

Lent IV: Mt. 20:17-28: Jesus' Third Prediction and the Request of James and John

1. Jesus has come to the end of His final journey through Perea, east of the Jordan. With His disciples He has just crossed the Jordan River near Jericho. Ylvisaker: "The highways were thronged with visitors on their way to Jerusalem, and the little company with Jesus mingles with them as they press onward to their destination."
2. Twice before Jesus has informed His disciples about His impending death and resurrection. Cf. 16:21; 17:12.22. In the first prediction He used the word δεῖ, Mt. 16:21. In the second He used the word μέλλει, Mt. 17:12.22. In the third He used Ἴδοὺ, 20:18. In the second and third He used the term "the Son of man," He Who is man, but more than man. Read all three predictions. They become progressively clearer. In this third prediction He tells them that His own people will betray Him into the hands of the Gentiles and the purpose and result of the betrayal is clearly spelled out. But in all three predictions Jesus also predicts His resurrection from the dead. Here Jesus clearly shows His divinity, His omniscience. So humble and yet so divine!
3. Vs. 17: μέλλων "when He was about to". Note that this word occurs again in 22. Our attention is rivetted on Jesus' final journey and what it implies. παρέλαβεν, this verb is frequent in Matthew. Cf. chapter 1 and 2 where it is used of Joseph taking Mary and the Child. τοῦς δώδεκα, Judas is included. κατ' ἴδαν quite privately.
4. Vs. 18: Ἴδοὺ TEV: Listen! AAT: Look! Lenski: "Now He tells them far more plainly than before what shall occur. This announcement warrants the exclamation 'lo'; going up to Jerusalem for all these things is astonishing indeed." He had said, at 16:21: δεῖ αὐτὸν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα ἀπελθεῖν etc., but Peter strongly objected and then the Lord used hard words on Peter. But this time, 20:18-19, there is no objection, but much is still amiss. That the Jewish leaders would condemn Him to death in the capital city is dreadful. On Scribes and Chiefpriests Bengel comments: "It was the duty of the Scribe to examine, and of the Priest to decide."
5. Vs. 19: Note that forms of παραδίδομι occur both in vs. 18 and 19. Judas was the agent in the first instance, the Chiefpriests and Scribes in the second. Fahling notes: "The word (παραδίδομι) is used thirty-six times in NT for the betrayal of Jesus and in addition only three times (Mt. 24:10; Mk. 13:12; Lk. 21:16) of kinsman delivering up one another to persecution," in other words, twelve times as often for Jesus. The Gospels concentrate our attention on the total rejection of Jesus by His people. Lenski states: "Since the Sanhedrin has lost the power to inflict the death penalty, Jesus reveals that this Jewish court 'shall deliver him up to the Gentiles' which can mean only the Roman governor Pilate and the men under his authority." Note that Jesus, by His omniscience, knows everything, down to the smallest detail. εἰς τὸ likely denotes actual result. For the first time He speaks of the mockery, whipping and crucifying, specific times of suffering. Only Matthew uses the word σταυρῶσαι in the prediction which Jesus makes. The final καὶ in this verse is more than simple "and". It's something like "and yet". In all three predictions He predicted this note of victory. Fahling: "Like a shining light comes also the comforting assurance of the resurrection." Ylvisaker: "But however cruel the fate of Jesus, the disciples should realize, nevertheless, that this was not His real or ultimate destiny. Death should not hold Him in its grasp; on the third day He should again arise." The fact and the time are foretold. Note that for the passive ἐγερθήσεται we have the variant ἀναστήσεται, active voice. Both are true. He was raised and He rose from the dead.
6. From what follows in vss. 20-28 we know that the disciples did not yet understand. Fahling: "The words were clear, but the minds of the disciples were so filled with false Messianic hopes that they

passed them by like an idle dream." Ylvisaker: "We realize that their thoughts were not yet disengaged from the kingdom of earthly glories which Jesus should establish. How desperately difficult for Jesus to separate them from their carnal concept of the Messiah!" They still had trouble at Acts 1:6.

7. Vs. 20: Τότε, Bengel: "At a most inappropriate time." True. She comes to Jesus with her two sons. She was obviously the prime mover in this request but her sons went along with it and certainly did not object. However, Fahling says: "In Mark it is the sons who petition Jesus, whereas in Matthew it was their mother. The request was made by the mother, who was the intercessor, but in truth it was the request of the two disciples, and therefore Jesus directs His reply, even in Matthew, to them and not to their mother." In any case, the three agree. προσκυνούσα is a strong word. TEV, JB, NEB, NASB and AAT translate "bowed". She treats Him like an earthly potentate or king. Her actions are in keeping with her mistaken views of Him and His Kingdom. Bengel says: "From the adoration and discourse of this woman, it is evident that she entertained a high idea of our Lord's majesty, but possessed very little knowledge."
8. Vs. 21: Εἰπέ, an aorist impv., is interesting. At Mk. 10:37 the brothers say Δός ἡμῖν. The mother says Εἰπέ Ἰννα, an object clause. The only other example of this construction in Matthew is found at 4:3 where Satan speaks to Jesus, using the very same construction. RSV, NASB here translate "command". NEB reads "I want you to give orders." AV, NKJV and NIV have "grant" and TEV, JB and AAT read "promise". In keeping with the idea that she considered Jesus an earthly potentate, very likely RSV and NASB translate correctly. She wants Jesus to do this by command, decree. Of course, we are not saying that she speaks in the spirit of Satan at 4:3, who was tempting Jesus. She is not tempting Jesus but has the wrong view of His Messiahship and Kingdom. ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ is like ἐν τῇ δόξῃ σου at Mk. 10:37, eschatological. The only thing which she will let Jesus decide is who will sit to the right and who to the left. Why would she request this? a) Very likely they were Jesus' cousins; b) They were among His intimate associates and constant companions; c) Perhaps they misunderstood Mt. 19:28. But, as Fahling remarks: "It was a carnal, selfish request, and it showed that the nature of Christ's kingdom was completely misunderstood. In an Oriental kingdom for persons to be seated to the right and left of the throne was a token of the highest honor and an evidence that they were men of the highest rank." Lenski: "Like a great king Jesus is to make this decree. . . . Usually the disciples expected too little of Jesus, they showing themselves as men of little faith. Here is a woman of such faith that she actually expects too much of Jesus." Not only "too much" but in the wrong spirit. By the way, the Centurion of Capernaum also said εἰπέ λόγῳ at Mt. 8:8 but was commended for his great faith. Not so in this instance, as the following vss. clearly show.
9. Vs. 22: The answer is directed only to the two sons. In this vs. we have οὐκ οἴδατε but in vs. 25 we have οἴδατε. They know the kingdom of power but have much to learn about the kingdom of grace. αἰτεῖσθε is middle voice "asking for yourselves". Now comes a searching question. Note that πειν is aorist but πνειν is present tense. "To drink the cup" is a metaphor for willing suffering. That of Jesus was more severe than that of His followers. Note that KJV and NKJV read the two variants in this verse and 23, found in the Koine text, but textual at Mk. 10:38,39. Fahling comments: "Jesus bore gently with their selfishness and error. . . . They did not know what Christ's glory was and how one could become a partaker of it. They sought exaltation and did not see the step leading to it. . . . The reference was to His Passion, the cup of bitterness, and the billows of the dark waters of death, while the brothers were probably thinking of a cup of joy or of the Epiphany glory on the banks of the Jordan. . . . They imagined, due to an exaggerated trust in their own ability, that they were able to drink that cup." Ylvisaker: "His Kingdom is not a Kingdom of glory in the world, but a Kingdom of the cross, and the road to glory must pass through suffering and pain. Cf. Mt. 26:39." Bengel:

"The request of the two sons of Zebedee, as it were, went before even Himself, not to say the ten disciples, in proceeding to the Kingdom at once, whereas He was dwelling on the intermediate Passion: He therefore urges them to follow after Him, not to take the lead of Him, and to bear the cross of His followers before receiving the crown." And then he adds this: "The Lord, however, bears with them, and accepts their confession. Cf. Mt. 26:37,39." Lenski: "By this cup Jesus refers to suffering (Jn. 18:11; Mt. 26:39,42), and to drink means to accept and to endure the suffering. . . . Mk. 10:38 adds a second question that employs a different figure but has the same meaning. . . . The way to greatness in his kingdom is not by means of a mere decree on the part of Jesus but by the way of the deepest humiliation (Lk. 14:11); and this is due to the spiritual nature of his kingdom."

10. Vs. 23: Note the beautiful $\mu\epsilon\nu\text{-}\delta\epsilon$ construction. It is one of contrast. Note the Koine variant found in KJV and NKJV. It is a repetition of the same thought, under a different figure. In His omniscience Jesus is gently telling them that they will suffer. Cf. Acts 12:2 and Rev. 1:9. James suffered a martyr's death. John was exiled for his faith. Fahling: "James and John were corrected, and in a deeper sense their request was granted." Bengel: "It is neither an earthly kingdom in which He gives it, nor does He give it to those who have not yet suffered. Under the very appearance of a repulse, He gives a promise to James and John." Lenski: "The two disciples spoke in ignorance when they said that they were able. . . . These disciples shall, indeed, advance to the spiritual ability of drinking Christ's cup. So Jesus declares that they shall drink this cup. I Pet. 4:13; II Cor. 4:10; Gal. 6:17; Jn. 15:20; Mt. 10:24." What they stated ($\delta\upsilon\nu\acute{\alpha}\mu\epsilon\theta\alpha$) in fleshly self-confidence He caused them to do, but in such a way that He removed the dregs of the flesh. What a marvelous Savior! And now the second part of vs. 23. Of all our English versions we think AAT is right to the point: "But sitting at My right and left is something I can give only to those for whom My Father prepared it." Read Jn. 5:19; Lk. 10:22 and Jn. 10:30. Jesus is not saying: a) "Sorry, boys, I can't do anything about it. The Father decided long ago against this." b) "There are some things I have and some things I haven't. Sorry." c) "The Father's will is different from mine. I'll have to yield." The last seven words, in Greek, literally mean: "Quite to the contrary, it is to these for whom it has been prepared by my Father" meaning the gracious, eternal plan of the Trinity which comforts the believer. That the believer will be in heaven is absolutely assured by grace in Christ, not by an arbitrary decree of one person of the Trinity to the exclusion of the other two. Stoeckhardt aptly says: "With this Jesus does not declare that the Father possesses a power which the Son does not have, but the meaning rather is this, that He does not act like an earthly king, who distributes positions of honor to His favorites according to their merits and worthiness, but that the Father will give a portion of His future glory to those whom He has chosen from eternity to salvation out of pure grace. This lesson all disciples must learn. The way to glory is through much suffering with Christ. But the Christians with their suffering never earn for themselves heavenly glory, which is solely theirs because of the election of grace." The election of grace in Christ is never an arbitrary decree but purest Gospel for the suffering and laboring believer, assuring him that he has belonged to the Lord from eternity, but always and ever by grace, not by decree. Bengel: " $\tau\acute{o}\ \delta\epsilon\ \kappa\alpha\theta\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\alpha$ there will, therefore, clearly be some who will sit on the right and left hand of Christ. . . . Jesus does not deny that it is His to give (Rev. 3:21), but limits and declares to whom He will give it, as well as the time and the order, referring, as is His custom, all things to the Father. Jesus did not give it until, His Passion having been suffered and concluded, He had sat down Himself on the right hand of the Father."
11. Vs. 24: From what follows in vss. 25-28 it is clear that the ten were not filled with righteous indignation. Fahling: "But 'the ten', filled with the same ambition and jealousies, were indignant at the selfish request of James and John." Hendriksen: "The spiritual attitude of the ten was not any better than that of the two. How easy it is to condemn in others what we excuse in ourselves!" Bengel: "They feared lest they should lose something (i.e. lest James and John should gain something

at their expense)." Lenski: "Here we see how Jesus turned the incident regarding Salome and her sons to good account for all his disciples. . . . The ten prove themselves no better than the two. All of them were misconceiving his kingdom and following a wrong principle."

12. Vs. 25: προακαλεσάμενος, also found in the parallel at Mk. 10:42, does not mean that for the moment they were absent, but the patient and tender call by Jesus whereby He corrects them. Here the μακροθυμία, the long-suffering of Jesus, shows through. From what He now says it is clear that He awaits their repentance over their selfish ambition (and ours too). Here He distinguishes what they know (οἶδατε) from what they did not know (vs. 22). Jesus is about to distinguish between the kingdom of power and the kingdom of grace. A Christian is a citizen in both kingdoms, but they operate on different principles. Jesus mentions two groups in the kingdom of power. The second emphasizes the first, bringing out the point that the kingdom of power is based solely on authority and lordship. NIV: "The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them." Jesus is not here passing judgment on them. He is merely pointing out a truth common to all cultures in the kingdom of power. Note that κατὰ, an intensive prefix, is used with both verbs.
13. Vs. 26: "Not thus is it among you." Note that ἐν ὑμῖν occurs three times in 26 and 27. It denotes the kingdom of grace, the attitude of the believer, a principle which the believer must follow at all times, whether he is dealing with church, family or state. ἀλλά, after a negative, "quite to the contrary". Now follow two conditional relative clauses (26.27), Hebrew parallelism for the sake of emphasis. Note "whoever" twice, no matter who. It is open to all, not just to οἱ μεγάλοι and οἱ ἄρχοντες the few rulers. Note the beautiful symmetry between the two sentences, but there is a heightening. Whoever-whoever; wills-wills; among you-among you; to become great-to be first; shall be-shall be; your servant-your slave. The great one in the kingdom of grace is man's servant. The first one in the kingdom of grace is man's slave. The two genitives, ὑμῶν, do not denote possession, but relationship. The will of Christ dominates the will of the believer. "Slave" means that the believer has the will of Christ, not his own. Luther said it beautifully: "That I may be His own and live under Him in His Kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness." Fahling: "There is greatness also in the kingdom of Christ. But secular notions of greatness must be turned completely upside down. . . . A plan for the exercise of 'ambition' is posed which will not offend any of their fellow-men." That is right. The "firstness" of the Christian does not irritate and cause jealousy, but rather attracts. Ylvisaker: "The higher we would ascend, the lower must we be willing to descend in our labor of love. . . . All tyranny is wrecked against the solid rock of subordination. . . . In the world-kingdoms man achieves greatness at the expense of his inferiors and by making his will a law unto others. . . . The same mind shall be in us which was also in Christ (Phil. 2:5ff)." Stoekhardt: "The domain of the church is nothing but service." Hendriksen: "It is an unforgettable paradox. . . . Greatness is obtained by pursuing a course of action which is the exact opposite of that which is followed in the unbelieving world. . . . To be great means to love. . . . It is the inverted pyramid, the believer being at the bottom--being the servant, the humble attendant." Lenski: "Whereas Jesus began with plurals (vs. 25) he now begins with the one (vss. 26 and 27). . . . Moreover, to be great, to be first, is open to all. . . . No matter who he may be. . . . Now the Gentile idea of greatness is inverted, turned upside down, the pyramid resting on its apex, the great man not sitting atop the lesser men, but the great man bearing the lesser man on his back." Cf. Gal. 6:1-2. It goes without saying that Jesus is not aiding and abetting chaos and permissiveness among men. He is not doing away with order among Christians. Nor is He telling people not to obey their government. Cf. Rom 13:1.
14. Vs. 28: ὡσπερ, "just as", introduces Christ as example, and yet the verse contains one of the major passages on the vicarious atonement. Note, as in vs. 18, He calls Himself "the Son of man". This is

a fulfillment of Dan. 7:13. God's incarnate Son. Jesus was served by others. His parents brought Him up, but He died for them and even provided for the physical needs of His mother on the cross. Jn. 19:27. Women served Him (Lk. 8:3) but the Easter account shows He served them in a much higher sense. ἀλλὰ "quite to the contrary." Both infinitives denote purpose. καὶ is "namely" "in particular" "and especially". The entire active and passive obedience of Christ are contained in this verse, everything He did when He came (ἦλθεν). Of course, His death on the cross is most prominent. τὴν ψυχὴν means "life" "soul and body" "self". He withheld nothing. Note the utter contrast between "command" (εἶπε) in vs. 21 and δοῦναι in 28. Note also the utter humility in οὐκ ἔστιν ἔμδν τοῦτο δοῦναι in vs. 23 and the utter selfless service in δοῦναι, vs. 28. Ὁν λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν, Fahling: "The symbolism is that of prisoners who are liberated upon the payment of a price. Thus the blood of Christ is a ransom, Col. 1:14; I Tim. 2:6; Acts 20:28. This ransom was not paid to the devil, but to divine justice. ἀντὶ 'in place, instead' --vicarious suffering and death, ἀντὶ λύτρον ὑπὲρ πάντων I Tim. 2:6. πολλῶν is not restrictive, as if Christ did not die for all, but used in special reference to the great number on whose behalf the sacrifice was made." No mere man has said it better than Luther in the second article: "Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sin, from death and from the power of the devil, etc."