

MATTHEW 20:17-28 SIDETRACKED!

17 Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, 18 “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.”

At this point of the story, Jesus and the disciples are still traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover. They are continuing southward via the route, which follows the eastern side of the Jordan River. They will then cross the Jordan and get on the road to Jericho which then leads to Jerusalem.

They will have been traveling with multitudes of other pilgrims who are also making their way to Jerusalem for the reason. The population of Jerusalem at this time of year would swell to perhaps millions of people. The roads were nearly as bad as Atlanta traffic in rush hour.

It is in this morass that we find Jesus telling His disciples once again that He must die in Jerusalem. But there is more to it than just a reminder. This time there are more specific details. We also need to take into account that these prophesied events are weighing heavily on Jesus. We will see this reach critical mass in the garden. But I can imagine that His heart rate increases with every step as they get closer to Jerusalem. At this point, Jesus has only days to live.

This is more than a reminder.

- First mention of Jesus' death; 16:21 in the far north of the country at Caesarea Phillip. Here Jesus stated that He must be killed and then rise on the third day. This was followed by the statement that anyone wishing to follow Him must take up his cross.
- The second time: 17:22,23; they were still in the Galilee and were just leaving on this journey. Jesus stated here that He was about to be betrayed into the hands of men and would be killed. This is the first specific mention of betrayal.
- Now Jesus gives more details of what is about to transpire.
- ***18 “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn***

Him to death, 19 and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.”

- It will happen in Jerusalem, He will be betrayed to the chief priests and scribes, will then be delivered to the Gentiles/ Romans to be mocked and scourged, and will then be crucified before resurrecting from death on the third day.
- **Matthew 10:38**
- **38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.**
- This mention of the cross comes into play prior to any mention of crucifixion. Now Jesus is explicit as to His manner of death. And also that it will happen in Jerusalem. This is the first time that the term “cross/ taking up one’s cross” has any real context for the disciples. We look at it and take the meaning for granted. But it is just now being made known to the disciples just how imminent and gory the next week will be.

And then as they’ve been pulled aside in order to get the details of what is about to happen, someone approaches the huddle with a request.

20 Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.

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

She said to Him, “Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.”

- According to the other Gospels, James and John put their mother up to this. But I want you to see how this request comes about on the heels of such an important meeting between Jesus and the disciples. More to follow.

22 But Jesus answered and said, “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

They said to Him, “We are able.”

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 Father.”

24 And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served,

but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

As I said earlier, the previous mentioning of “taking up one’s cross” probably didn’t register with the guys then. After all, though they were familiar with crucifixion, the fact that Jesus would be crucified had never been raised. It should jump off the page at them now, but it doesn’t. Why is that? Have you noticed that no one even blinked at what was just said? Why is that? We can figure it out by looking at the request, Jesus’ answer, His follow-up question to James and John and their response. It’s mind-boggling.

- Jesus: “Do you know what you are asking?” This means that they still don’t understand what He told them regarding the next week of His/ their lives! Jesus is about to be “baptized – immersed” into days of mockery, suffering and cruel martyrdom. “Can you handle that?”
- Their response: “Sure, we got this!” They are clueless!
- Jesus’ response: “You will suffer in similar fashion, but it is not my place to seat you in your proper place in the kingdom.” As Jesus stated earlier. Those rewards are given out on a different basis. They aren’t given by appointment. More on that later.

24 And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.

- Why were they mad? Not because of any righteous indignation regarding James and John’s request. They’re mad because they were beaten to the punch by their request! We can know this from the fact that Jesus turned to all of them in response to the raised ire of the others.
- This question of status in Heaven has come up again and again (chapter 18 and twice in chapter 19). And it will come up again in chapter 23:8-12.
- This is a recurring problem. They have just heard all this regal language about being seated on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel, but that isn’t enough! It isn’t enough to be a judge on a throne, now James and John, who have always been in Jesus’ inner circle, want to be seated right next to Jesus!

25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

In His answer and warning to them, Jesus actually brings the conversation back to where it started: with His death and resurrection.

- Likening their desire of status to the way of the Gentiles. That wasn't nice. But that is just how bad this way of thinking is. They lord over one another in their status. They don't lead from a servant's heart. They do so for the sake of wielding power and all that comes from that power. They seek to be served, not serve themselves.

Once again Jesus turns the thinking of the world on its head as far as the economy of the kingdom and its rewards are concerned. ***Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.***

- **Their worldly thinking with all its ramifications is so pervasive that it has to be unlearned! We truly have to have our minds renewed!**
- Jesus says children are the greatest in the kingdom. He says that we are to immolate children in our desire to move forward in the kingdom. Then He says that if we want to be great or even the greatest in the kingdom then we are to be servants... and even lower than that we are to be slaves or bondservants of Jesus Christ!
- Jesus then speaks of Himself. He is the greatest, but He didn't come to be served, but serve – even to the point of giving His own life for us!
- **Philippians 2:5-11 (J.B. Phillips translation)**
Let Christ Himself be your example as to what your attitude should be. For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God's equal, but stripped himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man. And, having become man, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, and the death he died was the death of a common criminal. That is why God has now lifted him so high, and has given him the name beyond all names, so that at the name of Jesus "every knee shall bow," whether in Heaven or earth or under the earth. And that is why, in the end, "every tongue shall confess" that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And this is what the disciples are missing. They don't comprehend what is going on or what all the ramifications are. **They are thinking "about" the kingdom, but they are doing it in terms of the world! That won't work.**

Jesus is the greatest example of a servant-leader. He also has the highest status in the kingdom.

- Rewards vs. salvation. In the words of J. Vernon McGee: Heaven is for the asking. There is nothing we can do to earn our way into Heaven. We are saved by faith in Christ His marvelous grace. However, our position, (what the disciples are inquiring about) is based on what we do here on earth. Many Christians have forgotten about this. I have no illusions of being at the right hand of Jesus, but I am “working on a mansion” in Heaven. Paul put it this way:

Philippians 3:12-14

12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; *but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,* 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

And herein lies the rub: All too often we don't get this concept either. So much of our time is spent with our minds and priorities in the wrong place. We, like the disciples can get sidetracked with things such as our status, provision, comfort and other worldly concerns that we miss what Jesus is saying or even what He has done for us. They, like us, were so concerned with their status on earth that they failed to grasp the gravity of what Jesus was trying to tell them regarding what just around the corner for all of them.

Have you ever unknowingly stumbled into a deep conversation only to bring up something rather trivial and then had everyone look at you like you were crazy? Turn it around now. Have you ever been in a deep conversation only to have someone come into the conversation and say something totally off the wall and trivial? That is what happened here because of worldly thinking concerning selfish ambition.

If you want to be great, don't think prominence, think service! The way you feel when people treat you like a slave is a good indication of how you're doing in the area of servant-hood.

If the disciples had been focused on what Jesus was telling them concerning all that was about to happen, then they wouldn't have been so concerned about their own status and maybe much of what was about to happen wouldn't have thrown them for such a loop. And that works for us also. If we listen carefully to what Jesus is trying to tell us and worry less about the pleasures and positions we can have in this world, then maybe we won't be thrown for such a loop when trials come our way.

The way to peace and eternal rewards is not through strife and backroom deals. It is

through a life of service, according to God's will for our lives as well as others.

Jesus came to serve and died in the ultimate act of service. He is our example. He is the way to the top. I can follow a God like that. Can you?