

Wanting What is Best for Your Children **Matthew 20:20–22 (NKJV)**

20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. 21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" 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. 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."

Parents paid up to \$6.5 million to get their kids into college

FBI Special Agent Joseph Bonavolonta said the parents spent anywhere from \$200,000 to \$6.5 million to guarantee admissions for their children.

They may have gotten an education but they didn't learn anything about integrity.

I think of the Mother of Moses who thought she knew of the king's order yet prepared an ark by faith to save her son, the deliverer of Israel.

Many a mother have been a driving force in the lives of their children in order for them to get what they thought was best for them.

I think we are dealing with the ambition most parents have for their children. If there were favors to be dispensed, she wanted those favors to go to her boys. In the minds of these people, the new and radical nature of Kingdom service was not yet clear. The spoils system had always been the rule. They wanted their share of the recognition and honor. It was as simple as that. *Cecil E. Sherman, Cecil Sherman Formations Commentary: Matthew - Mark., vol. 3, Cecil Sherman Formations Commentary Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2006), 75.*

I. For what did she ask?

A. Jesus had just told them that He was going to Jerusalem and to suffer and die there.

1. Matthew 20:17–19 (NKJV)

a. 17 Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, 18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again."

B. But they only remember the promise of thrones.

1. Matthew 19:28–30 (NKJV)

a. 28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the

regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

2. They ask not for employment in this kingdom, but for honour only; and no place would serve them in this imaginary kingdom, but the highest, next to Christ, and above every body else. *Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1716.*

C. The problem is that we want to know what am I going to get out of this?

1. Matthew 19:27 (NKJV)
 - a. 27 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"
2. It is not that the other disciples had not thought about the places of honor, but rather that James and John had gotten there first.

II. What was her advantage?

A. She was a follower of Jesus and also ministered to them of her wealth.

1. Matthew 27:55–56 (NKJV)
 - a. 55 And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, 56 among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.
2. She was one of those women that attended Christ, and ministered to him; and they thought she had such an interest in him, that he could deny her nothing, and therefore they made her their advocate. Thus when Adonijah had reasonable request to make to Solomon, he put Bathsheba on to speak for him. It was their mother's weakness thus to become that tool of their ambition, which she should have given a check to. *Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1717.*

B. James and John were already known as the inner circle of Jesus.

1. In the lists of the apostles Peter James and John are always first.
2. Only they were allowed to see Jesus transfigured.

3. They went a little farther with him in the garden.
- C. She was the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus.
1. The wife of Zebedee, Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40, and probably sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, to whom reference is made in John 19:25. The only events recorded of Salome are that she preferred a request on behalf of her two sons for seats of honor in the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 20:20, that she attended at the crucifixion of Jesus, Mark 15:40, and that she visited his sepulchre. Mark 16:1. She is mentioned by name on only the two latter occasions. *William Smith, Smith's Bible Dictionary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986).*
 2. Mother of Zebedee's children. Salome, apparently the sister of the Virgin Mary, as shown by comparing Mt 27:56 with Mk 15:40 and Jn 19:25. *Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett Falconer Harrison, eds., The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), Mt 20:20.*
 3.
 2. John 19:25 (NKJV)
 - a. 25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.
- D. Like any other person she was taking advantage of the position she was in for the benefit of her sons and no doubt herself.
1. The indirect intercession of a motherly woman was often more effective than a man's direct petition for himself, in both Jewish and Roman circles (see also 2 Sam 14:2–20; 1 Kings 1:15–21; cf. 2 Sam 20:16–22). In this case, however, it does not work. *Craig S. Keener, The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Mt 20:20–21.*
 2. Her faith in Christ must be admired; also her trust in His promise of the kingdom (19:28). But her motive was not right, since she was asking not for God's glory but for her own. *Warren W. Wiersbe, Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 74.*
 3. Our politicians know how to use this well.
 4. Every cousin and friend is given a government job or better a contract.
 5. That is why Washington D.C. is always awash with government money.
- III. So what is the problem?
- A. She should have known that the only way to glory is through suffering (1 Pet. 5:10). You do not pray for a throne; you pay for it. Beware selfish prayers: the

Lord may answer them. James was the first apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:1–2), and John experienced great trial as a Roman prisoner (Rev. 1:9). *Warren W. Wiersbe, With the Word Bible Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), Mt 20:1.*

- B. Jesus came to preach a heavenly kingdom not an earthly one.
 - C. Material gains are not as significant as spiritual gains.
 - 1. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?
 - 2. Seek those things that are above.
 - 3. This earth and all its treasures will pass away.
 - 4. John Ortberg wrote a book entitled “When the game is over, it all goes back in the box”
 - D. Those who are spiritually mature will better handle and enjoy earthly blessings.
 - 1. The disciple had just been told that they would all sit on thrones and judge the 12 tribes of Israel.
 - 2. But yet that is not enough.
 - 3. Most people can’t get enough and want just a little bit more.
- IV. It is not wrong to want what is best for yourself or your family but the emphasis is to be on spiritual things.
- A. There was pride at the bottom of it, a proud conceit of their own merit, a proud contempt of their brethren, and a proud desire of honour and preferment; pride is a sin that most easily besets us, and which it is hard to get clear of. It is a holy ambition to strive to excel others in grace and holiness; *Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1717.*
 - B. This is Jesus’ definition of true greatness. Craving positions of power is worldly and is the exact opposite of the self-sacrificing model of Jesus. *Mark Bailey et al., Nelson’s New Testament Survey: Discover the Background, Theology and Meaning of Every Book in the New Testament (Nashville: Word, 1999), 41.*
 - C. The problem is that neither James, John, nor their mother has begun to understand the significance of Jesus’s repeated passion predictions or the meaning of such teachings as 5:5; 18:1–4; 19:30; 20:16. *David L. Turner, Matthew, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 486.*
 - D. Jesus reminds her that suffering precedes blessing and privilege for the Christian. He then reveals that this is part of His authority that He has left entirely to the

Father to decide. Rather He emphasises to the ten, who are upset by the request, that the greatest Christians are the greatest servants, and that He Himself, the Son of Man, came to serve not to be served and 'to give His life a ransom for many'. If Christ had not been servant-hearted, He could not be the suffering Servant of Calvary. *Gerard Crispin, The Bible Panorama: Enjoying the Whole Bible with a Chapter-by-Chapter Guide (Leominster, UK: Day One Publications, 2005), 406.*

To Mother

You painted no Madonnas
On chapel walls in Rome,
But with a touch diviner
You lived one in your home.

You wrote no lofty poems
That critics counted art,
But with a nobler vision
You lived them in your heart.

You carved no shapeless marble
To some high-souled design,
But with a finer sculpture
You shaped this soul of mine.

You built no great cathedrals
That centuries applaud,
But with a grace exquisite
Your life cathedraled God.

Had I the gift of Raphael,
Or Michelangelo,
Oh, what a rare Madonna
My mother's life would show!
—Thomas W. Fessenden

Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 841.