

Influencers

Matthew 20:20-23

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A. Devoted (v. 20):

1. Mother of the sons of Zebedee came – The mother of James and John (disciples whom Jesus would set aside; Matt. 26:37 – Mt. of Transfiguration; Mark says it was they who came to Jesus; They were fishing partners to Peter – Luke 5:10; John 21:2) approached Jesus, once and for all, to ask how her sons fit into His kingdom.

a) The sons of Zebedee, James, and John were one of two sets of brothers called to follow Jesus (4:19–20). Their mother was a faithful follower of Jesus and evidently, a relative of Jesus. She was among the women who attended Jesus at the cross and later witnessed the empty tomb, which would identify her as Salome (cf. 27:56; Mark 15:40; 16:1), the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother. Therefore, Jesus is the cousin of James and John on his mother's side. The mother apparently comes to exercise her kinship advantage. A mother seeking the advancement of her sons through direct petition to a person in authority was a fairly well-known phenomenon, such as Bathsheba's seeking the throne for her son Solomon from the aging King David (1 Kings 1:15–21; cf. 2 Sam. 14:2–20).^[1]

b) Her name may have been Salome (cf. Mark 15:40; Matt 27:56), and perhaps she was Jesus' aunt, the sister of Jesus' mother (cf. John 19:25), which may have been

thought to add a certain leverage to the request. In this context, προσκυνοῦσα probably means “falling down before” Jesus to make her request.^[2]

2. Mother of the sons of Zebedee came – The mother of these men demonstrates that she is convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. It may be that she is viewing a kingdom on earth (this is what most Jews anticipated), but based on Jesus' response to the disciples in Matthew 19:27-30 it could be that she is thinking of heaven.

a) There is no mention of a husband. When men died at an average age of 45 years old, she could be a single mother raising two of the inner circle disciples of Christ.

b) One of the main ways in which a woman in a patriarchal society could exercise power was in terms of her continuing influence over her adult sons.^[3]

3. Bowing down/Worship – worth-ship - The main focus of how she is going to make this request is to commit to demonstrate the heart of worship before Christ and let Christ know she is continuously willing to worship Him.

4. Bowing down/Worship – worth-ship - When she made this request she repeatedly asked Christ to bless her sons in this manner. She did so with reverent devotion, prostrating herself while supplicating before Christ continuously. The same attitude of worship that was given to God, as a Jew, is the same manner in which this mother worshipped Christ.

5. Bowing down/Worship – worth-ship - We may go to Christ continuously asking for the wrong thing, but He will listen, especially when our hearts are committed to worshiping Him sincerely.

6. Making a request – She was not just prostrating herself in worship; she was literally begging Christ to fulfill what she was asking.

a) The request for seats of highest honor in Christ's kingdom may have been prompted by his previous revelation about the twelve thrones (19:28). [41](#)

B. Assertive (v. 21):

1. He said to her – Christ, by the mood of this verb, was only going to address this issue once verbally.

2. What do you wish – Christ asked what she wishes for Him to do? In other words, what desire does she have for Him to fulfill?

3. What do you wish – When we are willing to abide in His Word, and submit our will to His, He says He will provide us what we wish (John 15:7).

4. She said – She repetitively prostrated before Christ, asking Christ to grant her request.

5. She said – It is okay for our request before God to be bold (Luke 11:5-13) and persistent (Luke 18:1-8) when we are passionate about what we request from Him.

6. In your kingdom – She views Christ as eventually being in the kingdom of God, and she also believes that this is Christ's kingdom. This text seems to expose how this mother had a correct view of who Christ is. She got it.

a) The kingdom is referred to as Jesus' kingdom also in 13:41; 16:28 (both referring to the Son of Man; cf. Luke 22:29; 23:42).^[5]

7. In your kingdom – She is requesting this of Christ while prostrating herself before Him because she knows His kingdom is where He rules.

8. In your kingdom – No matter how correct her respective may be of who Christ is, it does not mean our request to Him meets His agenda for His kingdom or our lives.

9. In your kingdom – This mother was not asking anything for herself; she was totally looking out for the welfare of her sons.

a) Perhaps she had heard Jesus say His disciples would be seated on thrones (19:28), and she, with typical motherly pride, felt her sons deserved the two best locations.^[6]

10. In your kingdom – This mother had given her sons over to Christ and now wanted Christ to give them His best.

11. In your kingdom – Her heart exposes why her sons were in Christ's inner circle, and now she does not want that circle to end.

12. May Sit/Rest – To sit here means that she wanted her sons to be in a settled position of authority or high status (in other words, continue to experience what they are experiencing now) forever, not just for these moments they have experienced.

a) Seated at the right-hand side is the most typical place of honor, whether the king's mother at the king's right side (Judg. 2:19), King David at God's right-hand side (Ps. 16:11) or the Messiah at God's right side (Ps. 110:1, 5; cf. Matt. 22:44). The left side is reserved for the second highest position of importance to the monarch.

C. Good Listeners (v. 22):

1. Jesus answered – Jesus did not ignore this mother. He spoke directly to her, giving her with His full attention and a commitment to address her request.
2. Jesus answered and said – I love the fact that Jesus did not fuss or ignore a believing mother. He engaged with her as she sought the best for her children, especially when she probably knew of the discussion in chapter 19:27-30 and also that on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13), Jesus took her two sons with Him.
3. Do you know what you are asking – Christ answers her with a question the way God does with Job. He, in the same way, she is asking Him, meaning she is repeatedly asking the same thing, if she has a complete divine understanding of what she is requesting of Him.
4. Are you able – In order for Christ to be able to sit on His throne He has to face all that will take place at Calvary which includes the abuse before the cross. This focus of His response was more attached to the very thing He was not willing to bear; “take this cup from me.” (John 18:11; Matthew 26:39)

a) The “cup” throughout Scripture refers figuratively to one’s divinely appointed destiny, whether it was one of blessing and salvation (Ps. 16:5; 116:13) or wrath and disaster (Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15–29). Jesus refers to his forthcoming cup of the suffering of the cross (Matt. 26:39), to which He has just given His third prediction (20:17–19).^[7]

5. Are you able – It is interesting that Christ did not say can your sons “drink the cup” (drink the cup means bearing all the beating Christ is about to experience). Christ asks if she can. In other words, if your sons were to be beaten and treated the way Christ will be, could she really handle that? He was saying, “can you yourself be able to drink the cup?”

a) James was the first disciple to die for Christ (Acts 12:2); John suffered variously over the longest period of time. Yet assignment of the positions requested is the prerogative of the Father.^[8]

b) Amazing proof of their ignorance and self-confidence. Ambition had blinded their eyes. They had not caught the martyr spirit.^[9]

6. They said to Him – Interestingly, her sons responded, but she didn’t. They responded by repeatedly telling Christ they could .

7. We are able – The same people who said they have the ability and state of mind to apply themselves to whatever Christ would experience when the time came, left Him. Their mother, who understood, remained at the cross. Their ambitions clouded their ability to understand.

D. Do Not Have Selfish Ambitions (v. 23):

1. He said to them – Because her sons responded, Christ focused His attention on them and repeatedly kept speaking to them.

2. My cup you shall drink – Even though they will turn their backs on Him in the heat of the battle, they will remain in ministry, and when they do, they will have horrible experiences as they proclaim the gospel.

a) St. John did not, indeed, undergo a violent death, but he stood by the cross and felt his Master's sufferings; he lived a long life of persecution, banishment, and distress; he saw all his companions drop off one by one, till in extreme old age he was left solitary, with nothing to comfort him but the memory of vanished years, and the hope of an eternal future. [\[10\]](#)

3. This is not mine to give – It is interesting that Christ willingly accepted the order God has in place while this mother fights to establish one.

4. This is not mine to give – Christ said that setting up the kingdom of God is something only God does.

a) That prerogative was not His but His Father's (cf. 24:36). Thus Jesus here, as always in Matthew, yields in subordination to the will of His Father. The seats of

extraordinary honor in the eschaton belong to those for whom ἡτοιμάσται ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς μου, “My Father has prepared it ” (cf. similar language with reference to the kingdom in 25:34). The request was therefore not only improper in itself, but it was completely inconsistent with the pattern of the obedience of Jesus to the will of his Father.^[11]

b) *“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (Philippians 2:5-11; NASU)

5. Those for whom it has been prepared - Before time on earth ever existed, God completely set in place who He knows will share this position with Christ.
6. Those for whom it has been prepared - The position with Christ is completely and permanently put in place and cannot be changed. So, if they are a part of the process, great if not, they must accept God’s sovereign decision made before time and therefore made without partiality.
7. My Father – Until Christ dies and rises from the dead, God is only His Father, but after the resurrection, He is our Father (John 20:17). Christ's focus is on a future glory that we will all share (2 Corinthians 3:18).

^[1] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 122–123). Zondervan.

^[2] Hagner, D. A. (1995). [*Matthew 14–28*](#) (Vol. 33B, p. 580). Word, Incorporated.

^[3] Nolland, J. (2005). [*The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 819). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

^[4] Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*](#) (Mt 20:20). Moody Press.

^[5] Hagner, D. A. (1995). [*Matthew 14–28*](#) (Vol. 33B, pp. 580–581). Word, Incorporated.

^[6] Barbieri, L. A., Jr. (1985). [*Matthew*](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 66). Victor Books.

^[7] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 123). Zondervan.

^[8] Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*](#) (Mt 20:20). Moody Press.

^[9] Robertson, A. T. (1933). [*Word Pictures in the New Testament*](#) (Mt 20:22). Broadman Press.

^[10] Spence-Jones, H. D. M., ed. (1909). [*St. Matthew*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 282). Funk & Wagnalls Company.

^[11] Hagner, D. A. (1995). [*Matthew 14–28*](#) (Vol. 33B, p. 581). Word, Incorporated.