

Matthew 20:17-28 - The Servant King!

Scriptures:

17 Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took

Notes:
This is about one week before the
crucifixion.

the twelve disciples ¹² aside on the road and

said to them, ¹²

Scriptures:

18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and

Notes:

This is the third time Jesus has told His disciples of what lies ahead for Jesus in Jerusalem. This time He adds a few new details.

the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief

G3860 -

priests and to the scribes; and

they will condemn Him to death,

G2632 – "to condemn (declare guilty) v. — to pronounce guilt and a punitive sentence on someone in a legal context."

Scriptures:
Psalm 16:10 - For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

Psalm 118:22 - The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.

19 and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock

G3860 – same as 'will be betrayed' in verse 18.

G1702 – “to make sport v. — to subject to laughter or ridicule for one’s own pleasure.”

Notes:
Here Jesus includes the involvement of the Gentiles in His death. He also includes the way He will die – crucifixion.

Luke’s gospel includes Jesus saying this was all predicted by the prophets. Specifically, Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22. The rejection of the religious leaders of Israel was predicted in (Psalm 118:22). The resurrection is predicted in (Psalm 16:10).

and to scourge and to crucify. And the third

G3146 – “to flog v. — to beat severely with a whip or scourge; of the three levels of Roman beatings, this refers to the worst two (including the one that preceded execution).”

G4717 -

day He will rise again.”

G450 - to resurrect ⇔ arise v. — to resurrect, conceived of as rising to one’s feet.”

Scriptures:

20 Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came

Notes:
‘mother’ = Salome. This woman is Salome and may have been the sister of Jesus’ mother Mary. That would have made James and John His cousins and may explain why they thought they could make this kind of request of Jesus.

to Him with her sons, kneeling down and

asking something from Him.

Scriptures:
Luke 18:34 - But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.

John 12:16 - His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that

21 And He said to her, “What do you wish?”

G2309 – “to desire v. — to feel or have a desire for; want strongly.”

Notes:
Jesus just told them He was going to Jerusalem to die on the cross. It is not certain what they believed was going to happen that would make it possible for them to sit on Jesus’ right and left. There was a common belief that the Messiah would overthrow Israel’s enemies and establish His kingdom like the kingdom David had established.

Whatever it is that they thought

She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons

G2036 - to say
(express) v. — to
express in
words."

of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and

the other on the left, in Your kingdom."

22 But Jesus answered and said, "You do not

Scriptures:

Matthew 26:39 - He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Isaiah 51:17 -

Awake, awake!
Stand up, O Jerusalem,
You who have drunk at
the hand of the LORD
The cup of His fury;
You have drunk the dregs
of the cup of trembling,
And drained it out.

2 Corinthians 5:17 -

Therefore, if anyone is in
Christ, he is a new creation;
old things have passed
away; behold, all things
have become new.

know what you ask. Are you able to drink the

G4095 -

cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized

G907 -

with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

Notes:

James and John are looking for a promotion. Jesus responds to them by using two symbols that point to suffering. Instead of a promotion Jesus asks them if they are ready for persecution.

To share in Christ's ministry one must be willing to share the cost.

They said to Him, "We are able."

G1410 -

Scriptures:

Philippians 2:5-6 – Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God...

John 14:28 - You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I.

23 So He said to them, "You will indeed drink

My cup, and be baptized with the baptism

that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right

hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it

is for those for whom it is prepared by My

G2090 -

Father."

Notes:

James was the first of the apostles to be martyred for the faith. John was the last surviving apostle, but his life was not free from persecution. He was exiled to the island of Patmos where he received the vision of the Revelation. Legend says that at some point in his ministry he was boiled in oil but didn't die.

'...not Mine to give...' – Even though Jesus is in all ways God and equal to the Father in all things (Philippians 2:5-6), there are some things that outside of His authority. Jesus can tell them about the persecution that is coming, but only God the Father can determine what positions they will have in Christ's kingdom (John 14:28).

Scriptures:
Matthew 5:3 -
Blessed are the poor in
spirit,
For theirs is the
kingdom of heaven.

24 And when the ten heard ^{②-5&5} it,

they were greatly displeased with the two

G23 – “to be
indignant v. — to
be or become
angered at
something
seemingly unjust
or wrong.”

^{5&5} brothers.

Notes:
Why would the ten be upset? Not because James and John had made this theological error about the kingdom of Christ, but because James and John thought of this before they did. All of them wanted, and probably thought they deserved, these positions of greatness.

Even after being with Jesus for three years watching Him live as a servant and resisting all temptations to assume a position of greatness, they are still striving for greatness for themselves. They are acting just like their culture and the world around them. This is a real warning for us. Even though we are in the church and maybe even serving God in some way, the temptation to greatness is ever present. It is no surprise that the first beatitude addresses this weakness in the human condition ([Matthew 5:3](#)).

25 But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said,

Notes:
This is the way of the world. Those in positions of power, authority, or influence will do anything to stay there and to grow their power. In our own government politicians are elected by people for the purpose of serving the people who elected them. Sadly, once elected they often forget they are called to serve all the people they represent and seek to remain in office. Decisions and choices are made, not based on what is best for the people they represent, but for what will further their political career. Of course, not all politicians are self-seeking, but the higher the position, the greater the temptation.

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles

lord it over them, and those who are great

G2634 – "to dominate (completely) v. — to exercise control over someone as his master."

G3173 – "great person n. — a person of wealth or importance or stature."

exercise authority over them.

G2715 – "to reign v. — to have sovereign power."

Scriptures:
2 Corinthians 6:14-18 - Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

“I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My
people.”

17 Therefore

“Come out from among
them
And be separate, says the
Lord.
Do not touch what is
unclean,
And I will receive you.”
18 “I will be a Father
to you,
and you shall be My sons
and daughters,
says the LORD Almighty.”

26 Yet it shall not be so among you;

but whoever desires to become great among

you, let him be your servant.

G1249 - διάκονος
(diakonos), servant, one
who serves, without
necessarily having the
office of deacon.
“servant n. — a person
working in the service of
another.”

Notes:

When God called Abraham out of his country to establish a new people, they were not to be just another nation. They were called to be a different kind of people. God deliberately established them as a peculiar nation. The Commandments and the sacrificial system were meant to separate them from the rest of humanity.

As Christians, we are also called to be different (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

‘...whoever desires to become great...’ – Jesus does not suggest that this is an evil desire. But what He does say is that if you do have this desire, there is a right way to do it.

Greatness is about influence and authority. Because God is a God of order, He has established order within the body of Christ and His church. That means there must be some within the church who have authority. The kind of person who should be in authority in the church is someone who sees himself or herself as a servant.

Before I was saved, I was just like the rest of the world. During my time in the military, I advanced from E1 to E6. At no point did I see advancement as anything other than a way to benefit myself. At each new rank, I immediately set my eyes on the next one and started working toward it.

After I got out of the military and started working in a manufacturing company, my eyes were always on the next position.

I have been the pastor of this church for almost twenty years. In my case that was not something I desired. A relatively short time after I got saved, I started to sense God doing something in my heart. I sensed God calling me to serve Him.

In this verse Jesus uses the word ‘diakonos’, which we get the word deacon from. It refers to someone who serves others.

Scriptures:

27 And whoever desires to be first among you,

G2309 – “to desire v. — to feel or have a desire for; want strongly.”

G4413 – “first (preceding) adj. — preceding all others in time or space or degree.”

Notes:

‘...whoever desires to be first... - There is a lot of overlap between the ideas of someone being great and someone being first. To be great has the sense of influence and to be first has the sense of leadership.

‘slave’ – “a person who is legally owned by someone else and whose entire livelihood and purpose was determined by their master.”

let him be your slave—

G1401 – “slave n. — a person who is legally owned by someone else and whose entire livelihood and purpose was determined by their master.”

Scriptures:

Isaiah 53:11 - He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied.

By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,

For He shall bear their iniquities.

28 just as the Son of Man did not come

Notes:

“The beauty of Jesus can only be seen as it shines through His followers.” (Powell, 1986) page 368

‘...a ransom for many.’ – Can be translated, ‘to give His life in the place of many.’ This points to the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ’s death on the cross (Isaiah 53:11).

to be served, but to serve, and to give His life

G1247 - διακονέω (diakoneō), “to be served (state) v. — to be or become an object of another’s help or assistance.”

G1325 -

a ransom for many.”

G3083 – “ransom (payment) n. — what is given in exchange (as payment) for the release of someone held captive.”

G4183 -

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