



## Chapter 20

“The early bird gets the worm.” “You get out of it what you put into it.” These are the sayings that fuel our lives. We are self-made and convinced that our hard work pays off. We even celebrate and retell stories about the kind of hard work that gets results.

### Icebreaker:

1. What’s your favorite story about someone (you can even include yourself 😊) who worked really hard to achieve a certain result?

Most of life is based off merit. It’s true for our jobs, our education, our physical fitness, and virtually any other area of life...except one. There’s a shock to our system as we step into chapter 20. Human merit and God’s grace operate very differently.

### Verses 1-16

The previous chapter ended with Jesus’s comment that, in His Kingdom, “many who are first will be last, and the last first.” What’s that supposed to mean? Jesus is telling us in these verses. The parable is likely a picture of harvest, and it was common for day laborers to gather in a town’s marketplace waiting to be hired for the day. Commentators point out that the Jewish day began at 6:00am, so the “third hour” in v. 3 would refer to 9:00am, and so on.

We should probably understand the workers who get hired later in the day as being the least impressive of all the laborers. They’re idle in the marketplace because no one has seen them as being fit for the work at hand!

2. What’s your gut reaction to this parable? Does it strike you as being fair and just, or does it seem to violate what’s fair and just?
3. How is God’s grace different from a merit-based system of evaluation? Have you experienced a situation where you or others around you confused God’s grace with something that’s earned? If so, talk about what happened.
4. How does the protest of those hired first (vv. 11-12) reveal what happens when we think God’s grace is something we’ve earned or deserve?

We should give ourselves permission to feel bothered by this parable since it (potentially) offends our sense of how life works! This is first and foremost the shocking nature of God’s grace. Second, though, it’s also the power of parables. They present truth in a way that stirs our emotions.

### Verses 17-19

The contrast of first and last continues on in these verses when we set them in the broader context of the chapter. Jesus knows what awaits Him on the journey, and He discloses an even greater level of detail than in previous predictions.

5. Think about what’s in front of Jesus and how He is deliberately moving toward Jerusalem. What can we say about Jesus’s modeling of what it means to be “last”?

### Verses 20-28

Talk about a contrast! The mother of James and John comes to Jesus with a bold request. Arguments have been made for why she would speak on their behalf, but at any rate, it's best to see this request as being heartily endorsed by the brothers themselves. The positions of "at your right hand" and "at your left" are positions of exaltation. This, we're familiar with! The *first* are first!

6. This kind of campaigning is common in life, but why is it so out of place in this account?

Jesus sums it all up by saying that they have no idea what they're asking! They have confused a cup of suffering with a cup of glory. Grant Osborne explains that, "To 'share a cup' in Jewish thought means to share one's life and destiny." Jesus knows the suffering that awaits, but also that it's the Father's prerogative to assign the kind of exaltation James and John desire.

It's likely that the other 10 disciples are angry because of the way James and John have tried to usurp them. In other words, their anger is likely motivated by jealousy. This would help explain Jesus's desire to pull all 12 together for a leadership lesson.

7. This should be easy, but share a few examples of how people relish being in positions of authority and power over others? In other words, how is this true of our world?

Now we get down to business. Jesus is crystal clear in how His followers are *not* to operate according to the world's norm. Those who desire greatness must find it through servanthood.

8. The idea of servant leadership has grown in popularity even in secular settings. Name and describe one or two leaders who exhibit servant leadership.

9. Stop for a minute to think that the King of the Universe "came not to be served but to serve." What kind of impact does that statement make in your heart?

### **Verses 29-34**

The chapter concludes with yet another example that displays the "first-last" ironic nature of the gospel. Take, for example, the repeated Messianic titles of *Lord* and *Son of David* that are ascribed to the very same person who is going up to Jerusalem to be delivered over for crucifixion. In addition, many see an allegorical significance to how the men who are physically blind are able to see Jesus's true identity while many who can see physically are blind spiritually. Jesus is able to take those who are spiritually blind and give them sight. The physical miracle points to a spiritual reality. Note as well the persistent faith of the blind men—traits we've already observed in previous healing miracles.

10. Jesus is able to give sight to those who are blind. That's GOOD NEWS! As you wrap up this chapter's study, take time to pray for specific people who are still spiritually blind. Ask God to make them aware of their blindness so they would cry out for His mercy.

### **Tying the Bow**

*The first will be last and the last will be first.* That's a phrase that we should repeat each day as we live and breathe in a world where the first are first and the last are last. Discipleship is radical. It's counter-cultural. It's a commitment to go against the grain, and...as such...it can be lonely. This is why we were never intended to attempt it alone and in our own strength!

11. Can you see why community is essential as we follow Jesus? Spend time in prayer asking the Lord to strengthen, encourage, and direct your group so that you would be the kind of community that is informed by the Word of God and that lives out God's "first-will-be-last" ways in God's Spirit-enabled strength. In short, pray that you would be a Biblical Community on Mission!