

Jesus Revolution (Matthew 20)

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[0 : 0 0] So Matthew chapter 20, I think there's a few stories here, so I hope you can follow. For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.

He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. About nine in the morning, he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.

He told them, you also go work in my vineyard and I will pay you whatever is right. So they went. He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing.

About five in the afternoon, he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing? Because no one has hired us, they answered.

He said to them, you also go and work in my vineyard. When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.

[1 : 0 5] The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more.

But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. These who were hired last worked only one hour, they said.

And you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day. But he answered one of them, I'm not being unfair to you, friend.

Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want to do with my money?

Or are you envious because I am generous? So the last will be first and the first will be last. Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way he took the twelve aside and said to them, We are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law.

[2 : 1 2] They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life. Then the mother of Zebedee's son came to Jesus with her sons and kneeling down asked a favor of him.

What is it you want? he asked. She said, Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.

You don't know what you're asking, Jesus said to them. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink? We can, they answered. Jesus said to them, When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.

Jesus called them together and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you.

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave. Just as the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

[3 : 32] As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, Lord, son of David, have mercy on us.

The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, Lord, son of David, have mercy on us. Jesus stopped and called them.

What do you want me to do for you? He asked. Lord, they answered, we want our sight. Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately, they received their sight and followed him.

That is the word of God. Thank you, and hello everybody. It's lovely to be with you this afternoon.

My name's Nathan. If you don't know me, I'm the pastor down at Papakura Baptist Church. Some of you will know me because I've been visiting, coming to preach here on and off, and I always enjoy being here with you all to preach God's word, and looking forward to sharing this passage with you.

[4 : 46] So keep your Bibles open, and we'll go through it. But before we start looking at it, I'm just going to pray for us. So please pray with me. Our Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you that we can learn of our King, the Lord Jesus Christ, who rules. Thank you that we can learn that he's a servant, that he came to seek and save the lost.

And I pray, as we look at this passage, we're to come to understand him. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So I gather that William recently learned about this musical called Hamilton, and he's been going on about it.

And so I didn't want to rock the boat, so I've got an illustration from Hamilton, just to keep us going. So my understanding, the way I see the musical, the second half, it's about politics, boring, finances.

First half is exciting, right? Because it's about, you guys know, the American Revolution. Revolution. You've got all these young men sitting around, and it's songs, but you can see the picture if you listen to it.

[5 : 54] These young men sitting around, wanting revolution, wanting to take control of their nation, wanting to fight the English and be their own people. And Hamilton, the main character, is one of these men yearning for revolution, willing to give his life to change his nation.

Revolution was in the air, and revolution came. As we read through the book of Matthew, the sentiment amongst the young Israelite men may have been very similar.

Revolution. Revolution. When you read through the Gospels and Acts, you get these indications that there are revolutionaries popping up all around the place.

Men in Israel wanting to be free from Rome, the evil oppressors. They wanted revolution. And into that environment steps Jesus.

And what does Jesus talk about? He gathers large crowds to follow him and listen to him, teaching and proclaiming the ideals of a new kingdom.

[7 : 09] And now Jesus is, we see at the end of the passage, literally marching up the road to Jerusalem with crowds following him.

You won't get there because you'll move on to something else, but the very next chapter is a triumphal entry, something that a lot of churches celebrate today, Palm Sunday, where Jesus arrives in Jerusalem and receives a hero's welcome.

Receives the kind of welcome that you'd expect a conquering king to receive. They see him as this revolutionary. Someone who's coming to free them. There's no question.

There's no question if Jesus is bringing a revolution. The only question is what kind of revolution will this man bring? What is the revolution of Jesus that he is bringing at this time?

What kind of king will he be? What kind of kingdom will he bring? And in this last chapter, we get maybe the clearest description of the revolution Jesus is bringing.

[8 : 15] This last chapter before he enters Jerusalem, we get this wonderful picture of the revolution Jesus brings. Jesus is bringing a revolution of grace for leadership and for acceptance.

A revolution of grace for leadership and for acceptance. Let's walk through the passage and see this wonderful kingdom, this wonderful revolution Jesus is bringing.

It's a long passage, so have your Bible open and I'll be referring to it. He starts proclaiming the revolution he's bringing, the new kingdom he's bringing, the kingdom of heaven, with a parable.

And this parable is meant to tell us how just revolutionary Jesus' grace is going to be. And it's important to know the point. This is about Jesus and his grace and his mercy.

It's not about how to run your vineyard. If you go and try to run a vineyard like this, you'll lose money. That's not what it's about. And I say that because what we read and what we see, it's meant to be alarming and concerning and maybe even infuriating for some.

[9 : 26] You see, there's this landowner. He owns a vineyard. He probably has his own sort of permanent workers. He's got, you know, the foreman or whatever. But he needs seasonal workers. And the way you get seasonal workers is you go down to the town square.

And there are the unemployed people standing around in the morning. And you hire them and you say, come with me. Come and work with me. And so that's what this man does. He's down there at, say, let's say 6 a.m. in the morning before the sun's up.

And he calls these workers, come and work in my vineyard. And they agree to work for one denarius, which would have been like a good day's wage.

They would have been happy with that. That's good pay for them. And for whatever reason, the landowner is back. Let's say it's 9 a.m. when the sun's up.

And he's back for more workers. And he calls them and they agree to be paid whatever's fair, which is ambiguous. And off they go to the vineyard.

[10 : 25] And then the landowner is back again, maybe at midday. And then back again, maybe at 3 p.m. in the middle of the afternoon. Continue to employ more and more workers for his vineyard.

And then he's back a final time. Let's say it's 5 p.m. right at the end of the day. People have packed up their market stalls.

People are shifting on home. And yet this landowner is employing more people to come and work in his vineyard. Finally, the day finishes.

Let's say it's 6 p.m. And everybody's come into the office to settle their accounts. And if you're keeping count, there'll be people who have worked for 12 hours. People who have worked for nine. People who have worked for six.

People who have worked for three. People who have worked for one hour. And they line up. And, you know, the last to go come through.

[11 : 17] And they follow through and get their pay. And each one receives the same pay. A good day's work. Regardless of how long they actually worked, they all receive the same.

A generous day's pay. And it's at this point where the issue of fairness comes up. You see, I think we're meant to empathize and sympathize with the guys who have been there all day working 12 hours.

And we're meant to understand very well their complaint against the landowner. They've worked the whole day. They were there in the heat.

They feel they've properly earned their wage. And if the guys who have only been working for one measly hour get paid a full day's pay, why shouldn't we get more? We've worked harder.

We've worked more. It's unfair. In fact, the generosity of the landowner seems evil to them.

[12 : 19] It seems wrong to them. It's not right. It's not fair. It's not just. The story is meant to great in some ways against our economic instincts.

Our feelings of fairness and justice and how much people should be paid and what people should get. It's meant to make us really uncomfortable. Alarm us even.

What is Jesus telling this story about? out. It's meant to conjure the same kind of outrage we might feel when, you know, a really lazy co-worker gets a pay rise or a promotion and we think, why did they get it? They're the worst.

And yet Jesus is saying that his kingdom, his revolution is like this. This is the kind of revolution Jesus is bringing. A kingdom where people are rewarded, not based on how long they work for, not how hard they work. A place where merit and achievement doesn't actually apply.

A revolution where people are rewarded, not because of their contribution, but because of the generosity of the master. Jesus is illustrating that the reward of heaven comes by grace. It comes by mercy. It comes in a way that no one could earn or deserve and everyone can receive it because God is so generous, not because we work for it, not because we've earned it.

[13 : 52] But more than that, I think Jesus is illustrating how his kingdom, the kingdom he's bringing, it either revolutionizes your life or it ruins it. You're either changed in your entire perception of eternity or you can't accept it. It will horrify you. You see how it horrifies people even today.

Maybe you've been talking to a non-Christian and trying to talk to them about Jesus and his sacrifice and they say something like, you mean to say that a serial killer on death row can repent and believe and be saved?

That's terrible. I can't believe anything like that. After living a horrible life, someone can get into heaven just because they would believe where a good, respectable person like me doesn't because we didn't believe.

But that is the revolution of grace. Now it's not to say, it's not to say, you know, you can just wait till the last hour, wait till you think you're about to die or Jesus is about to come.

That's not the point at all. The point is the grace. It's not based on what we do. We don't get a bigger reward in heaven because we serve Jesus for longer or better or higher or whatever it is. It's the generosity of the owner.

[15 : 20] Everybody is rewarded. And this jarring reality, that forgiveness, the kingdom of heaven can be offered to anyone, that changes who we are and how we perceive things.

That changes our world and how we live in it. Jesus is bringing a revolution where people are awarded, not based on what they do, but because he is generous.

The other problem that arises when you talk about this, if you're talking with people, is people think it's a cheap grace, right?

Well, you don't have to do anything, you just trust and believe. But in the next little passage there from verse 17, we see that this grace, this revolution, it's anything but cheap.

The generosity of the master doesn't come because it's easy. This kind of generosity comes because Jesus will give his life for the sinner.

[16 : 29] Jesus talks about what's going to happen to him in Jerusalem. The reason he's going to Jerusalem is to give his life so that he can give life generously.

He can give life for the sinner. Giving his life to purchase our reward with his blood. God can be generous. God can be so gracious with us because Jesus has earned it in our place.

Jesus has given his life. He bore God's wrath for us and he lived a perfect life. And that's why God can be generous and gracious and welcome people even at the last moment.

We know our reward is coming because, as we'll celebrate in a week's time, Jesus rose from the dead. That's what Jesus is talking about. That's what he's saying. There is grace for everybody.

Because he's marching towards Jerusalem. And so Jesus is trying to tell his followers, his disciples, that his kingdom will be a revolution of grace.

[17 : 30] Where people are not rewarded based on their merit or what they do. They're rewarded because of what he's done. And that changes us. When we comprehend it, when we accept it, it will revolutionize who we are and how we behave.

And we see how it should start here in the passage. You see, the next thing Jesus goes on to talk about is leaders. Or that's the next story in the passage.

And grace revolutionize leadership and power. If we're looking at the story, there's this interaction between James and John and their mom.

So James and John come up and I think we can say they haven't really taken on board the revolutionary grace of Jesus. They're still thinking about power. They're still thinking about leadership.

They're still thinking about how they can get to the top. They think that Jesus is going to bestow glory and honor and power to the people who can sort of make it up the ladder.

[18 : 31] And they want in. Now, think about the irony of this passage. Here are James and John. They want to be leaders. They want to be Jesus' right-hand men with the most power and authority.

They think they're leaders and the obvious thing a leader will do if they want something is send their mom to ask for it. That's how leaders are born.

I think it's this sort of worldly mindset that they're using. Probably their mom is like a cousin or a relative of Jesus. And they're probably thinking maybe that's the leverage they need to get a leg up on the rest.

And before we criticize them too much, we've got to notice that all the other disciples are a bit slacked off. They didn't think of this earlier. And we have to admit, have to at least consider, that churches and Christians and pastors and all kinds of things have done all kinds of things to amass power and authority for themselves in a way that Jesus wouldn't approve of.

You see, we all naturally think this way. Most organizations, institutions, systems work in a pyramid where there are a few people at the top and everybody at the bottom is serving them.

[19 : 47] Things move up the pyramid. The closer you are to the top, the more honor, the more power, the more wealth, the more authority, the more everything you get. The people at the bottom, they're just, they're just worse.

That's what Jesus is saying in verse 25. Worldly power structures have someone at the top, lording it over the rest.

The power, the authority, the resources go to the top and someone gets them. And so everybody wants to be at the top. Everybody wants the power.

Everybody wants to, to, to get to those high places. And that's what James and John want. Jesus kingdom to be the top of the, the pyramid.

And Jesus says to them, I'm sorry, you have no idea what you're asking for. So you see, they don't understand what leadership looks like in the kingdom of heaven. They haven't really, truly been revolutionized yet by the grace of Jesus.

[20 : 46] With Jesus, the top of the pyramid, the highest place, is the place, place of the most extreme, determined, service. Leadership, power, authority in the kingdom of heaven goes hand in hand with slavery.

Giving your life for others. I think this is, frankly, what our world needs to hear about. I think in our world, when I listen to, you know, read the newspapers and this kind of thing, there's this, there's this crisis of power.

People are recognizing that if you have someone who has power, it almost always causes problems because they misuse it. It corrupts them. When there's a power disparity, there's potential for abuse.

And they're right. It happens all the time. And so our world solution is to try, spread the power around somehow, but you just can't. It just doesn't work because people are always rising up and others are sinking down.

There will always be power disparities because different people have different strengths and abilities and that kind of lifts you up sometimes. That's why we need Jesus to revolutionize our understanding of what leadership is.

[22 : 06] Leadership isn't a place where you can amass for yourself. It's a place where you give yourself to others. Jesus wants to change the way we think about power.

He's saying that if you have power, if you have authority, if you have honor, if you have respect, if you have skills and abilities, in his kingdom, they are for other people. If you have been placed in leadership, you've been placed there to honor and serve others.

And so the greatest in the kingdom of heaven are the people who are always asking, how do I serve? How do I give to others? How do I lift others up? What are the gifts that I have that could put me ahead of others, which I can use to put others ahead of me?

What are the abilities that I have that could put me on top of one another, other people, but I can use to put others on top of me? What are the resources, knowledge, skills that are mine, that I can use to serve others?

The greatest, the most powerful, those with authority in the kingdom of heaven, are those who are giving themselves to others. And it's Jesus who starts this revolution of power.

[23 : 21] He comes, he's at the very top of every single pyramid in all of creation. And he serves. He gives his life as a ransom for many.

He uses his power, his authority, his honor, his glory, to serve us and to give his life for the most insignificant of people. Once we see that, once we really comprehend what Jesus has done, that we've been served by the Lord God himself, that he died for us, you absolutely cannot hold on to power and authority in the same way that the world does.

You absolutely cannot use whatever you have to serve yourself. You must use it in laying down your lives for one another.

And so Jesus is bringing this revolutionary grace, which revolutionizes leadership. The people who serve in the kingdom of God will so understand who Jesus is and what he has done that they will be giving their lives because they know no one earns anything.

We all receive it by grace. But it raises a challenge for us, us who have authority, who stand up and preach sermons and stuff like that.

[24 : 47] How are we using our power? All the time, the world is creeping in. You think I'm at the top of Papakura Baptist. People should, you know, make room for me.

That's not how Jesus is doing it. How am I, as a pastor, seeking to use my power, my authority, my position to serve others? It's the same for all of us. How do we use what we have to serve others?

So revolutionary grace, creating revolutionary leadership, but finally, revolutionary acceptance. Jesus is on the road towards Jerusalem.

The crowd's coming. Revolution is happening. They're marching up the road to Jerusalem. This is it. This is the moment. Rome's going to be brought down. Whatever's going to happen. Imagine yourself as one of the people in the crowd, thinking that you're literally going to install a new king, who's going to rule you.

It's a revolution. And as you walk, you hear this annoying yelling coming from the side of the road, going on and on, and you're like, what are you doing? We're going to do something really important, and you're yelling about being blind or something.

[26 : 01] Stop! We're, we're, this is a revolution. And to you, and to your shock, and maybe to your annoyance, Jesus himself, your revolutionary leader, stops the whole thing for these blind people.

That's the thing about a, a kingdom that's built on grace. It's, no one deserves it. You can't be upset if Jesus stops for people that you wouldn't stop for.

No one deserves to have the son of David, the Messiah, stop for them. And so we can't begrudge Jesus stopping for anyone, to save anyone, to, to bring anyone in.

This is the, the true glory of Jesus' kingdom. It's so powerful that it is outlasted nations, outlasted kingdoms.

Rome, the empire, is long gone. And the church remains. It is powerful, truly. And yet it is so gentle that it stops for the least, and the lowest, and the last.

[27 : 12] It welcomes in the people who no one else wants. This too should transform the way we live.

You see, Jesus is so great that he can create a kingdom that will go on for eternity, that he is so graceful that he won't overlook a single person who calls upon him.

Have we taken that on board? In any revolution, it becomes us against them. It's Hamilton and the Americans versus the English and we fight them and get rid of them.

And Jesus says to that, no, I will welcome the outsiders in. Welcome those who are different. Bring in people even who are against him.

Show them mercy and grace that they might become his followers. We might say it this way. If we've been revolutionized by God's grace, then we will absolutely have compassion on the outsider and the outcast.

[28 : 24] If we know that we have received mercy, if we know that we were once enemies of God, yet received grace, then how much more will we show that to people who are different from us?

How much more will we stop to serve people who are below us, who are different from us, who are not like us? Like I said at the outset, outset, I've been coming, you know, every now and again for a number of years here to PCBC English and one of the things that I find so encouraging is that when I first arrived, basically everybody was the same age, basically everybody had the same experience of life, very similar to one another and then every time I've come since then, there have been people sitting in the pews which I wouldn't have expected who were different, different ages, different life experiences, different everything and it's a testament to how the gospel works.

The gospel causes us to accept people and welcome people in who are different from us and that's wonderful and you guys have an opportunity to continue doing that and it's fantastic.

It's a witness to the grace of Jesus. It encourages me when I go back to PBC and look at the congregation there and think how are we welcoming the people who are different from us, the outsider and the outcast.

The revolution is happening it's happening here, it's happening at PBC and you can see it in the faces of the people who are here and so revolutions in the air.

[30 : 07] Revolution is happening but the most important revolution is happening in the Lord Jesus and what he is doing. You know, empires will rise and fall, Hamiltons will come and go but Jesus is continuing to march his revolutionary kingdom forward.

Unlike any other revolution you'll come across, a revolution of grace where people cannot earn it but are given it because of God's generosity, a revolution that changes the way we lead, changes the way we accept one another.

It's happening. Will you continue on with Jesus as we go? Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you so much for Jesus as he leads us forward to a new heaven and a new earth.

Father, continue to revolutionise us by your grace. Continue to show us that we haven't earned our place in your kingdom, that we've been given it by your generosity.

Make us people who use what we have to serve others. Make us people who recognise that you will stop for the least and the lowest. Make us people who accept people like that because of your grace.

[31 : 29] We pray this in Jesus' precious name. Amen.