

Matthew 21-10-03b

Let's resume our study now. We're in Matthew chapter 20 and we are looking at this request, a request based on legitimate faith in the literal coming kingdom and the literal Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Points for that, credit for that.

However, you can start well. Remember what Paul tells the Galatians, you were running well, who hindered you? Who tripped you? You were off to a great start. You got out of the blocks, you accelerated, you were heading in the right direction and then you tripped.

So the belief in the kingdom, the belief in the King, the expectation is good, but there is a problem of absorbing and thinking and living in the light of what Jesus said about coming as a little child without personal ambition, without self-interest, without looking out for number one, the timeless description of the Lord Jesus in Philippians chapter two. That's the mind that needs to be in us, looking out for the interests of others. That is what is lacking.

So Jesus is going to emphasize that point here in verse 22. Jesus answered and said, you do not know what you ask. Now this shouldn't be the case.

You don't know what you ask. And so our goal as we wrapped up in the first session is we want to know what we ask. We think about it.

We research it in the scriptures. We speak the truth to one another in love. We discuss it amongst ourselves and get the benefit of maybe a thought or a perspective or a piece of viewpoint from scripture that hadn't occurred to us and God will use our fellow believers to bring it to our mind, to encourage us in the faith.

Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the habit of some is. Come together, have a song, have a hymn, have a spiritual song, sing and make melody in your hearts to the Lord. Those songs were the Psalms.

What was the hymn book in Israel in Jesus' day? David wrote it. Solomon wrote it. It's got 150 separate songs in it.

Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, making melody in our hearts. Many times the way we remember scripture is because of the beautiful way those principles have been condensed and expressed in poetic beauty in the lyrics of songs. We heard one just now.

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. You could amend that and say, my prayer is based on nothing less than Jesus' blood. Father, I come before your throne not on my own merit, not because I just got through confessing my sins and at the moment I'm not separated by iniquities.

Remember what it says in Hebrews chapter 10. There is a new and living way through the veil which is his flesh which was broken for us, his blood which was shed for us. My hope, my prayer, my confident approach to the throne is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and his righteousness.

I stand on the solid rock. All other ground is sinking sand. All other ground.

Wonderful distillation and I love when we review these hymns, when we think about them, when they are presented to us in such a beautiful way because it's a part of our faith. Scripture says when you get together there ought to be music that has lyrics, psalms, hymns, spiritual songs. The words are embedded and planted in our soul so that they can bear fruit.

So you do not know what you ask. That should stop us short. I don't want to come before God's throne not knowing what I ask, not having thought it through.

I've alluded to this several times but turn with me back to Daniel chapter 8. Ezekiel Daniel. There's a crease in my Bible at Ezekiel, there's another one forming at Zechariah, and there's a pretty good one in Daniel as well. These wonderful Old Testament examples.

Daniel receives revelation from God. Daniel is aware of circumstances related to those he loves. And look at the last verse of Daniel 8. I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days.

Afterward I arose and went about the king's business. I was astonished by the vision but no one understood it. I didn't understand it.

I consulted with Hananiah and Mishael and Azariah and they didn't understand it. Couldn't make heads or tails of it. I was made physically sick and I was mentally, emotionally, and spiritually confused.

This is the prophet Daniel about whom there is not a single criticism lodged in scripture. There's only a few people you can say that about. Nothing is ever held against Joseph.

Nothing is ever held against Joshua. Nothing is ever held against Daniel. And there are a couple of others.

Caleb the son of Jephunneh. He's never guilty of anything wrong in scripture. But Daniel, even Daniel, one of the wisest men up there with Solomon in the Old Testament wisdom category.

So what does he do in the next chapter? In the first year of Darius, in the first year of his reign, verse 2, I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet. He was in the word of God. How does he allay his dismay and his astonishment, his confusion, and something that made him

physically ill? He goes to the word of God, soaks himself in the word of God.

He's got a copy of Jeremiah. Very interesting that he's got a copy of this book. I set my face toward the Lord God to make a request, verse 3, by prayer and supplications with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

Daniel has a request. After appealing to the word of God, thinking through it, reading it, meditating on it, he dedicates himself to this request. I prayed to the Lord my God, made confession, said, Lord, great and awesome God who keeps his covenant and mercy with those who love him.

Notice how Daniel begins in verse 4. This is what I know about you, O Lord. You keep your promises. You are great.

You are awesome. You are merciful and keep covenant with those who love him. God keeps covenant, expresses mercy to those who love him.

Love is active. Love expresses itself in priority, in action with those who keep his commandments. Obedience.

Love is characterized by obedience. We have sinned and committed iniquity. We have done wickedly.

Daniel, to our knowledge, isn't guilty of anything, but this is confession on behalf of the nation, confession on behalf of the people. And Daniel identifies himself with the people in the same way that Moses did at the foot of Sinai when he comes down after the golden calf incident. Moses identified himself with the people.

Daniel identifies himself with the people. He is not too proud. He doesn't say, well, Lord, let us have mercy on these poor saps over here who have failed.

And I, you know, maybe you'll put in, I can put in a good word for them because of my upright standing and so on. Daniel says, we, we are guilty. We have sinned.

We have committed iniquity. We have done wickedly. We have rebelled.

We have departed from your precepts and your judgments. Neither have we heeded your servants, the prophets who spoke in your name to our Kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. We have not paid attention to the existing word of God.

For us, it's the scriptures. Oh Lord, righteousness belongs to you, but to us, shame of face, as it is this day to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which you have driven them because of the unfaithfulness, which they have committed against you. Acknowledging need.

Daniel is going to make an appeal by acknowledging that there is a need. There is guilt. There is inadequacy.

There is insufficiency. There is outright rebellion that has been a part of this problem. Verse nine to the Lord, our God belong mercy and forgiveness.

Even though we have rebelled against him, our rebellion does not redefine God. Doesn't take away his mercy, his grace, his forgiveness. We have not obeyed the voice of the Lord.

Verse 10 to walk in his ways, in his laws, which he set before us by his servants, the prophets, all Israel has transgressed your law and has departed so as not to obey your voice. Can we bring before God the decline in our nation, in our culture, in our Christian circles, in our churches, even in things that we have supported or that we're a part of, that we identify with, and yet they fall short because they're human and they're inadequate. Therefore the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God have been poured out on us because we have sinned against him.

Daniel is steeped in the law of Moses. He can give details of why judgment has fallen, the nature of those sins. Verse 12, he has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our judges who judged us by bringing upon us a great disaster for under the whole heaven, such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem.

As it is written in the law of Moses, this is a prayer of a man of God. Look at the amount of scripture that's in it. If you remember, Daniel prepared himself, set his face toward the Lord God in verse 3, before he made this prayer.

Verse 17, now therefore our God hear the prayer of your servant and his supplications and for the Lord's sake, cause your face to shine on your sanctuary. Wouldn't it have been great if Salome and John and James had come and said, Lord, looking at this nation, seeing what we've seen, looking at the Pharisees, looking at the Sadducees, looking at the chief priests and the elders and the scribes, when you come as king, I know from the Old Testament that there is an iron rod of judgment that is going to smash vessels like pieces of pottery. Oh Lord, we want to intercede on behalf of the nation.

When you come in your glory and sit on your throne, will you have mercy on us, on our nation, on our people? We are as guilty as the rest. We have been a part of of this culture and this nation. Will you have mercy on us? Contrast Daniel's prayer and the nation is ripe for judgment.

It is only going to be a few decades before God wipes out the nation of Israel and it is gone unto this day. The smoke of the destruction, as it were, is still ascending. The temple was never rebuilt.

They never regained their nationhood under God. There is now a country called Israel,

but look at the problems it's got. It's not dedicated to God.

They don't have the temple mount. They can't put God at the center. They do not have Emmanuel, God with us, and they're not going to see him until they say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And when that happens, what is the request? Well, Lord, I'd like to be right beside you. Or what is actually going to happen? Daniel understood it. So back to Matthew chapter 20, just think about that prayer of Daniel.

We studied it in great detail. The preparation, the time he took to be ready for that prayer, and God honoring his prayer by revealing to Daniel how God was going to work these things together for good in his plan and his purpose. And God revealed to Daniel the entire sweep of human history and the place that restoration and elevation and the peaceable kingdom would eventually have in the overall plan and purpose of God.

You do not know what you ask. Jesus said in verse 22, are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? Now that second part is soaked over. It has drifted over from Mark in Matthew.

It is just the cup. It's just the cup. Now, Jesus did say both things, but in this context, there is attraction when you have a similar passage and people quote it and then somebody writes it down.

They put it as a marginal note. The next scribe that comes along thinks it's a correction and puts it into the text. The earliest and best texts, it's just the cup.

And this cup figure that is being introduced is an Old Testament figure. It is the cup or bowl. You know, they typically had cups that look like small bowls.

And when Jesus took the cup after supper and passed it around to all of his disciples, it was probably a larger container than what we imagine. We like to think of a goblet on a stem and that wasn't the typical common man's table setting. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? Question mark.

Are you able to drink the cup? Now, what do James and John know about this cup? It is implied here, strongly implied, it is the connotation that qualification to be elevated to the place where the Lord Jesus is going to be in the kingdom requires partaking of this cup. The reason he is going to be seated on his throne is because he is going to drink this cup. They said to him, we are able.

How do you know you're able to lift a weight if you don't know how heavy it is? If there is a, if Jesus had said, are you able to lift the weight? And they said, yes, we're able. Well, how much is it? Five pounds or 500 pounds? This is the second point about prayer. The first point is, are we qualified and do we give God a basis for acknowledging and

answering our request? Secondly, do we ask questions? In an ideal world, and this is not a pick on James and John and Salome exercise, but in an ideal world, what would the response have been? Are you able to drink the cup? What does Jesus famously do when people ask him a question? He answers with a question, right? So if Jesus said, are you able to drink the cup? What would have been a great response? Lord, what is this cup? And Jesus would say, did you hear what I said a minute ago? We are going up to Jerusalem.

The son of man will be betrayed to the chief priest and to the scribes. They will condemn him to death, deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. Could they have said, Lord, that prediction you made a bit ago about what's going to happen in Jerusalem.

Is that the cup? What are we signing up for? When we say we are able to drink the cup, Peter is going to make this mistake famously. Lord, I will go with you even unto the death. And Jesus says, the rooster is going to grow.

Remember? And Peter's anticipation of what he is able to do and what he is actually able to do are greatly distant from one another. Our perusal of what influences our thinking and what we decide. One of those factors that we've been looking at on Thursday night is we project into the future far more optimistically than we should.

We believe things won't take as long as they're going to take. We believe they won't cost as much as they're going to cost. We believe we're going to be able to get more done than we can actually do.

We believe that we can endure more than we actually can. It is a common human failing. How do we correct that? How do we compensate for that? Ask questions.

Now, the disciples occasionally do this to their credit. We're going to see in an upcoming chapter, flip forward a couple of pages to Matthew chapter 24, verse 3. As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? Good job, disciples. Because they asked that question, we get Matthew 24 and 25.

The disciples, we often are quick to point out and sympathize with their failures, but sometimes they do the right thing and they ask a really good question. Jesus has been talking up in verse 37 through 39 of the previous chapter. Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who sent to her, how often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

Behold, your house is left to you desolate. I say to you, you shall see me no more until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. He looks at the temple, says there's not going to be one stone upon another.

And the disciples hear that and they ask a really good question. When will these things be? They don't say, are you sure these things will be or surely these things will not be. This temple, it can't possibly, they don't doubt.

They say, when will these things be? What will be the sign of your coming in the end of the age? Really good question. Like Salome and James and John, they take the Lord at his word. There's going to be destruction and there's going to be the inception of a regeneration.

What will be the sign of your coming? If these things are going to precede it, how will we know that you're coming to make all things new? Good question. And Jesus honors it with a detailed, beautiful prophetic answer in Matthew 24 and 25. Would God that it had happened here in chapter 20, are you able to drink the cup that I'm about to drink, be baptized with the baptism that I'm baptized with? It comes from Mark.

They did ask that question, but Matthew concentrates on the cup. What is the cup? Well, Jesus has just given a summary of the outward appearance of it. Now he's going to go a step further.

You will indeed drink my cup. You can scratch out, be baptized with the baptism that comes from Mark, but to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but for whom it is prepared by my father, for whom it is prepared. This is really interesting.

Think about this. It isn't already prepared and somebody is just going to walk up and sit down in that chair. Those places of of accompaniment, of fellowship with the Lord Jesus, of function, functionaries sat at the right hand and at the left.

These were the ones Joseph in Egypt no doubt sat at Pharaoh's right hand or at his left. The highest in the land who fulfilled the will of the high king himself were closest to him. His confidants, those who entered into his councils and helped prepare the plans and policies and so on, were intimates of the prerogatives of that ruler.

That is not a prepared place that somebody is going to be fitted to occupy. Look at what Jesus says. Those places are being prepared for people by my father.

It is as though God is looking at that person and saying, I am going because of your faithfulness. He that is faithful in that which is least, faithful also in that which is much. You have been faithful in a few things.

I will make you ruler over many things. I gave you five talents and you made five more. God looks at the person and says, I am going to prepare a place for you.

Just like Jesus says in John 14, 3, I go to prepare a place for you. He doesn't say, I am here to prepare you for a place. God concentrates not on the structure, not on the parameters.

How big is the chair? It is like Alexander the Great famously said when he was on his deathbed. Supposedly his generals came and he has the whole Greek empire there. Ptolemy and Seleucus and these other guys all come up and say, whose is the kingdom? When you pass away, which of us are you going to hand it to? Alexander said, at least according to legend, it is his who can give it to you.

Take it. Who can take it? Who can hold it? That's who's going to keep it. And of course, nobody could.

They weren't as great as Alexander. It ends up getting split four ways. But this place of honor and fellowship and function is going to be prepared for those that God looks at.

It is for those for whom it is prepared by my Father. The person is in view and the place is prepared, not the other way around. Wouldn't you love to be someone for whom God is preparing? You think about the Lord Jesus in John 14, 3, I go to prepare a place for you.

He's looking at us. What kind of place is it going to be? Well, what kind of person am I? To what extent will it reflect God's glory and God's plan and God's purpose and function and service in God's future kingdoms? Well, to what extent am I that kind of person now that those things are my priority? Wouldn't you love to have a hotline to the throne room in the coming kingdom? Well, are you exercising communication with God now? Are you someone with whom God communes now so that he wants to put that red phone in your house in the future? Are you someone who appreciates the small attention to detail graces of God now and brings them before the throne and express thanksgiving and gratitude for them? Those small details of grace and expressions of love will be in that place that is prepared. The place to which we go is being fitted for us individually.

God is looking at us. Look at what Jesus says. These places high or low are being prepared by my father for those, for them, for people.

He's not saying, well, I've got this wonderful place. I need to train you and equip you and fit you so that you can fit into this slot. God looks at us and a place is prepared accordingly.

It's personal. You know, the old time saying Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship. Well, that's the truth of it.

God looks at us individually and makes preparation both now and in the ages to come for us. His plan for us now is individual and personal and tailored from knowing us from before the foundation of the world. There's no accident that we were born where we were born into the family, into the circumstance with the genetic makeup, with the strengths and weaknesses, with the interactions and all of the causes, conditions, and successions and relations that make up life.

God looked at us individually and carefully with forethought and calculation, placed us

where we are. It is no accident that we know who we know. It's no accident that we're related to who we're related to.

It's no accident that we have physical strengths and physical weaknesses. God knew it all ahead of time and he placed us. He prepared the place for us.

None of us were born in Nigeria to my knowledge. None of us were born in a different century or in a different era or in a different space and time. We were placed by God individually.

You think about what Mordecai said to his niece Esther, you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. You have been placed here. God looked at you and said, I can use this woman right here because she's got courage and she's got faith.

So no accident. Even the Lord Jesus can't assign this because this is in the counsels of the Father. The Lord Jesus can't say, well, you know, Father, I've got this really close disciple.

John's going to be leaning on my breast in the upper room. Peter, you know, for all his faults, he loves me. He's going to dive in the water and swim to me when he sees me after the resurrection.

Jesus said, it's not mine to give in the same way that the timing of his return is not his to choose. No one knows that time and no one knows for whom these places are going to be assigned. God has prepared them for specific people in his counsel, in his plan and in his purpose.

And even Jesus at this late date is trying to orient his disciples to the plan and the purpose and the priority and the counsels of the Father. If you want to talk about the sovereignty of God, this is it. God will sovereignly prepare places for those whom he wills.

When the 10 heard it, verse 24, this is our final point this morning. When the 10 heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. Keep in mind, did Jesus not just say in chapter 19, verse 28, you who have followed me will sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

You're all getting thrones. I wonder, you know, it seems a bit off when Jesus tells them this. You know, the question was off and the answer seems a little bit off.

Lord, what do we get? Jesus says you get 12 thrones. But part of the reason for that is the setup for this. Because what comes in between the parable of the landowner? And remember, the landowner intentionally said, bring the guys that only worked one hour first.

And so when they had received it, then the people that worked all day finally got their pay. And when they get their pay in verse 12 of chapter 20, these last men have worked only one hour and you've made them equal to us who have borne the burden and heat of the day. They're indignant.

How can you assign this denarius to somebody that only worked one hour when I worked 12? That's not fair. What does the landowner say? Friend, I'm doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way.

I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good? Looking over at the other person, we sometimes think, well, I or someone close to me have been given a very hard road. God seems to have, there's just one burden after another.

And this person seems to be being wafted to glory on flowery beds of ease. They've only worked the one hour and I've worked 12 or I've worked nine or I've worked six. It is up to God to give us our individual assignment.

Jesus emphasizes that in his answer to Salome and James and John, it is the father's prerogative to make assignments. He looks at the person, you know, a person of very limited physical gifts. If they can get on a weight bench and press 50 pounds, 10 times, they have done their absolute utmost.

Just got that repetition. Can't do another one. 50 pounds, 10 times, they have maxed out everything that will power and their body.

You know, the spirit may be willing, but the flesh can only do so much. Somebody with great physical prowess and, you know, big bones and great fitness might sit down with 250 pounds and bench at 10 times without even breathing hard, or it might exhaust them right to their limit. Just barely got that 10th repetition with 250 pounds.

When you hang around a weight room, everybody finds what makes me just barely get that last repetition. I want to be at the point of exhaustion at my 10th rep, whatever that weight is. It's different for different people, depending on conditioning, depending on gifts, depending on build, depending on any number of things.

To say, well, you benched 250 pounds, this only 50, so you should be first and you should be last. There's a different criteria, isn't there? Did you do as much as you could possibly do with your particular situation? Some of these that didn't come till the 11th hour, they had waited all day for work and were never given the opportunity. Lord, no man hired us.

We've been standing here all day. We're ready to work. We're willing to work.

We weren't able to work. In this case, it's just a matter of nobody asking. It could have

been any number of things, but the point of the parable is God looks at us individually.

We have individual assignments and based on how well we fulfill our individual assignment, that is going to be the basis upon which God the Father is going to prepare a place for us. And doing lateral comparisons, horizontal comparisons is dangerous because we look on the outward appearance, the Lord looks on the heart. We don't know the struggles that people have had.

We don't know the history in many cases. We don't know the burden that has been borne. We don't know how much of the heat of the day someone has undergone.

What we do know is the character of God. Remember Daniel's prayer? He appeals to God's character, his faithfulness, his grace, his mercy, his forgiveness, his promises, his covenants. It's based on God.

How quickly the disciples have forgotten this. They become indignant because Jesus is having a private conversation with James and John and he said, you're going to drink the cup. They don't know what the cup is.

They haven't heard it. Even James and John don't know what the cup is. They're just indignant.

Jesus says, and we'll look at this in detail next time, you know the rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them and those who are great exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. It shall not be so among you.

Next time we're going to look at what should be so among us. And this issue of choice is going to recur. If you study it and reflect on it between now and next Sunday, you'll see it as I've seen it.

If I had more time, I'd just do it right now. But we're out of time for this morning. But what is our heart? God knows our heart.

The word of God exposes the thoughts and intents of our heart. What is the purpose of our prayer? Do we pray for the resolution of problems? Because well, that would make my life easier. Or do we look at it in terms of what accomplishes the goals and purposes of God's plan? What would reflect God's glory? What would contribute to God's future kingdom? What would interest people in him? What would shine the light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation? Jesus said, let your light so shine before men that they see your good works and do what? Say, oh Lord, he's definitely going to be sitting at your right hand or your left hand.

See your good works and glorify your father. What will make the issue of God and his grace and his salvation? What will make an issue of the Lord Jesus Christ? What's the purpose of our prayer? Be praying. Even when we're praying for others, it would certainly

take a weight off my mind if I didn't have to worry about X. I didn't have to worry about Y. I didn't have to worry about Z. Instead of thinking a little bit deeper, like playing chess, look a few moves ahead.

What could God be doing in this situation? Could he be bringing someone to a point of recognition of need? Could he be showing what happens when we come to the end of human resources and divine power, divine wisdom, divine strength? The issue of Jesus Christ ought to emerge and be manifest. Believers are involved. Where is God? Believers are involved.

Where's the word of God? Where's the glory of God? Where's preparation for the future of service and function and reflection of glory in the coming kingdoms? How does that play into the situation? Why am I praying what I'm praying? Is it for me? Or as it says in Colossians 3, 23 and 24, whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, not unto men, knowing that you will receive a reward on that basis. Reward is on the basis of doing what we do as unto the Lord, praying what we pray as unto the Lord, not for ourselves. Well, let's close here in a word of prayer.

We've got a fascinating study coming up next time. Don't miss it. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for how powerfully it exposes our need and not only diagnoses us, but treats us and gives us the grace and the provision to be healed, to be restored, to be renewed, to be enabled and empowered to bear fruit that is in keeping with righteousness that comes from faith. We pray that as we reflect on it, your Holy Spirit will find us susceptible and ready for improvement, for growing in grace and knowledge of our Savior, who has set such a wonderful example for us. We ask it in Jesus name.

Amen.