

Copied from bibleref.com

Isaiah 55: 6-9 Page 1

Psalms 27: 1-9. Page 1

Philippians 1: 12-14 19-30. Page 8

Matthew 20: 1-16 Page 18

Isaiah chapter 55

6“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; **7**let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. **8**For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. **9**For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Psalm chapter 27

English Standard Version

1Of David. The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? **2**When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. **3**Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. **4**One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. **5**For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. **6**And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD. **7**Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! **8**You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, LORD, do I seek.” **9**Hide not your face from

me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation!

Context Summary

Psalm 27:1–6 demonstrates David's confidence in the Lord. He trusts God will protect him from his enemies and restore him to Jerusalem, where he will offer sacrifices. Psalm 22:8–26 is a parallel passage. It's possible David wrote this psalm when he was in the Negev, as a fugitive from King Saul, or during the violent rebellion of his son, Absalom. In the second half of this psalm, David pleads with God for the very deliverance he seems assured of in the first half—demonstrating that "knowing" not to be afraid does not make a person immune to the emotion of fear.

Psalm 27:1

ESV

Of David. The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

What does Psalm 27:1 mean? The Lord is David's light, salvation, and stronghold. Each of these terms has significance in Hebrew thinking.

Light is a common metaphor in the Bible for knowledge, truth, and goodness. This was the ultimate ideal of the people of Israel, much as ancient Greeks valued *knowledge*, or Romans valued *glory*, and modern Americans speak of *freedom*. As his light, the Lord was the source of David's joy, understanding, and life.

As his salvation, the Lord was David's deliverer from his enemies. To be "saved" is to be rescued from something. Though David was a warrior, even in his own successes he never forgot that it was ultimately God who gave him victory.

The word "stronghold" implies a place of security and safety. The Hebrew term is *mā'oz*, which can also be translated as a "refuge," or even as a "harbor." The Lord was like a fortress that kept David safe.

As David thinks about the Lord filling these roles, he recognizes he has no reason to fear anyone. Like David, we have no reason to fear, because the Lord keeps us safe. The apostle Paul affirmed that "God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7). It has been observed

that there are enough exhortations in the Bible to "fear not" that we can assign a unique one to every day of the year.

As David shows later in the psalm, "knowing" that one ought not be afraid does not mean one will never actually experience fear. His pleas beginning in verse 7 are those of someone who trusts God to assuage the very human fear he is feeling.

Psalm 27:2

ESV

When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.

What does Psalm 27:2 mean? David expresses confidence that his enemies will not succeed. If they try to attack and destroy him, David is sure they will fail. In fact, he is certain they will fail. By identifying his foes as "evildoers," David indicates they are not just his enemies but God's enemies as well. It is certain, therefore, that they will stumble and fall.

David lived out that level of assurance when he engaged Goliath in combat. Goliath thought he would give David's flesh to the birds and wild animals, but David told Goliath that the Lord would deliver him into his hand, and David would give the Philistines' dead bodies to the birds and wild animals (1 Samuel 17:44–46). The apostle John realized our enemies—Satan and his followers—want to destroy believers, but he encouraged us to rely on the Lord for victory. He wrote, "Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in [the evil world system]" (1 John 4:4).

Psalm 27:3

ESV

Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

What does Psalm 27:3 mean? This creates an interesting contrast with a later statement in this psalm, where David pleads with God not to forsake him (Psalm 27:9). The first verses of this psalm present the idea that David has no reason to fear, thanks to what he knows of God. Questions such as "of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1) are more statements than inquiries. David is expressing the

fact that he has no *reason* to fear—but that does not mean he is literally immune to anxiety.

Faith, as expressed in the Bible, is trust in the face of uncertainty. David's faith in the Lord as his light, salvation, and stronghold would not lag even if an army laid siege around him. His confidence remained firm even if an enemy should declare war against him. In moments of emotion, he would cry out to God (Psalm 22:1; 27:12), but not from a place of despair.

An incident from the life of Elisha shows how capable the Lord is to protect His followers. Elisha warned the king of Israel about where the Syrian army planned to be, so the king of Syria plotted to destroy Elisha. He sent a great army by night to surround the city of Dothan, where Elisha and his servant were staying. In the morning, Elisha asked the Lord to open his servant's eyes that he might see how the Lord would protect them. When the Lord opened the servant's eyes, the servant saw horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (see 2 Kings 6:8–17). Sometimes, we may feel surrounded by threatening circumstances, but the Lord surrounds us with His grace that is sufficient for every crisis (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Psalm 27:4

ESV

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.

What does Psalm 27:4 mean? David's top priority in life was his relationship with the Lord. Although he was in the wilderness seeking refuge from his enemies, David's heart was in the tabernacle seeking the beauty of God. He longed to return to the tabernacle and spend the rest of his life in worship. Sometimes trouble drives us closer to the Lord and makes us more desirous of worshiping Him in the fellowship of other believers.

The prophet Jonah realized that when he was in the belly of the great fish his life was fainting away. And yet, he remembered the Lord and prayed to Him (Jonah 2:7). The Lord answered Jonah's prayer and delivered him from the great fish, depositing him safely on shore (Jonah 2:10). The believers to whom the book of Hebrews was addressed were tempted to faint under persecution. So the writer exhorted them to cling to faith "without wavering" and to "stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another" (Hebrews 10:23–25).

Psalm 27:5**ESV**

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.

What does Psalm 27:5 mean? The center of worship in Israel, during the time of David, was still a movable tabernacle: God's house was still a tent. Even so, this location was sometimes called a "temple" (1 Samuel 1:9). David's son Solomon built the first permanent sanctuary which was a true "temple" of God, but David rightly considered the tabernacle the equivalent of God's protection. He would feel safe in the tabernacle. His enemies would not be able to reach him there.

In David's time a host who welcomed a visitor into his tent accepted the responsibility to keep the visitor safe. His tent served as a stronghold (Psalm 27:1) for the visitor. David thought of the Lord as his protector under the cover of the Lord's tent, the tabernacle. Believers today are safe in Christ, who "tabernacled" among men (John 1:14). He said, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). Our chief enemy, the Devil, would love to pry us from our Savior's hand and destroy us, but he faces an impossible task!

Psalm 27:6**ESV**

And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

What does Psalm 27:6 mean? Confidence that he will triumph over all his enemies does not inspire David to take credit for victory. Instead, he would joyfully offer sacrifices to the Lord in the tabernacle and sing to the Lord. Likely, the sacrifices would be thank offerings.

Such joyful celebration had marked the occasion when David retrieved the ark of the covenant from the Philistines. He brought it to Jerusalem "with rejoicing" (2 Samuel 6:12). He "danced before the LORD with all his might" (2 Samuel 6:14).

"David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the horn" (2 Samuel 6:15).

The Lord Jesus promised to be with us always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). The apostle Paul reminded the Philippians that "the Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:5). Hebrews 13:5 gives us a promise from the Lord: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Knowing the Lord is present with every believer always and everywhere should cause us to rejoice greatly with thanksgiving. It also gives us truth to cling to when circumstances cause us anxiety (Psalm 27:7–9).

Context Summary

Psalm 27:7–14 reveals that David, while he commits his faith to God, is not immune from fear. In the prior section of this psalm, David stated his reasons to be confident in the Lord. Here, however, David seems to be pleading for those exact protections. Like anyone else, David experienced anxiety. Rather than succumbing to fear, however, David chose to trust God, remind himself of God's protection, and come to the Lord in prayer. This is concluded with another expression of trust in God.

Psalm 27:7

ESV

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!

What does Psalm 27:7 mean? After expressing reasons to be fully confident in God's protection, David desperately pleads with the Lord to answer his prayer. Perhaps at this time he saw the enemy bearing down on him. David's eyes may have been focused more on his enemy than on the Lord. He knew that he did not deserve an answer from the Lord. After all, he was a sinner like all other human beings. He simply appealed to the Lord to be gracious to him and answer him.

Rather than contradicting the first six verses of this psalm, David's prayer here is a natural reaction. He "knows" he has no reason to fear—but that knowledge will not make us immune to anxiety. Psalm 27, then, becomes a mixture of prayer and self-reassurance. David is expressing his need to God, stating both his trust and his weakness all at once. We see a father do something similar in Mark 9:24.

Similarly, we do not deserve an answer to our prayers, but the Lord is gracious, He provides what we do not deserve. The writer to the Hebrews implores us to draw near to the throne of grace so that "we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). In the midst of a sudden violent storm on the Sea of Galilee, Peter stepped out of a boat at the command of Jesus. He began to walk on the waves toward Christ. But soon Peter took his eyes off Jesus and looked at the stormy wind. That's when he began to sink. But like David who prayed desperately for the Lord to be gracious to him, Peter desperately cried out to the Lord, "Lord, save me" (Matthew 14:30). The Lord is gracious, and He answers desperate prayers!

Psalm 27:8

ESV

You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek."

What does Psalm 27:8 mean? David knew the Lord wanted him to seek His face. In fact, this is God's desire for all people: the word translated "seek" from the original Hebrew of this verse is addressed to a group of people, not just one person.

To "seek God's face" is to strongly desire His presence and blessing. David responded to the Lord's invitation wholeheartedly. Perhaps, as David wrote Psalm 27, he recalled the Lord's words in Deuteronomy 4:29, 31: "You will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul...For the LORD your God is a merciful God, He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them."

In Jeremiah 29:13 the Lord promises: "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart." Our prayers for an awareness of the Lord's presence and blessings must never be halfhearted or complacent. We must pray fervently with the whole heart and in faith (James 1:5-8; 5:16).

Psalm 27:9

ESV

Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation!

What does Psalm 27:9 mean? When God "hides His face" from us, it means He is displeased. The imagery is of a parent turning to look somewhere else when a child is disrespectful or rude. David did not want the Lord to be displeased with him. He knew he was a sinner who did not deserve the Lord's presence and blessings. Because of his sinful condition, he knew he deserved for the Lord to reject him in anger. Although the Lord had anointed David to be king over all Israel, David humbly referred to himself as the Lord's servant.

Psalm 51:17 assures us that the sacrifices the Lord accepts are a broken spirit and a broken and contrite heart. Faced with overwhelming opposition, David's spirit was broken before the Lord and his heart was broken and contrite. He recalled that God had helped in the past and urged Him not to abandon him now. He addressed his prayer to the God of his salvation. He recognized that only God could deliver him in his time of crisis.

This verse shows both sides of David's faith when compared to Psalm 27:3. David "knows" that God is with him, and yet he still experiences human fears and anxieties. His response to those emotions is not panic, or despair, but a trusting appeal to the Lord.

Philippians chapter 1

12I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, **13**so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. **14**And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

19for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, **20**as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. **21**For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. **22**If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. **23**I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. **24**But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. **25**Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, **26**so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, **28** and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. **29** For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, **30** engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Context Summary

Philippians 1:12–18 explains Paul's perspective on his imprisonment. Specifically, Paul sees the many hardships of his life as a good thing, for one reason: they have led to the spread of the gospel. Paul has been held captive; this has allowed him to preach to his jailers. Paul has seen others repeat his own message in an effort to harm him; this has caused even more people to hear the gospel. This passage sets up Paul's upcoming argument that, whether by life or death, he intends to bring glory to God.

Philippians 1:12

ESV

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,

What does Philippians 1:12 mean? Verse 12 changes Paul's focus. He began by encouraging the Philippians in what they had done, and would continue to do. Here, he begins to encourage them in what he was experiencing. Paul previously mentioned his time in prison (Philippians 1:7). He was often persecuted, sometimes severely (2 Corinthians 11:23–27), and suffered many other forms of hardship for the sake of his message. Paul puts a uniquely Christian spin—a truthful one—on these experiences. These things have all served to advance the spread of the gospel. For this, Paul is actually rejoicing. While the world would have seen Paul's situation only in negative terms, Paul saw it as a positive way to share the gospel with new people.

Further, Paul calls the spread of the gospel the "advance" of the gospel. The gospel did not merely spread like other information; it "advanced." It was a message of power that charged forward into unknown territories to change hearts and lives. The message that changed this man from Saul to Paul was

changing people in the capital of the empire. Paul considered his suffering well worth the transformation it provided for those around him in Rome.

Philippians 1:13

ESV

so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

What does Philippians 1:13 mean? This advance of the gospel, mentioned in verse 12, included even the guards who were part of Paul's Roman imprisonment. The imperial guard was literally the *praetorium*: soldiers assigned to guard high-ranking officials in Rome, who now had some exposure to Paul's teachings. Paul's captivity gave him the opportunity to interact with these men on a regular basis. As a result, many of them had been converted. It was of great significance that some of the most revered soldiers of Rome had become followers of Jesus.

In addition, Paul mentions "all the rest." This is likely a general reference to both Jews and Gentiles living in Rome who heard about Paul's gospel message. Acts 28:30–31 says of Paul, "He lived there [Rome] two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."

Critically, Paul notes that these people are all aware that he is a prisoner for one reason only: his witness for Christ. Neither the guards, nor "all the rest," are under any illusions. Paul is no criminal or rebel. He is guilty of nothing more or less than preaching the gospel.

Philippians 1:14

ESV

And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

What does Philippians 1:14 mean? Unbelievers in Rome had heard about Paul's message (Philippians 1:13). In fact, they had come to understand clearly that Paul's imprisonment was entirely for the sake of the gospel. Paul was

obviously not a thug or criminal. Not only had Paul been given a chance to witness to unbelievers, but other Christians had gained confidence by seeing how Paul responded to his circumstances. Paul's captivity motivated Christians to share the gospel more boldly. If Paul could go to jail for his faith, other believers could take a bold, risky stand for their faith in Jesus as well.

Even from the earliest days of Christianity, some have struggled with fear in sharing their faith. All believers are called to make disciples (Matthew 28:18–20). Certain occasions will give people more boldness to speak out. However, there are those who will be fearful for a variety of reasons. We must all work to better share our faith, acknowledging that some will be bolder or more gifted in evangelism than others.

Context Summary

Philippians 1:19–30 shows Paul reflecting on two competing desires. On one hand, a believer wants to serve God and bring others to Christ through their life. On the other hand, a Christian yearns to leave suffering behind—to be with God in eternity. Paul concludes that it's better to live until God calls him home, so he can serve his fellow men. Paul also encourages the Philippians with his conviction that he will be released to see them again. His experiences, good or bad, are all adding to the glory of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:19

ESV

for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,

What does Philippians 1:19 mean? Paul is confident of his future release from Rome. Prisoners in Rome could be held only for so long, without formal charges, before being released. It's possible that Paul's antagonists had nothing solid against him and were content to interfere by having him placed under house arrest. We are not told what specific legal or social reasons Paul might have had for this conclusion. However, we are given reasons for his confidence. These include the prayers of the Philippian believers and the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Prayer and God were the power behind his expectation of future release.

Was Paul released? It is clear he was, though it is not directly mentioned in the New Testament. The book of Acts seems to have been completed shortly after his release since it mentions "two full years" as the duration of his house arrest

(Acts 28:30–31). This is approximately the maximum time a Roman could be jailed without being formally charged by his accusers. The Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus) were all written after his release, sometime between AD 62 and 67.

Philippians 1:20

ESV

as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

What does Philippians 1:20 mean? Though Paul is confident of his release, he still has to face some form of trial. This could potentially end in death. After all of his troubles and tribulations, Paul was secure in his faith, and confident that he would represent his Savior well. In fact, Paul is not only poised, he looks forward to the opportunity to speak about Christ. Paul speaks as if he's already won the battle, and knows that no matter what happens to him, God will be glorified.

Regardless of the outcome of his trial, Paul wanted to honor God. He was willing to do this either through continued life and ministry, or through the kind of death he would endure. According to history, both were actually the case. Paul was released from this first Roman imprisonment and continued on with his ministry. However, he was ultimately arrested again and was incarcerated in Rome where he would die at the hands of the legal system. He remained faithful in both life and death, serving as a strong example for believers today.

Philippians 1:21

ESV

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

What does Philippians 1:21 mean? This verse offers some of the most memorable words in the entire Bible: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Regardless of whether the verdict of his case was life or death, Paul would remain faithful to God. He knew that life on this earth meant to live for Christ, but death would be even better because he would be in the presence of the Lord. Paul was in no hurry to die, since it was important to him to spread the gospel as far as possible (Philippians 1:22).

These words are also important when discussing what happens to a believer's soul upon death. Some have argued that "soul sleep" is possible. This is the view that the believer's soul enters a state of unawareness, and does not go to heaven with the Lord until the future judgment. This verse shows the false nature of this teaching. Paul clearly states his expectation to be with Christ the moment his life on earth ends. This is a view also reflected by Jesus when He told the thief on the cross he would be in paradise with Him "today" (Luke 23:43).

Philippians 1:22

ESV

If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.

What does Philippians 1:22 mean? Paul confidently states that any time he had left on earth would result in positive work for God. He did not see the remainder of his life as wasted time, even if he was to spend it in imprisonment. Instead, every moment of every day is to be considered "fruitful labor," or positive work that can be done for the Lord. Our choices in this life do matter, and Paul was well aware of how precious our given time is. This is one of the reasons Paul often refers to his years of rejecting Christ, before his conversion (1 Corinthians 15:9).

For as much as Paul wanted to serve God, the different outcomes before him create a dilemma. Naturally, he desired to be with Christ immediately. In some ways, death is preferable to life for the believer because it means living forever in the presence of the Lord. However, God also has plans for our life during the days we live. We are called to live every moment for His glory, allowing the Lord to define when we end our life on earth and begin our new life in heaven.

Philippians 1:23

ESV

I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

What does Philippians 1:23 mean? Paul continues describing his dilemma. Living means serving Christ, gaining rewards, and giving Him glory. At the same time, death means an end to suffering and an eternity with God. In heaven with the Lord, there will be no more sin, no pain, and no crying of any kind

(Revelation 21 — 22). This is certainly something believers should desire. It's encouraging, in times of trouble, to know this is our destiny (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

There has always been tension, for believers, between these seemingly opposed desires. On one hand is our desire to please God, and bring others to Christ. On the other hand, there is the rest and victory of heaven. The solution to this problem has always been the same: our lives are meant to serve others (Philippians 1:24), not ourselves. When we put God's will, and the needs of others, before our own will and needs, we can faithfully live focused on God's work. The timing of our heavenly arrival is in God's hands.

Philippians 1:24

ESV

But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

What does Philippians 1:24 mean? Paul has been musing about the conflict he feels at this time of imprisonment. Which does he want more, to endure persecution and preach the gospel, or to be taken to eternity with Christ? Paul concludes that, since God's will is for others to be saved, it is better for him to be alive. When God wills Paul's death, it will happen. Paul's focus must be to stay alive and serve others, including the Philippian believers. In fact, Paul seems to have a special burden for believers such as the Philippians; his comment here specifically mentions the readers of this letter as a reason for him to live on.

In Colossians 4:3 Paul will add a related note: "the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison." Paul was imprisoned because of following Christ. He wasn't there for personal failures, or for something random. There was a God-given reason for it, though that didn't make it any easier to endure. The benefit of this persecution included the evangelism of many people in Rome, as well as influence through writing four Prison Epistles.

Philippians 1:25

ESV

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,

What does Philippians 1:25 mean? Paul doesn't merely hope that he will remain alive to continue ministering. He is "convinced of this." He gives two specific reasons why he feels this way, as they apply to the Philippian believers. First, though the Philippian church was growing more and more mature, Paul could continue to serve them. His purpose is to assist the Philippians to great maturity. While it is not noted in the New Testament whether Paul ever returned to Philippi again, Paul appears confident he would return (Philippians 1:26).

Second, Paul would remain for their "joy in the faith." Faith involves both growth and joy. First Peter 1:8–9 says, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." The continued presence of a man like Paul would certainly encourage the people he had been ministering to.

Philippians 1:26

ESV

so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

What does Philippians 1:26 mean? Paul anticipates seeing the Philippian believers again, as a moment of great joy. That would be a victory well worth praising God for. If Paul did return to Philippi after this first Roman imprisonment, they would certainly have given glory to Christ Jesus. Prior to this letter, the Philippian believers were probably uncertain whether or not Paul would ever live to leave Rome. In this letter, Paul believes he will soon be released and later visit them. This would be a miraculous answer to prayer.

At this point, Paul has transitioned from reassuring his readers that his suffering is for a good cause, to his confidence that he will survive, to an encouraging hope for reunion. From the Pastoral Epistles, it is clear Paul did travel east again near the area of Philippi. However, Philippi is not mentioned in these later writings as one of his destinations. In addition to Philippi, Paul expected to once again visit Philemon in the city of Colossae (Philemon 1:22).

Philippians 1:27

ESV

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

What does Philippians 1:27 mean? In prior verses, Paul explained how his suffering was for the sake of Christ, and encouraged his readers with a hope of reunion. In verse 27, Paul gives the Philippian believers one assignment, in advance of his hoped-for visit: live a life worthy of the gospel. This is very similar to the teaching Paul gave in Ephesians 4:1: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." He says something similar in Colossians 1:10, encouraging others to live out the truth they proclaim.

Paul desires these Christians to show unity to the world. This echoes the teachings of Christ (John 17:11, 22), who emphasized the importance of love in living out the gospel (John 13:34–35). Paul is calling on his readers to live out unity, in one spirit and mind, working together "for the faith of the gospel." His goal continually remained on the gospel and its spread.

Philippians 1:28

ESV

and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

What does Philippians 1:28 mean? Paul encourages Christians to live with great courage, rather than in fear. The "opponents" he speaks of are likely the false teachers and antagonists mentioned in Acts 16. These enemies opposed Christianity—and Christians—in Philippi. Even though the Philippian believers were not facing the same level of persecution as Paul, they did face opposition in other ways. Christians throughout history have experienced every level of intimidation, and different levels of oppression. Those who read Paul's words in modern, free countries should realize how easy it is—relatively speaking—to be a follower of Jesus, as compared to the first century.

When believers live without fear in the face of threats, it serves as a form of evangelism. It emphasizes the confidence Christians have in the truth, which should be seen as a warning to those who reject their message. God's salvation

can give great courage to believers. At the same time, the courage of believers often reminds unbelievers of the uncertainty of their own afterlife. This partly explains why Christianity spreads so well under persecution: only the true believers claim Christ, and true belief, lived out in love, is a powerful testimony.

Philippians 1:29

ESV

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,

What does Philippians 1:29 mean? Paul clearly teaches that both believing and suffering were parts of faithful Christian living. His readers had likely already faced some persecution, and may have wondered why they had to suffer if they were faithfully living for God. Paul makes it clear that godliness and suffering often go together. There are times when we suffer, at the hands of the world, because we are following the will of God. The world hates the gospel, and it will naturally try to stamp it out (John 16:1–4). Second Timothy 3:12 says, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

Paul will later note in Philippians 3:8 and 10, "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. ... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." Christ is worthy of whatever suffering a believer may face. In Colossians 1:24, Paul would write, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake." First Peter 2:21 notes the role of suffering in this way: "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps."

Philippians 1:30

ESV

engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

What does Philippians 1:30 mean? Paul ends this chapter with a note regarding his own suffering. He was arrested in Palestine and appealed to the Roman legal system to escape an assassination attempt. During his sea voyage to Rome, the ship crashed and he and the crew barely escaped. A snake then bit Paul, and he shook it off into a fire. He was eventually brought to Rome,

where he had been rejected by many Jews, yet had a powerful ministry to Gentiles despite being under house arrest for two years (Acts 27—28).

Despite all of these past sufferings and his ongoing imprisonment, Paul was still able to preach to many, write letters to encourage believers, and be used of God to help encourage the spread of the gospel. Suffering is difficult, but is not without purpose. God has used pain, and continues to use pain, as faced by believers, to accomplish much good.

Paul's point here is also that the struggle he faces is exactly the same as it has always been. Whether the struggles are large or small, the same basic idea applies. The world—which rejects God—is working constantly to interfere with the spread of the gospel. Paul's experiences are simply the natural consequences of that battle.

Matthew chapter 20

English Standard Version

1“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. **2**After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. **3**And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, **4**and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ **5**So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. **6**And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ **7**They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ **8**And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ **9**And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. **10**Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. **11**And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, **12**saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ **13**But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? **14**Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. **15**Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ **16**So the last will be first, and the first last.”

Context Summary

Matthew 20:1–16 is a parable illustrating what Jesus meant in saying that some of the last will be first and the first last in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:30). When a master hires five groups of workers at different times throughout the day, he pays the last group the same amount that he pays the group hired early in the morning. Though that group grumbles, they received what they had agreed to earn and had not been cheated. The master insists he has the right to show generosity to whomever he wishes. Jesus concludes by saying, again, that the last will be first, and the first last. Themes found in this parable are echoed in the later portion of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:25–32).

Matthew 20:1

ESV

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

What does Matthew 20:1 mean? Jesus has assured the disciples that they will be richly rewarded for all they have lost for His name's sake, in addition to inheriting eternal life. He concluded though by telling them that many who are first will be last, and the last first (Matthew 19:27–30).

Now Jesus uses a parable to illustrate what that means. A parable usually takes the form of a very brief story, as it does in this passage. Jesus often begins His parables by saying "the kingdom of heaven is like" the story that follows. His parables provide snapshots and impressions of the way His kingdom works for those who will spend eternity there. In this case, Jesus is describing the kingdom in terms of the reward to be given to those who work on His behalf.

He begins by describing the master of a house. This master owns a vineyard, and it is apparently harvest time. It was common to hire temporary workers during the harvest when the work became more than the full-time servants could handle on their own. Those available for temporary work would gather in the marketplace in hopes of being hired for the day.

Matthew 20:2

ESV

After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

What does Matthew 20:2 mean? This is part of another parable Christ uses to explain an aspect of the kingdom of heaven. This is in response to Peter's question about what he and the other disciples will receive for leaving behind everything to follow Jesus. Jesus has assured them they will be richly rewarded, but He seems to be warning them with this story that others who have done less will also receive a reward (Matthew 19:27–30).

He is describing the master of a house, the owner of a vineyard, who has gone to the marketplace to hire temporary workers or day laborers. As farmers do today, it was common in this era for a vineyard owner to employ workers by the day, especially during the harvest.

The typical workday was divided into four three-hour blocks of time, beginning about 6 a.m. and ending around 6 p.m. The master of the house hires this first group of workers early in the morning. They agree to work the full day for a denarius, the typical wage of a laborer or soldier. He sends them to the vineyard to get to work.

Matthew 20:3

ESV

And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace,

What does Matthew 20:3 mean? Jesus is telling a story about the master of a house hiring dayworkers for his vineyard. The story is a parable meant to illustrate a specific aspect of the kingdom of heaven. In this case, Jesus is showing His disciples what He means when He says that many who are first in the kingdom will be last and the last first (Matthew 19:27–30).

The typical workday at this time began around 6 a.m. and ended around 6 p.m. The master hired a group of workers early in the morning to work the vineyard for one denarius for the day, the common wage for laborers. Now he returns to the marketplace at around the "third hour" from 6 a.m. He needs more workers and finds some men with no other work to do. This does not mean that they are lazy, only that they have not yet been hired to do any work for the day. He will hire these workers, as well.

Matthew 20:4**ESV**

and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.'

What does Matthew 20:4 mean? Peter has asked Jesus what reward they will get for leaving everything behind to follow Him (Matthew 19:27–30). To illustrate the answer, Jesus is telling a parable about the kingdom of heaven. He compares the kingdom to the master of house hiring day laborers to work in a vineyard. He hires the first group early in the morning, likely around 6 a.m. They agree to work the day for one denarius each. Then he goes out again at the third hour, around 9 a.m., and hires another group. He now tells them to go work in the vineyard for whatever he decides is right at the end of the day.

It's possible that the second group does not expect to be paid a full denarius since they won't be working a full day in the vineyard. They apparently need the work and are willing to trust the master of the house to pay them something reasonable when the time comes, whatever that is

Matthew 20:5**ESV**

So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.

What does Matthew 20:5 mean? How much is a day's work in a vineyard worth? Jesus is telling a story that will answer that question: A day's work in the vineyard is worth whatever the master is willing to pay for it, even if you work more or less than other laborers. The point of Jesus' parable, though, is about rewards in the kingdom of heaven for those who work in this life for Jesus' sake.

The master of the house needs laborers for his vineyard in the same way that God uses workers on earth, followers of Jesus, to prepare the way for the kingdom of heaven and to "harvest" those who need to hear the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 9:36–38). The master in the story hired the first group of workers early in the morning, likely around 6 a.m. They agreed to put in a full day for a denarius. Then the master returned to the marketplace at the third hour, 9 a.m., and hired more workers for "whatever is right." He does the same thing at the sixth hour—about noon—and the ninth hour—about 3 p.m.—agreeing to pay

each worker whatever is right in exchange for working for what's left of the workday, until about 6 p.m.

The following verse shows that even all those workers are not enough, though. The master needs still more hands and bodies in the vineyard to get the work done.

Matthew 20:6

ESV

And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?'

What does Matthew 20:6 mean? The master of the house in Jesus' story has spent the entire day hiring temporary labor, day workers, to help with the work of his vineyard. This parable is about the kingdom of heaven, and the vineyard represents the work of the kingdom in this life for those who follow Jesus. It's also about the reward they will receive when their work is done.

The master hired the first group early in the morning, agreeing to pay a denarius in exchange for a full day's work. He has returned to the marketplace to find more willing workers every three hours, at 9 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m. He has agreed to pay each of them "whatever is right" (Matthew 20:4).

Now it is the eleventh hour and there is still work to be done in the vineyard. The eleventh hour is 5 p.m., and the workday commonly ends at around 6 p.m. In apparent desperation, the master returns to the marketplace once more and seems surprised to find more available workers. He asks why they have spent all day just standing around. They will reply that nobody has hired them (Matthew 20:7).

Matthew 20:7

ESV

They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'

What does Matthew 20:7 mean? Jesus' story of the master of a household hiring workers for his vineyard (Matthew 20:1) takes a surprising turn. Who hires temporary workers when there is only an hour remaining in the workday?

Apparently, the work that needs doing in the vineyard, likely the harvest, is so urgent that the master requires all the help he can possibly get. For his own reasons, and under his own counsel, the master chooses to bring on these last-minute helpers.

The master has hired workers four times, at 6 a.m., 9 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m. The day is almost over, but he returns to the marketplace once more. He asks some available workers why they have spent the entire day just hanging around the marketplace. Now they answer simply that nobody hired them. They were ready and willing but not needed. The master needs them, though, and immediately sends them to join all the others working in his vineyard. No mention is made of what he will pay them. Perhaps they think that getting paid anything for a little work would be worth it at this point.

Matthew 20:8

ESV

And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’

What does Matthew 20:8 mean? The workday in Jesus' parable is complete. The master of a household has hired five different groups of people to work in his vineyard throughout the day. The first group was hired early in the morning. The last group was hired around 5 p.m. Now the time has come for the master to pay all the people who participated in the work.

He instructs his foreman, the person in direct charge of the workers, to line them up for their pay from the last hired to the first hired.

Jesus is telling this story, in part, to answer Peter's question about what he and the other disciples will receive in the kingdom of heaven since they have left everything to follow Jesus. Jesus has assured them that they will receive a rich reward, in addition to inheriting eternal life (Matthew 19:27–30). He then said, though, that many who are first will be last and the last first. This parable explains what that means.

Matthew 20:9

ESV

And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.

What does Matthew 20:9 mean? This part of the story is meant to surprise the listener a bit. Those paying attention heard Jesus say that the first workers hired by the master of the house at around 6 a.m. agreed to payment of one denarius each for the day's work. This was a reasonable wage for that era. Now, though, the master has paid a denarius to the workers hired last, the ones who showed up at the vineyard at around 5 p.m. to work for only an hour.

Jesus' story plays on a universal truth of human nature. We're all naturally insecure about what other people are making and how much they have. Since Jesus' parable is about the kingdom of God and the reward for those who follow Jesus in this life, the stakes are even higher than a single day's wages. Those who worked the longest heard what the latecomers were paid and thought, "If the master paid them a denarius, for just one hour, imagine how much we're going to get!"

Perhaps the disciples, following Jesus' tale, are thinking the same thing. If Jesus is saying that those who do only a little work for His kingdom will receive a "full day's pay" because of God's grace and generosity, imagine how much He will give to us for the sacrifice of our entire lives.

What Jesus says next, though, will make clear one more time that the kingdom of heaven does not operate like the kingdoms of the earth. In part, this is because the ultimate benefit of following Christ—an eternity in heaven—is precisely what is promised, and what is "paid," to all who follow Him (John 3:16–18).

Matthew 20:10

ESV

Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius.

What does Matthew 20:10 mean? In Jesus' parable (Matthew 20:1), the master of the house hired one group of men to work an entire day in exchange for a denarius. He then hired groups to work the rest of the day for "whatever is right" at 9 a.m., noon, 3 p.m., and even 5 p.m. When the master paid those hired last, the ones who worked only an hour, a full denarius, the wheels of those hired first started spinning. They assumed that because they worked far longer, the master was about to pay them far more than what they had agreed to work for.

Now they learn that they are wrong. Instead of receiving, say, twelve denarii as an equivalent compensation for twelve hours of work, the first group each got *exactly what they agreed to*: one denarius. Put in the same situation, perhaps our first reaction would be the same as these men (Matthew 20:11): to claim this is not fair. Jesus, though, will show the master insisting that he has done right and fair by everyone. No one is getting anything different than that which they had agreed to.

Matthew 20:11

ESV

And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house,

What does Matthew 20:11 mean? Perspective changes everything. The group of workers hired early in the morning agreed to work a full day in exchange for a denarius each (Matthew 20:1–2). They have done their work. Now they receive their pay right on time, before the sun sets, as the law of Moses required (Deuteronomy 24:14–15). This is the pay they signed on for, given when it was due. Everyone should be satisfied.

Instead, these workers grumble at the master of house. One thing has changed. They have learned what someone else was paid. Those who worked only an hour late in the day have received the same pay as them. Worse, they had briefly expected to be paid more than the original agreement, assuming the master of the house would be generous with them instead of merely honoring their agreement. That failed expectation and change of perspective left them grumbling and complaining despite being treated exactly as they had agreed.

Matthew 20:12

ESV

saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’

What does Matthew 20:12 mean? A group of laborers hired early in the morning to do a day's work in the vineyard in exchange for one denarius each are grumbling. Have they not been paid? Has their pay been delayed? Was the work different than expected? Was the master harsh with them? No, none of this has happened. The workers explain that they are upset because others were

paid the same amount despite working only one hour. They worked hard all day long, and it was hot.

None of their complaints are false. Israel's midday heat can be extreme for those who don't escape into shade. Ten to twelve hours is a long workday and harvesting in a vineyard can be grueling work. If the agreements made by the master had been to pay based on merits or under any merit-based system of pay or reward, the group hired early in the morning deserved ten times more than the group hired to close out the day.

The point of Jesus' parable, though, will be that the kingdom of heaven does not run on a merit-based system. It runs on the grace of God toward those who come to Him through Jesus, no matter when they come or what they seemingly deserve. Even more to the point, those who came to the Master earlier are not being cheated—they are obtaining exactly what was promised.

Matthew 20:13

ESV

But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?'

What does Matthew 20:13 mean? The master of the household in Jesus' parable (Matthew 20:1) clearly represents the Lord. It is encouraging then to see how the master responds to those who are grumbling at him about their pay. They have voiced their complaint: Those who worked only an hour in the vineyard received the same pay as those who worked all day long, since early in the morning. The master has given equal reward for unequal work.

In many of Jesus' parables, a character who expresses a wrong or selfish point of view is condemned to judgment. Not in this one. Instead, the master refers to the grumblers as "friend." His rebuke is gentle and, above all, reasonable. He insists that he has done nothing wrong to them and asks a question: Isn't this pay what we agreed on?

The bitter perspective of the grumbling workers is wrong, but the master sees them as allies, not enemies. He corrects their attitude, but insists they are friends. In this way, Jesus seems to be picturing the attitude of the Lord to those who follow Him while also, maybe, failing to appreciate His grace to others.

Matthew 20:14**ESV**

Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you.

What does Matthew 20:14 mean? What reward will be received by those who follow Jesus in this life? Jesus has been clear that the disciples should not expect material reward on this side of eternity. Their path will be like His, full of trouble, persecution, and suffering (John 16:33). Still, He has been clear that they will be richly rewarded in the kingdom of heaven for all they have lost in this life (Matthew 19:27–30). Even more, they will inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:29).

Jesus' parable about the workers in the vineyard, though, shows that any reward in the kingdom of heaven is a gift of grace from the king. It is not based on a sliding scale of giving the most reward for the most work and lesser reward for lesser work. Does this mean everyone will receive the exact same thing, as each worker in the story receives the same denarius? Not necessarily. What it means is that the Lord will claim His right to give to each follower of Jesus as He chooses based on His own grace and power (Romans 9:15–23).

When the workers who worked the most grumble that their pay is equal to the workers who accomplished the least, the master tells them to take their pay and move on. Then he declares that he chooses to give the same amount to those who did far less. He claims his right as master to reward fairly or *more than* fairly, as he sees fit. Jesus' story suggests that God does the same in rewarding those who serve Him.

Matthew 20:15**ESV**

Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?'

What does Matthew 20:15 mean? The master (Matthew 20:1) asks two questions of the grumbling workers (Matthew 20:11). They are upset because those who worked just an hour are receiving the same wage as those who worked far longer and harder under worse conditions. The master asks them if he's not allowed to do what he chooses with his own money. Do they resent his generosity to others? They are not being deprived of anything—the wages paid are exactly what they agreed to.

These are questions and concerns many of us should pose to ourselves when comparing the good gifts God has given to us with those given to others. This is especially important when we face the temptation to consider others less worthy of reward, especially the gifts of eternal life and a home in heaven.

Jesus' parable places into the master's mouth words valid for God to ask us. We know how we must answer. He is absolutely allowed to do whatever He wants with what belongs to Him. He is God (Romans 9:15–23). We are foolish to resent His grace and generosity to anyone, especially since our only hope in this life and the next comes through His grace and generosity, as well. We are left with nothing but to receive our own reward, in Christ, with gratitude. We're promised eternal life (John 10:28), and that's what we receive (John 3:16).

Matthew 20:16

ESV

So the last will be first, and the first last.”

What does Matthew 20:16 mean? This verse bookends this passage with Matthew 19:30. Jesus had assured the disciples of a rich reward in the kingdom of heaven for all they have given up for His sake, as well as eternal life. He had added, though, that many who are first will be last, and the last first, in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:27–30). Then He told the parable in this passage (Matthew 20:1) to illustrate what He meant by that.

Now Jesus makes the same statement in reverse order to show that He has explained what it means that the last will be first, and the first last. That may be, but not all commentators agree about what exactly He meant.

Some suggest the parable is about Israel and the Gentiles who will come into the kingdom by faith in Christ, making those who come through Christ first even though they came to be included in the family of God last. Others hear Jesus describing a general reversal in the kingdom of position and status on earth, making the rich poor and the lowly great. Still other teachers believe the meaning of the parable should be restricted to the disciples themselves to quiet their arguing about who was greatest among them.

The bottom line of the parable, however, seems to be that all are received and rewarded by God based on His grace. He gives much to those He wishes to, in Christ, based not on their worthiness but on His own generosity. Some of those who are last, least deserving of reward in the kingdom of heaven, may become

first in receiving God's grace precisely because of their lack of apparent work or effort. Others who gave up much for Jesus and seemingly did great things for God may be last in terms of their apparent relative reward. It is all for God to say.