We Are Family: Misunderstanding

Matthew 20:20-28

072521

Read Matthew 20: 20-28, on screen

Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

**21**“What is it you want?” he asked.

She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”

**22**“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”

“We can,” they answered.

**23**Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

**24**When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. **25**Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **26**Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, **27**and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— **28**just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

This is an awkward family moment.

* Mark records that James and John go directly to Jesus, but Matthew gives us a bit more detail.
* Perhaps lacking the courage to ask themselves or thinking that dear old mom might persuade Jesus more, the sons of Zebedee put their mom, Salome, up to asking Jesus for this royal favor.

Salome, their mom, is a faithful follower

* She will eventually be present at the cross even when the disciples flee
* She will be present to embalm the body of Jesus after his death
* She’s solid
* She kneels in worship
* She doesn’t speak until spoken to by Jesus

Then she reveals something that helps us see ourselves.

She asks the question that reveals a mother’s love, human nature, cultural circumstances, and a misunderstanding of the nature of the kingdom.

* These circumstances start gentle and get increasingly severe.

I. A mother’s love

* We can’t fault a mom for wanting the best for her kids [**A Christmas Story**, “My mother had not had a hot meal for herself in 15 years…”]
* She isn’t asking for herself [mom’s will starve to feed their children]
* We can applaud her parental instincts
* Besides, **Jesus has also given some clues** that James and John are special
	+ They are 2 of the inner-circle 3
	+ Jesus said in 19:28-30 that “at the renewal of all things” the 12 will sit on 12 thrones, maybe Salome thinks this is just ahead…
* **Can our legitimate loves cause us to misunderstand Jesus?**
* They can: (Luke 9:61ff.) shelter, custom, family…
* Jesus isn’t opposed to these things, but this moment helps us see that they can get out of balance in our lives.
* Do you have a love that is competing for Lordship with Jesus?
* It’s a priority question, right? A lot of things can compete for 1st place in our lives…

II. Human nature

* Mark indicates that James and John make the request
* Maybe the desire for prominence is theirs more than their moms
* It is probably indicative of all the disciples
	+ The 10 get angry because they didn’t think to ask first or that they are jealous of James and John’s position in the inner circle
* **Regardless, this request reveals a desire for position, power, fame, wealth.**
	+ Are any of those desires commensurate with the Jesus we read about in the gospels?
	+ Here is another case where the gospel stands in front of us and invites us to evaluate our motives.
* **It’s never been easier to become a sensation** [social media, plenty of free time, widespread access, culture that feeds on sound/video bites]
* If we aren’t careful we forget that Jesus teaches repeatedly that the way up in his kingdom is down.
* Vv. 25-28
	+ Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **26**Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, **27**and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— **28**just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
* **Shorthand for the 21st century? “Deny thy selfie…”**

III. Cultural Circumstances

* The disciples are still under the impression that Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem will signal an **earthly Messianic kingdom** where Jesus is an earthly king
* There may be some conflict, but they are ready to fight for their king
* **They are tuned in to the mode of operation in their surrounding world, it’s all they have ever known**
* **They assume that what equals power in their culture equals power in Jesus’ kingdom**
	+ We really can’t blame them, but we should learn from them
* This is the most difficult part of embracing Jesus’ teachings for people like us.
	+ We are capable
	+ We live in the land of opportunity, the envy of the world
	+ We have more than we need
	+ We are “force fed” images of success 24 hours a day
		- We know how to live in this world
	+ But Jesus isn’t from this world
	+ He came to this world, but he isn’t from here
	+ He came and announced that another world was invading this world in him
	+ To align with the world that is passing away, our culture, is to align with the ways of death
	+ To align with Jesus and his world is to align with life and the ultimate future
* We know, like the disciples did, the way to power in our world
* **To them, and to us, Jesus says these powerful words: “Not so with you, instead…”**

IV. Misunderstanding the Kingdom

* The problem is, we make the disciples’ mistakes over and over
* We assume that the solutions to what troubles us in our world are the tools we see in use every day
* **Jesus instead uses this misunderstanding to teach about suffering and service as the means to his rule and reign**
* They can’t get it, and we don’t either…most of the time
	+ We cannot rule our way into Jesus’ desired future, but we act like we can
	+ We cannot reason our way into Jesus’ desired future, but we act like we can
	+ We cannot buy our way into Jesus’ desired future, but we act like we can
* There is only one way to Jesus’ desired future and Jesus gives it to us here.
* **The only enduring way for the people of God to experience Jesus’ desired future is to…serve our way there.**
* What kind of service? What does that look life?
	+ **It looks exactly like laying down our lives** for others in the name of Jesus, just as Jesus showed us.
	+ It can begin as simple as a word of encouragement to an overworked and underpaid laborer who frustrates you. Don’t react like the world, react like Jesus.
	+ It’s as demanding as learning to give the first 10% of your hard-earned income to the cause of Christ. The very thing our friends give their lives for, we as followers of Jesus readily and happily give away.
	+ It’s as simple as going out of your way to reach out to a hurting co-worker even though you know they’ll ask for something. “Me time” isn’t really a Jesus concept.
	+ It’s as demanding as giving up your next comfort so that you can provide for someone else.
	+ It’s as simple as stepping away from being right so that you can instead retain relationship
	+ It’s as profound as taking the long approach to relationship with the hope that one day, someday you may earn the right to talk about Jesus.
	+ There are 10,000 ways per day to live this out, but it begins with emptying yourself of yourself and inviting Jesus to fill you so you can become a servant.

Close: “The Kenosis Passage,” Phil. 2: 1-11

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, **2**then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. **3**Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4**not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

**5**In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

**6**Who, being in very nature[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29398a)] God,
    did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
**7**rather, he made himself nothing
    by taking the very nature[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29399b)] of a servant,
    being made in human likeness.
**8**And being found in appearance as a man,
    he humbled himself
    by becoming obedient to death—
        even death on a cross!

**9**Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
    and gave him the name that is above every name,
**10**that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
    in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
**11**and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
    to the glory of God the Father.

* This is a passage about unity in the Body of Christ
	+ “being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind
	+ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit
	+ In humility value others above yourselves
	+ Not looking to your own interests but to the interests of others
	+ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus
		- Though God, made himself nothing
		- The very nature of a servant
		- Humbled himself
		- Obedient to a criminal’s death
	+ Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place
	+ This is what Jesus is teaching in Matthew 20

**[20/20] is the passage reference in Matthew.**

* Used to remind us of perfect vision
* Now it reminds us of a miserable year
* Today, let’s see more clearly what Jesus’ Kingdom is all about.
* Salome did not see 20/20 at the moment, but she was faithful
* Neither did James and John. Just a few verses earlier Peter asks a similar question.
* Good people, well-meaning people can get sidetracked, but eventually, Salome and James and John—even Peter-- all understand and go on to prove faithful in the work of Jesus.
* This is good news for everyone who gets sidetracked from time to time.

**Prayer**

Benediction: [**2 Cor. 13:11**](http://www.christianity.com/bible/bible.php?ver=niv&q=2+corinthians+13:11) - Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. --Amen