

Matthew

Chapter Twenty



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Matthew 20:1

כִּי דוֹמָה מַלְכוּת הַשָּׁמַיִם לְאִישׁ בֹּעֵל-בַּיִת אֲשֶׁר הֵשָׁכִים
בְּבֹקֶר וַיֵּצֵא לִשְׂכָר פְּעָלִים לְכַרְמוֹ:

“For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who was the master of a household, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.”

The Kingdom of Heaven is like.

Continuing the tradition of using *Mashalim*, or Parables, Yeshua’s words echo throughout Rabbinic literature. The phrase, “לָמָּה הַדִּבֶּר דּוֹמָה” - to what can this matter be compared? Sefaria lists 2,993 sources. The Jerusalem Talmud uses similar phraseology to describe one special vine in the midst of His vineyard (Israel):

“To what can Rabbi Levi ben Sisi be compared? To a king who had a vineyard with a hundred vines which gave him every year a hundred barrels of wine. He reduced them to 50, to 40, to 30, to 20, to ten, to one, and this one gave him a hundred barrels of wine. This one vine was as dear to him as the entire vineyard. So Rabbi Levi bar Sisi was beloved before the Holy One, praise to Him, like all mankind.” (**Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 2:8, Guggenheimer Edition, Sefaria.org**)

His vineyard.

As stated above, the vineyard symbolizes Israel. The landowner represents God, who continually seeks to bring people into His service. The “workers” are the individuals who come

to work in His vineyard—those who choose to follow God's path, regardless of the time or their past. Isaiah says,

“For the vineyard of HaShem of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for justice, but, behold, oppression, for righteousness, but, behold, a cry of distress.” (**Isaiah 5:7**)

Midrash Mishlei, the Midrash on Proverbs, comments,

“R. Simeon ben Yohai said: Why was Israel likened to a vineyard? In the case of a vineyard, in the beginning one must hoe it, then weed it, then erect supports when he sees the clusters [forming]. Then he must return to pluck the grapes and press them in order to extract the wine from them. So also Israel - each and every shepherd who oversees them must tend them [as he would tend a vineyard.] Where in Scripture is Israel called a vineyard? In the verse For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel, and the seedlings he lovingly tended are the men of Judah (Isa. 5:7).”

(**Midrash on Proverbs, Chapter 19 translated by Burton L. Visotzky, Yale University Press, pg. 89**) [Slide 2]

Matthew 20:2

וַיִּפְסַק עִם הַפְּעֻלִּים דִּינָר לַיּוֹם וַיִּשְׁלַחם אֶל-כָּרְמוֹ:

“When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.”

A denarius a day.

It is generally accepted that a denarius is equivalent to a common worker's wages for one day's work (John 12:5, cf. Revelation 6:6). In the Book of Tobit, it says that a drachma would be a day's wages, which was about 88% of a Denarius's value:

“I will pay you a drachma a day as wages, as well as expenses for yourself and my son.”
(**Tobit 4:15, NRSVCE**)

The First Century, it would be 1/10 of a Troy ounce of silver, with 90% purity. It later lost its purity and was subsequently devalued.

“It is difficult to give even rough comparative values for money from before the 20th century, as the range of products and services available for purchase was so different.”
([Wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denarius), Denarius).

The concept of “fair wages” (*schar yishar*) is found in numerous texts, where it is stated that a worker should not be deprived of their due payment (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). The landowner’s agreement to pay a denarius is seen as a symbol of the just and agreed-upon terms of the covenant between God and the workers.

Matthew 20:3

וַיֵּצֵא בַּשָּׁעָה הַשְּׁלִישִׁית וַיֵּרָא אֲחֵרִים
עֹמְדִים בְּטָלִים בַּשּׁוּק:

“He went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace.”

Third Hour/Standing Idle.

The workers who are still idle at the third hour (approximately 9am) represent individuals who have not yet engaged in God’s service. Every person has a time to come into the service of God, and there is always an opportunity for individuals to repent and join in the work of the covenant, regardless of when they begin. The “doing nothing” of these workers can symbolize a period of spiritual neglect or a lack of engagement in divine work, yet the landowner’s action of calling them to work reflects God’s desire to bring everyone into His fold, regardless of their past.

Marketplace.

In the ancient world, the marketplace was where people gathered to seek work. It symbolized a place of both opportunity and need. Here it seems to mean the world in general where there are various opportunities to serve different people or purchase different products that are being offered.

Matthew 20:4

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לָכוּ גַם-אַתֶּם אֶל-כַּרְמִי וְאֲנִי אֶתֶן לָכֶם
כַּמְשַׁפָּט וַיֵּלְכוּ:

“To them he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you. So they went their way.’”

Whatever is right, I will give you.

The going rate is one denarius for a day’s work as above. However, they are starting the day late. Pirkei Avot says,

“Rabbi Elazar said: Be diligent in the study of the Torah; And know how to answer an epicuros, and know before whom you toil, and that your employer is faithful, for He will pay you the reward of your labor.” **(Pirkei Avot 2:4, Sefaria.org) [Slide 3]**

Matthew 20:5

וַיֵּצֵא גַם בַּשָּׁעָה הַשְּׁשִׁית גַּם בְּתִשְׁעִית וַיַּעַשׂ כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה:

“Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise.”

Sixth/Ninth Hour.

To understand this parable, we must understand how the day was divided. Xus Casal writes,

“The Israelites divided the day into four quarters (cf. Neh. 9:3), each one consisting of three hours (cf. John 11:9). It is implied that the parable begins in the first hour of light, about six o’clock in the morning, which is the first quarter. Then it says the third hour (which is the end of the first quarter), then sixth (end of the second quarter) and ninth (end of the third quarter). The eleventh hour is one hour before the close of the working day, when it is already too dark to work. The times represent a person’s lifetime, the first hour being birth and the twelfth hour the time close to death.” **(Xus Casal on Mattai 20:3, Mattai)**

Not only could it represent the time of death, but also the prophetic timeline of history, with the eleventh hour representing the last moment before the new “day” of the Messianic Era.

Matthew 20:6

וַיֵּצֵא בַּשָּׁעַת עֶשְׂתֵּי עָשָׂרָה וַיִּמָּצֵא אֲחֵרִים עֹמְדִים וַיֹּאמֶר
אֲלֵיהֶם לָמָּה אַתֶּם עֹמְדִים פֹּה בְּטָלִים כָּל-הַיּוֹם:

“About the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle. He said to them, ‘Why do you stand here all day idle?’”

Eleventh Hour.

Whereas a day’s worth of work would be on average 12 hours (or whatever the daylight would be at the time of the year), here these workers would have only worked one hour. Pirkei Avot says,

“R’ Yaakov used to say, “He used to say, one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the life of the world to come. And one hour of spiritual rest in the world to come is better than all the life of this world.” (Pirkei Avot 4:17) [Slide 4]

Standing Idle all day.

This verse highlights the concept of divine mercy and the opportunity for repentance and redemption, no matter how late in the day it may seem. The workers standing idle at the eleventh hour can symbolize individuals who have not yet engaged in God’s service or those who, for various reasons, have not yet recognized the importance of participating in the covenantal work. There is a strong emphasis on the idea that it is never too late to return to God or to begin fulfilling one’s spiritual responsibilities.

Matthew 20:7

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ כִּי לֹא-שָׂכַר אוֹתָנוּ אִישׁ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם לָכוּ
גַּם-אַתֶּם אֶל-הַכֶּרֶם וְשִׁכְרְכֶם יִתֶּן לָכֶם:

“They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and you will receive whatever is right.’”

No one has hired us.

The workers’ response, “Because no one has hired us,” reveals a sense of waiting for an opportunity to serve or contribute. Perhaps the workers are not idle out of choice but because

they have not been given a task or a calling, which can reflect the feeling of spiritual emptiness that arises when one has not yet found their place in God's service.

You also go into the vineyard.

The landowner's willingness to hire these workers, even at the end of the day, illustrates God's boundless mercy. God is eagerly awaiting the return of those who have strayed, much like a father waiting for his child to come back home. This reflects the belief that God's grace and opportunity for redemption are available to all, no matter when they come to Him, and that God's desire is always for the welfare of His people, even if they begin their spiritual journey later than others.

Matthew 20:8

וַיְהִי בָעֶרֶב וַיֹּאמֶר בֹּעַל הַכֶּרֶם אֶל-פְּקִידוֹ קְרָא
אֶת-הַפְּעֻלִּים וְתֵן לָהֶם אֶת-שְׂכָרָם הַחֵל בְּאַחֲרוֹנִים וְכֵלָה
בְּרֵאשׁוֹנִים:

“When evening had come, the lord of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning from the last to the first.’”

From the last to the first.

The decision to pay the workers in reverse order—starting with those hired last and moving to those hired first—may seem unusual, but it reflects a deeper lesson about the nature of divine reward.

In addition, this action of paying the workers from last to first can be seen as an illustration of *Teshuvah* (repentance). Even those who turn to God later in life or after they have sinned are still given the full opportunity to be rewarded in the World to Come, highlighting the fairness and generosity of God's ultimate justice.

Matthew 20:9

וַיָּבֹאוּ הַנִּשְׁכָּרִים בְּשַׁעַת אַחַת עֶשְׂרֵה
וַיִּקְחוּ אִישׁ אִישׁ דִּינָר אֶחָד:

“When those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came, they each received a denarius.”

Eleventh Hour/Denarius.

In Jewish thought, God's actions are often described as merciful beyond measure. While humans may think in terms of proportional rewards based on effort and time, God's reward is based on grace and His own righteousness.

This teaching also speaks to the concept of *schar mitzvah* (reward for good deeds). While in Jewish tradition there is a notion that greater merit comes with greater labor, the landowner's actions here remind us that the ultimate reward from God is not based solely on the quantity of work but on His boundless generosity.

Matthew 20:10

וּבָבֹא הָרִאשׁוֹנִים דָּמוּ בְנִפְשָׁם כִּי יִקְחוּ יוֹתֵר וַיִּקְחוּ
גַּם־הֵם אִישׁ אִישׁ דִּינָר אֶחָד:

“When the first came, they supposed that they would receive more and they likewise each received a denarius.”

Supposed they would receive more.

Pirkei Avot again echoes this theme,

"Rabbi Tarfon says: The day is short, and the work is abundant, and the workers are lazy, and the reward is great, and the Master of the house is pressing." (**Pirkei Avot 2:15**) [Slide 5]

Samuel Tobias Lachs cites a parallel passage,

“...to what can this be compared? To a king who hired two laborers, one of the m worked a whole day and received a dinar, and one workes one hour and received a dinar. Which one was more beloved to him [the king]? The one who worked one hour and re ceived a dinar.” (**M. Semachot 3, pgs. Higger edition, 220-221, cited in a**

Matthew 20:11

וַיְהִי בְּקִחְתָּם וַיְלֻנוּ עַל-בַּעַל הַבַּיִת לֵאמֹר:

“When they received it, they murmured against the master of the household,”

They murmured against the master.

The workers who were hired early in the morning expected to receive more, assuming that their longer hours of work should result in greater compensation. While the workers believe they should be rewarded more, the landowner is acting in accordance with what was promised—a denarius for a day’s work, and his decision is just. While one could argue that he overpaid the workers who began late in the day, it cannot be argued that he underpaid those who worked all day. This underscores the Jewish teaching that God’s promises are always fulfilled, even if they don’t fit human expectations of fairness. Keener writes,

“Because status defined roles in ancient society, those who complained about receiving a day’s wage for a day’s work would be viewed as rude and ungrateful.” (Keener, Craig S. **The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (IVP Bible Background Commentary Set)** (p. 95). Kindle Edition.)

Matthew 20:12

אָלֶּה הָאֲחֵרוֹנִים לֹא עָשׂוּ כִּי אִם-שָׁעָה אַחַת וְאַתָּה הַשּׁוֹיֵת
אֹתָם לָנוּ אֲשֶׁר סָבְלָנוּ אֶת-טֶרֶחַ הַיּוֹם וְחֶמּוֹ:

“saying, ‘These last have spent one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat!’”

Made them equal to us.

The Midrash Rabbah says,

“When Rabbi Bon ben Rabbi Ḥiyya died, Rabbi Zeira got up and eulogized him with this verse: “Sweet is the sleep of the laborer.” To what was Rabbi Bon ben Rabbi Ḥiyya comparable? To a king who had a vineyard and hired many laborers to work it. There was one worker who performed his labor much more efficiently than all the rest. What did the king do? He took him by his hand and went with him on long and short strolls. At evening time, the laborers came to collect their wages, and that laborer came with them, and he gave him his wages in full. The laborers began protesting; they said: ‘We toiled all day, and this one toiled for two hours, and the king gave him his wages in full.’ The king said to them: ‘Why are you protesting? This one toiled for two hours efficiently [and accomplished] what you did not [accomplish] in your toil over the whole day.’ So too, Rabbi Bon ben Rabbi Ḥiyya learned [more] Torah in twenty-eight years than a distinguished disciple can learn in one hundred years. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Anyone who toils in Torah study in this world, in the World to Come they do not leave him to sleep, but they lead him to the study hall of Shem and Ever and of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Aaron. Until when? Until “I will make a great name for you, like the names of the great ones in the world” (II Samuel 7:9).” (**Kohelet Rabbah 5:11, Sefaria.org, cf. Shir HaShirim Rabbah 6:2) [Slides 6-7]**

Matthew 20:13

וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־אֶחָד מֵהֶם רֵעִי לֹא
הוֹנִיתִי אֶתְךָ הֲלֹא דִּינָר פָּסַקְתָּ עִמִּי:

“But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Didn’t you agree with me for a denarius?’”

Friend.

Keener comments,

“Hired workers were not landowners’ “friends,” and certainly not in this case; the respectful title might shame the complainers for their own lack of respect (cf. Mt 22:12; 26:50).” (**Keener, Craig S. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (IVP Bible Background Commentary Set) (p. 95). Kindle Edition.**)

I am doing you no wrong.

I paid you what was agreed. Pirkei Avot says,

“He [Rabbi Tarfon] used to say: It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it; If you have studied much Torah, you shall be given much reward. Faithful is your employer to pay you the reward of your labor; And know that the grant of reward unto the righteous is in the age to come.” (Pirkei Avot 2:16, Sefaria.org) [Slide 8]

Matthew 20:14

קח את־שְׁלֶדְךָ וְלֵךְ וְאֲנִי רְצוֹנִי שְׂאֵתוֹן לָזֶה הָאֲחֵרוֹן כְּמוֹדְךָ:

“Take that which is yours, and go your way. It is my desire to give to this last just as much as to you.”

It is my desire.

What the agreement is between one worker is irrelevant to the agreement of the other worker. The Talmud says,

“As it is said: “And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious” (Exodus 33:19); in His mercy, God bestows His grace upon every person, **even though he is not worthy**. Similarly, God says: “And I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy,” **even though he is not worthy**. According to Rabbi Meir, the way in which God conducts the world and bestows grace and mercy was not revealed even to Moses.” (Berachot 7a, Sefaria.org)

Matthew 20:15

הֲלֹא אוֹכֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּשָׁלִי כְרֻצוֹנִי
הָאִם־תִּרְעַע עֵינְךָ עַל־אֲשֶׁר טוֹב אָנִי:

“Isn’t it lawful for me to do what I want to with what I own? Or is your eye evil, because I am good?”

Or is your eye evil because I am good?

Keener comments,

“An “evil eye” (literally; cf. KJV) meant a “stingy eye” in common idiom (cf. Prov 28:22).” (Keener, Craig S.. **The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (IVP Bible Background Commentary Set) (p. 95). Kindle Edition.**)

The second part of the verse, “Or are you envious because I am generous?” addresses the issue of *ayin ra’ah* (the evil eye), which in Jewish tradition refers to envy and jealousy, particularly when one sees others receiving blessings or rewards. The workers’ reaction reveals a common human tendency to compare one’s own position with that of others and to feel resentment when someone else receives a perceived advantage, even if that advantage is not taken away from oneself. In Jewish thought, *kin’ah* (envy) is seen as harmful to both the person who feels it and the person who is the object of it.

The verse calls on the workers—and by extension, the reader—to reflect on their own attitudes toward divine generosity and to recognize that God’s ways are often more expansive and merciful than human conceptions of justice.

Matthew 20:16

כֵּן יִהְיוּ הָאַחֲרוֹנִים רִאשׁוֹנִים וְהָרִאשׁוֹנִים יִהְיוּ אַחֲרוֹנִים
(כִּי־רַבִּים הֵם הַקְּרוּאִים וּמַעֲטִים הַנִּבְחָרִים):

“So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Xus Casal points out a parallel in the Talmud,

רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחַי: רָאִיתִי בְנֵי עֲלִיָּה וְהֵן מוֹעָטִין

“Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: I have seen the sons of Aliyah (the spiritually elevated) and they are few.” (**Sukkah 45b, Sefaria.org**)

The Talmud says,

“As Rabbi Abbahu said: In the place where penitents stand, even the full-fledged righteous do not stand, as it is stated: “Peace, peace upon him who is far and him who is near.” (**Berachot 34b, Sefaria.org**)

Matthew 20:17

וַיְהִי כַּעֲלוֹת יֵשׁוּעַ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם וַיִּקַּח אֵלָיו
אֶת-שְׁנַיִם הָעָשָׂר לְבָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם בַּדֶּרֶךְ:

“As Yeshua was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them,”

Going up to Jerusalem.

Any journey to Jerusalem is always described as “going up”, even if one were on Mount Everest or at the North Pole. This can be seen as Yeshua’s final journey to Jerusalem, and one anticipated by the disciples to inaugurate the Messianic Era.

Matthew 20:18

הִנְנוּ עֹלִים יְרוּשָׁלַיִם וּבֶן-הָאָדָם יִמָּסֵר לְרָאשֵׁי הַכֹּהֲנִים
וְלַסּוֹפְרִים וְהַרְשִׁיעָהוּ לָמוֹת:

“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death,”

Son of Man will be delivered.

Contrary to expectations, Yeshua is going to become Mashiach ben Yosef.

Matthew 20:19

וַיִּמָּסְרוּ אוֹתוֹ לַגּוֹיִם לְהַתִּיל בּוֹ וּלְהַכּוֹת
אוֹתוֹ בְּשׁוֹטִים וְלַצֵּלֵב אוֹתוֹ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יָקוּם:

“and will hand him over to the Gentiles to mock, to scourge, and to crucify, and the third day he will be raised up.”

Hand him over to the Gentiles to mock/scourge/crucify.

This verse needs to be read to every anti-Semite who blames ‘the Jews’ for the death of the Messiah. Yeshua says “No man takes my life from me,” (John 10:18) and in a sense, everyone, both Jew and Non-Jew, are responsible, as he died for our sin.

Matthew 20:20

אָז נָגְשָׁה אֵלָיו אִם בְּנֵי זַבְדַּי עִם-בְּנֵיהָ
וּתְשַׁתְּחוּ לוֹ לְבַקֵּשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ דָּבָר:

“Then the mother of the sons of Zavdai came to him with her sons, kneeling and asking a certain thing of him.”

Mother of the sons of Zavdai.

She later appears in Matthew 27:56, at the crucifixion, thus showing her devotion to Yeshua.

Matthew 20:21

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ מֶה-בִּקְשָׁתְךָ וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אָמֵר-נָא וַיֵּשְׁבוּ
שְׁנֵי-בְנֵי הָאִלָּה אֶחָד לִימִינְךָ וְאֶחָד לְשְׁמָאלְךָ בְּמַלְכוּתְךָ:

“He said to her, ‘What do you want?’ She said to him, ‘Command that these, my two sons, may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand, in your Kingdom.’”

One on your right, one of your left.

The request made by the mother of James and John, asking for positions of prominence in the kingdom, reflects a desire for honor and prestige, which is a natural human aspiration.

What would you say if Yeshua asked you this question?

Matthew 20:22

וַיַּעַן יֵשׁוּעַ וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יִדְעֶתֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר שְׁאַלְתֶּם הֵיכַל
תִּוְכְּלוּ לִשְׁתּוֹת אֶת־הַכּוֹס אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹתִיד לִשְׁתּוֹתוֹ
וּלְהִטָּבֵל טְבִילָה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נִטְבָּל וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו נוֹכָל:

“But Yeshua answered, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be immersed with the immersion that I am immersed with?’ They said to him, ‘We are able.’”

Are you able to drink the cup?

Strack and Billerbeck highlight a parallel,

“To the prophets who were with him, Isaiah said this before he was sawed in two: ‘Go to the region of Tyre and Sidon; for it is for me alone that God has mixed the cup.’”

(Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 5:13, cited in Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud & Midrash*, ed. Jacob N. Cerone, trans. Andrew Bowden and Joseph Longarino, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022), 956.)

When Yeshua asks James and John if they can drink the cup He is about to drink, it evokes the imagery of *the cup* in Jewish tradition, which is often associated with divine judgment or suffering. In Jewish liturgy, the concept of *drinking the cup* is most famously connected to the *cup of salvation* (Psalm 116:13), but it can also refer to a cup of *suffering*, such as in the prophetic texts (Jeremiah 25:15) where God commands nations to drink the cup of wrath as a form of judgment. In this context, the “cup” symbolizes the trials and suffering that the Messiah must endure.

We can.

James and John may be thinking about the Cup of Praise, the Fourth Cup of the Seder, the Cup of the Messianic Era, the Cup of Glory. “We can,” reflects a common human desire to share in the glory or honor of a leader without fully understanding the cost that may come with it. In Jewish thought, true discipleship and service to God often involve a willingness to endure suffering for righteousness' sake. The idea of suffering for a greater purpose is embedded in Jewish teachings about the *tzaddik* (righteous one), who often faces trials and persecution because of his commitment to God’s will.

Matthew 20:23

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם הֵן אֶת־כּוֹסִי תִשְׁתּוּ (וְטָבִילָה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי
נֹטָבֵל תִּטְבִּילוּ) וְשֵׁבֶת לִימִינִי וְלִשְׁמָאֲלִי אֵין בְּיָדִי לְתַתָּה
בְּלָתִי לְאֲשֶׁר הוּכָן לָהֶם מֵאֵת אָבִי:

“He said to them, ‘You will indeed drink my cup, and be immersed with the immersion that I am immersed with, but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give but it is for whom it has been prepared by my Father.’”

You will indeed drink my cup.

The first part of the verse, "You will indeed drink from my cup," affirms the idea that James and John will indeed face suffering and trials, as discussed in the previous verse. This echoes the Jewish concept of *suffering for righteousness' sake* (Isaiah 53:3-5).

It is not mine to give.

However, the second part of the verse, where Yeshua says, "to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant," emphasizes the Jewish concept of divine sovereignty. It is God alone who determines who is elevated or honored in His kingdom. This reinforces the idea that positions of honor in the *World to Come* (*Olam HaBa*) or in God's divine order are not determined by human desires or ambitions, but by God's will and purpose.

Matthew 20:24

וַיְהִי כֹּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ־זֹאת הָעֶשְׂרָה וַיִּכְעֲסוּ אֶל־שְׁנֵי הָאֲחִים:

“When the ten heard it, they were indignant with the two brothers.”

They were indignant.

The other ten disciples react with anger to the request made by James and John for positions of honor in Yeshua's kingdom.

Matthew 20:25

וַיִּשׁוּעַ קָרָא לָהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר אַתֶּם יֹדְעִתֶם כִּי־שָׂרֵי הַגּוֹיִם
רֹדִים בָּהֶם וְהַגְדֹּלִים שְׁלֹטִים עֲלֵיהֶם:

“But Yeshua summoned them, and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.’”

The rulers of the gentiles lord it over them.

Pirkei Avot says,

“Shemayah and Avtalyon received from them. Shemayah said, “Love work, and hate domination, and make not yourself close to the government.” (**Pirkei Avot 1:10**)

Matthew 20:26

וְאַתֶּם אֶל־יְהִי כֵן בֵּינֵיכֶם כִּי הַחֹפֵץ לִהְיוֹת גָּדוֹל בְּקִרְבְּכֶם
יְהִי לָכֶם לַמָּשָׁרָת:

“It shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.”

Whoever desires to become great shall be your servant.

Keener comments,

“Inverting the role of master and slave was radical anywhere in antiquity; even the few masters who believed that slaves were theoretically equals did not go as far as Jesus goes here.” (**Keener, Craig S. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (IVP Bible Background Commentary Set) (p. 96). Kindle Edition.**)

Matthew 20:27

וְהַחֹפֵץ לִהְיוֹת לְרֹאשׁ בְּקִרְבְּכֶם יְהִי לָכֶם עֶבֶד:

“Whoever desires to be first among you shall be your slave,”

Whoever desires to be first shall be your slave.

The use of the word "slave" is striking. In the context of the time, slavery represented the lowest and most humble status one could occupy. Yeshua is teaching that the one who seeks the highest position in God's Kingdom must be willing to serve others in the most selfless way, even to the point of complete submission to their needs.

Matthew 20:28

כְּאִשֶּׁר בֶּן־הָאָדָם לֹא בָא לְמַעַן אֶשְׁרֶי־יִשְׁרָתוּהוּ כִּי
אֶם־לְשָׂרֵת וְלָתֵת אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ כְּפָר תַּחַת רַבִּים:

“even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.

This verse encapsulates the core of Yeshua's mission and His radical understanding of leadership and greatness.

Matthew 20:29

וַיְהִי כִּצְאָתָם מִירֵיחוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ אַחֲרָיו הָמוֹן עַם־רָב:

“As they went out from Jericho, a great multitude followed him.”

Jericho.

Some have pointed out that one Gospel says this event happened when Yeshua was coming to Jericho, and others say it happened as he was leaving Jericho. A careful reading of the Gospels solves the problem easily,

“Then they came to Jericho. And *later*, as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a beggar who was blind *named* Bar Timai, the son of Timai, was sitting by the road.” **(Mark 10:46, NASB modified)**

Luke says,

“He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man called by the name of Zakkai, he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. *Zakkai* was trying to see who Yeshua was, and he was unable due to the crowd, because he was short in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree in order to see him, because he was about to pass through that *way*. And when Yeshua came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zakkai, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” And he hurried and came down, and received him joyfully. When *the people* saw *this*, they all *began* to complain, saying, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner!” But Zakkai stopped and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I am giving to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone, I am giving back four times as much.” And Yeshua said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” **(Luke 19:1-10, NASB)**

The Hebrew word for sycamore is שִׁקְמָה shikmah. Peter J. Williams says,

“Another striking piece of knowledge appears where Luke records that the tax collector Zacchaeus climbed up a sycamore tree in Jericho (Luke 19:4). The relevant species, *ficus sycomorus*, did not grow in northern Mediterranean countries (Italy, Greece, Turkey), and in fact lacks natural pollinators in those countries.⁵³ But this tree was characteristic of Jericho, according to the second-century rabbi Abba Shaul.⁵⁴ How did the author know there were sycamores in Jericho? The simple explanation is that he had either been there or spoken to someone who had.” **(Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (p. 82). Crossway. Kindle Edition.)**

The Talmud affirms,

“It was similarly taught that Abba Shaul says: There were sycamore tree trunks in Jericho, and powerful people would take them from their owners by force. The owners stood and consecrated these trunks to Heaven.” **(Pesachim 57a, Sefaria.org)**

Matthew 20:30

וְהִנֵּה שְׁנֵי-עִוְרִים יֹשְׁבִים עַל-יַד הַדֶּרֶךְ וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כִּי יֵשׁוּעַ
עֹבֵר וַיִּצְעֲקוּ לֵאמֹר חַנּוּן-נָא אֲדֹנֵינוּ בֶן-דָּוִד:

“Behold, two blind men sitting by the road, when they heard that Yeshua was passing by, cried out, ‘Lord, have mercy on us, you son of David!’”

Son of David.

Calling Yeshua the “Son of David” is highly significant from a Jewish perspective. By addressing Yeshua in this way, the blind men are acknowledging His Messianic identity, signaling a recognition that he has the authority to bring healing, not only in a physical sense but in a spiritual and national context as well.

Matthew 20:31

וַיִּגְעֲרֻם הָעַם לְהַחֲשֹׁתָם וְהֵם צָעֲקוּ
עוֹד וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲדֹנֵינוּ חַנּוּן-נָא בֶן-דָּוִד:

“The multitude rebuked them, telling them that they should be quiet, but they cried out even more, ‘Lord, have mercy on us, you son of David!’”

The multitude rebuked them.

Keener observes,

“Those believing that their trek to Jerusalem was leading to the establishment of the kingdom might well feel that Jesus had more important things to do than to be stopped by these beggars, whether they just want alms or are seeking something more.”
(Keener, Craig S.. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (IVP Bible Background Commentary Set) (p. 96). Kindle Edition.)

Matthew 20:32

וַיַּעֲמֵד יֵשׁוּעַ וַיִּקְרָא לָהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר מַה-תִּרְצוּ שְׁאֶעֱשֶׂה לָכֶם:

“Yeshua stood still, and called them, and asked, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’”

What do you want me to do for you?

Yeshua’s willingness to stop and engage with the blind men, even though they were being dismissed by the crowd, shows His deep compassion. He does not ignore the marginalized or those in need. Instead, He takes time to respond to their cries. This demonstrates that, in the Kingdom of God, the cries of the humble and desperate are never ignored, and Yeshua is always available to meet genuine needs.

He already knows what the blind men need. However, His asking them this question invites them to express their faith and desires openly. Yeshua provides an opportunity for the blind men to directly express their faith. The clarity and specificity of their request—“Lord, we want our sight to be restored”—demonstrates their belief in Yeshua’s power to heal. Their boldness in asking is a model for all who approach God: to ask for what they truly need with faith and without hesitation.

Matthew 20:33

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו אֲדֹנָינוּ אֲשֶׁר תַּפְסֵחֲנָה עֵינֵינוּ:

“They told him, ‘Lord, that our eyes may be opened.’”

Our eyes may be opened.

Isaiah says,

“I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind...” (**Isaiah 42:7, NASB**)

One commentary says,

“***To open the eyes***”. The Holy One said: I will call you to open your eyes that were blind, because of great troubles in the exile and to extract you from the captivity, from the dark dwelling of exile.” (**Tze’edah Ure’edah, Haftarah, Bereshit 4, Sefaria.org**)

Matthew 20:34

וְרַחֲמֵי יֵשׁוּעַ נִכְמְרוּ וַיַּגַּע בְּעֵינֵיהֶם וּפָתָאם
נִפְקְחוּ עֵינֵיהֶם וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרָיו:

“Yeshua, being moved with compassion, touched their eyes, and immediately their eyes received their sight, and they followed him.”

Touched their eyes.

Psalms says,

“The L-RD restores sight to the blind; the L-RD makes those who are bent stand straight; the L-RD loves the righteous.” **(Psalm 146:8, Sefaria.org)**

The Radak, R' David Kimchi, comments,

“Those who are blind from an eye disease, He will heal them. This ailment is mentioned because blindness, like imprisonment, prevents a person from moving from their place. Alternatively, it can mean those blinded by extreme distress, as suffering is likened to darkness and salvation to light. There are many verses in Scripture that attest to this. Similarly, He did for Israel, who were blinded in exile, as it is said, “We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noonday as in the night.” **(Radak on Psalm 146:8, Sefaria.org)**