

Review

Jesus' ministry has been focused on the northern part of Israel for quite some time. But recently, He has left Galilee and came into the region of Judea, beyond the Jordan (Matt. 19:1). Now, He is about to go up to Jerusalem, where He will be killed. You could say that this time of His ministry is "the beginning of the end."

20:17-19 Condemned To Death

You may recall that in chapter 16, Jesus asked the disciples who they thought He was. Peter responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Matt. 16:20-21 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

They knew He was the Messiah, but they only knew about the conquering king Messiah. Jesus began to tell them about the suffering servant aspect of the Messiah. But no matter how much they heard it, they just couldn't comprehend it.

Even when they acknowledged what Jesus was saying, they couldn't accept the clear meaning. When Peter, James, and John were coming down from the mount of transfiguration, Jesus told them again, telling them that He would rise from the dead. But...

Mark 9:10 They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.

Now, the time is at hand. They will be in Jerusalem soon, and everything that is supposed to happen to Jesus will happen to Him. And so He warns them again. But Luke tells us...

Luke 18:34 ...the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.

20:20-21 The Request

In last week's study, you remember that a rich young ruler had walked away when Jesus told him to sell everything and give it to the poor, and then follow. Watching the guy walk away, Peter said, "Hey, Jesus. WE'VE walked away from everything to follow you! What are WE going to get?"

Jesus told all of the disciples,

Matt. 19:28 ...“Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

I'm sure that James and John had excitedly told their mother what Jesus had said. And I imagine that her response was, "Twelve thrones? Thats a lot of thrones. Are my boys going to have the best ones?"

"Yeah," they must have thought. "It's fine to be one of the Twelve, but who's going to be the most prominent? Who's going to have the highest position in the kingdom?"

And so James and John, along with their mother, approached Jesus. They asked for the two highest throne positions.

Imagine the hurt in Jesus' heart. He has just told them that He's going to be scourged and crucified, and they're thinking, "I wanna be known! I want to be an authority! I want to have prominence and position!"

20:22-23 We Are Able

I would think that their self-centered thoughts and selfish request might get the best of Him. But instead of lashing out, Jesus answers gently: "You don't know what you're asking."

You see, asking to be an authority in the kingdom means asking for affliction on earth. Asking to be a superior means asking to first suffer. James and John were saying, "We want to rule with you in your court." But Jesus said that first they'd have to drink from His cup.

Of what cup would He be drinking? The cup of the wine of the wrath of God (Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:10). A cup so distasteful and distressing that in just six chapters, Jesus Himself will be praying that it could

be taken from Him (Matt. 26:39).

Although they didn't understand any of this, they said that they were ready. Jesus told them that they would in fact be drinking the cup. They themselves would ultimately be...

Col. 1:24 ...filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

As a matter of fact, these would be the first and last of the twelve apostles to die in faith. James would be arrested and killed by the sword at the command of King Herod (Acts 12:2). John would live a much longer time, but would suffer grievously for his faith in Christ. He would be arrested and beaten numerous times, and ultimately banished to a tiny, barren, volcanic island in the Aegean Sea.

Even as Jesus promised the suffering, He did not promise them the places of prominence. That would be up to the Father.

20:24-28 Authority Vs. Slavery

When the other ten apostles heard what James and John had done, they were indignant. But they couldn't have been upset that they'd had the idea of being superior. You see, of late they had all been feuding:

Mark 9:34 ...on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.

No, I believe they were indignant with James and John because the brothers had gotten the idea first. Their anger probably arose from their envy.

But Jesus was focused on a different kind of greatness. He called the disciples together and said that the world's view of greatness and authority was completely wrong. In God's eyes, the greatest is the servant, the one who serves others.

And He used Himself as the supreme example:

Matt. 20:28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

There is no greater life than the one which is lived serving others.

Let me ask you today: How great are you in God's eyes? The answer is found in asking, "How many people am I serving, and how well am I serving them?"