



Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Matthew 20.1-28 | June 4, 2017

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### I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our series *They Will Know Us By Our Fruit*, looking at the marks of discipleship we are aiming for as a church, as we invite all people to grow into a Christ-centered life in God's family.

This week we engage the fruit of *Serving Willingly*.

### II. Connecting with One Another

What comes to mind when you think of the word "serve"? Better yet, *who* comes to mind?

When has someone served you?

### III. Study the Text

- a. Let's begin back in Matthew 19.30. After talking with the "rich young ruler" (verses 16-22), Jesus concludes, "many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."

How do you understand that statement? (Feel free to read the story to get a fuller context)

- b. Read Matthew 20.1-7

As with many of Jesus' parables, the initial hearers could relate better than us 21st century city dwellers! Wealthy landowners, vineyards, and day laborers were common features of first century Galilean life. And as we have discussed in previous weeks, vineyards are a common metaphor for Israel throughout the Hebrew Scriptures (see, for instance, Isaiah 5.1-7).

How does knowing that common metaphor affect your understanding of this parable?

What is Jesus seeking to communicate (thus far in the story)?

Who do the different characters represent? (Reread the parable slowly, if it helps!)

- c. Read Matthew 20.8-16

One author provides some helpful background: "Sometimes workers hired themselves out to work for others for a period of time up to six years, but temporary help was cheaper for employers. Harvest required an influx of extra workers – most

to harvest, and some to guard crops in the fields and gathered sheaves against thieves and animals... Landowners typically drew from the ranks of the landless – sometimes homeless – poor for such brief and urgent tasks.”

The workers in Jesus’ parable echo Israel’s complaints in Moses’ day. See Exodus 16.7-12, Numbers 14.27, and Deuteronomy 1.27.

Would you feel the same if you’d worked all day? Why or why not?

- d. It’s been written, “The landowner pays equal wages to all the workers, a full day’s for each. Those who have worked all day lose nothing; justice is served, but mercy is added. Jewish hearers would consider it pious to give wages even to those not expecting it... The image of Jesus’ parable is of unmerited grace; the owner realizes that an hour’s fraction of a day’s wage would not sustain a family.” (Time permitting, see Deuteronomy 24.15, which was likely on everyone’s mind)

Does this explanation alter how you would feel?

When have you gotten what you didn’t deserve?

When have you *not* gotten what you *did* deserve?

- e. How does this parable exemplify Jesus’ repeated statement in verse 16: “So the last will be first, and the first will be last”?
- f. Read Matthew 20.17-19

This third of Jesus’ “passion predictions” keeps the reader of Matthew’s gospel focused on where the story of Jesus is heading. Time permitting, read the first two in 16.21 and 17.22-23.

Why do you think Jesus keeps reminding them of the impending trouble in Jerusalem?

- g. Read Matthew 20.20-22

First century Jewish culture afforded older women a place of respect not held by younger women. As such, they could get away with making requests that men dared not mention aloud.

So, do you think this was really their *mother’s* request?

Or the disciples’ themselves? (notice who Jesus responds to in verse 22!)

- h. Jesus’ question, “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” includes a common metaphor for God’s wrath (see Psalm 75.8 or Isaiah 51.17).

What, then, is Jesus asking? How does it relate to his passion prediction just moments before?

- i. Read Matthew 20.23-28

Jesus affirms that, indeed, the disciples will share His cup. And they do in Matthew 26.27-28.

R.A. Cole writes, "This price they will in any case pay, for this is not the price of Christian greatness but the price of following Christ at all."

What do you think Cole means by that?

j. Reread verse 24

Why do you think the other disciples were indignant with James and John?

k. In Matthew 20.25-28, Jesus offers both a positive and negative example. Write them here in your own words:

Negative Example:

Positive Example:

l. Where – or whom – has God called you to serve?

m. Time permitting, reflect on Philippians 2.1-11.

What should our attitude be when serving?

IV. Pray

a. Ask that God would give you an attitude not of "power over" others, like James and John wanted, but "power under" others, in which you would serve willingly,

b. Pray for Good Shepherd, that God would inspire us – as a community – to be willing servants wherever we go,

c. Lift up those who see our willing service, that they would understand our motivation for God's Kingdom, and that we would have the words to explain our actions!