have, God can do a miracle and reduce us to such smallness that the narrow gate looks very wide to us and easy to go through.

So it all depends on how much we are willing to let God break us and humble us and make us small in our own eyes. This is the answer. This is the way to find salvation, to enter through the narrow gate, and also this is the way to walk along the narrow way.

You see the way is so narrow that a camel would find it difficult to even walk on it, whereas amoeba could run along at full speed. So it depends on how small we are if we want to continue. There are people who sometimes initially come through the narrow gate because they are willing to humble themselves and be small and acknowledge they're sinners and they're nothing etc.

But after a while you find after a few years that God has blessed them and it's gone well with them and their family, they suddenly get puffed up. Their heads become big. So we have to remain small if we want to continue along the narrow way.

And then Peter answered and said to Jesus, Matthew 19 27, look at us, we're different from this rich young ruler. We've left everything and followed you. What will be there for us? In other words, what are we going to get as a reward? Now Jesus gave two answers to that and we need to understand both answers.

First of all he said, truly I say to you, you have followed me one day in the regeneration, the new kingdom, in that final heaven and earth. The Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne. In the millennial kingdom you shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And everyone that applies even to us today who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, or children or farms for my name's sake, will receive many times as much and will inherit eternal life. So this is the answer to Peter's question as to what we're going to get. But he continues to say, I want to say one more thing before I conclude that.

He says to Peter, many who are first will be the last in that day and the last will be first. It's true, you know, that if you've given up brothers, sisters, and children and farm for my name's sake, God himself will give

you many hundreds of other brothers and sisters in many parts of the world, brothers and sisters in Christ. So we're not going to lose out that way and we'll inherit eternal life which is worth more than anything we have ever given up.

So that's the answer. But he also says, I want to say one more thing, Peter, and I want you to listen to this carefully, that many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first in the final day. So how is it that there's going to be this difference that many who are first here is going to be last in that day, many who are last here will be first? And Jesus explained that in this chapter division here is very unfortunate, but Matthew 20 is really a continuation of the answer that Jesus was giving to Peter and explaining the second part of his answer which is that many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first.

And he uses a parable to explain that. He says the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who rented out, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. He wanted people to work in his vineyard and when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, the work started at six o'clock in the morning, and he agreed, he made an agreement with the laborers saying I'll give you one denarius which is a laborer's wage for one day and he sent them into the vineyard.

About nine o'clock in the morning, which is called the third hour, verse 3, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace and to those he said you two go into the vineyard, whatever is right I will give you. That means again he promised them some payment. In the first case he promised them an exact payment, in the second case also he promised them a payment.

I will give you whatever is right and they knew what a laborer's wage is for a day and so they went. And the third and then in the sixth hour a third group went and at three o'clock in the afternoon another group went. So we see altogether four groups and it says he did the same thing, which means all four agreed to work for a wage.

That's the important thing to notice here. All four agreed to work if they were paid for their work, otherwise they may not have gone to work in the vineyard. They did this, he said the same thing.

Then at the eleventh hour, which is five o'clock in the evening, just one hour more for work, he went out and found some other standing and said why you've been standing here all day doing nothing. He said well nobody hired us and he told them go into the vineyard with no promise of reward. That's the important thing you need to distinguish between these people and the first four groups of people.

The first four all went to work for pay and for reward. This group went with a promise of nothing. They just went to work.

That's very important to notice that because this is what makes the difference finally. This is how the last become first, the first become last. And when the evening had come, six o'clock in the evening, work was over, the owner said call the laborers and pay them their wages and start with the last group to the first.

And when they hired, those who were hired at the eleventh hour came, they were surprised that they got a full day's wages. In other words, they got twelve times what they deserved. One denarius was the wage for twelve hours of work and they worked only for one hour and they got a full day's wages.

And when those hired and when those who were hired first who came at six o'clock in the morning, they thought wow this man is very kind. We'll get twelve denarii if this man gave one denarii to people who work for one hour. But when they came, they also received one denarius each.

And they grumbled and they went to the landowner and said these last men worked only one hour. You see, comparison. All problems come when we compare ourselves with others and wonder why God has done something for them that he's not done for me.

Here's where the problem arose. They went and checked up. How much did these guys get? Oh, they got one denarius too.

And you have made them equal to us. Here's the other problem. Whenever we are upset that God makes somebody equal to us, then we have a problem.

We have been here born the burden and the heat of the day. We are senior workers. We see a lot of that in Christian churches today.

People who think they are senior workers and therefore deserve greater honor and respect and reward than those who came later. But he answered and said to one of them, friend I'm doing you no wrong. When I called you at six o'clock in the morning, didn't you agree to come for one denarius? Well, I've given you one denarius.

I didn't cheat you. Take what is yours and go your way. If I decide to give the last man as much as that to you, what's that to you? I don't have the right to give my money to anyone I like.

Are you envious? Because I'm generous. Thus Jesus explained, the last will be first and the first will be last. So what is the point of this? Who is going to be first in the final day? Those who served without hope of reward, who did not serve for pay, who did not serve the Lord for what benefit they could get from serving the Lord.

There are two categories of people serving the Lord today around the world. Those who work because they get paid for it, they want some honor, they want some position or perhaps a reward in heaven. And then there are others who say Lord we will serve you even if we get nothing out of it.

We're not here to get, if somebody gives us a gift, that's fine. But if you don't get a gift, we struggle with poverty and even if we starve, we'll serve you. These are two completely different categories of people.

One who served because of what they can get from it. For example, even those who are told by preachers, if you give a tithe to God, God will bless you and you'll prosper in your work or God will reward you a hundred times or something like that. Such people are doing business with God and you can't do business with God.

And they give tithes expecting a return. What is that? That is doing business with God and such will be lost. Whereas those who say Lord I don't want anything in return, you've already done enough for me on Calvary, why should I expect anything more than that? I want to just serve you and spend my whole life showing my gratitude to you for service.

The other, like the people who came in the 11th hour, served without any hope of anything. And that was Jesus' second answer to Peter who said, Lord what will we get for what we did? So there is a very important principle here that all of us, not only those who are full-time Christian workers, but all of us who are born-again Christians, you need to ask yourself, do you expect the Lord to do something for you because of what you've done for him? Sometimes we expect the Lord to bless us in some way and answer our prayers because we have served the Lord faithfully. The best way to serve the Lord is to

expect nothing and we will never have a problem then.

We'll never have a complaint against the Lord or any such thing like many Christians have. Do you have a, when you come to the Lord, do you inwardly think, well I've served the Lord faithfully for so many years, surely the Lord will do this for me. Well, in that case, you're coming to the Lord not in Jesus' name, but in your name, meaning you're not coming in the merit of Jesus Christ, but in your own merit because you have served the Lord for 40 years and therefore God should do something for you.

And that's why your Christian life remains so shallow. If you want a rich Christian experience, come to the Lord expecting nothing and say, Lord what I deserve is hell. That's what I really deserve, but you give me everything better than hell that you've given me is what I don't deserve, so I don't ask for anything more.

Those are the happiest Christians on the face of the earth and it's because people don't come with this attitude that many Christians are absolutely miserable. So that's the lesson we can learn from this parable. This is all that Jesus taught in this area and that we need to understand.

We move on to the next verse, which is Matthew 20 and verse 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, behold we are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes.

Right from chapter 16 onwards, where he spoke about the church for the first time. Immediately he spoke about the cross for the first time. It's very significant that he spoke about the church and his going to the cross and disciples having to take up the cross for the first time in connection with building the church.

After that we find him repeatedly mentioning this and again over here that the chief priests and scribes will condemn him to death, deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify and the third day he'll be raised up. Imagine when hearing such a word about the suffering, the mocking, the scourging, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. One would expect that his disciples would be in such sorrow and grief, but we see the mother of the sons of Zebedee, James and John, seeking her own and coming up and bowing down and talking nothing about the crucifixion, but saying can you please put my two sons, one on your right hand and one on your left, in the final day.

It's a complete rejection and lack of understanding of what the parable with Jesus just spoke. Jesus said you should not serve for reward, not even in heaven, not even seeking for the reward of sitting on my right hand on my left hand there, but she just didn't understand it. Another gospel says that James and John went and asked Jesus for it, so it was not just the mother.

The mother and James and John went to Christ and said we want to sit on your right hand left hand. Had they understood what he just spoke about not serving for reward? No. James and John were some of the finest of Jesus' disciples.

They were part of the inner three with whom Jesus was constantly working and in fellowship with and even they had this attitude. You know why? They had not yet been filled with the Holy Spirit. They loved the Lord.

They'd given up their jobs to serve him. They were willing to trust him for their needs. I'm sure they lived much more simply than when they were fishermen and they were willing to sacrifice all that, but yet there was this desire for honor and I've seen that in many Christian workers who've given up their jobs and are willing to sacrifice so much for the Lord and go through many hardships, but deep down is a desire for

honor and position in Christendom and there you can see that's what destroys them.

All these things are warnings for us. Jesus is trying to teach us through example in Scripture. Beware of this attitude of seeking a reward for your service.

The reward could be honor on earth or in heaven or financial reward or any type of reward for our service for him. It should never be the motive for our service. We must serve the Lord because we are grateful for all that he's done for us.

It's like if a man's given you billions of rupees and he asks you to do a little service for him, would you ask him for payment? Think of some man who was so generous that he cleared a billion rupees of your debt one day and one day he asks you to do some small thing for him and you go and ask him for payment. You'd be ashamed of doing that. He's already spent a billion rupees clearing your debt.

Why do you need payment for that small work that you did for him? And that is how we must look at our service for the Lord. He's cleared so much of our debt. Are you expecting a reward now? You want honor? You want position? You want to be an elder? You want to be a leader? You want honor in the church? Honor in heaven? Shame on us, anyone who feels like that.

And Jesus said to this woman, you don't know what you're asking. I've just spoken to you about the suffering I'm going through, about the way of the cross. Are you able to drink the cup? He asked James and John now because they were also involved in it.

Are you able to drink the cup that I'm able to drink? Are you willing to go through this way of the cross? And they boldly said, we are able. And they were quite arrogant to say that. They didn't realize that without the power of the Holy Spirit it'd be impossible.

But they said, yes, we are able because they wanted those positions of honor. And then Jesus replied to them, look at his humility. Yeah, maybe you will drink my cup, but to sit on my right hand on my left is not mine to give.

Oh, I'm amazed at the humility of Jesus. He says, I'm sorry, folks, I can't give it to you. I see the gentleness there of Jesus in not rebuking them, saying, hey, you fellas are so covetous, you're greedy, you want to push other people out and sit on those thrones.

No, he's so gracious and says it's not mine to give, but it is for those for whom the Father has prepared it. And I know whom the Father has prepared those two seats for. The Bible says in Philippians 2 that Jesus humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death on a cross.

And therefore, that is the reason why God has given him a name which is above every name. That is the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, Philippians 2 and verse 8, 9 and 10. How did he get to that throne? Because he humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross.

So who will be sitting on his right hand and left hand in glory? It will be those who have humbled themselves to the maximum in these years of human history. I don't know who they are. It could be some poor widow from Africa, for all you know, unknown.

It's not necessarily some great apostle. It's those who have humbled themselves to the most in their earthly life. And God, who's not partial, will exalt them.

It's a principle. God exalts those who are humble. And so those are the ones who are going to be closest to Jesus in eternity.

And that should be the reward we should long for, closeness to Christ, not to sit with authority over people. And when the other ten heard this, verse 24, it says, they were very indignant and angry with the two brothers. Why was that? Not because they were any more spiritual, but because they were disturbed that these two got in ahead of them asking for those seats.

They wanted those seats themselves. Because even at the Last Supper, you see, they were discussing who's going to be the greatest. And after Jesus died, everything changed when they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

You see, remember, these apostles, though they were very dedicated, very sacrificial, full of love for Jesus, willing to lay down their lives for him, they were not spiritual. And it can be like that with people today who are willing to sacrifice so many things for Christ. Many people think, I've given up my job.

I'm willing to sacrifice this. I'm going through so much hardship. That does not mean you're a spiritual person.

If deep down in your heart you're seeking a reward, you're among those who'll be lost in the final day. This is all continuing on from the parable, who will be first and who will be last. Those who are seeking for some position and honor, now or in eternity, will be lost.

And then Jesus speaks to them. He called them to himself and said, I want to teach you fellas something. Verse 25, you know the rulers of the Gentiles, they lord it over others.

And for them, the great men are those who exercise authority over others and sit on thrones. But it must never be like that among you. But whoever wishes to become great, let him be a servant.

This is greatness in the kingdom of God, to be a servant, to have the attitude of a servant. And whoever wants to be first, learn to be a slave to others. And just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

He's saying, I'm not just preaching this to you. Look at my example. I didn't come here on earth to get position.

I already had position in heaven. I gave it all up. He says, that's the spirit you must have.

It's an absolute shame for a person to call himself a representative of Jesus Christ on this earth and to seek for position when we say we are following a master who gave up the greatest position in the universe, being equal to the Father in eternity, to come down and become a man and be our servant. So may God help us to learn this lesson so that we can follow in our Savior's footsteps. We'll continue our study in the next episode.

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