

Matthew 21-10-03a

Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 3rd of October 2021. We're continuing our study in the Gospel of Matthew.

It's a privilege to be assembled together this morning to look at these wonderful truths from God's Word. We're going to see a profound example of what not to do. I like those.

I don't enjoy nearly so much looking back at my own examples of what not to do as I enjoy looking at other people messing up and I can benefit from their experience. And that's what we see this morning. We'll be resuming in the 20th verse of the 20th chapter, 2020.

Hopefully it will give us that kind of vision into our situation and operation. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll get started. Father, we're grateful that you have provided cleansing grace for us when we fail, when we fall short, when we commit sins, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

The provision you've made for us through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ allows us to be restored and renewed and placed once again on solid ground. We're grateful for that unique privilege that we enjoy as members of the body of Christ that qualifies us to come before your throne to represent ourselves, to make intercession for each other and request on our own behalf. We make requests this morning that as we look together at the truth of your Word, that the Holy Spirit will find us apt and ready pupils and we'll be able to plow it deeply into the soil of our souls so that it will bear fruit that equips us for every good work and reflects the glory of our Savior in whose name we pray.

Amen. The recording has started. We look this morning at Matthew chapter 20 verse 20 and having once again for about the fourth time in this gospel warned the disciples that arrest, trial, and crucifixion is coming in Jerusalem.

The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles by the chief priests and the scribes. They will condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, to scourge, and to crucify. You can glean a lot of background information and cultural and historical and social detail from Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus Christ*.

If you don't have a copy of that, it should be on every shelf. It's a fascinating backdrop for the scriptural accounts in the gospels. One of the things we learn by studying that time period is that typically scourging was a punishment unto itself and did not generally accompany a death sentence.

It was administered and then the prisoner was released. But in Jesus' case, these insults and punishments are piled one on top of another in an unusual and exceptionally cruel

manner. He knows it's coming before he ever gets there.

And it brings to mind our recent study on choice. What do we know? When do we know it? And what are our choices as a result? The Lord Jesus knows this for a fact. He has known it for months, if not years.

He has probably known it at least since the age of 12. He knows who he is. He knows why he's here.

But I think the specifics of the manner of his betrayal and death came to him through Old Testament scripture. The heel of the familiar friend with whom he shares bread being lifted up against him, the content of the Psalms where the details of the crucifixion are given in some cases in greater detail than even what you find in the gospels. His role as the suffering servant, who is going to be scourged and afflicted and give his life from Isaiah, had to have been circulating in his soul throughout his earthly ministry, and yet he consciously chose to fulfill the will of the Father.

Why? We find this out from Hebrews, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father. This, of course, is a wonderful example for us because Jesus did this in his humanity. He didn't access his divine power.

Philippians 2 tells us he emptied himself, took on the form of a servant, and came in the likeness of men, humbled himself, and was obedient. His humility and his obedience were enabled and empowered in his humanity by the same things that God gives to us—God's Word and God's Spirit. His earthly life, accomplishing our redemption and reconciliation and propitiation for sin on the cross, his resurrection, are all explicitly stated to have been done in the power of the Holy Spirit in Scripture.

We have just seen on Thursday nights that his second coming and his millennial reign will similarly be supported and empowered by the Holy Spirit. So it's a wonderful and significant example for us and makes our appreciation of the Lord Jesus that much greater because he used the same resources that God has provided to us and has shown us how to use them. But knowing this, to be delivered, to be scourged, to be crucified, and the third day he will rise again.

And Jesus has been careful to include that detail when he warns his disciples of what is to come. But in the same way that the words did not sink down into their ears as Jesus commanded them, let these words sink down into your ears, and they just don't. This was the capstone, this was the conclusion of the parable that we saw last time, the parable of the workers in the vineyard.

What is the summary of that parable? The landowner goes out at the beginning of the day and finds people who are willing to work. And it has been used as an example of

sovereign grace, the sovereign grace, folks who make an issue of sovereign grace and prioritize God. God is certainly sovereign and God is certainly gracious.

But when it comes to salvation, sometimes this parable has been invoked because everyone gets the same denarius at the end of the day, whether they worked one hour or worked 12 or six or nine or three. And the inscrutable will of God that says, that's the way I want to do it, who are you to question me, can be read into the parable. That is not the point of the parable.

It's not the purpose of the and it actually isn't even the content of the parable. Because if you will notice in each case, these workers were not impressed. They were not taken from a prison and put to work in the field.

All of them chose to respond to the call of the landowner for workers. They didn't have to come. They were not forced to come.

They weren't dragged there in chains and released to work. The call was issued and as many as were willing to work, who trusted the landowner, everyone after the first group didn't know what they would get. They came in faith.

He said, what's right. I will do what's right. Well, anybody can say that.

Politicians can say that. I'll do what's right. I'm going to do what's right.

What's best. I'll be bipartisan. I'll unite.

I will do this. I will do that. Every president in my historical memory has said those things.

And I remember when the first president Bush said, read my lips, no new taxes. And he was forced really against his will to raise taxes later in his administration. And they kept playing that clip over and over again.

This is what you said. And here's what you did. To be able to trust the landowner is required to go work in a field with no contract.

There's nothing but a verbal contract. I'll do right by you. And so they come.

This is an expression of faith, not of sovereign grace. So just in case you ever see somebody invoke this parable and say, look, an example of sovereign grace, God just dispenses. It doesn't matter if they work an hour, work 12 hours.

And it is true that he can do what he wishes, but what he wishes to do is respect human choice. And this whole section in Matthew is about human choice. And the reason I bring that up at this point is that the disciples are going to miss that point and miss it galactically, miss it by more than a mile, miss it by several stadia.

So we pick up this morning in verse 20. We began this last time. The mother of Zebedee's sons came to him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from him.

Mother of Zebedee's sons. This is, her name is Salome, S-A-L-O-M-E. Early church tradition held that she was the sister of Mary, the mother of the Lord, and that this made John and James, Jesus' first cousins.

It's early, it's old. We have no way to know for sure that that was the case. It would illuminate a little bit why the mother comes and asks.

If she is Jesus' aunt and the sister of his mother, this would produce a little bit of additional leverage. Let's keep this rulership thing in the family when you get to the top levels. This has recurred down through history.

People like to get into power and then have their family and confidants associated. You see this in recent presidential administrations. But irrespective of that, scripture doesn't make that point, so we won't either.

But the fact that the mother of Zebedee's sons comes here, when you go to Mark, she's not mentioned. She's not in view. The parallel in Mark 10, it says, James and John came and made this request.

So it's a double team. James and John are going to come and they're going to make this request, but they're going to do it through their mother. I find this interesting because we have other cases where there will be a intermediary, such as the centurion with his servant who comes.

One gospel says that he came and made appeal directly. The other says that the word was sent back and forth. Or the other cases we've seen in the past where it appears as though God is speaking in the first person, but it's actually the angel of the Lord.

Patty, can you unplug this please? So in this case, the gospel of Mark is not incorrect. It simply skips the means by which the request was made. So the request is something from him.

So he says 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. Normally you see judgment scenes where, for example, the sheep and the goats famously. So he puts the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left.

And we say, well, the left hand isn't a place of favor. You wouldn't want to sit on the left hand because that's the side of judgment. But this is different.

This is not a judgment scene. This is a throne scene. This is not a judgment throne.

This is a rulership throne. And they were different. You remember the Bama sometimes was even at the city gate in earlier times.

But this is not a courtroom scene. This is a palace scene. And in that case, those who are seated at the right and the left are of practically equal standing.

And it doesn't imply any more than that. So what are the positives here? There are some positives. Do James and John and their mother, Salome, believe that Jesus is going to come and rule in a literal kingdom? Yes, they do.

And by the way, for those who want to spiritualize the kingdom of Christ, those who want to say, well, Jesus has already come and the kingdom is in our hearts, and they'll misread, mistranslate when Jesus said the kingdom is in your midst. And they'll say the kingdom is within you. Doesn't mean within you personally.

It means I'm here. I'm in your midst. The kingdom is at hand.

But people say, oh, it's all of the promises to Israel, the millennial promises, all of those things we've seen in the prophets are fulfilled spiritually in the church. And God has just made it a mystical kingdom. Well, evidently James and John don't believe that because they believe Jesus is going to be sitting on a real throne, the throne of his father David.

And there's going to be a chair on the left and a chair on the right. And last time I looked in my soul, there is no such throne and there is no such chair on each side. And James and John are not sitting on either side of the Lord Jesus in my heart or in yours or in anybody else's down through the last 2000 years.

So on this basis alone, you either have to decide that James and John, in addition to other misunderstandings, didn't understand that it was going to be a spiritual kingdom. And that's the way people will typically answer that objection. But it is at least a good piece of evidence that we should expect a literal earthly 1000 year reign in Jerusalem, in Zion.

My heart is not in Zion. I don't have daughters of Jerusalem going around. I don't have children playing in the hole of the asp and the leopard and the kid laying down together and the rest of it.

Unless you want to metaphoricalize and spiritualize and allegorize all of that, there are just too many promises that are explicit for Israel, for Jerusalem. This is the new covenant I will make with the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, with Israel and with Judah, God says. And so if it's all in the church, then why is he talking about the house of Israel and the house of Judah? We're not the house of Israel and the house of Judah unless you want to spiritualize that and you wind up spiritualizing so much that the Bible just loses all traction.

This is literal. And so on the positive side, they believe that Jesus is the king. They believe that the kingdom is real and they believe that it is coming and coming in their lifetime.

Interestingly, so grant that these two sons of mine may sit one on your right hand, one on the left in your kingdom. That's the positive side. They have the faith that can see what does not yet exist.

And it's real enough that they make this request. What is the downside? Jesus has already taught that service and having the heart of a little child, whoever humbles himself, 18, four of Matthew as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Unless you change your mind and become as little children, you will by no means enter.

And that seems to have gotten lost, that idea. Secondly, and more importantly, this assumes that what Jesus said just hours earlier in chapter 19, verse 28, in the regeneration, when the son of man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel. If you want to be prominent, if you want to have a role of service and function in the kingdom, it has already been promised explicitly to James and John and the 10 other disciples.

Evidently, this is not enough. All Israel living and resurrected is going to be under the rulership and judgment of these 12 thrones with these 12 disciples who have left all and followed him sitting on them. And we're not quibbling about Judas and Paul and the substitution and so on.

12 thrones, 12 tribes. James and John are certainly earmarked for two of those thrones, right? Within hours of this, they're asking for more on the basis of what? Have they left more than the other disciples? Matthew's left his tax collecting business. These others have left their home and kith and kin.

Peter and Andrew, they left a fishing business just like James and John did. Was the house of Zebedee's Fish Incorporated a bigger company? Did they abandon more? Their mother is down there with them. Peter's mother-in-law is up north someplace.

So on what basis? This is key. And one of the first points, if we don't remember anything else out of lesson this morning, if we are going to come before the throne of grace for help in time of need, to make requests, to intercede, whatever it may be, what is the basis for the request? We are enjoined. We are commanded.

We are given example after example, after example, that in our prayer life, we need to give God a reason. Moses did this when he kept the people from being blown away by the wrath of God after the golden calf incident. Moses argues with God and says, Lord, you can't destroy these people and make a new nation out of me because your integrity is on the line.

The nations know what you have said. The nations know what you have done. This is going to impugn your character and sully your divine glory to do this.

Abraham, when he was getting ready to plunge his sacrificial knife into Isaac, why was he able to do that? He had the promise of God that in Isaac shall your seed be called. And he said, the God that promised me that I'm going to have descendants as numerous as the sand by the sea and the stars in the sky. If he says, put the knife into this boy, somehow he's not going to die.

Or if he dies, he's going to come back because I have an inerrant, infallible, irreversible, divinely guaranteed promise. And he acted and lived on the basis of what he knew to be true that God had said. This has to be the basis for our request.

There is no basis given for this request. And that's the necessary observation to understand Jesus' reply. Jesus doesn't say, you arrogant, ambitious young men, shame on you, Mother Salome, for wanting to shamelessly promote your... He doesn't invoke condemnation or criticism or judgment against ambition or overweening desire or insensitivity to the other disciples.

Jesus makes the very point that we're introducing here. And that is, there is a basis for this assignment and it does not come by request. How many times do we think there's something I want, I can get it from God by request.

I want healing for myself or others. I want a resolution of a problem for myself or for others, my loved ones. I want resolution.

I want clear skies. I want smooth seas. I want this, I want that, I want the other.

There is nothing wrong with bringing those requests before the throne of grace. If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you can move mountains, you can uproot trees. But what is the basis of the request? We have to give God a reason that is God's reason.

Lord, I request this because I know it's a part of your plan. I know it is not your will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Here's somebody that needs repentance, Lord, bring them to that point.

If I can be a part of that, if others can be a part of that, bring the issue to their mind, bring information that creates the need, that demonstrates the need. We all have need, but if someone is not responding, they are obviously unaware of the need. You're not going to embrace salvation if you don't think you need it.

And people who are unbelievers, people who are apathetic and indifferent toward Christ and toward God, do they have a need? Of course they do. Everybody has the need. We are all mired in sin.

We are fallen. We are hopeless, helpless, and useless apart from God's grace. We are headed for judgment, whether as wayward believers or unbelievers, judgment is coming.

We have the need for cleansing. We have the need for restoration. We have the need for connection and relationship with God.

We have need for His grace. We have need for His spirit. We have need for His word.

Our lives are meaningless. We are literally dust in the wind if we do not connect to God and connect to eternity through the Lord Jesus Christ. We are just another fading photograph on a back shelf in an antique store that nobody remembers.

All of you are strutting and fretting your hour on the stage, sound and fury signifying nothing. Nobody remembers your highs, your lows, what you did well, what you did poorly, what the name of your dog was, where you lived. It is all gone.

All of your furniture, all of your clothing, all of your possessions, all of your hopes and dreams, all of your aspirations, all of your accomplishments, all of your failures are wiped away. The only way we can invest time and redeem the time is to invest it in eternity. The Lord Jesus has given us that privilege.

He has given us the life to return and enjoy it. He has given us the purpose which is to reflect the glory of His Father and His own glory. We have a mission of service, of opportunity like God's angels, God's unfallen angels who communicate God, who serve God.

His ministering servants are a flame of fire and that can be a good thing to warm and to cook and to cleanse and to purify. It can be to destroy and eliminate that which is in need of judgment. We can enter into those realms.

We have meaning and purpose and definition. So everybody has a need. If you want to pray for someone who is far from the faith, whether saved or unsaved, give God a reason.

He's not going to come in and change their mind. He's not going to just turn them from negative to positive. He's not going to override their freedom of choice which is God-given and God-granted and the basis for judgment is our human responsibility.

So how do you pray for somebody who's off in the weeds? Well, what can I pray? What do I know? This is the function of maturity. This is where knowing God's Word, knowing God's plan and purpose, we can do what Moses did. Do the people deserve destruction for idolatry just weeks out of Egypt? They're already returning to idolatry.

This is the God that delivered us from Egypt. How does Moses pray for them? He puts God's character, God's promises, God's grace on the line and invokes it. People who

have not embraced God's grace don't have a sufficient sense of their need.

Can God make that clear? Can God put people in circumstances, however painful they may be? Do you want earthly pain that leads to heavenly salvation or do you want to hope that nobody encounters any problems and because of that they never sense their need for God and they spend eternity in the lake of fire? I would rather pray that God create circumstances that impress upon a person their need for Him, their absolute hopelessness without Him. And if they still choose against Him and say, I'm going to shake my fist in the divine face no matter, you know, instead of Job, though he slay me, yet will I trust him. There are some who look at the people that saw the Lord Jesus healing and teaching and never was there a man like this and yet condemned him to death.

There are people that no matter what you do, their heart is against God and therefore against Christ, just as Satan and a third of the angels. Did they have a problem of information? Did they lack a sense of understanding of who God was? They dwelt in the heavenly realm. Satan was in the throne room of God as Lucifer and willfully chose to go his own way.

I would like to be my own God. Well, there's no help for that, but we can pray that God will give every opportunity, make the issue as clear as possible. What are the issues? Do we know? Can we pray specifically about the issues? Sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Jesus gives those in John 14. Sin, righteousness, and judgment. A sense of my goodness is going to prevent me from feeling like I need forgiveness and cleansing and restoration and being made whole.

If I don't think I'm corrupt, why would I buy into some program that tells me I'm corrupt? So I need a demonstration that my righteousness is as filthy rags and that I fade as a leaf and that my iniquities like the wind carry me away. That there is not permanence. The promise of God is eternal life.

So Lord, impress upon those who are without you that impermanence, that thing that Solomon understood, that human life is heaven. It's a vapor in the wind. It's here today and gone tomorrow.

The grass withers and the flower fades. Beautiful green grass. We've got some now.

We just had a couple of fresh rains. It looks like spring out there. The pastures have sprung to life.

Beautiful green grass. But come November, it's all going to be dead. It's all going to be brown.

There won't be a green blade to be seen out there. The grass withers, the flower fades.

We have demonstrations in nature all the time of the ephemerality, the impermanence, the transient nature of human life.

But there are people who blind themselves to that, who don't register the significance that now is the appointed time. Now is the day of deliverance. Now is the day of salvation.

Father in heaven, impress these truths on the heart of these who are far from you. We give God a reason to answer our prayers. Who do you think God is going to listen to more closely? Someone who says, give me, give me, give me? Or someone who endeavors to enter into the thinking of God, the priorities of God, the plans and purposes of God, who gives back to God what God has given to them? Who's he going to listen to? Even if we're off base, we're going to pray imperfectly.

The Holy Spirit's got to take those things and reformat them and present them before the throne. We do not know how to pray as we ought. But the Holy Spirit, another one of his many roles is to make our expressions of need and thanksgiving and request and intercession acceptable before the throne so that we don't get blown away by the wrath of God for ignorance and impropriety.

The Holy Spirit is our buffer. He presents them before God's throne in, as Paul says, groanings that cannot be uttered. I'm anxious to find out exactly how that works.

I think maybe we'll understand that heavenly language in the, in the resurrection, but that's what did not happen here. And Jesus is going to make that point. Look at verse 22.

You do not know what you ask. You don't know what you ask because there are conditions for those seats. You're just wanting them by request.

They come a different way. How many things do we go to God and say, Lord, give me peace. Lord, give me strength.

Lord, give me the joy that seems to have fled. Give me endurance. Give me patience.

Guess what? None of the things I just mentioned come by request. Not a one of them. You don't ask for joy and get joy.

You don't ask for peace and get peace. You don't ask for a heart that could be more loving and God just grants it. Where do those things come from? And I specifically named three that you should know exactly where they come from.

The fruit of the spirit is does the fruit of the spirit come by request? It does not. It comes by his presence and giving him something to work with the content of the word of God so that he can speak so that he can bring it to our minds. We've been seeing this on Thursday night.

Even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, when he rules in the millennial kingdom is going to be relying on the Holy Spirit for wisdom and counsel and judgment, equity, how much more so us. So why would we go rushing in like toddlers with leaky diapers into the throne of grace and say, God, give me, give me, give me God and grace often provides for us when we're in that infant state. But we get rebuked in Hebrews chapter six at such time as you ought to be teachers.

You have that one teach you again, the first principles, the end of Hebrews chapter five, you're ones who still need milk. You can't take solid food. God wants us to grow up to the standard of a mature man.

And a mature man doesn't do what he does on impulse or on emotion or with a lack of foundation and a lack of basis, this request. And why is the mother implicated? It's an emotional appeal. Well, we can't just come in and say, Harumph, Harumph, look at us big fishermen.

Uh, we'd like these chairs. We'll put mom in there. We'll appeal to his gentler side.

Uh, it'll be, you know, a sentimental appeal. How happy would it make mom to know that we're going to be at your right hand and at your left. And she's the mother of such fine young sons.

It's natural, but it's not divine. It's there's nothing that says, well, now I believe that my mother has got great influence on high, but, and praise on my behalf, but God does not grant those requests because she's my mother. She grants those requests on other bases.

Do you have a foundation for your request? Have you given a reason? Are you someone whose requests will be heard? Remember the, the downside of requests being made? Uh, the Lord's arm is not shortened that he can't save. His ear isn't heavy that he cannot hear. What's the problem? Your iniquities have separated between you and your God.

Your sins have hid his face from you so that he will not hear. It isn't that he can't hear that he doesn't want to hear. It isn't that he can't save or doesn't want to deliver, but if there are unresolved iniquities, that's what Jesus Christ came to deliver us from.

Well, all of that is out of the picture here in this request. Here comes mom. Oh, my fine nephew, I've got a request for you here.

My boys, your cousins, how about we frame that picture? One's on the right hand, one's on the left. I don't care which one you put where, but no basis. That's what Jesus points out when we get into verse 22.

So our concluding point for the first session this morning, how do we view the kingdom? It's good that we understand that it's real. How do we view the future and the

resurrection and our opportunities detailed in the overcomer promises of Revelation chapter two and three for the church? Are they real? Do we believe them enough to come to God and anticipate them in hope? That's a good thing, but it's not good enough. It isn't enough to believe.

It's not enough to expect. It's not enough to anticipate. That anticipation has to be informed and has to result in living in humility and with an attitude of service, not with an anticipation of what will I get? Peter's question in the preceding chapter is background and context for this.

Lord, we have left all and followed you. What do we get? What do I get? The question and the issue in our requests, in our hope, what does God get? What do our fellow believers get? Wouldn't it have been something if James and John had come and said, Lord, these are fellow disciples here. What will they get when you come in your kingdom? What can you do for Thaddeus? What can you do for Simon, James the less? What will you do for them? Is there any notion of concern for their fellow disciples? You know what it's like when you're in a group that suffers hardships together and dangers and they've been camping out for weeks on end.

They've left all and they're hearty band. Wouldn't it be something if this story instead was James and John making appeal, Lord Andrew, look at his faithfulness and all of the things that he does. Maybe he goes in and helps and gets provisions for our meals and he goes and scouts ahead and finds places for us to stay and talks to sympathetic people in the towns and villages.

Lord, what for him? What will you be doing for him? What a wonderful example that would be instead. Lord, can I get as close as possible to you in the kingdom? Can I be as high as possible? I know you're going to have the 12 thrones, but could there be two more that are a little higher? What a contrast. It's food for thought.

Let's pause there and take our break. When we come back, we're going to look at Jesus answer in verse 22.