

Episode #843 Matthew 20 Part 3-First in the Kingdom

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord was approached by James and John along with their mother in order to ask a request of Him.

III. The Request of James and John. Matthew 20:20-23.

A. Verse 21. “Wish” is *thelo*, what do you will or desire? “Grant” is literally “say,” as in say it will be so. Bullinger suggests here it means to “bid.”

1. This was not about just the place of their chairs, but that one would be His prime minister and the other be His second minister. Thus they seek to elbow out Peter, who was the third with them in the most privileged three disciples.
2. Notice that they have increased in greed from the earlier argument of the twelve as to which will be the greatest. Here they would elbow aside, not just the rest of the twelve, but all the Old Testament saints: David, Moses, etc.
3. There is no word for “hand” in the Greek. The request was to sit one on the right and the other on the left. Two positions of authority, not two physical locations.

B. Verse 22. The requirements to be in one of these exalted positions were far stiffer than they imagined! He asks if they are “able,” *dunasthe*, do ye have the inherent power to? To “drink” means to participate in it. Could they participate in the sufferings He was about to go through? This is the sort of thing these exalted to these positions must be willing to do! The “and be baptized” phrase is omitted by the modern texts, though Bullinger retains. There is no question about it in Mark 10:38. This is about identification. This was His identification into death. *Baptizo* can also mean “to overwhelm,” and the Lord was indeed about to get overwhelmed with suffering unto death. Think of “overwhelm” as the waves washing over the head of a sailor stranded at sea until he drowns. Of course, they answered without the least idea what He meant, or what this would actually cost them to carry through on it.

C. Verse 23. The “cup” is the sufferings He would experience, to the extent of martyrdom. They would be martyred, as He was. His words would seem to indicate that these positions were already chosen out. We would suspect that David, the Prince over Israel sitting on his throne on earth while Jesus Christ is King of Israel sitting on His throne in heaven, Ezekiel 34:24, is to be the prime minister. Who the second minister will be, we cannot say.

IV. The Ten Are Indignant. Matthew 20:24-28.

A. Verse 24. Apparently, someone overheard the conversation with the two brothers, their mother, and the Lord, and reported this back to the ten. Four people or groups are moved to displeasure or indignation in the New Testament: the disciples (here, and when the woman anointed the Lord in Matthew 26:8 and Mark 14:4), the chief priests and scribes (when the people at the triumphal entry cried “Hosanna to the Son of David), the Lord (when the disciples tried to keep the little children from coming to Him in Mark 10:14), and the ruler of the synagogue (in Luke 13:14 when the Lord was healing on the Sabbath day).

- B. Verse 25. He compares them to the *archons* or rulers of the nations. “Lord it over” is *katakuriuo*, related to *kurios*, “lord” or master. Bullinger claims the *kata* in the verb implies a bad sense, as in oppress them. This is the way of the world, and the way of Satan, after which our world is patterned. This is not the way God looks at greatness or rulership. “Exercise authority over” is *katexousiazō*, related to *exousia*, delegated authority.
- C. Verse 26. “Desires” is *thelo*, the will in the sense of desire or wish. Servant is *diakonos*, one who serves. The Lord didn’t just say this; He modeled it as well. Look, too, at the behavior of His most honored servants: Moses, Elijah, David, etc.
- D. Verse 27. First is *protos*. But the “first” is often with the idea of the chief or leader, as in the “first priests” are the chief priests. This is the sense in which Paul says he is the “chief of sinners.” He does not mean He is the worst of sinners, which is not what this word means. He means he is the first or chief over sinners, made such by God. “Slave” is correct, the Greek *doulos*.
- E. Verse 28. “Be served” and “serve” are both related to *diakonos*. “Life” is the Greek word *psuche*, meaning “soul.” The Lord gave His soul as a ransom for many, meaning He gave Himself, as the soul is often put for the whole person. “Ransom” is often used as the price paid for freeing slaves.

V. Conclusion: James and John wanted to elbow out not only the other disciples, but all saints through the ages to get the top position in the kingdom! Yet the Lord taught that these positions were taken, and it is better to serve than to lord it over others. Do we believe this? Are we the kind of people who serve?