

A Ransom For Many

Oh, James! Oh, John! Have you learned nothing from the lessons the Lord has been teaching? Still you think the kingdom of God is temporal. Still you dream of David's royal throne restored with external glory, earthly grandeur and political power. And, as if this deep rooted error is not enough, you have the audacity to request the positions of greatest honour in your imagined kingdom! You even brought your Mum to plead your case. Really?

Asking amiss

It is little wonder the other disciples were 'much displeased' with James and John. But it was not because they were wiser. On the contrary, they wanted those places for themselves. They felt they had as much right to pre-eminence as these presumptuous sons of Zebedee. Jesus had spoken of the disciples being seated on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes. He meant in their role as evangelists and gospel preachers, but fleshy desires heard 'pomp and circumstance'. It is just a few weeks until the Lord Jesus is to be arrested, tortured and sentenced to go to the cross, yet simmering under the surface of His disciples' thinking is mutual rivalry, ambition for status and self-preferment. Behold the fruit of our sinful nature!

Patience and prophecy

We can only admire the patience displayed by the Lord. He tells James and John that what they ask is not possible. The positions they aspire to simply do not exist. He again informs them what lies before Him; His cup of suffering, His being plunged to the depths of despair, His death. They fancy sharing in Christ's glory, but can they face sharing in His grief? "Yes", James and John declare. "And so you shall", the Lord replies, "But the glory you crave is not mine to give. Heavenly glory is reserved for those whom the Father has given to me."

Christ's spiritual kingdom

As the Lord looked around upon the twelve and searched their hearts and understood their resentment towards James and John. He knew He must explain again to them the nature of what lay before Him, and them. How tenderly the Lord managed His disciples' human frailties and their prejudices, time after time, teaching them to lift their thoughts above sinful, fleshy, ambition and instead to marvel at the wonders of divine mercy and sovereign grace.

Princes of the Gentiles

Often our thoughts are shaped by sinful desires and moulded by our responses and reactions to the world around us. The 'princes of the Gentiles' as Jesus calls them, are the trend-setters, the influencers, the great and the popular, the strong and the admired of this world. They rule and dominate in the world. They 'exercise authority' upon the minds and motives of men and women, fashioning aspirations and shaping opinions. But it all flows from a heart of sin.

Christ our Example

There was to be no place for this among the disciples. There are no princes in the church! On the contrary, greatness in Christ's kingdom is measured in service, and glory in terms of sacrifice. In the church of Jesus Christ he who is great is he who stoops, she who is chief is she who serves, and the Lord Jesus Christ is our great Example.

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Mark tells us in verse 45: 'For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.' Our Lord Jesus Christ knew, as the God of all glory, what it was to be ministered unto; but as the Godman His glory lay in fulfilling His covenant responsibilities, and redeeming His people from their sins. This He accomplished by humbling Himself, becoming a servant, suffering as a substitute in His people's place, and laying down His life for His friends.

Drinking from Christ's cup

Once again the Lord Jesus Christ patiently and carefully re-iterated the message of His suffering for the redemption of His people, and His death. His disciples who three years before had left their livelihoods to follow Him must learn that following Jesus means taking up their cross. In the days to come James, the first of the apostles to suffer death, would give his life, slain by Herod's sword, and drink from His Master's cup. One by one the others would follow.

Baptised with His baptism

John, here a young man, would outlive the others, but his life, too, would be filled with suffering. For both James and John the Lord's words came true. 'Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with.' John was imprisoned, beaten by the Jewish Sanhedrim, banished to the isle of Patmos; and, some say, thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil. If this is indeed true then perhaps being baptised with the baptism with which Christ was baptised took on for him a literal meaning.

Amen

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