

AN UNWISE PRAYER

[BIBLE TEXT](#) : Matthew 20:20-28;

LESSON 184 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:27).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Matthew 20:20-28

²⁰ Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping *him*, and desiring a certain thing of him.

²¹ And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

²² But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

²³ And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared of my Father.

²⁴ And when the ten heard *it*, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

²⁵ But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

²⁶ But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

²⁷ And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

²⁸ Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

The Call of James and John

Among the twelve disciples of Jesus were two brothers whose names were James and John. Jesus had called them to follow Him one day when He passed by where they were mending their fish nets. They left their occupation to become fishers of men.

For three years James and John had zealously followed Jesus. He named them the sons of thunder, perhaps because of their boldness in defending Him. They had wanted to call down fire from Heaven to destroy some Samaritans who had at one time been discourteous to Jesus. And when they saw a man casting out devils in the name of Jesus, and not following with them, they asked Jesus to rebuke him.

Jesus knew that James and John loved Him very much, and were doing what they thought was right to try to please Him and to help Him; but Jesus does not do things in the way man naturally does them. He explained that He felt no bitterness toward the Samaritans, and had come to show them how to be saved rather than to destroy them. And He reasoned that the man who was casting out devils must be for them if he was not against them.

The Inner Circle

Jesus loved James and John, and together with Peter they made up what one might call the "inner circle." They went with Jesus more than any of the other disciples. They had been with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, when He was glorified; and they had heard Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus.

In some instances Jesus took only Peter, James, and John with Him when He went to do a great miracle. At one time He had been called to heal a girl who was dead. He put everyone else out of the room, and Peter, James, and John were the only ones who saw Him speak the girl back to life.

More than that, John was called the Beloved Disciple. It must have made him very happy to be favored with this special love of Jesus.

The Kingdom in the Heart

In spite of all this, James and John had not yet learned what Jesus considered to be true greatness. They did not understand that His Kingdom must begin in their hearts where no one could see it, and that it would not be a kingdom like Caesar's. They thought that surely Jesus would be a great, powerful king when He set up His throne, and He would need cabinet members and army officers to help Him rule — and to share His honor. Who else than they had as great a right to enjoy such favor with Jesus? they reasoned.

The Unwise Request

The mother of James and John must have been very proud that Jesus had called her sons to walk close beside Him; and no doubt she thought that her request was reasonable when she said to Him: "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom."

Jesus realized that they did not understand what they were asking. In their minds they could see the kingdoms of the earth which honored a man as king, and honored other men who were the king's knights and lords. The carnal nature wants to be praised and looked up to. But Jesus wanted a different spirit in the hearts of His followers. He wanted to show by His life how He expected them to live.

A Servant

Jesus said that He was among them as one who served — or as a servant. He had come to do good to others and not expect them to wait on Him. Those who wanted to be great in His Kingdom and live near to Him would have to do as He did. He said: "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all" (Mark 9:35).

The disciples thought, as you and I might, that to be a great man one must do great deeds in the world, perhaps be a leader of men. In the kingdoms of the world a military leader who has won battles for his country is honored; and the man who has made great scientific discoveries, or who has great wealth earned by a brilliant business career. The world looks up to such men; but few of us could earn recognition that way.

How happy we are that Jesus said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3, 10). We do not care what the world thinks of us, so long as we can live to please Jesus. He will reward us for our little deeds of kindness if we are faithful in what He calls us to do. "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward" (Matthew 10:42).

The disciples must have been very much surprised when Jesus took a small child upon His lap and said: "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:4).

The other ten disciples evidently had the same idea about Christ's Kingdom that James and John had. They were displeased with the two, for it seemed as though they were trying to get ahead of the other ten in choosing the best positions.

Faithful in Little Things

In one parable Jesus spoke, the lord said to his servant, "Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities" (Luke 19:17). Think of the contrast! He had been faithful in very little, and now was given authority over ten cities.

Willingness to Suffer for Christ

The Apostles of Jesus had not realized that they were asking for the wrong thing, and when Jesus asked them if they would be willing to suffer with Him in order to win the prize they wanted, they quickly agreed that they would.

Jesus knew their hearts, and said: "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup ... but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." To die for the cause of Christ would not earn for them a place in Heaven if their hearts were not washed clean through the Blood. Everyone must be saved first, before his works will be rewarded in Heaven.

James became the first martyr of the twelve. He, with the rest of

the Apostles, fulfilled Christ's commandment to go everywhere preaching that Jesus had died to make an atonement for sin and had risen again. This doctrine made many people very angry because they did not want to believe that Jesus was really the Son of God and had risen from the dead. King Herod wanted to please the Jews who hated Jesus, so he took James and cut off his head with a sword. James had said that he would be willing to suffer for Christ; and when he was put to the test, he did not back down.

John, too, learned the lesson Jesus taught at this time. He was the Apostle who was banished to the lonely Isle of Patmos because of his preaching. There God honored his faithfulness by giving him a glimpse of the hereafter. John saw the New Jerusalem, and his own name among the names of the twelve Apostles on the foundation stones. By that time he did not care about exalting himself, and he must have felt very humble when he saw the honor God was going to bestow upon him. John wrote down all he saw, and it is in the Bible as the Book of Revelation.

Willing Service

We can all have that spirit that is willing to serve others rather than to get everything for ourselves. After we are saved we must continue to pray and study God's Word. The more we consecrate our lives to Jesus, the easier it will be for us to be willing to do what Jesus wants us to, even though we do not at first feel that we can do that particular thing. We may see our friends gain more of the things of the world than we get; they may be looked up to when nobody pays any attention to us. But Jesus sees our hearts, and if we are working to please Him at any cost, He will say to us in the judgment: "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:23).

QUESTIONS

- 1 What did the disciples think about Christ's Kingdom?
- 2 Who were James and John?
- 3 What did James and John want?
- 4 What, in this lesson, did Jesus consider Himself, master or servant?
- 5 In which position did He want His disciples to place themselves?
- 6 What did the disciples say they were willing to do for Jesus? 7 How did James prove that He would give all for Jesus?
- 3 What punishment did John receive for preaching about Jesus?
- 9 What reward did John see for himself when he saw the New Jerusalem?
- 10 How is the Lord going to reward His righteous followers?