

# Matthew 20:20-28.the Request of the Mother and Sons of Zebedee.

by Favell Lee Mortimer

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*True happiness comes from knowing the greatness of God, not from one's own greatness, and humility is the key to a life of self-denial and self-abasement.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 20:23, John 5:19, Acts 12:2, Acts 14:22, 1 Corinthians 10:5, Revelation 1:9

**Topics:** "Humility", "Servant Leadership"

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## Description

Favell Lee Mortimer delves into the story of the sons of Zebedee and their request to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus in His glory, highlighting the natural desire for greatness that often leads to discontentment and anxiety among people. Mortimer emphasizes the importance of humility, drawing examples from Nebuchadnezzar's misery due to pride and the apostles' dispute over greatness. Jesus, the ultimate example of humility, teaches that true honor comes from serving others and following God's will, even if it means enduring suffering and trials.

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## Transcript

Was it a right request that the sons of Zebedee made when they asked to sit at the right and left hand of their Lord in his glory? Was it right in their mother to plead that this honor might be conferred on her children? A desire to be first is natural to the human heart in its fallen state; but this desire is the cause of the greater part of the anxiety and discontentment that prevail among men. All cannot be first; therefore if all desire to be first, all but one must be disappointed. And will that one be happy? None are so miserable as the proud. Nebuchadnezzar, the first monarch of his day, was a miserable man. What an account we read in the prophet Daniel of his fears, and tremors, and rage! On one occasion his spirit was troubled by his dreams, and on another through his fury the form of his visage was changed. No creature can be happy from his own greatness--but only from knowing the greatness of God. The angels are happy, because they delight in seeing God upon his throne. Adam and Eve were happy in the garden of Eden until they desired to be as gods; then, ceasing to delight in the glory of their Creator, they became miserable. When the Holy Spirit enters the heart of man, he begins his work by casting down "every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God." (1 Cor. 10:5.)

Yet true believers are troubled, as long as they remain on earth, with sinful feelings; though, as they grow in grace, they grow in humility. The apostles, at their last supper with their Lord, disputed who should be

greatest. Let us be on our guard against the secret workings of ambition. We have perhaps ceased to desire the great things of this world. We have perhaps no desire to shine in worldly circles, or to be commended by irreligious people. But do we cherish a wish to be thought much of by religious people? to be commended above our fellow-Christians? to be more noticed, more admired, more honored? Whereas we ought to esteem others better than ourselves. Our Savior has set the most wonderful example of humility by coming into this world to minister to us, and even to give his own precious life as a ransom for our sinful souls. Yet with what gentleness he answered the two brethren! He knew they had forsaken all to follow him; he knew that they would prefer shame and suffering with him, to any honor or joy apart from him; therefore he treated them with tenderness, though he did not promise to grant their request.

The words in ver. 23, "It shall be given to them," are written in italics to show that they were inserted by the translators in order to make the sense clear--yet, perhaps, if they were omitted the sense would be more clear--for Jesus did not say that it was not in his power to give the most honorable seats to whom he would. We know that whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. (John 5:19.) This is what he said--"To sit on my right and on my left hand is not mine to give, but for whom it is prepared of my Father." The Son will bestow honor according to the decrees of the Father.

Though the Savior concealed from the apostles what they desired to know, he told them some things that must have been strange and unwelcome. He revealed to them that they must partake of his own bitter sufferings. This is the first time in which it is recorded that he spoke so openly of the sufferings of his apostles. The terms in which he spoke of their future trials were suited to sweeten them to their affectionate hearts. It was out of his own cup the two brethren were to drink, and in his own baptism they were to be baptized. It is this thought that has sustained many believers under persecution, and has strengthened them even to endure the burning flame, or the bloody cross. But not martyrs only--all true Christians suffer with their Lord. There is no sorrow that we can ever experience that our Lord has not tasted first; and he has tasted it, not only that he might take away our guilt, but also that he might sympathize in our grief. He knew all that James and John would be called to endure; and he knows also what each of us will be appointed to bear. He could have told James that the sword of Herod would cut short his days before those of any of the other apostles, and he could have told John that the cruel decree of Domitian would banish him in his old age to the Isle of Patmos, to dwell among convicted criminals. And he could tell each of us what losses we shall sustain, what pangs we shall suffer, what death we shall die. But he forbears to tell us more than that through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God. Who shall occupy the places at his right hand and at his left he has revealed to none; but though their names are secret, their characters are manifest--they will be humble. Whether they will be missionaries, or martyrs, or whether they will be beggars or slaves, we know not; but this we know, they will be self-denying and self-abased followers of their lowly Lord.

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Source:

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