

STORY 25- THE GREAT, THE RICH AND THE POOR
Matthew 20:20-28; Luke 19:1-10; Mark 10:46-52
Troy Crain

In the story of The Great, there is a discrepancy between Matthew's account and Mark's account. In the Gospel of Mark, James and John are the ones who approach Christ and make the request about sitting on the right and left hand of Christ in His kingdom (Mark 10:35-45). In Matthew's account, "the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him (Christ) with her sons" (Matthew 20:20). Matthew portrays James and John's mother going to Jesus. William Barclay tells us

There may have been a very natural reason for this request. It is probable that James and John were closely related to Jesus. Matthew, Mark and John all give lists of the women who were at the Cross when Jesus was crucified. Let us set them down.

Matthew's list is:
Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. (Matthew 27:56)

Mark's list is:
Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Younger and of Joseph, and Salome (Mark 15:40).

John's list is:
Jesus's mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene is named in all the lists; Mary the mother of James and Joseph must be the same person as Mary the wife of Clopas' therefore the third woman is described in three different ways. Matthew calls her *the mother of the sons of Zebedee*; Mark calls her *Salome*; and John calls her Jesus' *mother's sister*. So, then, we learn that the mother of James and John was named Salome, and that she was the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. That means that James and John were full cousins of Jesus' and it may well have been that they felt that this close relationship entitled them to a special place in his Kingdom. 1

Christ had just finished telling the disciples that He would be betrayed, beaten and then suffer death by crucifixion (Matthew 20: 17-19), when the two disciples' mother approached Christ. Warren Wiesbe declares that 'the message did not penetrate the disciples' hearts'.

In contrast to this announcement of suffering and death, we have the request of James and John and their mother, Salome. Jesus spoke about a cross, but they were interested in a crown. They wanted reserved seats on special thrones! We get the impression that the mother, Salome, was the real inspiration behind this request, and that she was interested in promoting her sons. 2

Wiersbe proceeds to show that there was at least three things wrong with the request by James, John, and their mother.

To begin with, it was born in ignorance. “Ye know not what ye ask,” Jesus replied. Little did Salome realize that the path to the throne is a difficult one. James was the first of the disciples to be martyred, and John had to endure hard days on the Isle of Patmos. These three believers wanted *their* will, not God’s will, and they wanted it *their* way.

Another factor was their lack of heavenly direction. They were thinking like *the world*: James and John wanted to “lord it over” the other disciples the way the unsaved Gentile rulers lorded it over their subjects. Their request was *fleshly* (sensual), because they were selfishly asking for glory for themselves, not for the Lord. No doubt they felt relieved that they had gotten to Jesus with this request before Peter did!

Finally, the request was not only of the world and the flesh, but it was of *the devil*. It was motivated by pride. Satan had sought a throne (Isa. 14:12-15) and had been cast down. Satan had offered Jesus a throne and had been refused (Matt. 4:8-11).

Satan magnified *the end* (a throne) but not *the means* to that end. Jesus warned Salome and her sons that the special thrones were available to those who were worthy of them. There are no shortcuts in the kingdom of God.³

Christ said if someone truly “desires to become great among you, let him be your servant (Matthew 20:26). The word for servant here is diakonos, where we would get our word ‘servant’ or ‘minister’. Christ instructed all the disciples that their pathway to greatness is through humility. They must learn to serve one another, or to put it another way - to minister to the needs of others.

Christ did not stop there, He also said that if anyone “desires to be first among you, let him be your slave...”. (Matthew 20:27). The word for slave here is doulos, which means “to being under someone’s total control, slavish, servile, subject.”⁴ Not only is Christ saying that we must be a minister but we also become a slave if we indeed desire to be great.

1 William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series*, vol.2, *The Gospel of Matthew - Chapters 11-28*, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 229.

2 Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire “BE” Series*, vol.1, *BE Loyal* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1989), 74.

3 *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1, 75.

4 Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. And ed. Frederick Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 259.

