

# John Wesley's Explanatory Notes - Matthew 20

by John Wesley

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*God's kingdom is a place where the last called are equal to the first, and where the chief are servants, not lords.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 19:30 - 20:16, Mark 10:32, Luke 18:31, Acts 15:9

**Topics:** "Grace", "Servanthood"

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## Description

John Wesley explains the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, emphasizing that God's kingdom operates on principles of grace rather than human expectations. He highlights that many Jews may be rejected while Gentiles are accepted, and that those who are last in conversion may be first in the kingdom of heaven. Wesley also addresses the misconception of entitlement among the first called, illustrating that God's generosity is not bound by human standards. He concludes by affirming that true greatness in God's kingdom comes through servanthood and sharing in Christ's sufferings.

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## Transcript

XX. 1. That some of those who were first called may yet be last, our Lord confirms by the following parable: of which the primary scope is, to show, That many of the Jews would be rejected, and many of the Gentiles accepted; the secondary, That of the Gentiles, many who were first converted would be last and lowest in the kingdom of glory; and many of those who were last converted would be first, and highest therein. The kingdom of heaven is like - That is, the manner of God's proceeding in his kingdom resembles that of a householder. In the morning - At six, called by the Romans and Jews, the first hour. From thence reckoning on to the evening, they called nine, the third hour; twelve, the sixth; three in the afternoon, the ninth; and five, the eleventh. To hire labourers into his vineyard - All who profess to be Christians are in this sense labourers, and are supposed during their life to be working in God's vineyard.

Verse 2. The Roman penny was about seven pence halfpenny. [About thirteen and three quarter cents, American.] This was then the usual price of a day's labour.

Verse 6. About the eleventh hour - That is, very late; long after the rest were called.

Verse 8. In the evening - Of life; or of the world.

Verse 9. Who were hired about the eleventh hour - Either the Gentiles, who were called long after the Jews into the vineyard of the Church of Christ; or those in every age who did not hear, or at least understand the Gospel call, till their day of life was drawing to a period. Some circumstances of the

parable seem best to suit the former, some the latter of these senses.

Verse 10. The first supposed they should have received more - Probably the first here may mean the Jews, who supposed they should always be preferred before the Gentiles.

Verse 12. Thou hast made them equal to us - So St. Peter expressly, Acts 15:9. God-hath put no difference between us (Jews) and them, (Gentiles,) purifying their hearts by faith. And those who were equally holy here, whenever they were called, will be equally happy hereafter.

Verse 14. It is my will to give to this last called among the heathens even as to the first called among the Jews: yea, and to the late converted publicans and sinners, even as to those who, were called long before.

Verse 15. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? - Yea, doubtless, to give either to Jew or Gentile a reward infinitely greater than he deserves. But can it be inferred from hence, that it is lawful, or possible, for the merciful Father of spirits to "Consign an unborn soul to hell? Or damn him from his mother's womb?" Is thine eye evil because I am good - Art thou envious, because I am gracious? Here is an evident reference to that malignant aspect, which is generally the attendant of a selfish and envious temper.

Verse 16. So the last shall be first, and the first last - Not only with regard to the Jews and Gentiles, but in a thousand other instances. For many are called - All who hear the Gospel; but few chosen - Only those who obey it. Matthew 19:30; .

Verse 17. Mark 10:32; Luke 18:31.

Verse 20. Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children -Considering what he had been just speaking, was ever any thing more unreasonable? Perhaps Zebedee himself was dead, or was not a follower of Christ. Mark 10:35.

Verse 21. In thy kingdom - Still they expected a temporal kingdom.

Verse 22. Ye know not what is implied in being advanced in my kingdom, and necessarily preredquired thereto. All who share in my kingdom must first share in my sufferings. Are you able and willing to do this? Both these expressions, The cup, the baptism, are to be understood of his sufferings and death. The like expressions are common among the Jews.

Verse 23. But to sit on my right hand - Christ applies to the glories of heaven, what his disciples were so stupid as to understand of the glories of earth. But he does not deny that this is his to give. It is his to give in the strictest propriety, both as God, and as the Son of man. He only asserts, that he gives it to none but those for whom it is originally prepared; namely, those who endure to the end in the faith that worketh by love.

Verse 25. Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles lord it over them -And hence you imagine, the chief in my kingdom will do as they: but it will be quite otherwise.

Verse 26. Your minister - That is, your servant. Matthew 23:11.

Verse 29. Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35.

Verse 30. Behold two blind men cried out - St. Mark and St. Luke mention only one of them, blind Bartimeus. He was far the more eminent of the two, and, as it seems, spoke for both.

Verse 31. The multitude charged them to hold their peace - And so they will all who begin to cry after the Son of David. But let those who feel their need of him cry the more; otherwise they will come short of a cure.

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