

The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

MATTHEW 20:17-34

THE words, “**The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many**” (20:28), may be said to constitute the central statement of the whole paragraph.

The great truth therein declared explains:

- The mind of the Master as revealed in this story;
- The perplexity of the disciples;
- The Master’s attitude toward need, as revealed in the crowds which followed Him.

This section is most interesting, as it brings before us the different classes of people by which the King was surrounded in the last days. Again we may describe it as a microcosm, showing us the whole condition of affairs in those last days.

We have watched Him as He devoted Himself almost exclusively to His own disciples, and yet manifested a perpetual readiness to turn to the multitudes as they came, to Him in their need, and with their question, and continually maintained His attitude of defense against the attacks of His foes.

Now in this paragraph:

- We see first the Lord Himself and there is a wonderful revelation of the working of His mind at this point.
- We see next the group of disciples, the first circle immediately around Him, and we learn what they were thinking.
- We see beyond them, a great multitude following Him, curious, interested, and expectant.

We shall divide the paragraph into three sections for our study.

- First, that revealing the mind of the King (verses 17-19).
- Secondly, that revealing the mind of the Kingdom, as it was established in the hearts of those who were yielded to the King (verses 20-28).
- Finally, that revealing the multitudes (verses 29-34).

First, then, as to the revelation of the mind of the King.

It is first manifest that He had a clear understanding of what lay before Him at the hands of lawless men. Mark the minuteness of His description. There is not a perhaps in it, or a peradventure, or a maybe; not a single word that will allow us to imagine that Jesus was speculating as to the future.

He said, "**We go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, And shall deliver Him unto the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify.**"

There is the utmost accuracy in the details, and a calm, quiet knowledge of the actual things that were before Him. The roads to Jerusalem were thronged with multitudes who were going to the feasts. Many of them would be near Him because of their interest in Him.

He took His disciples apart from these crowds perhaps turning off the highroad into some bypath for a little, or making it evident that He desired to be alone and calmly told them in brief words of the facts to which He was moving in Jerusalem.

In the second place there was evidently in the mind of the King a clear vision of the fact that what lay before Him was within the determinate counsel of God, for He ended the declaration of coming suffering with these words, "**And the third day He shall rise again.**"

From that wonderful day at Caesarea Philippi after the confession of Peter, when Jesus began to talk about His Cross, He never mentioned His Cross to His disciples upon any one occasion without also declaring the fact of His coming resurrection.

Not only the clear vision of the darkness, and the clear vision of the light beyond; not only a certain knowledge of all the suffering and the pain, and an equally certain knowledge of the ultimate triumph over these things in resurrection; but, and because of this dual certainty in His mind, there was manifested a quiet and dignified cooperation with the "**determinate counsel**" of God as He set His face towards Jerusalem, saying quietly and calmly to His disciples, "**Behold we go up to Jerusalem.**"

There was never a thought of turning aside; undeterred by what He knew most certainly of coming pain, He set His face toward the suffering deliberately, compelled toward Jerusalem by no other than His perpetual devotion to the will of God, and His perpetual determination to co-operate with that will, to its ultimate purpose.

Then notice the action consequent upon that consciousness.

He took the disciples apart, and He told them in detail the things He knew. It has been said our Lord was attempting to draw these men into sympathy with Him; that He wanted them to come into a closer comradeship with Him, in order to His own comfort. The probability is that He was not thinking of Himself for a moment, that He was still a self-emptied soul; and that He was rather getting them ready for the pathways of pain that lay before them.

He did not lean upon human sympathy as He faced the lonely sufferings of the Cross. The only strength He knew was the strength of His unbroken fellowship and communion with God. He was storing their minds with things which at the moment they could not possibly understand, for these men never knew Him while He was still amongst them.

They loved Him, they saw enough in Him to draw out their affections after Him. They saw enough to make them believe in Him in some unintelligent sense, but they never understood Him.

In the Paschal discourses, which John has preserved for us, He said to them in effect, "The things I am saying to-day, you will understand in the days to come, when the Comforter has come and opened your minds. It is better for you that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Comforter cannot come, but when He comes He will guide you into the truth."

And in the first four-and-twenty hours after the baptism of the Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, they were more familiar with the truth concerning Jesus than they had ever been during the whole period of His ministry in their midst. Nineteen centuries have passed away, and now by the illumination of that Spirit of God, Who has withdrawn the signs which were material, the tongues of fire, but Who abides in all spiritual power, we can walk with Him on the pathway of suffering in a more intimate fellowship than those men could.

But let us consider the mind of the Kingdom.

Taking the story of the coming of these two men with their mother, let us notice the revelation of mind which it affords.

First, in the mind of those who constituted the Kingdom, there was evident present faith in Him. They still believed in His coming into His Kingdom. As to what they meant by the Kingdom does not at all matter for the moment. They were not perfectly clear concerning His Kingdom; their ideas were largely material ideas, yet not wholly; but they did not see all the spiritual height and depth and spaciousness.

What made those two men persuade their mother to come and ask that they should sit one on His right hand and the other on His left? They would never have preferred the request if they had not believed that He was coming into a Kingdom.

Then mark the anger of the ten, and remember that their anger and criticism was because of their belief in the King, and because they wanted the positions of importance themselves.

The twelve believed that He was coming into a Kingdom. Yet they were strangely perplexed since Caesarea Philippi. He was always making them uncomfortable by talking of a Cross, and they could not believe that by death life could begin, that through defeat a crown could come.

Perhaps they said within their hearts; He is tired, weary, and oppressed; He thinks He is going to be defeated, but we do not. He is going to build His Kingdom.

Perhaps in this request, a repeated one, there was a desire on their part to comfort Him. He said; “I am going to Jerusalem to be mocked, and scourged, and crucified. They replied; Nay, Lord, who art Thou going to appoint in Thy Kingdom, who will sit on Thy right hand and on Thy left?”

One’s admiration, for the faith of these men grows, the more we study the records. They came to Him, and asked things which evidenced their faith in Him. No man asks to sit on the right hand and left of a man who is going to the gallows. They still believed that He was a King, and that He was about to establish His Kingdom.

Again, we see not merely their faith in Him, but their devotion to Him.

When, in infinite patience and great gentleness, and as it always seems, with a touch of loving satire, He said, “**Are ye able to drink the cup that I shall drink of?**” they said, “**We are able.**”

Again they meant well; they thought they were able, and they were willing, so far as they could, to go with Him. They were just as magnificent, devoted, and honest-hearted as Peter was when he contradicted his Lord’s estimate of himself, If “**all shall be offended, yet will not I.**”

It was a mistake, a blunder to put his opinion against his Lord’s, a mistake also to put himself into comparison with his own brethren, to their disadvantage. But it was devotion.

And these men meant it when they said, “**We are able.**” Had He not called them sons of thunder?

Ah, but they were not able!

A few short weeks at most, days in all probability, and He would see the sons of thunder flying with the crowd of frightened disciples. The failure revealed then, is the failure of the self-centered life. Faith in Christ, devotion to Christ, and yet self-seeking. “**Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.**”

They wanted the places of power. He never’ spoke of Cross and Resurrection but that some of His disciples broke in and asked Him who was the greatest man, or who was to have the place of power in His Kingdom.

If we read on to the last Supper and the institution of the Christian feast, when He said that awful and tragic thing that no man can read without trembling, “**One of you shall betray Me,**” then we also read, “**There was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.**”

Their devotion was sincere, and yet there was the desire to get out of this Kingdom something for themselves. Let us go back to Caesarea Philippi once more in memory, and see the shadow of it all. As long as Jesus talked to Peter about building the Church, and giving him keys, Peter was contented. But when He mentioned the Cross, he drew back.

The King had set His face towards Jerusalem, and the next thing was the Cross, the thing for which He was almost eager, the thing concerning which He continued to speak to these men. But they were anxious about the keys, and the seats of power, and precedence. How these things have continued!

What did the King do with these disciples?

Observe first, His patience in that He did not say one single angry word. Probably if we had been doing what He was doing, we should have been angry. When they said, Grant that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left, He looked back at them with ineffable tenderness, and said, "**Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?**" And when they said, "**We are able,**" He did not even then tell them that it was impossible. No, He allowed them to come into fellowship, and He told them they should do so; "**Ye shall drink indeed of My cup;**" You also shall come to death and sorrow. You shall follow Me presently, and shall consent to the very thing from which you shrink.

- One, swift sudden death by the sword;
- One, long wearisome exile in Patmos.

They drank of His cup. They did not drink of its fulness. They never knew its unutterable fulness, but they drank in some measure; but lo, they found it to be the red wine of life as they drank. He pressed that sacramental cup of sorrow to His lips alone, and then allowed men to share in the sorrow. But as for Him, so also for all who share that cup, it became full of blessing, the cup of salvation, not in any narrow sense, but in the broadest, and deepest, and highest sense. When the shadows were about His soul, and there was no sympathy, He said I will admit you even to this.

His correction is discovered in the words, "**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.**" These words "*it shall be given to them*" are in italics in the Authorized, and they are put in by the translators, not so much by way of translation as interpretation. If we leave them out, the wording is somewhat awkward. If we include them it is as if Jesus said, "It is not Mine to give the places of power and precedence in My Kingdom, but they shall be given by My Father, to those for whom it is prepared." If we miss the words out. He said, "It is not Mine to give these places, except to those for whom it is prepared." He did not for a moment say He had not power to give the places. He had the power; but He could only give the places, the precedence, the power, to those for whom it was prepared.

That is to say, He corrected the thinking of the disciples.

He was telling them that when they came, asking Him to give to them capriciously, or in arbitrary fashion, places of power, it was not His purpose so to do.

That is the kind of thing that still goes on in the world, although we are moving slowly toward the great ideals of the Christ in this respect.

We are beginning to put men into power upon the basis of their moral fitness for power; to erect monuments to men upon the basis of character. Christ said, Not upon the basis of favour will men get into office in My Kingdom; they will be put into office according to fitness, and that within the will of God.

When God prepares an office for a man, He prepares the man for the office; and there is perfect fitness.

And the King said, So shall I appoint in My Kingdom. There was no anger in it, He was correcting them, and He ended by giving them the one supreme example, His own, of what brings a man to the place of power in His Kingdom.

He said, among the Gentiles this is the method, this exercise of lordship, but not so among those of My Kingdom, "**But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever would be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.**"

We see the light flashing back upon their request.

They wanted the positions of power, not to do good to others, but that they might be ministered to. No, He said, "**The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.**"

He had told them that He was going to Jerusalem to suffer, to rise. They had broken in with this request about place and power. He took them back to the original word - The Son of man came to give His life a ransom, by the pathway of that suffering. Do not argue about your place of power, but get ready for any place your King may give you by following the Son of man, in giving your life for the ransom of others.

- By sacrifice a man fits himself for power.
- By self-abnegation, by the actual denial of self and readiness to serve does a man climb to the throne of power;
- He only retains his throne of power as he retains his badge of service.

Then we have one passing glimpse of the multitudes.

They took their way through Jericho, on that last journey to Jerusalem, and as they went forth from Jericho, the multitudes looked at them, curious, expectant, wondering what He was going to do, following Him along the highway, sharing the disciples' idea of the Kingdom.

Now let us listen to the blind men.

They were in need, and they made a venture. We do not know whether it was a venture of faith. Perhaps it was. If not, it was a venture of hope, as they said, "**Have mercy on us, O Lord, Thou Son of David.**"

Mark the crowd's estimate of Him.

The crowd silenced these men, in all probability because they thought He was too dignified to turn to beggars. But, "**They cried out the more.**"

It was their one chance, He was passing by.

Now let us leave the multitude, and the men, and look at the King.

He halted the whole movement, and stood still and called for these two men, and they were brought to Him.

We shall fail to understand this if we forget that which we have been considering. He was going to Jerusalem to suffer. He had a little group round about Him, who did not understand Him at all. The multitudes were after Him, the curious, crushing mob; but He halted the whole movement to help these two men. He would wait till they came.

And then the old word recurs, surging in music, beating in beauty, He was moved with compassion, He "**touched their eyes; and immediately they received sight, and they followed Him.**"

The first thing they saw was this wonderful King, and they followed Him in the way.

Mark the relation of the last scene to the foregoing sections, how by this action the King corrected the false idea of the Kingdom, the false idea of dignity, the false idea of the right to place and power, as He revealed Himself as a King Who had compassion enough to halt the movement toward the mystery of the Cross, for the sake of two men that needed help; that He would turn aside from that pathway, which according to His own showing was a pathway toward His crowning, to heal them.

One can only say again, Let us behold our King. Let us press more closely to Him, and, in order that we may be more kingly after the measure and manner of His life, let us follow Him, even by the way of the Cross; knowing this, that for evermore the light of resurrection life and power lies just beyond the place of the pain and the suffering.

~ end of chapter 55 ~

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