



Rembrandt, Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, 1637, oil on panel, 31 x 42 cm, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

# MATTHEW 19–20; MARK 10; LUKE 18

COMMITMENT TO THE KINGDOM

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LYNNE HILTON WILSON

## Jesus Leaves Galilee

**Mt 19:1 (Mk 10:1).** “*when Jesus had finished these sayings.*” The Gospel of Matthew uses this phrase repeatedly to identify a change in location and topic.<sup>1</sup> Jesus and His disciples now go to the east side of the Jordan River and begin to head south to Jerusalem. This is similar to Lk 9:51 (except Luke’s Gospel mentions crossing the Jordan River) and Jn 10:40 (which has Jesus near Bethabara for His last six months). The word the KJV translates as “coasts” (*horia*) is often translated “region” and means “the boundaries of a place, hence: districts, territory.”<sup>2</sup>

## Prayer and Humility

Luke alone includes these two parables in which Jesus teaches the need for prayer and humility in discipleship. The parables fall just after an eschatological prophesy, as if they are instructions on preparing with prayer for the last days.

### *Parable of the widow and unjust judge—Lk 18:1–8*

**Lk 18:1.** “**pray, and not to faint.**” This is also translated “not give up” (NIV), “always to pray and not lose heart” (ESV), and “pray at all times and they should not grow weary” (AB). Discipleship requires us to have constant hopeful prayer in place of discouragement.

**Lk 18:3 (ESV).** “**a widow . . . saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’**” This parable (similar to Lk 11:5) teaches the value of continual prayers to God. The widow pleads for help to “avenge” (repeated four times in 18:3, 5, 7, 8). As the widow seeks relentlessly for legal protection from the judge, her complaints become annoying, and so the judge addresses her needs as soon as he can.

**Lk 18:7.** “**elect, which cry day and night unto him.**” Jesus defines the elect as those who pray day and night to God. The image of the nagging widow with selfish demands is not the role model for Jesus’s disciples—the imagery only goes so far. But elsewhere Jesus teaches that He wants praying disciples who seek God’s direction to serve Him better. Especially in the context of the calamities of the last days, disciples need to connect with God through prayer to keep their faith tethered to Him.

**Lk 18:8.** “**when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?**” I like to answer the questions Jesus asks in scripture as if I were there with Him. I hope our answer to this question is an emphatic yes. The JST addition promises that the Lord will avenge the Saints’ persecution. But remuneration is promised only in the long term, not the short term.

### *Parable of the praying Pharisee and publican—Lk 18:9–14*

**Lk 18:9 (NIV).** “**confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else.**” Jesus chooses another story to teach His self-righteous audience who “trust in themselves.” In this section, Jesus repeatedly highlights this theme, denouncing those who pridefully think they are better than others.

**Lk 18:10.** “**Two men went up into the temple to pray.**” The two men represent opposites in this society. As mentioned in earlier weeks, Pharisees made up the largest group among the Jews (numbering six thousand) at the time and were honored for keeping the commandments with exactness. According to Josephus, they held “the most accurate interpreters of the laws.”<sup>3</sup> They believed in the Law, Prophets, Writings, and oral laws. They emphasized purity through following the rites of the oral laws, paying tithes of money and food, and strictly observing the Sabbath.<sup>4</sup> Publicans, on the other hand, were generally despised because they worked for the Romans in collecting taxes.<sup>5</sup> The New Testament often categorizes publicans with sinners.<sup>6</sup>

**Lk 18:11.** *“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself.”* The Pharisee prays not to communicate with God but to aggrandize himself, which is seen in his posture. Contrast the stance and prayer of the two men—one stands while the other smites his breast, a sign of sorrow and compunction, and looks down. The Pharisee’s contempt for the rest of humanity is evidence of his lack of charity. The publican’s humility, on the other hand, won’t even allow him to look up to heaven.

**Lk 18:12.** *“I fast twice in the week.”* Some Jews at that time fasted on Mondays and Thursdays to honor the memory of Moses ascending Mount Sinai on a Thursday and coming down on a Monday.

**Lk 18:14.** *“every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”* Again we see the Lord turning the social order upside down. His main point is that the humble will be exalted. Similarly, He preached that the least will be the greatest (Lk 13:30).

**Mt 19:2 (JST; also Mk 10:1).** *“great multitudes followed him; and many believed on him, and he healed them.”* The JST precedes mention of Jesus healing the crowd with an important observation: that many believed. Healings make up the vast majority (75 percent) of Jesus’s miracles recorded in the New Testament. Of all the miracles that God could have used as a sign of the coming Messiah, healing the blind, lame, possessed, and dead, inside and out, was the sign primarily prophesied in the Old Testament. The New Testament miracles reflect Jesus’s compassion and love, and they teach that His healing is more than a physical healing; it makes us whole. Mark’s parallel account is similar, but rather than describe the healing, Mark focuses on Jesus’s teaching.

## **Marriage and Divorce—Mt 19:3–12; Mk 10:2–12; Lk 16:18**

**Mt 19:3 (NIV; also Mk 10:2).** *“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”* A group of Pharisees in the crowd want to continue to test Jesus’s teachings. They have been mad that Jesus shamelessly disregards the ten thousand oral laws that the Pharisees added since the Babylonian exile. This time the Pharisees question Him on the hot topics of marriage and divorce. People held very strong and differing opinions on the topics across the Jewish and Roman world. A few examples of these opinions were covered in my comments on Mt 5:31, but I will add a little to that discussion here.

The average Roman had four or five divorces.<sup>7</sup> It appears that number was lower in Jewish families living in the late second temple period (AD 20–70). Yet Jewish husbands could obtain a divorce merely by writing a “bill of divorcement” that included a date, a signature, and witnesses.<sup>8</sup> Arranged marriages were rarely based on love. The ideal situation was to arrange a girl’s marriage before she turned twelve and a half.<sup>9</sup> The father’s task of arranging marriages was complicated by familial, financial, and political motivations. Given the young age at the time of marriage, the culture of gender segregation, and the social hierarchy that put women and children on the same level as servants and slaves, it is unsurprising that many marriages did not last.<sup>10</sup>

The right to divorce was given entirely to husbands. A popular Jewish writer who was widely admired in the time of the New Testament wrote, “The wife who does not make her husband happy [is evil].”<sup>11</sup> Further, “an evil wife is a plague to her husband. What is the remedy? Let him drive her from his house [i.e., divorce her], and he shall be healed from the plague of her.”<sup>12</sup> He continued by labeling as wicked any woman who socialized outside of her home or contradicted her husband. Elsewhere he wrote, “I would rather dwell with a lion and a dragon than dwell with an evil wife.”<sup>13</sup> If a woman “speaks inside her house so that her neighbors hear her voice,” she was labeled a scolding woman, which was cause for divorce.<sup>14</sup> The constant cultural threat of divorce suffocated many marriages.

**Mt 19:4 (BSB).** “*Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator.*” Jesus addresses the cultural baggage by going back to the scriptures, denouncing the stifling practices of temporary marriage and explaining the higher law of marriage given in Eden.

**Mk 10:6.** “*from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.*” The eternal significance of gender and marriage has become a priority again for living prophets (see also Jac 2:7–35).

**Mt 19:6 (BSB).** “*what God has joined together, let man not separate.*” The desire to become unified is a lifelong goal for married couples. At the time of Christ, very few—if any—understood the principle of marriage lasting for time let alone for eternity.

**Mt 19:7 (Mk 10:4; Lk 16:18).** “*Why did Moses then command . . . divorcement, and to put her away?*” The law of Moses encouraged marriage and discouraged divorce (Mal 2:16). Nevertheless, divorce was an option if one broke the law of chastity (see Deu 22:13–29; 24:1–4). But Moses’s law became shackled over time with hundreds of oral laws based on Satan’s lies. The culture at the time of Jesus included arranged marriages and a segregated lifestyle. Generally speaking, the lack of communication and respect destroyed mutuality in marriage.<sup>15</sup> Jesus’s audience needed a dramatic paradigm shift to understand the value of marital relationships.

In the higher law of marriage, Jesus called disciples to avoid divorce unless immorality was involved. Later Paul added one more justification for divorce in marriages with unbelievers (1 Cor 7:10–17). Modern prophets have also added, “No one is expected to endure abusive behavior.”<sup>16</sup> Jesus restored the commandment given in the Garden of Eden: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife” (Gen 2:24). Throughout His mission, Jesus called for more love, reconciliation, patience, communication, understanding, and forgiveness. He demonstrated how to honor and respect one another.

**Mt 19:11–12 (JST).** “*All men cannot receive this saying; it is not for them save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men.*” These verses appear only in the Gospel of Matthew. They receive a lot of discussion because they can be interpreted very differently. The verses can be read to support celibacy in certain situations (that is, for “eunuchs”). Celibacy was practiced in the ancient world by some, including certain Essenes, who saw it as a higher law of purity. These two verses may reflect those thoughts. Some disregard them as a later editorial addition. On the

other extreme, some interpret them as encouraging castration for the kingdom of God. This later view seems to contradict what Jesus taught in Mt 19:4 about the importance of man and woman becoming one flesh and that God created them in the beginning.

Fortunately, the Prophet Joseph Smith restored the importance of marriage in God's plan of happiness. D&C 49:15 addresses this very issue: "Whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man" (see also D&C 131:2 and the heading to D&C 70). Other prophets have taught that God created the earth for the spirit children of heavenly parents to receive bodies.<sup>17</sup>

### **Jesus Blesses Children—Mt 19:13–15; Mk 10:13–16; Lk 18:15–17**

**Mt 19:13 (Mk 10:13; Lk 18:15).** *"unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them."* The Lord's disciples were initially so entrenched in their culture that they were not accustomed to having infants around. In Lk 18:15, the word "children," *brephē*, refers to babies (NASB). Ancient Jewish culture rarely welcomed children in public, and children were to be kept quiet and out of sight. Even in wealthy homes, children were often segregated, kept away from adults and public life.

Jesus did not live by these segregating restrictions for children (or anyone). He refused to isolate them and treated them as valued individuals. Earlier He allowed children to join the group of five thousand and later the group of four thousand who gathered to hear Him teach in Galilee (Mt 14:21; 15:38).

**Lk 18:16 (Mt 19:13; Mk 10:14).** *"forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of God."* Jesus's response turned the social hierarchy upside down by honoring children—who were often categorized as servants and called young slaves (*paidion, pais*).<sup>18</sup> In ancient Jewish culture, children waited like servants on their fathers (washed their faces and feet, helped them dress, eat), but Jesus acknowledged them as citizens in the celestial realms. Shortly before this scene in Mark's Gospel, Jesus gently embraced a child, and "when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me" (Mk 9:36–37; Lk 9:48). His message and tenderness become our example to follow.

**Lk 18:17 (RSV; also Mt 19:14; Mk 10:15).** *"whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."* How do little children receive the kingdom of God? Luke uses the word for babies, so perhaps Jesus is speaking to the fact that children, because of their innocence, are covered by His Atonement. Children also exhibit great faith, meekness, and love.

### **Earthly Riches**

*Jesus teaches a rich young ruler—Mt 19:16–22; Mk 10:17–27; Lk 18:18–27*

**Mk 10:17 (Lk 18:18; Mt 19:16).** *"Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"* This is the second time this question is asked in Luke's Gospel (10:25–37 and 18:18–17), but Jesus's

answers are customized to the needs of the individual. His answer here reminds me of the similar counsel given in response to questions asked by new members of the Church in D&C 4, 6, 11, 12, 14, and so forth.

**Mt 19:17 (Mk 10:18; Lk 18:19).** “*there is none good but one.*” Throughout His ministry, Jesus tears down the rank and pride of the upper class. In a world where masters were highly respected, He wanted everyone to be respected regardless of expensive dress, special seats, fancy foods, and social status.<sup>19</sup> Jesus never sought acclaim and even denounced the title “good” when it was applied to Him.

**Mk 10:19 (RSV; also Mt 19:18–19; Lk 18:20).** “*You know the commandments.*” In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus quotes the fifth through ninth commandments from the Decalogue (each Synoptic Gospel quotes a slightly different list). Even in the Old Testament, the list of the Ten Commandments is written differently in different places (compare Ex 21:10; Deu 24:14).

**Mt 19:20 (Mk 10:20; Lk 18:21).** “*what lack I yet?*” The rich young man is also obedient and reports his lifelong efforts to live the law of Moses. He is still open to learning more. He acts as if he is willing to sacrifice more and thus asks the second question—is there more I need to do to gain eternal life?

**Mk 10:21.** “*Then Jesus beholding him loved him.*” Mark alone adds this touching addition, allowing us to visualize what it would have been like to watch the Lord’s eyes fill with admiration and love as He examined the young man’s heart.

**Mt 19:21 (Mk 10:21, Lk 18:22).** “*If thou wilt be perfect.*” The idea of becoming perfect is, in Greek, only an extension of the word *teleios*, “having reached its end, i.e. complete, by ext. perfect.”<sup>20</sup> The young man lacks a generous heart and an understanding of which riches matter in heaven, so Jesus asks him to consecrate his goods. (This is an example of how we can live the law of consecration without a Church-wide mandate.) Interestingly, in the Sermon on the Mount the last thing Jesus taught before His charge to be perfect was to live the law of consecration.

**Mt 19:22 (Mk 10:22; Lk 18:23).** “*sorrowful.*” The Greek here is also translated as “grieved,” “his countenance fell,” “being struck sad,” and “shocked.”<sup>21</sup> Our choice is between caring for money and wealth and caring for the things of God. We may not recognize wealth as a problem now, but if it is used for selfish purposes we may be in the same situation as the rich young ruler. President Harold B. Lee recounted the atrocities and trials that the early Saints underwent (for example, starvation, murder) and then added, “We are the inheritors of what they gave us. But what are we doing with it? Today we are basking in the lap of luxury . . . as never before. . . . It would seem that probably this is the most severe test of any we’ve ever had in the history of this church.”<sup>22</sup> He made this statement in the early 1970s! Many in our generation tend to live the law of consumption more than the law of consecration.

*Jesus teaches on riches and discipleship—Mt 19:23–30; Mk 10:23–31; Lk 18:24–30*  
**Mk 10:23 (BSB; also Mt 19:23; Lk 18:24).** “*How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.*” Jesus has already taught why it might be hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God when He holds up children as examples of those who will enter it. Wealth often breeds pride, a false sense of

self-sufficiency, and an attitude of domineering power. Each of these is antithetical to how Jesus led. He meekly submitted to the will of His Father, regularly going out to the wilderness to pray alone and serving those in need all day long.

**Mt 19:24 (Mk 10:25; Lk 18:25).** *“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.”* Jesus’s hyperbole was likely intended to startle the audience. The Greek text could be literally translated “through the aperture of a sewing needle.” Camels were often associated with merchants in the ancient world.<sup>23</sup>

A nineteenth-century minister named a narrow gate in Jerusalem the Eye of the Needle after this parable because a camel could not enter through unless its bags were unloaded. Some have mistakenly thought this gate preceded New Testament times, but it did not appear until nearly one millennium later. Jesus’s proverb is just another funny and exaggerated image used to teach a principle.

**Mt 19:25 (Mk 10:26; Lk 18:26).** *“Who then can be saved?”* The listening disciples now feel that it is impossible to get into heaven. But Jesus has already taught that they need to be willing to live the law of consecration. Zion can be built only on that principle.<sup>24</sup> We find stories of wealthy, righteous prophets in the Old Testament (for example, Job, Abraham, Isaiah), suggesting that if we selflessly serve the Lord with all our heart, wealth does not need to be a barrier to entering the kingdom of heaven.

**Mt 19:26 (JST; also Mk 10:27; Lk 18:27).** *“Jesus beheld **their thoughts**.”* Salvation is a gift from God, and only through Him are all things possible. The JST adds to this verse and its parallels in the other Synoptics (additions in italics):

Mt 19:26	Mk 10:27	Lk 18:27
With men this is impossible; but <i>if they will forsake all things for my sake</i> , with God <i>whatsoever things I speak</i> are possible.	With men <i>that trust in riches</i> , it is impossible, but not <i>impossible with men who trust in God and leave all for my sake</i> , for with <i>such</i> all <i>these</i> things are possible.	<i>Unto them, It is impossible for them who trust in riches, to enter into the kingdom of God; but he who forsaketh the things which are of this world, it is possible with God that he should enter in.</i>

**Lk 18:28 (NIV; also Mt 19:27; Mk 10:28).** *“We have left all we had to follow you.”* Peter again is the spokesperson for the Twelve. He comes across as earnest and relatable.

**Mt 19:28 (JST).** *“in the **resurrection**, . . . ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones.”* Jesus promises the Apostles a rich reward for their sacrifices. The JST changes the KJV “regeneration” for “resurrection”; the Greek word is *paliggenesia*, meaning “a new birth, renewal.” Ministers from the time of the Prophet Joseph used the biblical word *regeneration* to refer to the Holy Spirit instigating a rebirth. But the JST changes this meaning to emphasize the role the early Apostles will play in the future—that of judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

**Mk 10:29 (Lk 18:29–30).** “no man that hath left house, or . . . shall receive an hundred-fold.” All sacrifices are acknowledged, remembered, and rewarded by God. The three Synoptic Gospels all include this promise.

**Mt 19:30 (Mk 10:31).** “But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.” This is an example of a simple chiasm found in the Bible. This prophecy has multiple applications. In part, it foretells that the gospel will be taken from the Jews to the Gentiles. The JST in Mark includes a gentle rebuke for Peter’s bragging: “But *there are* many *who make themselves* first, *that* shall be last. . . . *This he said, rebuking Peter.*” Jesus has just promised him he will become a great judge—but still offers a good reminder to beware of pride.

### **Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard—Mt 20:1–16**

As we follow the Prophet Joseph Smith’s counsel to understand parables by looking to “the question which drew out the answers,” we have to look back to Peter’s question in Mt 19:27: “Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?”<sup>25</sup>

**Mt 20:1.** “early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.” The analogy of God’s servants working in His vineyard is reiterated in scripture (especially Isa 5:1–7 and Jac 5 in the allegory of the olive tree). We can interpret the timing of this parable in several different ways. The Hebrew day begins at 6:00 a.m., known as the first hour (daytime was divided from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and night was divided into four watches). The early morning could refer to the early history of mortality. Perhaps the householder starts his search at sunrise, which could represent the beginning of Adam and Eve’s posterity. Or perhaps the morning refers to the beginning of a dispensation. It may also be seen as the beginning of one workday when the sun rises.

**Mt 20:2.** “a penny a day.” The Greek *denari* was the average daily wage for a laborer or a soldier.<sup>26</sup>

**Mt 20:3.** “the third hour.” The third hour was 9:00 a.m. We are idle in the marketplace when we are not working for God.

**Mt 20:4.** “whatsoever is right I will give you.” A monetary price is not set, but a fair wage is promised. More laborers are called at noon, then 3:00 and 5:00 p.m. These different times may represent different times of one’s life or in the history of the world, or they may be random. Considering the dispensations outlined in the Bible, perhaps each of these times could fit into the period when God sent Adam (6:00 a.m.), Noah (9:00 a.m.), Abraham (noon), Moses (3:00 p.m.), and Christ (5:00 p.m.). The timing across scripture is inconsistent, but within the book of Revelation, one day is a thousand years (D&C 77:6).

**Mt 20:6.** “eleventh hour.” The eleventh hour was 5:00 p.m. There is very little time to work in the daylight. If we use the dispensation analogy above, this is the last dispensation, opened by the Restoration and God calling the Prophet Joseph Smith shortly before the advent of the Millennium. In this interpretation, we are living in the eleventh hour on Saturday night. This is the perspective of D&C 33:3: “The field is white already to harvest; and it is the eleventh hour, and the last time that I shall call laborers



into my vineyard.” We are blessed by the Lord as the last group of laborers in the vineyard. We have not had to wait for either the Lord’s Resurrection or the restoration of all truth—we just need to work our very hardest for the time we have been allotted. The parable has many different levels of meanings as well. All members serve their best as they work together to build God’s kingdom.

**Mt 20:8.** “*give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.*” The parable elaborates on Jesus’s message in Mt 19:30 that the last will be first. This is the characteristic of the kingdom of heaven. Elder James E. Talmage said, “The principle which Christ lays down is, that, while nothing done for Him shall lose its reward, yet, from one reason or another, no forecast can be made, no inferences of self-righteousness may be drawn. It does not by any means follow, that most work done—at least, to our seeing and judging—shall entail a greater reward. On the contrary, ‘many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.’ Not all, nor yet always and necessarily, but ‘many.’”<sup>27</sup>

**Mt 20:11–12.** “*Murmured against . . . borne the burden and heat of the day.*” From an economic perspective, this parable creates a disturbing dynamic: all receive the same wages even if some work all day in the hot sun and some work only a couple of hours in the late evening. The time frame may be a single lifetime or the history of the world. From a spiritual perspective though, this is liberating and empowers all who come unto Christ and work for Him, even at the end of life (or in the next life). We are children of a merciful God who welcomes all to join the covenant. We rejoice with all who come.

**Mt 20:13.** “*Friend, I do thee no wrong.*” The Lord is no respecter of persons, and all are alike unto God, black and white, bond and free, male and female, young and old. Our mortal sense of equality is warped—we must trust in God’s omniscience. I presume we all agreed to the wages of mortality prior to our arrival. We must take what lot is ours and do our best with it.

**Mt 20:15.** “*eye evil.*” This refers to one who looks with envy or malice on the good fortune of others.

**Mt 20:16.** “*many be called, but few chosen.*” According to the context of this parable, all who are willing are called to build the kingdom, but it appears that the workers must do something more than receive their call to be chosen. The Lord repeats this teaching to the Prophet Joseph Smith while in Liberty Jail and answers why this is the case in D&C 121:34–37.

And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—that the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.

In a sense, these workers who are called may choose to be chosen by their attitudes and behaviors.

## Jesus Prophecies of His Death

**Mt 20:17 (Mk 10:32; Lk 18:31).** *“Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart.”* This is one of the clearest examples of how Matthew uses the word *disciples* in lieu of *apostles*. It sounds like Jesus has a large group traveling together to Jerusalem, which was the norm for safety. What a blessing to be in the company of Jesus for that journey!

**Mt 20:18.** *“the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests.”* Although the Gospel authors record multiple prophecies detailing Jesus’s death, the Apostles’ shock and confusion at that event suggest that they did not understand those prophecies until after His Resurrection. Decades later, by the time the Gospels were finished, these prophecies were remembered as very important and were included throughout the Gospels. Especially during the last several weeks of His life, Jesus had the burden of knowing how and when He would die as well as the blessing of knowing of His Resurrection.

## Salome’s Desire for Her Sons, James and John—Mt 20:20–28; Mk 10:35–45

**Mt 20:20 (Mk 10:35).** *“mother of Zebedee’s children.”* This mother is Salome.<sup>28</sup> By comparing all the named women at the tomb, we realize that Salome may be the sister to Mary the mother of the Lord, making Jesus and the Apostles James and John first cousins.<sup>29</sup> If this is the case, these familial relations make this conversation more plausible. Possibly a favorite aunt asks Jesus if His cousins can remain close to Him in the future kingdom. Mark does not record the request as coming directly from Salome but from the two Apostles themselves.

**Mt 20:21 (Mk 10:37).** *“two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.”* This request to sit beside Jesus goes counter to what He has just taught about being no respecter of persons. I think Matthew placed this conversation here, directly after the parable of the workers in God’s vineyard, to again emphasize that God is no respecter of persons. We don’t want to miss His message that entering the kingdom requires service and submission.

**Mt 20:22 (Mk 10:38).** *“Ye know not what ye ask.”* With our myopic perspective, we do not see mortal life and eternity as God does. Our prayers are filled with desires from our perspective, not necessarily God’s eternal one. This is why the Lord instructed Oliver Cowdery, “Ask me if it be right” (D&C 9:8). King Benjamin added the same qualifier for our prayers: “Whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive” (Mosi 4:21). The Lord Himself repeated this lesson to the Nephites: “Ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you” (3 Ne 18:20). With this perspective we can be grateful that all our prayers are not answered because the Lord will bless us with an answer only when it is right.

**Mt 20:22.** *“Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink?”* The cup that Christ will drink is greater than that which anyone else could sip. It is the bitter cup, made so by the crushing pain He experienced. (Wine is bitter if the seeds and skin are crushed.) Jesus points out that the Apostles

will have to drink a bitter cup too; James, son of Zebedee, died a martyr's death (Act 12:2), as did nine of the other original Apostles.

**Mt 20:22. “to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”** The Lord refers to baptism in a new way. The disciples assume they all entered into Jesus's service through being converted and baptized by immersion either by John the Baptist or by Jesus and His disciples (Jn 3:22; 4:1–2). Here though, “Jesus's baptism” is a change that will happen by being immersed in suffering. Have you ever thought of our trials as our baptism? Trials prepare us to serve Him and to become who we need to be in order to enter His presence.

**Mt 20:23 (Mk 10:40). “to sit on my right hand, and on my left hand, is not mine to give.”** Jesus does not usurp His Father's position. He repeatedly admits that He is only a servant of His Father and cannot make such an honorary promise because it is the Father's to give. The rest of the quorum were “moved with indignation” or “much displeased” with the situation because it appears that James and John (or their mother for them) tried to receive a place of honor above the others. It seems they created a competitive environment by asking for the best seats within the quorum.

**Mt 20:26. “it shall not be so among you.”** Even though social hierarchies exist in the world, Jesus wants none among His disciples. This is the antithesis of what He has been trying to teach by word and example. Jesus teaches a wonderful principle here that He repeats in the Book of Mormon.<sup>30</sup> In God's eyes, the greatest are children and those who are humble, meek, and submissive to His will.

**Mt 20:26–27 (NIV). “whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant and whoever . . . first . . . your slave.”** Jesus offered a new look at servitude by turning the social hierarchy upside down. In His kingdom, servants are “the greatest.” Jesus transforms “first” to “slave.” No longer are servants and slaves at the bottom of the social pyramid. In His kingdom, those that are the most committed are those who submit to serve Heavenly Father. With God as master, there is no need to worry about abuse. The message Jesus is trying to teach is that we must submit our will to God's as slaves submit to their master's wills. Repeatedly Jesus did not denounce servitude; He denounced the aristocracy that did not serve and tried to teach masters how to serve. Through His example and words, He encourages us to serve each other with love. In the first century, one-third of the Roman Empire was in the class of slaves and servants (but the system was more similar to what we think of as the feudal system).<sup>31</sup>

**Mt 20:28. “the Son of man.”** As discussed in earlier chapters, the term “son of man” is used by the Lord in a different way than it was used by Ezekiel and the other prophets. Rather than referring to the son of Adam, when Jesus uses it, it appears to refer to His divine origins. As mentioned earlier in Matthew, Jesus uses this title as uniquely His. Enoch said that the name of Heavenly Father is Man of Holiness (Mose 6:37; 7:35). When Jesus calls Himself the “Son of Man” it is a parallel for “Son of God” that avoids offending His audience (Jews who avoided saying the name of God).

**Mt 20:28. “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”** Of all the radical changes that Jesus made—from cleansing the temple and refuting the oral laws to restoring the higher priesthood and its

ordinances—this message is one of the most repeated. It goes against not only the cultural norm but also the tendencies of the natural man and economic theories. But to become disciples, we must apply it. Jesus came not only to redeem us but also to teach us how to become like Him. To do that, we must learn to serve each other and our God with a heart filled with love, we must have as submissive a heart as a servant or child. Perhaps families and ward communities are structured how they are on earth so we have more opportunities to serve as Christ did, without much recognition.

**Mt 20:28.** *“give his life a ransom.”* Ransom was the price paid for the manumission of a slave. Jesus’s use of the word “ransom” here emphasizes

- the voluntary nature of self-giving
- the vicarious nature of offering sacrificial obedience for someone who could not
- the universal nature of the gift<sup>32</sup>

Jesus’s example of living each day in the Father’s business is the same aim that His disciples must adopt—we submit to God’s will and serve those in our path.

## **Jesus Heals Bartimaeus Near Jericho—Mt 20:29–34; Mk 10:46–52; Lk 18:35–43**

The three Synoptic Gospels record this miracle with minor differences: Matthew has two blind men leaving Jericho, Mark has only one blind man, and Luke has the one blind man entering Jericho. The differences sound like variations within oral histories. The other observation is that the Gospel of Matthew records five instances of Jesus healing the blind.<sup>33</sup> In one of those accounts (Mt 9:27–31), Jesus heals two blind men. Perhaps Matthew just mixed up these two accounts. More likely, though, is the possibility that he is continuing his pattern of duplicating many witnesses.<sup>34</sup> This is the last miracle story in the Synoptic Gospels before Jesus’s triumphal entry and is the only healing of the blind that they all record, fulfilling Isa 61:1. Mark’s Gospel gives us the most details about this story.

**Mt 20:29 (Mk 10:46).** *“a great multitude followed.”* As Jesus journeys south to Jerusalem, the crowd following Him grows. They may have joined His caravan to Jerusalem for Passover or joined for the day as He passed Jericho.

**Mk 10:46 (Mt 20:30; Lk 18:35).** *“blind Bartimaeus . . . sat by the highway side begging.”* Mark tells us the blind man’s name and heritage. Bartimaeus positions himself on the road to beg. Lk 18:36 adds how the blind man tries to find out what all the noise was about. The news filters through the crowd, and he learns that Jesus is coming. Bartimaeus now has a higher motive than begging for money: he wants Jesus to heal him.

**Mk 10:47 (Mt 20:30; Lk 18:38).** *“he began to cry out, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”* Bartimaeus, calling out, shows his faith in the Lord’s healing power. Notice the different titles

used for our Lord. The multitude refers to Jesus by His geographic name, “Jesus of Nazareth” (which was possibly His legal or full name). Yet, when Bartimaeus calls for help, he honors Jesus’s messianic title: Son of David.

**Mk 10:48 (Mt 20:31; Lk 18:39).** “*he should hold his peace: but he cried the more.*” The crowd found the loud, blind man to be a nuisance and rebuked him. But Bartimaeus’s determination grew, and the man called out exceedingly (JST, Mk 10:48). Jesus stopped because He either heard Bartimaeus’s call or was just prompted. Most English translations say Jesus “called for him,” but Jesus “commanded” that the blind man come to Him. Perhaps this was needed because the crowd was chiding Bartimaeus.

**Mk 10:49 (NIV).** “*Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.*” I presume it was the density of the crowd that prevented Bartimaeus from standing earlier and running to ask for help, but from his sitting position, he now comes forward to Jesus.

**Mt 20:32 (Mk 10:51; Lk 18:41).** “*What wilt ye that I should do?*” Even though it was quite evident that the man was blind, Jesus wanted Bartimaeus to ask for healing. Jesus asks the same question to all disciples, encouraging us to open a dialogue to ask God for our own needs. This echoes the explanation on prayer in the Bible Dictionary that some blessings are made conditional on the asking. The miracles began to flow after Bartimaeus answered Jesus’s question.

**Mt 20:34.** “*Jesus had compassion . . . immediately . . . received sight, and . . . followed him.*” Matthew’s storyline wants to emphasize Jesus’s compassion, not the interplay with the crowd. Jesus’s compassion is an element in this man’s healing (as well as in our healings now). The Gospel of Matthew does not mention it, but this miracle fulfilled Isa 29:18; 35:5; 42:7. Unlike the healing of the blind man in Jn 9, where Jesus also taught a lesson about the appropriateness of doing good on the Sabbath, this time, the healing happened immediately.

**Mk 10:52 (Lk 18:42).** “*thy faith hath made thee whole.*” Jesus acknowledges and honors Bartimaeus’s faith—which then furthers the healing of his whole soul. In a community that attributed blindness to sin, Jesus’s additional encouragement would have been both gratifying and empowering. Luke also adds that when Jesus’s disciples saw the miracle, they had even more reason to praise God.

## Notes

1 See Mt 7:28, 13:53; 26:1.

2 “Horion,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/3725.htm>.

3 From 900 BC. For more, see Lynne Hilton Wilson, “The Confusing Case of Zacharias,” *Religious Educator* 14, no. 2 (2013): 107–123.

4 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 13.297–298.

5 Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper Collins’ Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1996), 842.

6 Mt 21:31; Mk 2:16; Lk 15:1; and so on. Even the Romans looked down on publicans. Supposedly Theocritus, a third-century Greek poet, was asked what the worst wild beast was, and he answered, “On the mountains, bears and lions; in the city, publicans.” Fredric William Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (New York, NY: Dutton, 1874), 247. Jews tried to avoid marriages with publicans: “Take not a wife out of a family where there is a publican, for they are all publicans.” Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:741–743. David Noel Freedman and Allen C. Myers, eds., *Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1278. The Romans hired tax collectors in each region to enforce their 1 percent income tax, one-tenth ground tax on production, a poll or head tax levied on all men over fourteen and girls over twelve, and an “indirect tax,” which covered imports and exports that crossed a major street or harbor. The tax ranged from 2.5 to 12.5 percent, providing plenty of room for favors or extra charges or partiality. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 3rd ed. (1838; repr., Mclean, VA: MacDonald, n.d.), 133.

7 Evelyn Stagg and Frank Stagg, *Woman in the World of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1978), 86; Ben Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 20. David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 73.

8 Mishnah, Gittin 1–9, 2:4. “All [men] are qualified to write a bill of divorce, even a deaf-mute, an imbecile, or a minor.”

9 Mishnah, Yebamoth 13:1. The famous rabbi Hillel (60 BC to AD 20) explained that after a girl was twelve and a half, she “may exercise right of refusal four or five times” in the selection of her husband. In opposition, the rabbinic school of Shammai complained, “The daughters of Israel are no [such] ownerless property!” They allowed a young girl who had not gone through puberty to live in her father’s home until “she is come of age.”

10 Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: Good Sound Publishing, 2015), chapter 6.

11 Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus* 25:23. These writings of Ben Sira were considered for the Jewish canon and are found in the Apocrypha.

12 Arthur Ernest Cowley and Adolf Neubauer, eds., *The Original Hebrew of a Portion of Ecclesiasticus* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1897), 24.

13 Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus* 25:12–18; 26:7. “Give the water no passage; neither a wicked woman liberty to gad abroad. If she go not as thou wouldn’t have her, cut her off from thy flesh. . . . The wickedness of a wife changes her appearance, and darkens her face like that of a bear. Her husband takes his meals among the neighbors.” He continues, “[The husband] cannot help sighing bitterly. Any iniquity is insignificant compared to a wife’s iniquity; may a sinner’s lot befall her!” Ben Sira also bemoaned, “An evil wife is an ox yoke which chafes; taking hold of her is like grasping a scorpion. . . . Any wound, but not a wound of the heart! Any wickedness, but not the wickedness of a wife!”

14 Mishnah, Ketuboth 6:6. Abba Saul justified divorce “if she curses his parents in his presence” after the New Testament was compiled (but it was probably applicable even during that time).

15 Wilson, *Emancipation of New Testament Women*, chapters 1 and 5.

16 Gospel Topics, “Abuse,” online at [churchofjesuschrist.org](http://churchofjesuschrist.org).

17 “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” churchofjesuschrist.org.

18 “Pais,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/3816.htm>.

19 See Mt 18:1–4; 23:2; Lk 11:43; and so on.

20 “*Teleios*,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/5046.htm>.

21 RSV, DRB, ISV. Mark often records stronger emotions. This is especially evident in the Lord’s Passion. It is Mark who shows the Lord in deep anguish in Gethsemane and on the cross.

22 Paul Y. Hoskisson, ed., *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2005), 83–99.

23 Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, ed. Don E. Norton (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1989), 315.

24 D&C 105:5; 3 Ne 26:19; Mose 7:18.

25 “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1459, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/102>.

26 In 44 BC, Julius Caesar paid 225 denarii for a year of skilled labor. In 27 BC, an unskilled laborer or soldier was paid 1 denarius. On an annual basis, a centurion earned 3,750, and the highest-ranking military officers earned 15,000.

27 James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1916), 486.

28 Mk 15:40. We learn a few details about the names and family relationships of the women in the Gospels in Mt 27:56; 28:1; Mk 15:40; 16:1; Lk 24:10; Jn 19:25. For a detailed table of this information, see table 6 in my commentary for Easter.

29 Jn 19:25; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII–XXI* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 98: “The tradition that Salome, wife of Zebedee and mother of John, was Mary’s sister, a relationship which makes John the cousin of Jesus.” Brown lines up the women listed in different places in the Bible and finds a possible family relation.

30 Jac 5:63; Mosi 2:12, 17; Alm 17:26; Eth 13:12.

31 Jacob Neusner, *The Economics of the Mishnah* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 65. Male slaves were released on the seventh year of their servitude unless they chose to be a servant for life. Women were not always released, as they sometimes became a servant-wife to bear their master’s children. In the Roman world, slaves were released at age thirty or thirty-five (some sources record this number as high as age forty). Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4:545. Ken Campbell, ed., *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 135.

32 Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 243.

33 Mt 9:27–31; 12:22; 15:30–31; 21:14; 20:30–34.

34 Matthew’s account at the triumphal entry records there were two donkeys, and the others report just one. Matthew adds an incorrect heritage for the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah.