Chapter 20 – Answers

1. How does the beginning of chapter 20 tie into chapter 19?
   1. Remember, the Evangelists did not separate their accounts into chapters and verses. chapter 20 is the continuation of the discussion Jesus has with the disciples from chapter 19. Jesus continues to impart upon the disciples the importance of humility, sacrifice, service, and discipleship as we begin chapter 20.
2. How do you understand the parable of the landowner with the laborers? What is the point of the parable?
   1. Please keep in mind, parables have a multiplicity of meaning. It is possible that every time we read them, or hear them read, the parables can teach us something new. The point of this parable is to show (at least):
      1. The Lord sets the conditions for the work of salvation (work vs wages).
      2. Each person, each worker, is promised something for the work produced, regardless of the time at which the worker “punched in” (i.e., early in the day, middle of the day, late in the day).
      3. Similarly, a reward is possible regardless of the time in a person’s life in which he begins service to the Lord.
      4. While the day is with us, there is always an opportunity for work to be done. The length of work (service to God) does not ultimately matter except that each worker, once he “punches in” (starts serving the Lord) is expected to finish his work.
      5. Those who begin work for the Lord early should not be prideful that they have labored for a long period of time nor should they hold it over the heads of those who came to work later. For those who begin work later in the day, they are assured of the same reword for their efforts – they will not be shorted what the Lord has promised.
      6. The Lord wants everyone – no matter when that person comes to work for the Lord.
3. How do you understand verses 14-15?
   1. In verse 14, we have a reminder that the Lord has made a contract with the workers. Since both parties agreed, and since all conditions were met to serve the contract, the workers cannot argue their work (starting earlier in the day – that is, earlier in their lives) is more important or worthy than whatever the conditions the Lord has set. Salvation belongs to the Lord and He will offer it according to His will. And if there can be a “besides” to that statement, since the workers already agreed to what the Lord had offered, they are bound by their agreement and should abide by it with honor, humility, patience, love, and joy.
   2. In verse 15, we get a glimpse, a peephole’s view, of the “ways of the Lord.” (reference Isaiah 55:8) With frequency, the actions and goodness of the Lord put to shame quickly the thoughts, ambitions, and deeds of men. In doing so, all our efforts, in comparison, are worthless. Therefore, the mere existence of the Lord and the goodness that comes from Him force our inadequacies to be illumined easily. In this way, the heart of man may be hardened simply out of a negative response to the sheer goodness of God which is ever-present. Thus, if we view our efforts apart from the will of God and His goodness, we can easily make idols of ourselves and our own works. The danger is this can cause enmity between man and the Lord.
4. Does this remind you of any writings of a particular Father of the church – perhaps heard recently?
   1. St. John Chrysostom based his Catechetical Paschal homily on this very parable – making the connection between the work periods in the parable with the length and effort put into Great Lent. In a similar fashion to the parable, St. John Chrysostom points out that at Pascha, all are welcome, regardless of how long they have labored in during Great Lent.
5. What is happening, once again, in verses 17-19? Why does Jesus keep making this point?
   1. At this point in St. Matthew’s account, the time is the period just prior to Holy Week. Jesus, once again, reminds the disciples of the fact that He will be given up to the leaders of the Hebrews and then to the Gentiles (Romans) to be condemned, crucified, die, and resurrect on the third day. Since this is the culmination of Jesus’ work of salvation, and since it is still a very difficult thing for the disciples to understand (they’ve been taught, or it has been assumed, that the Christ was going to lead the Hebrews to some sort of political freedom), Jesus must continually remind them of what is to come. This is the third or fourth time this is mentioned by Jesus.
6. How do you view the mother of Saints Iakovos and John (verses 20-21)?
   1. Clearly, she wants the best for her children. At the same time, she does not really understand what she is asking. Further, such thoughts and questions can lead to anger and jealousy in others.
7. What is the baptism Jesus is speaking about in verses 22-23? The disciples answer correctly, but do they know what Jesus really means?
   1. The baptism Jesus is referring to is martyrdom/death. Jesus is about to go to His death, and, indeed, all of the disciples (except St. John and Judas) will die in martyrdom. Death and resurrection have always been connected to baptism. St. Paul illustrates this point in his letter to the Romans, chapter 6. As one is put under the water, the person dies to the old, sinful self. When the person rises out of the water, he rises into a new life in the Kingdom. Martyrdom means death in the earthly sense, but the person will rise to life eternal in the Kingdom.
   2. At this point, the disciples really don’t understand what Jesus is saying. How can they? It is not until after the resurrection, when the meet Jesus and Jesus continues to instruct them, and then, especially, after Pentecost, when the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit, dot hey understand what Jesus has done and what they must do to fulfill righteousness and receive salvation.
8. What does the displeasure of the other disciples towards the Zebedee brothers reflect?
   1. It reflects our human response. Here we have a serious discussion with the 12 closest confidants of Jesus, and the mother of two of the confidants, in front of everyone else, is asking for something special for her sons! It is reasonable, from the earthly perspective, for the disciples to be upset with the Iakovos and John because of what their mother said. It is as if the brothers thought of themselves in a higher light than the rest (or at least the mother did) and were not trying to be “team players.”
9. What is Jesus’ response to the ire of the disciples towards Iakovos and John?
   1. The disciples, from an early perspective, are naturally upset with the Iakovos and John. Jesus, however, is teaching them to be godly. Jesus tells them that the way of the world is to be envious of others, to lord power over others, to want things just for oneself. Jesus teaches the disciples that if they want to attain heaven, they must be the best servants to others – sacrificing themselves out of godly love. To make the point crystal clear, Jesus reminds them that He, the Son of Man, came to serve, not to be served – and it is true. Jesus came and served the people constantly throughout His period of ministry. He never put His position over anyone else, even as Lord of Creation! – and He expects His disciples to do the same.
10. What is special about how the blind men approach Jesus (verses 29-31)? Does this remind you of any other healing miracle – the persistence of the blind men? The next chapter, 21, starts with Jesus’ triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. What is important about the miracle at the end of chapter 20 (verses 29-34)?
    1. The blind men are persistent in their approach to Jesus. Even when they are rebuked by the disciples and others around Jesus, they continue to request Jesus’ attention regardless.
    2. Furthermore, they refer to Jesus as the “Son of David.” When people use this appellation for Jesus, it means they understand Jesus to be the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah – the Son of God.
    3. Their faith is incredible because it is not through their eyes that they understand Who Jesus is – it is through their understanding in their hearts. Though blind, they “see” clearly Who Jesus is – much better than most others around them.
    4. This story reminds us of the Canaanite woman whose daughter was ill. The sequence of events (minus some of the details of the interactions) are they same. In both cases, the Canaanite woman and the two blind men, acknowledge Who Jesus truly is and show incredible persistence and faith (and the Canaanite woman was a Gentile!).
    5. This miracle is important in its timing because Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem triumphally, and His passion is nigh. Once again, the words of the prophets are true: the blind see, the mute speak, the lame walk. The positioning of this story reiterates the reality that Jesus is the Christ. As well, and as St. Matthew notes, Jesus offers Himself out of compassion, which is a driving force in His work and should be the example by which we offer ourselves to others. Finally, as the blind men receive their sight, they follow Jesus. Truly, many eyes will be opened after Jesus’ resurrection, and those people will also follow Jesus into the Kingdom (and this includes us!).