

## Rediscovering Jesus in the Jewish Gospels

Why Stand Ye Here Idle?

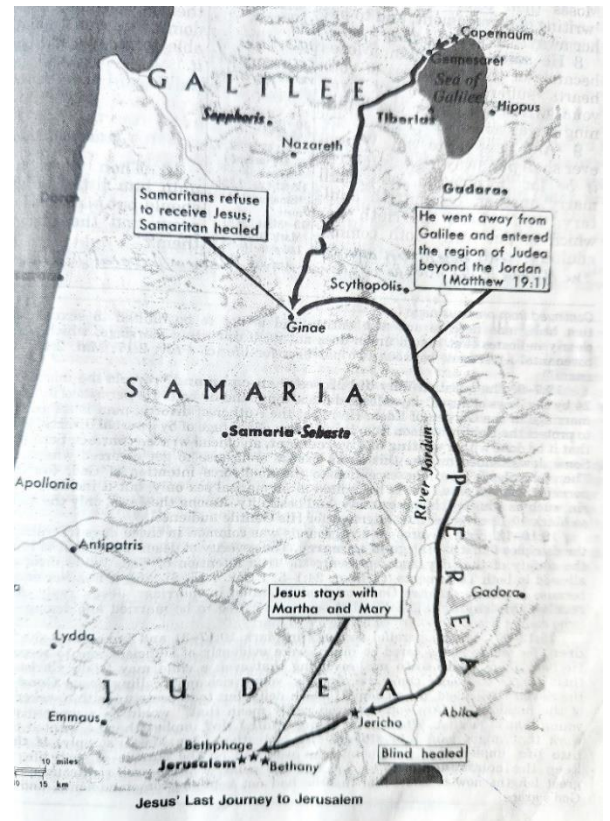
Matthew 19:27- 20:28 Lesson 38

This chapter concludes Jesus' ministry in the north Galilee region. *Wilmington's Guide to the Bible* lists these events in step # 48 of his "72 steps from Glory to Glory." This time frame should be cross-referenced with events recorded in Mark 10-12 and Luke 10-18. Jesus is in Jericho (20:29) from where he is making "Aliyah" going up to Jerusalem from the Jordan Valley for the last time. He is accompanied by throngs of people who have swelled into great multitudes and will soon hail him King Messiah with great fanfare. Within two weeks he will be arrested and crucified. Messianic anticipation of the multitudes is at a fever pitch.

The chapter divisions should not interrupt the continuation of the theme in chapter 19:27-30. In contrast to the rich young ruler who went away saddened rather than giving up everything to follow Jesus, these disciples abandoned everything to follow him. However, the old self-centered question of "what's in it for us?" arose.

They were assured not only of blessings now in following Jesus but eternal life, not as a reward, but as he had just pointed out that they already were inheritors of eternal life through their previous proclamation of faith.

His message in Matthew 1 through chapter 12 was "The kingdom of Heaven is at hand." This was consistent with all the Old Testament Jewish prophets of whom John the Baptist was the last. After the official rejection of His power, message, and person by chief rabbis from Jerusalem (12:23,24), Jesus never again made the offer of a literal kingdom, to "this generation." When they attributed all the evidence "signs" and wonders as being from Beelzebub ie: Satan, Jesus immediately gave seven parables in Matthew chapter 13. His new introduction to parables became "the kingdom of Heaven is likened unto." The disciples noted this stark change of methodology. He had never used parables with the multitudes, only them. He explained that it was given to them to understand but veiled in parable to those who did not believe that they might not understand. We covered the purpose and interpretation of these parables and His paradigm shift. (These can be viewed online at [www.jewishawareness.org](http://www.jewishawareness.org) under Ministries/Bible Study in lessons 27 and 28). In short, Jesus changed the message from offering a literal kingdom to Israel and postponed it to be given to "another nation." The literal offer was withdrawn from "this generation" of Israelites and given to "another nation" not a gentile nation but an end times new "nation" of Israelites as the Old Testament prophets foretold in Jeremiah 31 among other prophecies. Ever since that rejection Jesus had been teaching the development of a "mystery" form of the kingdom that would rise in the interim before he returns to establish the literal kingdom. Although he has switched paradigms, the multitudes and even his disciples missed it as evidenced by their proclamations at his Triumphal entry in Jerusalem (21:1-11). Nevertheless, he must still show up in Jerusalem hailed as Messiah on the exact prophesied day (Daniel 9:24-27). Jesus said, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke 19:42). He had to ride into Jerusalem fulfilling the Psalmist's prediction.



Psalms 118 is the last of the Psalms of Ascent (113-118). We believe it was the “hymn” Jesus sang with the 12 after the last Passover seder as they went to Golgotha (Matthew 26:30).

“I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD. The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death. **Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD: This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter.** I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone *which* the builders refused is become the head *stone* of the corner. This is the LORD'S doing; it *is* marvellous in our eyes. **This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.**” Psalm 118:17-24

Now that we have the context of his kingdom message and understand that he gave them a preview of the “mystery” form of the kingdom in chapter 13 which would begin by Pentecost, we can understand this verse...

“ I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (19:28).

“Regeneration” [Gk. Παλιγγενεσία- paliggenesia (spiritual) *rebirth* that is, (figuratively) spiritual *renovation*; specifically Messianic *restoration*]<sup>ii</sup> This word was used of the ancient Greeks as far back as 200 BC speaking of the post deluge world (Philo Mos. 2, 65) – *paliggenesia kosmos* – renewal of the world. It used of the rebirth of a redeemed person, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, [Gk. Παλιγγενεσία- paliggenesia] and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” Titus 3:5<sup>iii</sup>

Here it refers to a regenerated world of the future. (see my six-part course on the Millennial Reign of Christ “Thy Kingdom Come” in our online School of Biblical and Jewish Studies.) The rest of the verse clarifies the time period as “when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory.” They were assured regal positions.

“ And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Luke 22:28-30

It seems that John’s description of 24 elders in Revelation 4:4-11 may include the 12 Apostles and 12 from the Gentiles in the “Church age.” Although the Revelation 4 scene occurs in Heaven, the same scenario will play out on Earth when Jesus returns as King of Kings to save Israel and rule the world. “shall reign with him a thousand years.” (Revelation 20:6)

“Many that are first shall be last and the last shall be first” refers to the rich young ruler’s reaction when he heard Jesus’ statement that “a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of Heaven,” for the young ruler had great possessions. The rich are first in this world’s kingdom in power, position, and possessions. The common people who comprise most of Jesus’ followers are often last in this system. In contrast, those who have laid up treasures in Heaven will be first in the Kingdom realm. Notice Jesus did not say that it is not impossible for rich men to believe and enter, but that it is difficult. He did not say that no rich would be in the kingdom. There is however the implication that some of those that we think to be first in the kingdom will not be. We will see more about that in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:15-25. (again, see my online series “Thy Kingdom Come.”)

The phrase “last shall be first” should have been verse one of chapter 20, because Jesus’ parable of the workers in the vineyard develops that theme and is repeated in 20:16 closing this section “and the first last”. Then Jesus concludes this discussion resolving their dispute over position of prominence. They latched on to the 12 thrones concept and a “game of thrones” began. Again, their upside-down and backward paradigm of the coming kingdom and their positions in it had

to be corrected “Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant,” ie: “first shall be last”.

Here again, Jesus uses the “mystery” form of the kingdom language, “the Kingdom of Heaven is like.” Only one verse of interpretation is given found in verse 16, “So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called, but few chosen.” (20:16) To the last first principle “first shall be last,” He concisely adds, “Many are called, but few are chosen. Unlike his listeners, we know his summary from the outset. They were following in real time and with difficulty as evidenced by their jockeying for future positions in the following section.

He is still adjusting their focus in this parable. They have a case of “throne-itus.” Jesus flips their mindset of *what’s in it for me* to *what’s in it for the vineyard owner*?

### **Laborers During the Interim Mystery Kingdom**

Who are the characters?

1. The land owner or “householder” is the same as the “good man of the house.” (Gk. οἰκοδεσπότης oikodespotēs) is used twice in this passage, translated as householder in verse 1 and good man of the house in verse 11. He owns the vineyard and hires the laborers. He is also referred to as “the lord of the vineyard” (vs. 8) (Gk. Κύριος – lord, ἀμπελών ampelōn – vineyard).
2. The steward (Gk. ἐπίτροπος epitropos – steward is a domestic *manager, guardian*)  
Under the direction of the landowner, the steward oversees the work, and the workers, and also distributes the pay at the end of the day. In this scenario, he also handles complaints. He is middle management.
3. Laborers. (Gk. ergatēs *er-gat'-ace* = workers) They were seasonal day laborers much like migrant farm workers.

What is the agricultural goal?

We often assume that it is harvest time, but harvest is not mentioned. A great devotional book, *In My Father’s Vineyard* by Wayne L. Jacobsen with Lifestream Ministries, was inspired by his experience growing up on his father’s 35-acre vineyard. He uses the annual vineyard schedule to illustrate our spiritual growth. Vine care is a labor-intensive horticulture endeavor including planting, pruning, cultivating, irrigating, protection from insects and foxes and diseases, harvesting, and winemaking. The work is year-round. Significant first fruit is not seen for 3 years. Labor is especially intensive during pruning and harvesting season. We do not know which season is being referred to in the text. The need for the steward to go out four different times on the same day hints at the intensity of harvesting the perishable fruit before it spoils. However, there is no mention of the customary celebration as the grapes are trampled.

The point being made here was not to show reward for service i.e. sitting on thrones judging the tribes of Israel. His point seems rather to be the labor and pay of those hired. Rewards and pay are not necessarily the same. The son of the lord of the vineyard will sit at the table and enjoy the rewards from the fruits of the harvest with his father. The emphasis here is on day laborers who were standing idle in the marketplace until given a short opportunity to work for hire. Some worked a shorter period of time than others, but they all received the same pay. The laborers complained to the steward about the householder’s decision to pay every worker the same wage when some had worked longer hours. It was especially egregious for the all-day workers to see the ones who only worked an hour receive the same amount, “thou hast made them equal to us”(vs 12). The problem was that they “supposed that they should have received more.” They complained about the “good man of the house” but not to him directly. Middle management is the complaint department.

The steward defended the goodness of the lord of the vineyard. He rebuked their “evil eye” towards the one who, in his goodness, hired them. He reminded the ones who had worked all day that they had signed on and agreed to the terms. They did not negotiate up front for a greater percentage. There was no agreement with the short-term workers to pay them a full day's wages. “a penny” was promised to the first group but all successive workers agreed to only “whatsoever is right.” They would not have expected to receive full pay, especially those hired at the end of the day. The fact that this parable always elicits complaints of unfairness verifies that this parable is a one-size-fits-all truth. We all have an evil eye for comparison and suppose we’ll be treated at least equal to others or better than others. The lord of the vineyard will do “whatsoever is right.” We should not be surprised when we walk into His Kingdom on earth that those who were first will be last and those who have born the heat of the day for the longest time with little or no recognition by man may be first in line for a crown and for a position to reign with our Lord. Many were called, but few were chosen, and even fewer work in the harvest of God’s chosen people. It is a privilege to be called and chosen to serve our Lord Jesus. But did these disciples get the message? Sadly, not at this time.

Verses 17-19 were not spoken for the great multitudes to hear. He took the 12 aside to warn them. Can you imagine the poor timing and lack of discretion of the mother of James and John! She interrupts this tender moment with a special request for her sons to get the best positions. Jesus was kind enough to allow her time to make a request of Him. He patiently said to her “Ye know not what ye ask.” Then he asked the disciples, “Are ye able...” They affirmed. He assured them they would endure his bitter cup and baptism as it were by fire. He deferred to his heavenly Father as to who would sit where. I will be shocked if those two are flanking Jesus in the Millennial Temple throne room.

The problem became the response of the ten. (24) “Indignation against the two brethren” At this point I would be shaking my head and saying to myself “Did anybody hear a word I just said about the laborers in the vineyard? I mean, can anyone here recall one point from the parable I made just five minutes ago? As they neared Jerusalem I wonder which two Jesus asked to go borrow a donkey? That would have certainly put them in their place to the glee of the rest.

Jesus spelled it out. (25-28) Their great ones exercise authority over them and upon them. IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU. Jesus established his model. In my Kingdom, the greatest and chiefs shall be the servants and ministers. He then led by example; the Messiah, the Son of God came to minister/serve and “to give His life a ransom for many.”

Point in case: Two blind men cried out for Jesus. The multitude tried to hush them. They cried out for mercy from the “Son of David.” Jesus asked what they wanted him to do. He had compassion on them. He touched them. He healed them. Immediately they followed him. Did Jesus allow these two to be first in line on the way to Jerusalem? What if Jesus gave these two all the attention on the long 12-mile long uphill walk from Jericho to Jerusalem. For the petty 12 it may have been a pensive walk from Jericho to Jerusalem.

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<sup>i</sup> The King James Study Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishers, From MacMillian Bible Atlas

<sup>ii</sup> Strong’s Concordance

<sup>iii</sup> A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature, University of Chicago Press, 1958, P 606