

Misplaced Request

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[0 : 00] was it in my past that has led me to assume something which is so wrong? It is an essential part of Christian growth that we are brought to these times when God shows us something that is different from what we always assumed or always thought.

So don't be surprised when you're sitting in church and all of a sudden it may not even be something the minister says. It may be something that comes to you. You're reading a passage of the Bible and you're saying, I thought that, and you realize it was wrong all the time.

In this passage, you find out something that this was part of the disciples' almost daily experience because when they came to Jesus, of course, the disciples were Jewish people and they had to be persuaded that Jesus was in actual fact the coming Messiah.

But it was much more complicated than that because they had to be persuaded that God was three as well as God was one. They had no idea of the Trinity.

They perhaps wondered about the Old Testament and the references to God in the plural sense, but they had to revolutionize that whole way of thinking.

[1 : 24] And that meant that there were times in their experience with Jesus where they had to be wrong. They had to realize, I was wrong up until now, up until this moment in time, the penny has dropped.

I now understand. Up until now, I've thought this and I didn't realize how wrong I was. Now, here is a passage where the disciples were wrong.

And when I say disciples, I don't just mean the 12 disciples. I mean also this woman, the mother of the sons of Zebedee. She was a disciple as well.

She wasn't one of the 12, but she was still a disciple. She was a follower of Jesus, someone who listened to Jesus on a regular basis. And there are at least three things about this passage from verse 20 to 28 in which the disciples were shown or the people were shown to be wrong.

First of all, the request that this mother, this woman made about her two sons, it was not what she thought it was.

[2 : 29] Her request was wrong. Even if it was well motivated, even if it was made with the best, as far as she was concerned, the best of intentions, she was wrong.

It wasn't what she thought. And she had to be put right by Jesus. The second thing is that when Jesus spoke to his disciples about the cup that he was to drink of, when he said in verse 22, Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?

And they said to him, Yes. They were wrong in their understanding of what that cup was. And even though Jesus said they would drink of that cup, it did not mean that they were to, that their understanding of the cup.

And we'll go into all this in a few moments' time. Don't worry. We'll try and unpack this passage a little bit more in detail. But what I'm trying to say at the moment is that it involved the disciples having to realize and having to confess that they were wrong.

And then thirdly, the disciples came to Jesus, particularly these two, with a particular perception of authority in the kingdom of God. That's the whole point of the mother's question.

[3 : 45] Can I say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom? Well, she obviously had this picture. Probably the disciples themselves, John and James.

I don't believe for a moment that she asked this question without conferring with them. In fact, Mark's gospel, when it gives its account of this very same incident, it comes from them. The request comes from them.

So they were part and parcel of this question that the mother brought to Jesus. And they were wrong in their assumption of the authority in the kingdom of God.

Let's go through these things then. Let's go through this passage and try and glean from it what we can about all these areas and elements. But let's beware.

Let's never come in that door without an open mind, ready to be taught and ready, if necessary, to be corrected by the Lord. How many times in our lives have we had to realize that I am wrong?

[4 : 48] It's part and parcel of Christian growth and being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. I want us to look, first of all, obviously then, at the request that the mother made.

She said, Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in the kingdom. I want us to see, first of all, that it was well motivated.

You can't fault her motives. I think she just went way too far in her understanding. I suppose those of us who are parents, we want the best for our children, don't we? Naturally, we do.

But some parents, in their desire to have the best for their children, they go way too far. And they dream and they have ambitions for their children that their children will never achieve.

The psychologists tell us that our failures, we try and reflect our failures in the successes of our children. We try to make our children succeed where we have failed.

[5 : 48] Well, I don't know what was in the mind of the mother of the sons of Zebedee, but she certainly wanted something big for her sons. And she was prepared to do everything that she possibly could and to use her influence with Jesus to achieve for her sons something that she wanted to achieve.

We've all done it. I remember when I was a teenager, I remember one of the most embarrassing moments in my life was when my dad decided that I needed a job. I was 16 years old and he decided that one day he was going to not, but not that I was going to look for a job, but that he was going to look for a job with me.

And so we went down the town and he was wearing his collar because he believed at that time, it was a long time ago, you had a lot of influence if you wore a collar in those days, not just in church circles, but in community circles as well.

And he believed, I can tell you, I have never been so embarrassed in all my life from shop to shop, from business to business. And he would go in and ask for a job for me.

This is what this mother was doing. She was asking on behalf of her children and parents, we can overdo it and we can embarrass, we can end up embarrassing our children. I don't know, I don't believe that these disciples are embarrassed at all.

[7 : 04] I believe that they were complicit in this mother's request. In any case, what was it that she wanted? Well, here it is. Say he, she said, that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left in your kingdom.

What does she mean by that? Well, first of all, I wonder what she meant by his kingdom. But whatever she meant by it, she probably goes back to the passage we read in chapter 19, which happened just before, where Jesus says, Truly, I say to you, verse 28, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me, you, now listen to this, this is key, you who have followed me will also sit on the twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And obviously, as the disciples listened to Jesus' description of thrones and kingdom and authority, then the mothers obviously thought, well, if there's going to be all these thrones, I want my sons to have not just a throne, I want them to have the best throne.

I want them to sit one on one side and the other on the other side of Jesus in his authority. But one has to question what exactly Jesus meant in chapter 19 when he talked about the thrones and the kingdom.

The disciples, they had a complete misunderstanding of what the kingdom was in any case. They still believed that an earthly kingdom was going to be set up where Jesus was going to be the king and where the Romans who were occupying that region, they would be thrust out and where God was going to restore the kingdom to Israel.

[8 : 59] They believed that that's what Messiah was all about. And so when this mother asked that her two sons would sit one on one side, one on the other, it's likely that she had in mind an earthly kingdom and their authority and their place and their status in that kingdom.

But Jesus was not talking about an earthly kingdom. He was talking about another kingdom altogether in chapter 19. It still begs the question, what did he mean?

I'm just going to take a little aside. What did he mean in verse 28 in chapter 19 when he said, When the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones.

There's a mystery to this. It either means heaven, the next world, when the dwelling of God will be amongst man, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth and where God will dwell in a perfect kingdom, where his people will be perfected and their bodies raised and reunited with their souls and where they will be with the Lord forever.

In which case, it appears that whatever the rule and authority means in that kingdom, and I'm not exactly sure what it will be shared, it will be a shared, something that will be shared among his people.

[10:33] Now, there are references to the Bible, 1 Corinthians, for example, in chapter 4 and verse 8. And then there's Daniel chapter 7 and verse 22 and 27, that seem to give the impression that in glory, that whatever authority there will be will be a shared one.

Now, that's as far as we can go. We don't know what that means. But it could also mean something else. Please note, and again, I'm just putting this out to you. I don't know what you make of it. But you see the word in chapter 19, verse 28, when it says, in the new world, it actually means in the regeneration.

I think that's what the authorized version has. The regeneration. And a lot of people seem to think that that's not about heaven at all. Rather, it's about the era of the gospel, when Jesus would rise again from the dead, and when he would ascend and sit at the Father's right hand, and as a result of his ascension, the Holy Spirit would be poured out on the church at Pentecost, and the whole thing would from then on explode to all the world.

That was the beginning of the gospel era, or the regeneration. And it can be said that when Jesus sat at the Father's right hand, he sat on his glorious throne to rule over the success of the gospel as it would go through the world.

[12:12] Don't ever underestimate the power of the gospel, by the way. We may be in a minority today, in Britain or in Scotland, but God's kingdom will never fail. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

I will build my church, said Jesus, and the gates of hell will never prevail against it. That's the one certainty that there is in this world. Governments come and go. Laws come and go. Statutes come and go. Change is all around us in this world. But one thing is absolutely certain, that Jesus will fulfill his promise. He will build his church, and the gates of hell will not.

Why? Because he's on the throne, on his glorious throne. Now, if this is what he meant in verse 28 in chapter 19, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, not in heaven, but in heaven with respect to the gospel, the gospel era, what place did the disciples have?

Well, they had a very special place. A place where theirs was the task of initiating the gospel, and spreading the gospel, and establishing the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, in which they had that authority that was given to them for to carry that purpose out.

[13:31] That may have been what he meant in chapter 19 and verse 28. We have to leave it there. We can only talk around the passage and believe that one day, all will be revealed.

In any case, this woman, the mother of James and John, she wanted the very best for her sons, or what she believed was the very best for her sons.

And it's important that we recognize right away that her request was misplaced, and it was misunderstood.

Jesus answered, first of all, by saying, you do not know what you are asking, and neither she did. You know, just again, as a little aside, there are times, aren't there, when even in prayer, we come to the Lord, and we don't really know what we're asking.

We think we know what is right. We think we know what we want. We think we know what is best. But we can only go insofar as our minds lead us, our own logic, our own understanding, and our expectations.

[14:44] And, you know, there are often times, when you look back, and you realize how wrong you were, even to ask for the things that you asked for in prayer.

Is that not right? And the Lord teaches us, as He changes us, and as He gives us that greater understanding of His mysterious purpose for us, we realize how wrong we were.

And you actually, you end up thanking God for not answering your prayer the way you prayed originally. Amazing, isn't it?

There was this woman, and she had no idea what she was asking. We also, and that's why it's so important when we come to pray, we have to say, nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.

That always has to be part and parcel of our prayer. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.

[15:49] You do not know, Jesus said, what you are asking. Then He said something which is, which I guess, to the disciples, again, they assumed that they knew what Jesus meant, but in actual fact, they didn't know.

He said this, He asked them a question, are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? And it was like, automatically, they didn't even think about it.

They said, yes, of course we're able. They had no idea what they meant by that, but Jesus did.

Now, what did He mean? What was the cup that He was to drink?

Well, in Jewish times, or in the times when Jesus lived, this was a way of expressing the circumstances which you had to go through.

They could, your cup was your life, and the various events that took place in your life, now it could be a joyful event, or it could be a sad event, but your cup was what you had to drink in terms of the events that took place in your life that God put into your lap by providence.

[17:15] You remember very vividly, don't you, when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, and when He said, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.

What did He mean by that? His cup, the cup that He asked to be passed from Him, was His impending death on the cross, and all that that involved, the cruelty, the pain, the agony, the suffering, the darkness, which was just beginning to unfold in front of His face.

And it was, even at that moment, so horrific that He asked God the Father to let it pass from Him. that's the way He asked, let this cup pass from Me.

And I believe that it's the same cup that He's talking about here. When He asks His disciples, are you able to drink the cup that I am going to drink, what He meant was, are you able to suffer even to the point of death?

You see, they were thinking in terms of their own authority, their own place, their own status, the glory, the splendor, the honor, the status.

[18:26] We want to be alongside you in your glorious kingdom. But when Jesus spoke about the kingdom, He is talking about what He had to go through in order for that kingdom to come, and that was death itself, His own death on the cross.

That's what He meant. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? And they said to Him, We are able. And He said to them, You will drink my cup.

Now, what did He mean by that? If only He was going to suffer on the cross, He alone uniquely, what did He mean by you will drink it?

Well, they too in time were going to suffer for the sake of Jesus. Little did they know at that point in time. It's best we don't know what's ahead of us, isn't it?

These disciples did not know what was ahead of them. Here they were in blissful ignorance talking about, We are able to drink the cup that you are able to. They did not understand what they meant.

[19:30] What Jesus meant was, You will die for me. You will die because you are my disciples. James died at the time of Herod.

John died eventually in exile on Patmos. He was to suffer for the sake of His Savior. But it was best at that moment in time that Jesus kept all these details from them.

And only in His providence did they receive the strength to be able to face all of the cup that they had to drink. But Jesus had to drink His own cup.

And no one could possibly drink that cup except Him. He only could unlock the door of heaven and let us in.

Only Jesus. And He had to drink it because it was the only way. Do you ever ask yourself, was there no other way in which we could be saved?

[20:38] Do you ever ask yourself, why did our salvation necessarily involve the death of the Son of God? Surely, given everything that is at God's disposal, God can do anything He wants.

God is almighty without beginning and without end. He created the world and all the universe as we're going to see this evening. He created everything that we know.

Surely, there could have been some other way of saving us from our sins. There wasn't. It was absolutely essential that this one way had to be gone through by Jesus Christ and Him alone only. An angel couldn't have done it. A man couldn't have done it. A woman couldn't have done it. No one else could have paid the price of sin. And Jesus was willing and able and ready to do it and to do it all and to do it for us.

Not stopping for a moment until it was finished. Until the last drop was drunk. It's absolutely necessary for our salvation that the Son of God had to become sin for us so that we could be made the righteousness of God in Him.

[22 : 10] I want us to reflect this morning on that glorious truth that Jesus went the full extent and did and accomplished everything that was necessary for our salvation stopping at nothing until it was all done.

And then lastly authority in the kingdom was something I mentioned this just a few moments ago they were thinking only in terms of their own authority. I wonder why sometimes James and John you remember there were three disciples who were particularly close to Jesus there was Peter and James and John but here when it comes to this question there's only two of them.

I can understand the three of them perhaps thinking because we are naturally closer to Jesus than the rest of them I'm not sure that does not mean he didn't love the rest of the disciples doesn't mean that he didn't give himself for them in every possible way but you know from the gospels of course that these three disciples seemed to go places with Jesus that the other disciples didn't go they seemed to have enjoy a closer perhaps on a human level experience with Jesus but now it appears that Peter has dropped out it's only the two of them James and John now they were two sons of this woman and some people suggest that the woman was Salome and some people suggest that she in actual fact was the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus which would make these boys Jesus' first cousins we're not entirely sure but a lot of people suggest that so it's not surprising if they were his first cousins that family would come into this and they would think that because they were his family that they deserved a right to a closer place and status in his kingdom

I guess that's the way people thought in those days if you were family whether you were the Romans or whatever that if you were related to someone that you would give that person a particular place or else it could have been as I said before the fact that James and John they were part of that triplet that that group of three but Peter had dropped out by that stage I wonder why I wonder if it's anything to do with the fact that Peter had already become his own deficiencies had become so obvious to the rest of the disciples and they were about to become even more obvious Peter what you saw was what you got and Peter seemed to be he seemed to be one of these people that just wore his heart on his sleeve and whatever he was thinking he said whether it was right or wrong and there were times when Peter said things which Jesus had to rebuke like for example just before in Matthew 16 when Jesus announced his death and Peter said to him no no this is not going to happen to you and Jesus said to him in front of all the other disciples get behind me Satan because you regard the things of man rather than the things of

God now imagine the rest of the disciples they're listening to that and they're saying whoa this is Messiah this is the son of God and he is saying to one man he is saying get behind me Satan because you don't mind the things of God you're rather interested in the things of man and I wonder if there was a temptation to kind of think of themselves on a higher level than Peter to think of themselves as closer to Jesus than Peter because they didn't say what Peter said they weren't guilty of what Peter was guilty and I wonder if they slipped into a classic temptation that so many Christians are prone to slip into and that is to create a separation between me and another

[27 : 03] Christian to think of myself as being more spiritual than another person perhaps because I know of a weakness in that other person and instead of doing everything I can to encourage and help my brother or my sister in the Lord I kind of look down on them because of their weakness and I think of myself as being because I'm not guilty of what their guilt I think of myself I remember one of the most important lessons I have ever learned in my life is this one that's why I want to share it with you today once you get to my age if you've been a Christian for many decades like I have you look back and you can see things in a different perspective when I was a young Christian particularly when I was a young student there were crowds of young people and there were all different types of young people different personalities and backgrounds and on one end of the spectrum there were those who were mature and they seemed to be so godly they seemed to take the

Christian faith so seriously and they were active in all the right stuff and at the end the other end of the spectrum there were let's call them the weaker ones they kept tripping up kept doing stuff that they knew was wrong and other people knew were wrong and so on and at that time there was a tendency to look down on the weaker ones let me tell you something I know some of these same people and some of the ones that were mature in those days are nowhere now I can tell you and I wonder sometimes if they just went too far in their own pride and some of the very ones that struggled are still there today serving the

Lord as never before you know what the Bible says let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall and this Peter to whom Jesus said get behind me Satan went on to preach the most powerful sermon in the world at the day of Pentecost 3,000 people were converted when Peter preached full of the Holy Spirit you see God doesn't give up on us you can be weak today but as long as you're running to the Lord with your weakness asking him to help you and to forgive you and to cleanse you and to restore you he will do it the problem is that when we think of ourselves as being strong and mature then we tend not to see our own need and that's fatal so I'm going to leave these three misunderstandings with you this morning and ask that God will bless this passage to us to all of us that he will challenge us all with this passage that he will give us a greater understanding as to what is the right as to we started off by talking about these times when we suddenly realize that we are wrong but we thank God for those times and we ask that there may be times to come when we will always be brought to see our own mistakes our own errors and that we will be brought by them to be closer and closer to what we should be as his people let's pray together our father in heaven we give thanks once again for your word and we pray that your word will have a powerful effect in our minds and our lives we pray

Lord that you will create within us a clean heart a renew a right spirit within us and continue to persist with us we give thanks oh Lord that you restore our soul and make us to walk in the paths of righteousness continue to do that we pray forgive us in Jesus name amen to go amen to go to go