

# Salome

Matthew 20:20-28

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2021-05-23

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## I. Who was Salome?

Today we are going to look at Salome - a woman who has been given a bad rap because of her one attempt to misuse her relationship with Jesus. And yes, that was wrong, but I don't think that one event should define her. She was a wonderful woman of faith. And I believe the last chapters of Matthew hint that she learned from this event. And I hope that each of us can learn as well.

Paul says that there is no temptation that has overtaken us except that which is common to man. Well, that means that her temptation is common to man and is something that any of us can be tempted with as well. So let's all listen and learn from this remarkable woman.

### ***A. She was Mary's sister and thus the aunt of Jesus ("His mother's sister" - John 19:25 with Matt. 27:55-56; Mark 15:40; 16:1)***

And let's start by identifying who she was. Salome is most commonly pronounced just the way I pronounced it: Salomee. But there are some who pronounce it Salomay. The Greek is Salomane (Σαλώμη), with an n on the end. All three pronunciations have the emphasis on the second syllable. But the standard is Salome.

I am 100% convinced that she was Mary's sister, and that Jesus would have grown up calling her Aunt Salome. There was probably a very close family bond there. Given the fact that Jesus' brothers were not believers yet but Salome's children were, there was probably a tighter bond between Jesus and Salome's family than there was with his own siblings. In fact, at the cross (contrary to all expectations and culture), Jesus transfers His charge and care of his mother to Salome's second-born son, John, rather than to any of His own brothers. So that in a nutshell is my view of who she is.

But I do want to admit that there is debate on her identity. Why don't you turn to John 19:25. It says,

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

The debate stems around whether this verse should be translated in a way

that describes two women, three women, or four women. The two-women theory says that His mother's sister is Mary the wife of Clopas and is also called Mary Magdalene. So they translate the word "kai" as "even" rather than as "and." Almost nobody buys that argument. The second theory says that there were three women: Jesus' mother, His sister who is the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. My theory says that the New King James and 27 other versions that I own have all translated this right and there were four women there.

Hendriksen, Brochert, and many others give very cogent arguments as to why John 19:25 must of necessity be describing four women, not three or two. For example, it is extremely unlikely that Mary's sister would be named Mary. You just don't name two of your kids with the same name. And it's extremely unlikely that Mary Magdalene was married to Clopas. I won't get into all of the debates on this. But if there are four women (as our version says that there is), then when you put the parallel Gospel accounts of the women who were at the cross side by side, and line up all of the women, you see that the same woman is described three different ways. Matthew calls her the mother of Zebedee's sons. Mark calls her Salome. And John calls her His (that's is, Jesus') mother's sister. So Salome was Christ's aunt on his mother's side. It helps to explain why she even came to Him with this request. Not only was Jesus the most closely related to James and John physically, He was closer to them spiritually than He was to His own family. It made sense to her that her own children would be preferred.

But it also brings up a very fascinating sidenote that many commentators have mentioned. They have noticed that many of the apostles were either relatives of Jesus or close friends of Jesus. I've already mentioned that James and John were first cousins on his mother's side. While there is legitimate debate on some of the other relationships (and I myself am not dogmatic), many scholars believe that Simon the Zealot, James the less, Thaddeus, and Thomas were first cousins on his adoptive-dad's side. They base this on Heggesipius' claim that Clopas was the brother of Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus. Though we cannot be certain about all of the facts, F. W. Farrar claims that "no less than half of the Apostles would have been actually related to our Lord,"<sup>1</sup> and a majority of the rest were closely connected to each other in some other way. For example, Luke 5:10 says that Peter was a business partner with James and John. That makes him rather tight with them. Matthew 4:18 says that Andrew was Peter's brother. That

1 Farrar says that "Simon Zelotes and Judas Iscariot were father and son." F. W. Farrar, *The Gospel according to St Luke, with Maps, Notes and Introduction, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 134.

makes all four of them rather tight. Bartholomew and Philip may have been brothers. And Eusebius claims that Thomas and Matthew were twin brothers. So there were a lot of tight connections between these men even prior to Christ calling them.

What difference does this make? Well, it tempers our modern carefulness about having relatives serving in the same church. Many modern Christians would say that what Jesus did in calling these men would be utterly inappropriate in the modern church. They have a false sense of propriety, and in the process insult Jesus. The fact of the matter is that if any of this is even approximately true, it shows how frequently God's grace and callings line up with natural relationships. God can pull a Matthew and an apostle Paul out of the blue, but often He raises up leadership from within local assemblies that are either related to each other or friends of each other.

I bring this up because there are a lot of marriages happening within this church, and that means that within 50 years it is possible that elders and deacons will be more and more related to each other. I'm related to Gill. There is nothing wrong with that. More of those kinds of relationships will be almost inevitable in the next 50 years. It is certainly inevitable in small towns. It should not be thought a strange thing that father and son, or brothers, or friends find God calling them into the same ministries or calling them into the same businesses or lines of work. It seems to be the way God normally works.

That of course can lead to the very problems that we will deal with in today's sermon. But the fact that there can be problems with relatives working with each other should not in any way be an automatic bar to such things happening. My dad was a pastor and my brother and I were called to be pastors. If we had all been in the same town, we would likely have all been working together.

So who was Salome? The first point says that she was Mary's sister and thus the aunt of Jesus. John refers to her as "His mother's sister" (John 19:25).

***B. She was the mother of James and John (Matt. 20:20; 27:56)***

Second, she was the mother of the apostles James and John. And we know that James, John, and Peter were in the inner circle of Christ's relationships. His closest friend was John - Salome's second born son. And the reason I say second-born is that out of the twenty times the two brothers are mentioned together, James is listed first 19 times, and the 20th time it is

simply showing the order in which Jesus selected three men to go with him.<sup>2</sup> But Jesus was very close friends with all three.

Application? Well, if Jesus needed close friends, all of us could use close friends. But this is part of what factored into Salome figuring that making James and John the first in the kingdom was an obvious thing to ask. And with the other apostles vying for that position in chapter 18, she may have felt that she needed to get on the stick and cement this deal before they did. And we will be showing that relatives and friends should not be allowed to influence us away from Christ's instructions. That's the main point.

***C. She was the wife of Zebedee, a wealthy fisherman (Matt. 20:20 with 4:18-22; 10:2; 20:20-28; 26:37; 27:56; Mark 1:19-20; 3:17; 10:35; 16:1-8; Luke 5:1-11; John 21:2)***

Third, Salome was married to Zebedee, a very wealthy fisherman. When you look at all the passages I put into your outline about Zebedee, you discover a number of clues that have made commentators conclude that he was a wealthy fisherman - wealthy enough to have plenty of servants. Wealthy enough that when he lost his two sons from the business to follow Jesus, he was able to carry on just fine. They were wealthy enough that they were continually able to financially support Jesus, and later to support the ministry of James and John and perhaps other apostles. Luke 5:9-11 says that he was business partners with Simon Peter, so Peter himself was not poor. Too many children's books present those three as very poor, uneducated, rough around the neck, lower class peasants. Nothing could be further from the truth. They were well-educated (as the Greek of their epistles definitely reveals). And they were fairly well-to-do.

And just the way Zebedee is mentioned in the Gospels you get the impression that he was a very prominent man in Capernaum. Commentators point out that Zebedee had enough clout through his social standing (and probably his wealth) that John 18:15 says that John was well-known by the high priest and could enter his courtyard without raising an alarm. For someone in Capernaum to be that well known by the high priest in Jerusalem, he had to be a very prominent person.

The point is that Jesus did not despise the wealthy. This explains why some of these apostles were able to finance their own missions trips. But I also bring all of this background information up because it does factor into why it

<sup>2</sup> Every time James and John are mentioned (except Luke 9:28), it is in that order: Matt. 4:21; 10:2; 17:1; Mark 1:19,29; 3:17; 5:37; 9:2; 10:35,41; 13:3; 14:33; Luke 5:10; 6:14; 8:51; 9:54; Acts 1:13; 12:2; Gal. 2:9.

would have been so easy for Salome to presume upon Jesus without realizing she was doing something inappropriate. And we will talk about that in a bit.

## **II. Salome really was a wonderful woman of faith**

But to get a real feel for Salome, we also need to get an understanding of why she is presented in the Gospels as a wonderful woman of faith. I think that you will miss the lesson of our main passage if you think of her as a mercenary, selfish, self-serving woman. She was none of those. Her sin was so subtle that any of us could fall into it without thinking that we were wrong. That's why I have picked Salome as the woman who can teach each of us how to guard against letting blood be thicker than baptismal water. Our story shows that our relationship to Christ takes precedence over our relationship to family, though both forms of relationship are important.

### **A. She was a strong believer (Matt. 20:21; 27:55-56; Mark 16:1-8)**

There are five evidences that Salome was a wonderful woman of faith. First of all, she is presented in the Gospels as being a strong believer. That much is obvious. You can see that even in the passage we read together. In that passage it is clear that she believes that Jesus is the Messiah and that He will fulfill the Old Testament promises of the kingdom.

But Matthew 27 and Mark 16 indicate that she had put her faith in Jesus right from the beginning of His ministry through to the end. She was one of the women who stayed at the cross of Christ despite the danger of associating with Jesus. When you compare the Gospels it appears that the soldiers had chased people away from the cross, and they were looking from afar. But Salome is one of the women who pushed her way back to the cross despite the danger. She was one of three women who brought embalming spices to Christ's tomb. So she was a true believer, and follower of Christ. And there are hints that she had gracious boldness.

When she says, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom," (Matt. 20:21), it is very easy to so focus on what was wrong about her statement that we fail to realize what was powerfully right about her statement. It is important to realize that by the time of Matthew 20, most of the crowds had forsaken Christ and had become disillusioned with Him. Not Salome. She still firmly believed that He would establish His kingdom as He said He would. I think there is a lack of understanding concerning the nature of the kingdom, but

there is faith.

***B. She was a very generous and selfless woman (Mark 1:19-22; Luke 5:1-11 with Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:3)***

Second, she was a very generous and selfless woman. Luke 8:3 implies that she was one of the women who had generously provided for Jesus out of their substance. Other versions say that they provided for Jesus and the apostles out of their wealth, or out of their belongings. And the rest of the verses show that she and her husband had considerable wealth. But she did not hold onto that wealth. She shared it generously. She was a steward. She had a kingdom vision. And by the way, the fact that the text says that there were women who shared with Jesus out of their substance shows that it isn't just husbands who should make financial decisions or can own wealth. These can be joint decisions. Husbands should listen to their wives who may have insight on what ministries need financing.

***C. She was very hospitable (last verses + Matt 4:13; 19:1; 17:25; Mark 2:1; John 6:24; Matt 27:55-56; Luke 8:3)***

But let's move on. The next point shows that she wasn't like some wealthy people who only throw money at projects and refuse to get their own hands dirty. No, she got personally involved in serving. Whenever Christ was in Capernaum, and He was there more frequently than any other place, there is good evidence to suggest that He stayed in Salome and Zebedee's house. And there were other ways in which she showed her Christian grace of hospitality.

But she also left Capernaum with some other women to cook, clean, and help Jesus in any way that he needed. Her husband was off in the fishing boat and she didn't have any children to care for at home, so why not travel a bit to help Jesus and the disciples? For example, Mark 15:40-41 indicate that whenever Jesus and His disciples would come into the province of Galilee, Salome would join with other women in ministering to the group's physical needs. The text says that they "ministered to Him." In other words, their service for the group had a Christ-centered focus. She probably washed their clothes and cooked meals and went on errands for them, and followed them around on their route when it was close enough to be able to do so. So we can deduce that she was a very generous and hospitable, and service-oriented lady.

***D. There were other ways in which she was unselfish (above verses + Luke 5:1-11; 8:3 with Matt. 27:55-56)***

Though this request in Matthew 20 evidences some selfishness - or at least going along with the selfishness of James and John, that was not her defining mark. Most people who knew Salome would probably say that she usually did not evidence any selfishness. For example, when Christ called Peter, James and John to be disciples, their departure would have been a real strain to the family business. And the reason was because Peter, James and John were all partners in business with Zebedee. He is now the only partner left. But Salome shows nothing but support for their decision. Christ clearly came before her business affairs. And her other ministries that I have described show that at least in terms of finances and sacrifice, she was not selfish in the least. She gave up these things for Christ.

***E. She was devoted and loyal to Jesus (Mark 15:40; 16:1-8)***

And last, but not least, she was devoted to Christ at a time when He was becoming more and more unpopular. And even after this humiliation, she does not leave in a huff. She does not get offended with Jesus. She continues to be loyal to Christ and devoted to His cause right through to His death and after. I think we can learn from her to not get offended when our advances or our ideas are turned down.

So Salome was a godly saint and a woman of faith. She took this rebuke with grace.

**III. But even women of faith can blow it**

But I would like us to now try to learn what we can from the sin that this woman of faith engaged in.

***A. It started with a desire to please her sons***

I believe it started with a desire to please her sons and to want to advance her sons at the expense of the other disciples. And I put the primary blame upon her sons because it is obvious that they used her. Let me give three reasons why I have come to that conclusion:

First, Matthew 20:20-21 says that she said to Jesus, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." It is clear that she did indeed say these words. But if you flip over to Mark, you will see that the sons are the driving force behind these words. They were the ones who put those words into her mouth. Mark 10:35-38.



Mark 10:35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." 36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 37 They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

Mark is clear that this was their idea and their words and Jesus addressed His rebuke to them. We see the same thing in Matthew chapter 20 - our main text. Though in Matthew she says the words, Jesus rebukes the sons.

Beginning at verse 22:

But Jesus answered and said, "You [that's plural - "y'all"] do not know what you ask. [He is clearly attributing what she said to them - to the plural "you." "You do not know what you ask."] Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able."

So, to reconcile the two passages we need to say that word-for-word everything that Salome said in Matthew 20:21 was what her sons told her to say. These words are their words.

Second, Jesus doesn't rebuke Salome. He rebukes the two brothers. Though she was wrong in accommodating their request, they were more wrong in using her.

Third, verse 24 says that the disciples were greatly displeased with the two brothers, not with Salome. They knew where these words were coming from. And there are two harmonizations of the accounts (one by Boettner and the other by Cheney) that show how this happened. And you can see it when you slide the two passages together. Both the mother and the sons come kneeling before Jesus. The brothers then say, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask," (which is a pretty bold wide-open request that no one should say yes to). But He doesn't rebuke them. When He asks what they want, they signal to mom to say what they had instructed her to say. And then they agree with her.

This means that the first sin of Salome was the sin of being an undiscerning obliger. An obliger does things for others at their request without considering the consequences and the costs of doing so. Obligers have a hard time saying "No." This is one of the passages that the Lord has used to rebuke me for saying "Yes" to the requests of others without first considering what God would want. We must learn to run things past the Lord before we say "Yes" to the demands of others - even the demands of our children.

And by the way, you don't even have to have an obliger personality to fall into this sin. The apostle Peter was not an obliger by a long stretch, yet peer pressure made him fall into the same sin. Galatians 2 tells us that though

Peter didn't want to hurt the feelings of the Gentile Christians, he did so through peer pressure and the fear of man. Let me read Galatians 2:11-12.

Gal. 2:11 Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; 12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

The desire to please one segment ended up hurting another segment of the church and also ended up violating Scriptural principle. Peer pressure and other forms of needing to please others can be such a dangerous thing. The essence of this first sin is captured in Galatians 1:10. (And I am reading from the New American Standard Bible).

For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

Avoiding the related sins of giving favors to those that we love, trying to please men, or succumbing to peer pressure, are sins that must be avoided if we are to be servants of Christ. And at the cross and at the tomb we discover that Salome did indeed learn that lesson. She didn't care what the Roman soldiers wanted, she made sure that she was by the cross with Mary and John. She was willing to offend others in order to please Christ. She had learned her lesson.

### ***B. But she misused her position***

The second sin was misusing her position with Christ. For her to come before Christ in this way, especially since all the other disciples had already been arguing as to who was greatest (that's chapter 18), clearly shows that she thinks her sons somehow have a better right to get in on the getting while the getting was good. What would make her think that her sons were a better fit for the post than the other disciples? There are only three things that I could think of. And the most obvious reason is that they were related to Christ.

### **Her position as Jesus' aunt and Mary's sister (Jn. 19:25 with Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40)**

As I have already mentioned, she was the aunt of Jesus. Now you need to understand Jewish social custom to get a feel for what is going on in this passage. Back in those days you didn't apply for jobs or positions on your own. You had to know somebody who could pull strings for you. And though James and John obviously desired this position for themselves, none of the disciples had the courage to ask Him outright. Apparently most of the apostles wanted these positions. It would have been much more tactful for an

intermediary to ask for the position.

Normally parents were the big go-betweens for marriage possibilities, for big business deals, and for getting a son or a cousin into a position in government or on the Sanhedrin. And so Salome was a natural pick. And I can imagine that after all the vying for position that the apostles had been going through in chapter 18, James and John felt the pressure to get this dealt with quickly and used a time-tested and culturally acknowledged tactic of getting someone close to Jesus to speak on their behalf. And it makes sense to Salome, and she tells her sons not to worry. She has the soft touch of a woman, she's an elderly woman and she's an aunt, so she is sure that she will be able to have some pull with Jesus. There was likely some cultural tradition that entered into this situation.

Here's the problem: the subtle underlying assumption of all of them is that blood is thicker than religion. It is so easy to allow blood relations to dictate spiritual relations. This is one of the reasons why so many people today find it easier to shy away from doing what Jesus did within the church, and they do not allow relatives of a pastor to serve even though they are eminently qualified. In my opinion that is a fleshly way out of the potential problem. The Biblical way is to deal with the sinful attitudes and actions as they arise, and not to opt for sanctification by man-made rules.

When I was called to the previous church, my father-in-law was an elder. But I was pleased that the pulpit committee, the church, and the Presbytery were Biblical in how they handled it. Blood relations didn't stop the ball rolling, but they also made sure that blood relations did not get in the way of spiritual relations.

By the way, church members can also easily fall into the same worldly way of thinking. It has been known to happen that relatives will leave a church because they were disgruntled that their daughter was not used enough in music, or a son or a cousin was put under church discipline. I know of cases where they have admitted that the discipline of their fornicating child was totally biblical, but blood relations were thicker than Christ-relations. That should not be.

I know a pastor's wife in an independent church who has had tremendous influence and "say" in the church through her husband. Newcomers to the church would never know that since she was very good at showing submission just like Salome bowed down before Christ here. But the pastor's policies were all dictated by flesh and blood opinions rather than by Christian principles.

In Matthew 12, when Christ's mother and brothers came to him asking for His audience, He didn't give them any favors. My reading of the passage is that Jesus' siblings were using their mom, Mary, to try to manipulate Jesus into doing something, and Jesus saw right through that manipulation and said this:

Matt. 12:48 ...“Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” 49 And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.”

When we become Christians we enter a spiritual family, and while we will still have love and loyalty to our kin (that is Biblical), our loyalty to Christ should never ever be superseded by our loyalty to relatives. And Christ said in verse 23, “to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.” OK, enough on that.

### **Her position as a major source of Christ's income (Matt. 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:3)**

Another reason which may have caused her to rationalize that she had the right to ask for higher favors for her sons than the other disciples did, was that Uncle Zebedee and Aunt Salome were helping to support the disciples out of their family coffers. “What would happen to this ministry without our money? It wouldn't go anywhere, would it?” Now you may smile at that possibility and think that is unrealistic. But unfortunately, in churches and parachurch ministries, money often talks very loudly. On the part of ministers who do not have the attitude of Christ, they can tread very carefully and not preach on things that will offend the ears of wealthy patrons, or any patrons for that matter. I've actually had more than one pastor in Omaha tell me that they would never preach on topic x because he would lose some tithers. You can imagine where that conversation went - I did not approve. And we had a pretty heated discussion. But in that discussion it became obvious that other pastors felt the same way. Money talks. It still talks.

On the part of the people who give, there is often the feeling that the church (or for that matter, the Lord) owes them something. They give with invisible strings attached. They will never say that strings are attached, but the feeling is there. And perhaps in this situation there was the unexpressed knowledge that the disciples were in some way dependent upon her and by all rights she and her sons deserved a good stake in the future kingdom. She had sacrificed a lot for that kingdom. Well, Christ's response shows that this is a pagan way of thinking - the way of the Gentiles.

## **Her position of service (Mark 15:40-41 and implication of above verses)**

One other point that may have factored in was that she had worn her fingers to the bone for Christ and His disciples. Perhaps she and we would not be so crass as to say this outright, but there are often invisible strings attached to service in the church. We need to realize that our service does not obligate Christ in the least. In fact, Jesus said that after we have done everything that we have been commanded to do, we should say, “We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10). That’s the attitude that Jesus calls us to take on - to give and serve with no strings attached. In other words, we should serve out of gratitude for the infinite debt we owe God and with no expectations of a return-favor. We do it because we love Him and because we are passionate for His kingdom and because we are indebted to Him.

Sometimes relations, money, and service can very subtly become a means of promoting our ideas, or our programs, or ourselves. And if people don’t move the way we wanted them to move, or they don’t realize there are strings attached to the things we have done, then we can attempt manipulation by hinting that we might drop off in our giving or drop off in our service. And of course, if people accused them of manipulation it would be so easy to deny that this is the case since they could take the humble attitude of “I don’t want to interfere with the ideas of the other people, and it would be for the best of all concerned that I drop off of this committee. I’m very busy anyway and I don’t mind if someone takes my place. I don’t want to be telling people what to do.” The point is that we can camouflage our pride and manipulation with humble words. Notice the dramatic show of humility and submission displayed by Salome as she bows low before Jesus - and in Mark it says that all three of them bowed before Jesus. Verse 20 says, “Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.” A great show of humility. Well, let’s take a look at the request and what Jesus does with it.

### ***C. Her request and Christ’s response (Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45)***

21... She said to Him, “Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.” 22 But Jesus answered and said, “You do not know what you ask.

Now, because it is plural, He is addressing both of the brothers, or possibly all three of them. None of them knew the full implications of what they were asking. In verses 17-19 Jesus had just finished telling them that He was soon

to be betrayed in Jerusalem and would be condemned to death on a cross. He is talking about a cross and the two of them approach Him about a crown. This request is shockingly insensitive to what Jesus has just finished saying. And any of us can be guilty of not listening very carefully to what is being said because we are so wrapped up in what we are going to say next. It's weighing heavily on our hearts and we miss the context. Well, even that side issue can be solved if we have servants hearts.

But though they were utterly insensitive to the timing and context of what Christ had been saying, you've got to appreciate their faith in Jesus. Rather than totally rebuking them, He challenges them with this statement:

Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able."

Again, they had no idea what they were asking or promising. It shows too much self-confidence. In chapter 26 Jesus predicted that they would all abandon Him, yet just like here, they all insist that they would not. Within a few hours they would fall asleep on Jesus in Gethsemane and flee when He was arrested. As Meyer pointed out, they would only be able to drink the cup of suffering faithfully after they were endued from on high by the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And we need to remind ourselves that without the Spirit we will fail Jesus just as surely. It is only by His indwelling power that we can faithfully fulfill our callings. And Jesus predicts that they will.

Verse 23:

Matt. 20:23 So He said to them, "You will indeed drink 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 is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father."

Some commentators say that this prediction means that both brothers would be martyred - and would be faithful in their martyrdom. Others say that it only means that both would suffer persecution like He did. I tend to agree with the early church fathers who said that both were indeed martyred, but we don't know for sure.

When the other disciples discover what has happened, they are outraged.

Verse 24 says, "And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers." The hypocrisy of this is that Jesus had gotten on their case in chapter 18 for doing the same thing; for arguing as to who was the greatest. Jesus had said back then, "Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." But all of them had missed that lesson, as well as the lessons on forgiveness in chapter 18, and the call to leave all and follow Jesus in chapter 19, and His words in chapter 20:16 - "So the last will be first, and the first last." Christ's point all along has been that self-seeking is not rewarded. Those who want to be great must

give up all and seek Christ first. But here He amplifies on that teaching. Reading verses 25-28 again:

25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, Notice that Jesus doesn't let controversies lie hoping that they will resolve themselves. Broken relationships rarely resolve themselves. He calls them to Himself. He takes the initiative . He deals with them face to face. Every time that sin bubbles to the surface, Jesus uses the exposure of that sin as an opportunity to teach. And in the same way, we shouldn't be mortified when our kids sin. We should thank the Lord that another opportunity to instruct and shape and disciple them along the way. In this case He teaches them about how to be more Biblical in their view of authority. And I think all of us can learn from these lessons on authority.

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— 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.”

That paragraph isolates five things that are critical to properly understand authority: He deals with the nature of authority, the source of authority, how to receive authority, the exercise of authority, and the purpose of authority.

First, the nature of Biblical authority is totally different than the Roman or Greek concepts. According to the Bible, authority is not inherent in a person or in a position. Biblically you could have lots of power in an office and still have zero authority. Forcing your way is power; it is not authority. It is Dana is, not excusing. Climbing the ladder so as to get into office might give you influence and power, but God's authority only flows to those whom He has granted authority. Nor can authority be shared from one person to another by occupying a position. It is derived from God alone. Actually, the Bible says that God alone ultimately has authority or exousia. The bible presents all authority as residing in the Father, and if others have authority, it is only because they receive authority from God and represent God. Romans 13:1 is literally, “There is no authority if not from God.” Interestingly, this can be seen in even the Son's authority, as stated in verse 23. Jesus said, “but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.” If this was true of Jesus, how much more so of us. Biblically, all original authority resides in the Father. So that deals with the nature of authority.

Second, this means that the source of any authority we have is not the state or the church or any other human. The source of authority is also from the Father, through Jesus, to human representatives. This again rules out vying

for positions of authority. If we are not called by God to a position, then the most we can do when we are in that position is to exert power, not authority. Verse 25 does say that the Gentile rulers exercise power over people (the phrase “lord it over” - it’s power). But the phrase, “exercise great authority over” is not your normal word for authority. It is literally “against authority” and means to domineer or to be tyrannical. The point is that human representatives have no authority in themselves, and if they claim to have authority when God has not given it, it is automatically tyranny or domineering, not true authority from God. It’s acting against authority; against God’s authority. As the Puritans used to say, “The only authority that should exist in the Church is the authority of the Scriptures.” For these men to be vying for a position of authority is to bypass the nature of how authority flows. Position does not grant authority. Submission to God does. So they had the wrong concept of the nature of authority and the source of authority.

Third, they had a wrong conception on how to receive authority. We do not receive authority by stepping on people’s hands and heads as we climb the ladder of success. Hendriksen renders the Greek as, “the rulers of the Gentiles lord down upon them and their grandees wield power down upon them.” The Gentiles received authority and maintained authority by holding people down rather than lifting them up. Jesus said that authority is granted by the Father.

Fourth, they had a wrong conception of how to exercise authority. Biblically we exercise authority by serving God and serving man. Authority comes through service. And you could deduce that from the first three points even if Christ had not explicitly said so. Since authority flows from God, and since God resists the proud, the only way to have true authority is by radical submission to God. But this does not make us weak or passive leaders who put up with anything. I’ll just give one illustration. When I bring God’s law to bear in people’s lives, they will often tell me to judge not lest I be judged. “You shouldn’t judge me Phil.” Because I am representing God’s authority and not my own, the response is easy. My response is that I am not judging them; God’s Word is. It’s not about me; it’s about God. God’s Word judges both them and me, and I am simply coming into agreement with God’s Word and calling them to come into agreement with God’s Word. We exercise authority by standing in God’s authority, not our own.

And finally, they had a wrong concept of the purpose of authority. The purpose of authority is not to conform people to our will, but to help people conform to God’s will and God’s authority. All of this was modeled by



Christ, who said in verse 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.

Jesus was about doing His father's will, glorifying His father, serving His father, and helping people be reconciled to His father.

All of this means that those who are truly in authority over others are slaves and are not free to do as they wish. Romans 13 says that is true of even civil magistrates. They are servants of God and are not free to do as they please. Likewise, those who have true authority sacrifice for others and are not self-serving. It's a right-side-up model of leadership and the world's way is an upside-down model of leadership.

The American pattern of success is to look after number 1 and to let others fend for themselves. But Christ is our pattern for success in God's eyes. 1 John 3:16 says, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Salome learned this lesson so well, that at the cross, when almost everyone else fled and looked on from afar, she, Mary, and John came right up to the cross and would not be shooed away. They saw their lives as expendable for Jesus. And their self-sacrificing love at the cross became a model for all of us for all time. May we too put off self-seeking, self-advancement, self-protection, and self-centeredness and by God's grace put on the self-giving and self-sacrificing love of Salome. Amen.