

Misused Power

Our passage this morning is Matthew 20:20-34

Matthew 20:20 *Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. 21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. 22 But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? **They** say unto him, We are able. 23 And he saith unto **them**, Ye shall drink indeed of 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 shall be given to them for **whom it is prepared** of my Father. 24 And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. 25 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. 26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; 27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: 28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. 29 And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. 30 And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. 31 And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. 32 And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? 33 They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. 34 So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.*

In vv. 20 & 21, we find a strange request from the mother of James and John.

20 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. 21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

Mark 10:35 tells us that it was James and John who actually made the request. Evidently, they encouraged their mother to speak to the Lord about the matter. Their mother is Salome, who is said to be the sister of Joseph, the husband of Mary, the mother of our Lord. If she is Joseph's sister, then she was Jesus' aunt. So, James and John probably sought special favor from the Lord based upon their connection with the Lord through their mother,

How many seek special favors from the Lord based upon someone else's "connection" with the Lord? How many unqualified people are in positions of civil and spiritual leadership because of their connections with family or friends?

In Matthew 19:28, 29 Jesus had told the twelve that they would be seated on twelve thrones judging Israel. In chapter 20, Lord had told His disciples that the time of His departure and the time of His glorification in His kingdom was at hand.

We know from Acts 1:6, that the twelve expected Christ's literal throne to soon be established over the literal twelve tribes of Israel in a manner more glorious than either David or Solomon.

Acts 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

Expecting the restored literal kingdom of Israel, James and John moved their mother, the Lord's aunt, to speak to the Lord for their exaltation to the places of chief prominence, power and authority in the Lord's glorious, temporal kingdom on earth.

In Matthew 20:22, 23, the Lord placed conditions upon ruling with Him; those conditions would be suffering with Him. The two disciples readily agree to the conditions, but the Lord knew that the two did not really understand what they were asking. To start with, contrary to their idea of Christ's kingdom, the glory He was about to ascend to was not earthly glory. It was His heavenly glory with His Father. It should be noted that though His kingdom is not of this world, we are told in **John 18:36 & 19:11** that it totally controls this world, and all the affairs of men.

How many followers of Christ have desired temporal wealth and power only to find out about the danger of carnal wealth and power after they were destroyed? Both wealth and power easily lead to denial of the Lord, and independence from God.

The context of the Lord's answer shows that **the motive for James and John making this request was their desires for temporal glory and power.** It was not from their desires to serve the Lord, nor to serve others. The Lord assured them that instead of temporal power and glory, they, the twelve, would suffer as He was going to suffer. And they did.

The Lord dealt gently with James and John, using the situation to strengthen the very basic foundation of God's kingdom, *viz.* self-abasement and humility before God rather than temporal power and wealth.

In Mark 10:41 we see that the other 10 were *much displeased with James and John, and they were moved with indignation.*

The issue in both Matthew, Mark and Luke is authority in God's kingdom—that is, the New Israel of God, the New Jerusalem, or the Gospel Church.

Christ's words are much broader than just His kingdom. It goes into **every realm of authority.** The Lord uses James and John's request to teach the proper order in God's kingdom. He pointed

out how that in the world's kingdom, the Gentiles fight and even kill each other for the temporal power to subdue others to their will. In contrast, He pointed out that the way up is down in **His Kingdom**.

1 Peter 5:6 *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:*

Matthew 20:26, *But it shall not be so among you* was spoken to the spiritual leaders in the new Israel that Christ established upon the profession of faith in Himself. **Matthew 16:16** *And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God., &c.*

A NOTE in passing: Believers are the only legitimate heirs to the name "Jew." Also, the church of Jesus Christ is the only legitimate heir to the name "Israel, the chosen people of God."

There must be religious and civil leaders in the world, or anarchy will develop in both church and state. **Religious leaders** are addressed in Hebrews 13:17 *Obey them that have the rule over you*, and **civil leaders** are addressed in Romans 13. All authorities, particularly **civil, religious and family** authorities have legitimate authority **only as granted to them by the law-word of God**.

The Lord Jesus sums up His instruction to the disciples with **Matthew 20:28**:

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

The Lord uses Himself as an example; He points out that He came not to obtain temporal splendor, wealth and power as James and John desired, but to **give Himself a ransom for many**. **How foolish, therefore, for His followers**, especially those with whom He is going to build His kingdom, to desire and work for something for which their Master did not desire nor work; **that is**, temporal splendor and power. Christ's desire was not for His own well-being, but for the well-being of the Elect:

The point that caught my attention in this exchange is the character of Zebedee's two sons who made this request for temporal power and authority. We see them in **Luke 9:51-56**

*51 And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, 52 And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. 53 And they (the Samaritans) did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. 54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, **Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?** 55 But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. 56 For the Son of man is not come**

to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

James and John probably had the more zeal than did the other 10, except maybe Peter, but the Lord rebuked them for their misdirected zeal.

The Lord **did not** say in Matthew 20 that they would not be seated as they desired. However, He clearly said the spirit that desired to call down fire was **not from above**. Obviously, at the time of Matthew 20, these two disciples, though they were zealous for the word of God, would misuse temporal power and authority if the Lord gave it to them. They would have used their authority to force others to believe like they did or even to destroy all who might disagree with them.

In John 14, the Lord promises to send the Holy Spirit who would change the spirit of the disciples. Only the Spirit can replace the spirit of **fallen man** that fights and kills for temporal power and authority. Without redemption, the lust for power will control the nations.

Paul describes the new spirit of the Redeemed in Galatians 5 and Ephesian 5.

AUTHORITY

Matthew 20:25-28 and Luke 9:53, 54 show us that the natural man sees authority as the ability to enforce, with a gun if necessary, one's will upon others, which is what James and John desired to do in their desire to call down fire upon the opposition to Christ. In Luke 9:55, Christ rebuked them with, *ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of*.

Civil Rulers

Christ called the civil rulers gods in John 10:34, which means that we are now in the midst of a battle of the gods

The Greeks have many tall tales of battles for power between their many gods.

We are living in a real battle of the gods. The **Federal government** clearly claims to be god over every area of life and thought, and even over the intent of the heart (Hate Crimes); the **governors** and the local authorities all consider themselves gods. They claim the power of the sword to support their arbitrary, unconstitutional and unbiblical demands.

There seems to be a common purpose in the actions of these gods; **that is, the destruction of the Christian foundation of this nation, and of all the once Christian nations of the world.**

According to World Net Daily, Aug 29, "The United Kingdom's Christian Institute is warning that the Bible could be criminalized in Scotland if a hate-crime bill becomes law."

The gods have learned that manufactured fear of a flu virus will allow them to act as gods to enforce their will upon a docile population.

American society is rapidly moving toward the day when civil authority will exercise the power of the sword against those who insist on worshipping Christ, much as is being done in China and North Korea. There are already such noises from the Marxists in Congress.

What is next for a population that has shown itself docile enough to cease worshipping the Lord God at the command of a local god?

James and John show us that even the followers of Christ are not immune from the natural desire to forcefully put down all decent and subdue all people to their will. In Luke 9:54, they wanted to destroy the Samaritans by calling down fire upon them because they did not receive the Lord as they thought they should.

Throughout church history, various men have not only desired to, but have actually put people to death because the "offenders" did not understand Scripture as they did, or because men did not "follow the Lord" as they thought they should.

Myself, and many others have experienced a malicious spirit toward those who do not hold to the dispensational faith, or who do hold to "Calvinism."

I have found some "Christian" publications as well as "Christian" speakers difficult to follow because they have such a malicious spirit of anger, hatred and bitterness against those who do not follow their system of doctrine.

More than a few times I have had the distinct impression that if someone had the authority and power in God's Kingdom as requested by James and John, that person would certainly *command fire to come down from heaven even as Elias did, and consume me* for not understanding God's word as they did. **I have actually had professed Christian men tell me that the civil authority should be used to enforce their particular point of doctrine.**

I mentioned last week about the radio speaker who was calling down fire on those who did not see Israel as they did. We find that attitude far too common among church men, as they establish unwarranted Shibboleths to divide. (Judges 12:6)

Certainly, we must defend sound doctrine regardless of the source of false doctrine. But that defense must be with a meek and quiet spirit, if there might be any hope of God giving repentance. Otherwise, the "defender" of sound doctrine becomes the "offender" against God:

2 Tim 24:24-26 *Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle*

unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

Defending sound doctrine must **not be done** with any desire to call down fire upon our “foe.” **Any malicious spirit in disagreement**, even in disagreement with the devil's crowd, according to James 3:15, *descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.*

There is a vast amount of devilish zeal being promoted today in the name of "Christian" zeal.

The Lord spoke very clearly: Even an outward zeal for the Word of God, if it includes a malicious desire against someone, is earthly, sensual and devilish.

Some Applications

1. *the mother worshiped the Lord, desiring a certain thing of Him.* Her motive in worshiping the Lord Jesus in this case appears to be self-centered: **she wanted something, so she worshiped the Lord.** We have no record of her going away sorrowful because she did not get what she requested.

Those who have been involved in the Lord's work for any length of time cannot count the number of people who *worshiped the Lord for a purpose*: they *desired a certain thing of Him*: they attended church faithfully and did everything that was expected of them until the *certain thing* did or did not materialize. Then they were gone—they stopped *worshiping the Lord*.

A man and his wife showed up at the church Louisiana in a beat-up old car. He became a “good Christian,” and convinced a well-off church member to invest in his “money making” plan. The churchman invested though he was warned by the pastor. Over a year or so of deceit, the “good Christian” transferred the wealth of the church member to himself, and he was gone with the money.

My wife and I had to make a many hour quick overnight trip to Texas to recover a truck the man took with him. He was living in a very nice home at the other man’s expense.

However, he did no more than take advantage of the man’s discontent with the good living the Lord has already provided for his family.

We had another man in a church who desperately wanted something from the Lord. When that something did not materialize, he did nothing but condemn the Lord for not meeting his demands.

2. Many times prayer is regarded as little more than a blank check to be presented to the Lord. James and John presented their "blank check" request to the Lord, and agreed to meet the

conditions, but they received a sermon rather than their hearts' desires. Thus, we must desire our answers to prayer be conditioned upon the will of the Lord. **Demanding our will** be done can result in sad results, *e.g. Ps 106:15 And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.*

Though we are required to present our request to God with thanksgiving, we do not have a "blank check" any more than did the mother of James and John.

In the short time span of Matthew 20, we are shown a tremendous contrast in **two types of prayer. Matthew 20:21, James and John's hearts' desire** was to be exalted with Christ in the literal Kingdom they were expecting Him to establish.

The contrast is found in Matthew 20:30-34. Immediately following the selfish request by James and John, we have the two blind men. They clearly realized their helpless condition; they realized they had no claim on the Lord. Their only hope was mercy: *"Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David."*

James and John's request was a request for power and glory. The blind men's request was for mercy.

Ps 30:10 *Hear, O LORD, and have mercy upon me: LORD, be thou my helper.*

The contrast between the disciples and the blind men fulfills the Lord's words of Matthew 19:30: *the first, the proud followers of Christ, shall be last, and the last, the humble who cling only to His mercy, shall be first* in the Kingdom of God.

3. The account of James and John's request for temporal power is given in both Matthew 20:20, 21 and Mark 10:35-37. In both accounts, their request is met with a sermon on humility, summed up with *the last shall be first and the first last.*

Before the Lord made this statement, he has already taught on humility at least 4 times, Luke 9 & 10, Matthew 19:30, & Matthew 20:16.

We see that no matter how many times one may be confronted with the truth, he cannot understand until the Lord gives His light. **The more one understands scripture, the more he can understand what is taking place around him.**

Ps 36:9 *For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.*

Those who do not know nor believe God's word cannot know the truth.

4. Luke 9:55, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. Their spirit was of the devil, and they did not know it.

Jer 17:9 *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

Ps 139:23 *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:*

5. For whom it is prepared by the Father. We understand from places like **Daniel 4** that it is God's sovereign choice who will be exalted in both the temporal and spiritual realms in this present world, and in the world to come.

There is nothing man can do to determine his own position apart from God's grace, for **He alone** raises up and puts down all authorities and powers in this world and in the world to come.

5. Sticking with the context of the Lord's rebuke of James and John, we see that church leadership is NOT AN OFFICE to tell others what to do. The leaders are not CEOs, though many may consider it so. It is an office of servant to the people of God. It is an office of helping others be what they should and can be for God.

We have good friends in Va. The pastor of the Baptist church they attended was such a dictator that they had to leave. They now attend a presbyterian church. After they left, the church got fed up with him, and voted him out.

Obliviously, the Lord's words here are much broader than church leadership. He instructs every area of leadership: **civil, family and even occupational**. The spirit of this world sees leadership as the authority to force one's will upon others.

Civil rulers are called gods. With lying words that say they want to be public servants. Sadly, once they get in authority, they consider themselves gods, and demand their **fiat arbitrary word** to be enforced.

But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him.

Galatians 5:13 *For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

The servant's attitude is a work of the Spirit of God. Not only in the church, but in everyday life, the true leader looks for ways he can serve others, not for ways he can control others and make them serve him.

Let us pray

We thank you Lord that as we see the wicked prosper as a green tree all around us, we are assured that they will be cut down like the grass of the field. Give us the grace not to envy them, and remind us that all these things are working together for the good of your church. By faith, let us rejoice in the assured victory we have in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In his name we pray