

A NEW WAY OF LIVING

Matthew 20:20-28

Intro: The account of this incident has been recorded for us in Mark's Gospel as well as Matthew's. In reading the two records, however, we find one main difference: Matthew tells us that the request presented to the Lord was made by the mother of James and John; Mark said that James and John made the request. Matthew Poole, in his commentary, said that he believed that Salome, mentioned in Mark 15:40, was the name of James and John's mother, and Mr. Poole referred to her as "a constant follower of Christ" (III, 94).

There really is no contradiction or problem in this difference. It simply means that all three were in agreement about this request. Matthew makes it clear that James and John were with their mother when she made the request of the Lord. And he also indicates that after the initial request was made, the Lord spoke to all of them, probably more to James and John than to their mother.

Let us consider the account in Matthew's Gospel.

I. THE MOTHER'S REQUEST (Matt. 20:20-21).

There is little doubt but that the mother of James and John was a godly woman. She is listed by Matthew (27:56) as one of the women who was present when the Lord was crucified. And when we look at her request, there are several things that we can say about it.

- A. She came to the Lord with her request (v. 20).
- B. Her attitude was right: She came worshipping (v. 20).
- C. She asked in faith (v. 21). She believed that the Lord was the Messiah, and that He would eventually establish His kingdom on the earth. It seemed very unlikely at the time, especially since the Lord kept speaking of His death and resurrection. But she believed the kingdom was coming!
- D. She wanted the very best for her sons (v. 21).

She had done a good job raising her boys. They were young men at the time who were interested in the things of the Lord. And she had put those same desires into the hearts of her sons. How many mothers are there who, if the Lord were to say to them, "What wilt thou?" would say what the wife of Zebedee said? When we look at this request in the

best light that we can give it, she wanted her sons to be as close to the Lord as they could get, working with Him and for Him!

But I, for one, am not willing to condemn James and John, or their mother for making such a request. It was the wrong kind of a request to make, as the Lord pointed out to them. It revealed that there was much that they needed to learn about the kingdom of God. But the request itself revealed that these people really loved the Lord, and wanted to give their full support to whatever the Lord would do. I would assume that they would be at the Lord's side to work, not just to have that place of honor.

We need to ask ourselves the question, Are we that interested in the work of the Lord that that would be the #1 prayer request on our list? And those of you who are mothers can ask if that is on your heart at all for your children? There is actually a lot that all of us can learn from just those first two verses of our text.

The second thing in our text is:

II. THE MINISTRY OF THE LORD TO THIS MOTHER AND HER SONS (Matt. 20 22-23).

Notice how gentle the Lord is as He sought to increase their understanding of what was involved for Him, and for them, before there could be any kingdom as they were thinking about it.

How many times has the Lord had to say to all of us when we bring our requests to Him, "Ye know not what ye ask"!

Before the Lord would wear the crown of the Messianic King, He must wear the crown of thorns of the Suffering Savior. Could they drink from His cup, and could they be baptized with His baptism?

Their response showed as little understanding as the initial request. They quickly said, "We are able." This was very similar to the declaration that Peter made later when he boldly declared to the Lord that he would never forsake the Lord even if all of the other disciples did.

But put such statements in their best light. Although they indicate:

- 1) A lack of understanding of the terrible things ahead, and
- 2) A gross overstatement of their own ability,

yet both James and John here, and Peter later, were expressing to the Lord how much they loved Him, and that they would be willing to do anything for Him.

They were to learn differently later when they all failed.

But the Lord knew that they could endure the sufferings that would come their way, not in their own strength, but in His. And so we see what His response was in verse 23a. (Read.)

But the answer to their initial request is given in the latter part of verse 23. (Read.)

Note: There will be a kingdom. And there will be thrones on either side of the Lord. But it was not for even the Lord to say who would be there; it would be given to those for whom it was prepared by the Father.

This is another lesson that we all have to learn. We have our own ideas as to how we would like to serve the Lord, and perhaps even the fruit that we would like to see. But the Lord calls us, and He appoints us our place of ministry. It is not for us to choose what we want; it is for the Lord to make His own appointments.

Cf. what Paul wrote to Archippus in Col. 4:17. We must be careful of personal ambition. It is so easy for our flesh to control our thoughts and our desires. Here, as in all other things, we must learn to say, "Thy will be done."

But notice what we read in verse 24.

III. THE INDIGNATION OF THE OTHER TEN DISCIPLES (Matt. 20:24).

This means that they were M-A-D! They felt that James and John and their mother had no right to make such a request--that they were not worthy of such a place. They may have been the youngest of the Apostles, and this would not have helped at all. The word "indignation" suggests that it may have made the ten disciples physically ill. Right then and there a major split was developing among the Apostles.

What did the Lord do? Did He throw James and John out? Did He turn with impatience on the ten because they did not understand what made the mother of James and John make this request? No, He did neither. Instead, He called them together to teach them.

If our hearts are right, there are no difficulties which cannot be cleared up by a greater understanding of the Word of God where we find the will of God. It is no wonder that Paul prayed as he did for the the Colossians in Col. 1:9, 10.

What did the Lord have to say to the twelve, with perhaps the mother of James and John listening, too?

IV. THE LORD'S TEACHING (Matt. 20:25-28).

He did three things here:

- 1) He told them what man's usual way is in such matters.
- 2) He instructed them in the different way of the Lord.
- 3) He used Himself as the Example.

A. The way of the Gentiles (v. 25).

The great men, as far as the world is concerned, are the men at the top: the kings, the presidents, the world rulers.

B. The different way of the Lord (vv. 26, 27).

Here the Lord used two words for the Apostles:

- 1) "Minister."
- 2) "Servant."

The ten interpreted the request of Salome as pride. And, although I do not believe that that was her intent, nor the intent of her sons, that is what it looked like. Here were two disciples who wanted to have a place higher than the rest.

The Lord said that in the kingdom of God His servants should not seek the highest places, but the lowest. The chief qualification for a servant of the Lord is that which is often scorned in the world's estimation: HUMILITY! If we want to have the chief place, it is to be found in the lowest position, that of a minister and a servant. They are those who, instead of issuing the commands to others, are willing to carry out the commands which others give to them. In one instance we have a free man; in the other a bonds slave. But in both we see, not lordship, but service.

C. Our Lord, the Example (Matt. 20:28).

If we want to see that which will please the Lord and bring the greatest glory to the Lord, that which will

also be the most fruitful, let us take our Lord as the Pattern to follow, not the high men of the earth. They may have their place now by divine appointment, but the government of the kingdom of God on earth is going to be very, very different. So study the life of our Lord. Do as He did in so far as it is possible for us to do so. Cultivate His attitude toward men and their needs. Seek to fill the place that God has given to you. That is where you will find your greatest joy, and that is where God will use you as He intends to use you.

Concl: The Epistles of Paul all have different points of emphasis. The emphasis in Philippians is JOY and REJOICING. But, strangely, that is the Epistle where we have that great passage which speaks of the humiliation of the Lord. Cf. Phil. 2:5-11. And it is prefaced with the statement that we are to have the mind of Christ, we are to think about things the way He did.

In that passage we see two things:

- 1) How we are to be humbled is to be our concern.
- 2) How we are to be exalted and honored and used, is God's concern.

It is easy for us to get the order reversed. When we do, the joy goes out of our service. But when we humbly take our rightful place, below the lowest, then the blessing of God will be upon us, and the joy of the Lord will be our strength.

This is the lesson that we all need to learn. It makes no difference how insignificant we are, the Lord has given us the place we have, and it is there that he will use us when we walk in His ways and seek to fulfill the ministry that He has given to us.