

THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPELS

"Greatness in the Kingdom"

(Matthew 20:20-28)

Mark 10:35-45

Nov 30, 1986

INTRODUCTION

1. The plain announcement of our Lord's death had been given (vv 32-34). For Him, the Cross lay directly ahead.

2. Matthew puts this section into perspective. He shows that it was "then" (v. 20), at the time His death was announced, that the events occurred.

3. Consider the events and their significance to show the ways to identify greatness in the kingdom.

1. REQUEST vv 35-37

a. Who? v. 35a

Matthew notes it was Salome who opened the subject (v. 20) while Mark says John and James spoke out. However resolved, it was a family affair. It should be remembered that Salome was Christ's earthly aunt, the sister of Mary (Mt. 27:56; Mk 15:40; Jn 19:25).

b. What? vv. 35b-37

Here is an ecclesiastical intrigue for high places among the disciples. The subject had been addressed before (cf Mk 9:34). Matthew uses the verb "worship" in coming to the Lord. The disciples expressed their "will" to have special places in relation to the Lord in His glory. This may have come from the transfiguration experience with Moses and Elijah (Mk 9:4) or the assignment given by our Lord in the kingdom (Mt. 19:28). However one looks at it, the thoughts of this family are far away from the subject the Lord had just discussed-- His death! He spoke of the Cross; His disciples of the Crown.

2. Response vv. 38-40

a. Statement v. 38a

The verb is middle voice. The meaning is clear: you don't know what you're getting yourselves into."

b. Question v. 38b

The issue about ability handling His cup of suffering (inwardly) and His baptism of suffering (outwardly) is answered foolishly. The Lord uses the emphatic personal pronoun "I." The disciples reply "we are able." That is ridiculous.

c. Answer v. 39

Simply, the Lord agrees that suffering will come, but the Father will assign places in the kingdom,

although Christ is the appointed distributor (2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:12).

3. RESENTMENT v. 41.

For the Lord to give a special place to Peter, James, and John is one thing, but for James and John to ask for favors is quite another idea. Peter probably joined the other 10 disciples in their "indignation." The verb means to feel pain, to grieve. The idea of "much" is included in the verb prefix.

4. REPLY vv 42, 43

a. About Gentiles v. 42

The standard of greatness among the Gentiles is patent: 1) Those recognized as rulers "lord it over" or "have lordship." 2) Those who are great officials "exercise authority" or "control over." These two verbs certainly indicate a firm control.

b. About Disciples vv 43, 44

Contrary to the Gentile world system, the kingdom standard of greatness is twofold: 1) Being a minister (word for "deacon," cf. 1 Tim. 3:8, 12) and 2) being a slave (word for bondsman). Supremacy is more than greatness and slavery is more than service. The higher one's rights, the greater one's duties. So be it!

5. RATIONALE v. 45

This is taken from the purpose for which the "Son of Man" (Christ) came.

a. Negatively

Jesus did not come to be ministered to (passive voice). What a revelation!

b. Positively

1) Jesus did come to minister (active voice).  
2) He came to give, not to get. He gave His soul (life) as a ransom (complete deliverance) instead of expecting "the many" to do it for themselves. Truly, at this point the contrast of the two systems is at a maximum.

CONCLUSION To stoop to the lowest position is in fact to be the greatest in the kingdom. Thus a practical instruction is the basis for a definitive doctrinal statement of infinite worth (cf. 1 Pet. 1:18, 19).