

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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SALOME: THE MOTHER WITH A MISGUIDED REQUEST

Matthew 20:20-28

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INTRODUCTION: The two disciples in today's sermon were the sons of Zebedee. Matthew chapter 4 tells us their names were James and John. Later on, after Jesus was resurrected from the dead, Matthew 27 tell us the names of the women who were present at the resurrection, including the mother of the sons of Zebedee. In the parallel gospel of Mark, the wording is almost the same, however, instead of saying the mother of the sons of Zebedee, her name is given - Salome.

My three points are as follows:

- Salome believed Jesus was the Messiah, partially.
- Salome didn't really know what she asked for.
- Salome's request would be granted but not like she imagined.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 20:20-28

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

²¹ "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

²² "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered.

²³ Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

²⁴ When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.

EXPLANATION: By now, the disciples must have known that Jesus and the religious elite were on a collision course. But in the midst of it, we have this little aside. A mother asks Jesus a favor.

Now, Jesus predicted his death several times and it took his disciples a while to get it. He also predicted his resurrection and, as you know, they didn't get that at all until after it happened. They saw Jesus' focus become more intense as he scoffed at those who thought they had all the answers, told parable after parable, and ministered without taking a break. They knew trouble was ahead, but they didn't understand the full impact of what awaited them.

SALOME BELIEVED JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH, PARTIALLY

You'd think that the disciples would be very concerned about how much time they had left with Jesus, and maybe they were, but we read in Matthew's account that a well-meaning mother was most concerned about her sons' future positions. We have to wonder whether any of the disciples were getting it at this point. After all they had been through, the idea of jockeying for position makes me think they hadn't really gotten it yet.

Salome's request that her sons sit on either side of Jesus in his kingdom indicated that she knew he was the messiah. Whether she thought he was going to set up an earthly kingdom, or whether she meant heaven, we do not know, but from the reading it seems to me she had an earthly kingdom on her mind.

So, Salome, this beloved mother, had good intentions. I find it very interesting that two grown men came with their mother who knelt in front of Jesus to ask a favor for her sons. Did they know what she was going to ask? If so, did they put her up to it? If not, were they embarrassed by her request? I do not know the answers to these questions, but what I do know is that she believed Jesus was the Messiah. She knew he was a king. And she knew he was a non-traditional king who advocated for peace. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey which is what a king did if he came in peace.

When two boys, or young men, left home to follow a rabbi, the idea behind it was that they would go through an intense spiritual boot camp. They would learn from

the rabbi as they followed him. He would quiz them and make sure they were tracking with the teaching.

But no parent ever went to a rabbi during the period of their son's tutelage and talked with him like he was a king, or the Messiah. If anything, a parent would bring supplies or money for the rabbi and his followers. To approach Jesus the way she did indicated she knew who he really was, at least partially. And how did she learn this? From the scriptures – the part we call the Old Testament – and from observation, and from the testimony of her sons. Her sons had traveled quite a bit with Jesus and now that they were home, they no doubt visited with their mother and told her all the things Jesus had done. She decided she wanted to ask Jesus a favor.

APPLICATION: When I said she believed Jesus was the Messiah partially, I didn't mean it as an insult. Her request was based upon partial information.

Today, a lot of people have partial knowledge of who Jesus is. That's not necessarily a bad thing, if it is leading to more knowledge and eventually repentance and belief in him. No growing believer should be satisfied with partial knowledge.

SALOME DIDN'T REALLY KNOW WHAT SHE ASKED FOR

EXPLANATION: Salome, meaning well, asked for her sons to have the highest positions in the kingdom of Jesus. She wanted them to be close to him forever. She saw the transformations in their lives and she wanted it to stay. She was being a good mother. She asked Jesus to give them a place of pre-eminence, a place of authority.

At first, this sounds like a preposterous request but she was Mary's sister, which made her Jesus' aunt. They were family. Surely Jesus would have a special place in his kingdom for his cousins.

If you will, turn to Matthew 19:27-28. Jesus had just finished telling them how difficult it would be for a rich man to get to heaven.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 19:27-28

Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" ²⁸ *Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

It goes to reason that when James and John told their mother what Jesus said she got an idea... *I'll go ask Jesus for a favor. I'll get him to commit now.* Her timing was not good. She just could not grasp that Jesus was headed toward his death on a cross. All she could see was the crown. If she had known the pain of the cross had to come before the glory of the crown, would she have wanted such positions for her sons?

She meant well but she was misguided.

ILLUSTRATION: You know, many people want to experience the finish line without experiencing the pain of getting there. When I attended Southwestern Seminary, do you know what the drop-out rate was? Fifty percent. Think about that. A lot of young people entered those studies thinking their seminary experience would be one huge, warm, welcoming, and rather easy experience. And then they were hit with the grueling requirements that weeded them out quickly. And of those fifty percent, how many are still in ministry? I don't have a number but I know many of them have moved on to other things.

I used my experience because that's what I can understand. But it is the same with any career field. How many people say they want to be a doctor until they learn how many years it'll take to qualify and how much it will cost? I talked with a young man who said he wanted to be a doctor but didn't really like to study. Think about that. How many people want to be a nurse until they learn some of the non-glamorous things nurses have to do? How many want to be musicians until they found out how much practice it takes? When I was a young boy, just about every child wanted to be an astronaut. Of those that apply, only 6/10 of one percent have a chance of being selected.

APPLICATION: The world's concept of success is to promote oneself without the hard work. To be a growing disciple of Jesus Christ, you must be willing to set aside the glory of the crown and take up the cross. Jesus responded to their mother's question with - "Can you drink from the cup I will drink from?" Without hesitation,

they said, “We can.” They had absolutely no idea what they were talking about. What they should have said was, “Will you tell us what’s in that cup, and if you’ve already told us, will you overlook that we forgot and tell us again?”

Salome believed Jesus was the Messiah, partially. She didn’t really know what she was asking for. Next...

SALOME’S REQUEST WOULD BE GRANTED BUT NOT LIKE SHE IMAGINED

EXPLANATION: Jesus did not rebuke Salome for her request, but he did foretell the future. “You will indeed drink from my cup,” Jesus told James and John. They would experience persecution – all of the disciples, except for Judas, who would shortly betray Jesus and leave the picture very soon.

The disciples would all drink from the cup and tradition tells us they all died martyrs’ deaths, except for John who was exiled for his faith.

Yes, they would all drink from the cup and would experience some of what Jesus experienced but not everything. They would not experience God’s separation like Jesus experienced while he was on that cross. They would not die as a propitiation for the sins of the world, but yes... they would drink of the cup. They would know the true cost of being a follower of Jesus.

It was one thing having your mother make a request of Jesus when everyone is healthy, enjoying the tutelage of their rabbi, and experiencing no persecution. It was a completely different thing dying a martyr’s death merely for preaching the Gospel of Jesus.

It’s one thing saying you’ll trust Jesus to meet your needs, it’s another thing to actually do it.

It is one thing listening to a sermon and thinking I’ll live for Jesus. It’s another thing altogether actually doing it.

No, I don’t preach an easy-believism Gospel, because Jesus didn’t either. I’d like some of the evangelists of the 70s who talked people down the aisles of church to come and help me do the funerals of those who haven’t been back since. Yes, I believe in the gift of evangelism, but I don’t believe in manipulating people to go

through an experience that results in no commitment.

When Jesus asked if they would drink from the same cup, he was reminding them of Matthew chapter 10.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 10:37-39

“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”

Luke 9:23 *Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”*

“Brother Paul, you make surrendering to Jesus sound like something to be afraid of.” Yes and no. Yes, because the last thing Jesus needs is another half-hearted disciple. No, because being in the will of God is the best place to be, whether living for him or dying for him. I Corinthians 5:9 *So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.*

When Jesus said you will indeed drink from the cup, he knew what was going to happen. This is a strong story. Be careful what you ask for. But be willing to be in God’s will.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 20:25-28

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

CONCLUSION: The lesson that Jesus taught based on this mother’s request was that the real place of position in God’s kingdom is as a servant. Let us all be servants.

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