

Matthew 21-10-10a

Greetings, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're celebrating on this 10th day of October 2021, another gift from the Lord in terms of opportunity to spend time together in fellowship and in looking at the Word of God together. We are in Matthew chapter 20 and looking at this critical time, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem.

He is going to perform his last public miracle in the account that we look at this morning. But we're introduced to it by the question that James and John and their mother Salome bring to the Lord Jesus. And it foreshadows the major event that takes place in our next chapter, which is commonly called the triumphal entry.

And the mistaken attitude, the credit for partial understanding and demerit for missing the major point that we find in the James and John request is going to be reflected in a much larger way in the upcoming parade. So we have this harbinger, we have this preparation, and of course, looking at the miniature and then looking at the large event, we then hopefully will turn our gaze on ourselves and try to avoid making this mistake. 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 for this time of exchange of blessing through the spiritual gifts that you've given to each one of us. We treasure the time that we can spend together, the ministry of your Holy Spirit, both through those gifts and through impressing your Word on our hearts. We pray that as we look at this portion of it together and see the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, that we will be drawn closer to Him.

And because of that, drawn closer to each other and to that place of service and function that reflects your glory, as well as that of our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen. Let's reread our account right quick in 20, 20 of Matthew.

The mother of Zebedee's sons came to him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from him. We know a little bit more about the mother of Zebedee's sons than might at first be apparent by comparing scripture with scripture. The information we have in the gospel of Mark chapter 15, verse 40, listing the women who are at the foot of the cross are Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the less and of Joseph and Salome.

So we get her name from Mark 15, 40. In the similar listing in Matthew 27, 56, these ladies are listed as Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of Zebedee's sons. So in one place, she's called Salome, in the other, the mother of Zebedee's sons.

When we put that together with John 19, 25, this is one of the fun things you can do in is

triangulate information from the various sources and find things out that are not necessarily a proof-textable concept. But in John 19, 25, there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. So from three different gospels, we get three different pieces of information that tell us that Salome was the mother of James and John and was Mary's sister.

It seems quite probable. The sons of Zebedee, you notice that in our context, which we read last time and studied in some depth, they are not named here. The mother of Zebedee's sons came to him with her sons.

And this is sort of a tactful, gracious thing to not call them out by name for this, which you might say is a misstep or a misunderstanding, or perhaps a bit of exposed ambition that doesn't reflect well on them. So their names are omitted. But we know the sons of Zebedee from John 4, 21, when Jesus is collecting the disciples for the formal ministry phase.

It's not the first time he's met them, but when he's walking beside the sea, Matthew 4, 21, we saw this. He saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee and John, his brother. They are always mentioned in that order, which tells us that James was the older brother and John the younger.

And which is poignant when you think about the death of the 12 disciples, excluding Judas. But of the 11 faithful disciples, James is going to die first and John is going to die last. So you have it again in Matthew 10, verse two, the names of the 12 apostles are first Simon, who is called Peter, Andrew, his brother, James, the son of Zebedee and John, his brother.

So they are a part of that special group that is uniquely visible at particular times, such as the raising of the girl in the upper room, the Talitha Kumi resurrection. We saw in chapter 17, verse one, that they are taken to the top of the Mount of Transfiguration in the garden of Gethsemane. We're going to see that Jesus will take Peter, James and John with him in Matthew 26, verse 37.

We have already seen that Peter was addressed in a special way back in chapter 16. You are Peter on this rock. I will build my church.

Whether this had any bearing on the request of James and John that if they mistakenly thought that Peter was going to have a place of priority as the Catholics do, they might have said, well, if Peter's going to be the rock on which you build, we'd like to be at your right hand and at your left. As for those positions, I ran across a fascinating thing in Josephus antiquities. He's a near contemporary of the apostle Paul and that first century in which the life of Jesus takes place and later the first generation of the church.

He wrote down the history of the Jews and he bases it a lot on the narratives of the Old

Testament, but he adds oral history, traditional understandings to it. When he's writing, you remember back in first Samuel, long about chapter 19, I think it is where Saul is beginning to be very jealous of David. The women are singing, Saul has slain his thousands and David, his 10 thousands.

And once again, you have this same ambitious desire for elevation, for glory, for adulation and approval by the masses. Saul begins to get very jealous and David begins to come under attack. And you remember that the whole thing with the bow shot, David's going to be in the field, Jonathan, they go through this big, big rigmarole.

And David does not show up at the feast that is being held in the capital. So Josephus in Antiquities, and this is 6.11.9. If you want to look it up, you can, the Antiquities of the Jews and many other things like this are online. And if you have the reference, so to speak.

So this is Antiquities 6.11.9 and paragraph 235 is the specific thing I'm going to read. But he has talked about this exchange between Jonathan and David and the arrow flying and sending the servant and it's beyond you. But then they drop all of that pretense and just get together and hug and talk.

And why did they bother? We went through that in 1 Samuel, it was quite an interesting study. But David, wherein he had received assurances from Jonathan, went his way to the place appointed. Now we come to our paragraph 235 in section 6.11.9 of Josephus.

On the next day, which was the new moon, the King, when he had purified himself, this King Saul, as the custom was came to supper. And when there sat by him, his son, Jonathan on his right hand and Abner, the captain of his host on the left hand. And he saw that David's seat was empty, but said nothing.

The point here is from ancient times, the seat at the right hand and at the left were the most important, most honorable, highest seats. And this is in the minds of the people. Josephus is bringing this up out of common knowledge.

This is like when we talk about the right hand of fellowship, that sounds obscure, but everybody knows what that is. Or we're going to lay hands on these missionaries before we send them back after their furlough to the mission field. When you say the laying on of hands or the right hand of fellowship, we know what these symbolic gestures connote and what they mean.

Well, everybody understood what the right hand and what the left of the King meant. And it was in the common parlance. So this is going to be the request.

And back to Matthew chapter 20, she wants to ask something of him. And you get the idea. We've seen this type of request before where, you know, Lord grant what I'm about to ask you.

You want an affirmation. You want some signal that your request is going to be met with favor and with approval before you ever even make it. You know, do me a favor is our informal way of saying this.

Would you do me a favor? And you want somebody to say, yes, I'll do. Then you tell them what the favor is. You don't tell them this hard task and say, and then say, would you do this for me? If you're, if you're, you know, really interested in getting it done.

So we want to ask something from you. And Jesus says, what do you wish not for the last time in this chapter? Is he going to ask that question? 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. When you go to the parallel in Mark chapter 10, these words come directly from James and John.

And instead of kingdom, it says your glory in your glory. So the glorious kingdom, the emphasis here in the kingdom, isn't we want to be sure and be there to help you and to serve and to put a shoulder under the load, because this is going to be a very hard job. It's about the glory.

And this is the real misstep. It's possible to request to be nearby. Let me help you.

Let me stand by your side. The Holy spirit is the one who comes alongside. That's his name.

Para Kaleo, the one called alongside paramedic is the medic who is alongside. If you've got an emergency of a physical nature, a paramedic is a good thing. Somebody being by your side, you know, the married people are pictured as walking together through life side by side, holding hands, walking into the sunset and so on.

Being at the side can be a good thing. Why do you want to be at the side? Is this the presidential banquet table? I've, I've seen a picture of Dr. Criswell attending some uh, quasi political function where he was going to give the invocation prayer, but president Reagan is there and Mrs. Reagan is there and several other recognizable, notable faces. Um, and, uh, there's the pastor, you know, in the midst and he's surrounded.

So you think, well, are these politicians being glorified by the presence of this famous pastor or is the pastor being given some political leverage by his schmoozing with the, you know, it's there, there's some rubbing off that takes place when these people are pictured and seated together. And, uh, you're asked to give the prayer, not because you're an opponent, but because you're an ally and an advocate and somebody who's going to speak kindly of their, your efforts. So this is the idea of Jesus answers in verse 22 and says, you do not know what you ask.

Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? Similarly to this notion of the right hand and of the left, this drinking the cup carries freight. Uh, it's not a novel idea.

They're not saying drink a cup.

I don't remember there being a table settings at the right hand and at the left. This is not a banquet table. It's a throne.

And what, you know, to sit next to the throne, I got to be able to drink it. Am I going to be the wine taster? I'm going to sip your stuff to see if it's poison before they give it to you. What is this about? What is the cup? Well, it was not mysterious at all.

Um, we're of course going to see this again in the garden and these same two men are going to hear Jesus pray to his father in 2639 of this same book. Oh my father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me when he tells them they do not know what they ask. Jesus is not excited about drinking this cup.

These same two individuals are going to hear Jesus ask a question about, is this cup so necessary that I must drink it? Uh, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. And that response, which is future in our gospel, is really the key to understanding how it is.

They don't know what they are asking. If they knew what was in this cup, they would not be so quick to say we are able to drink it, which is what they're about to say. We are able in the same verse.

Uh, remember in this gospel, the concept of baptism is not in view and it's been imported from the parallel, uh, account. They said we are able. Jesus seems a bit doubtful about drinking this cup, but they're, they're confident.

Well, whatever the cup is, we'll drink it. We're fishermen. We haul nets.

We rig boats where hail and Hardy were young and vigorous, whatever this is, we can do it. Much as Peter, the third member of this threefold group is going to say, Lord, all of these may deny you. I will never deny you.

And Jesus says, you won't just do it once or twice. You'll do it three times before the rooster finishes crowing. You want to know what that sounded like.

You just come up here and visit a little bit and you'll hear rooster growing all day long. Um, they said we are able, what is this cup? The cup, which I am about to drink this cup. Uh, I mentioned, uh, 2639.

Um, it's also mentioned in the arrest scene after the garden, when Judas and the soldiers come to arrest Jesus and Peter draws his sword in John chapter 18, verse 11, Jesus says to Peter, put your sword in the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup, which my father has given me? So Jesus knows that this cup is the will of the father, that it comes from the father, even though the contents of the cup are made up of treatment that Jesus, uh, has

described already in earlier in the chapter, we are going up to Jerusalem. The son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes.

They will condemn him to death. They will deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and discourage and to crucify versus 18 and 19. That's the cup.

If Jesus understands that this is collusion, corruption, confederation, and betrayal by one of his own disciples with the Jews and the Romans, it would be easy to characterize this cup as the evil conniving and plotting of men. This scheming to bring about his death and the success of it. Human beings are going to be the agency, corrupt, evil, bribed, power, hungry, jealous, religious leaders in cahoots with the Romans who just want troublesome things to go away.

That's what's in the cup. But Jesus looks at it as something from the father. It's the father's cup.

It's the father's will. It's up to the father, whether he can and will drink this cup. It's the same when this cup is shared specifically with James and John.

Now we know that the other 10 disciples find out about this conversation. Maybe one or two of them overhear it and go tell the rest, but make no mistake when Jesus says in the next verse, you will indeed drink my cup. He is not talking to the 12.

He is talking to the two, you two, you, James, you, John. And I've mentioned this many times, but just remember anytime you see James in your new Testament, what's the real name? What's the name in Hebrew? Yakov. I don't know if it was because there was a King James or what, but it's Jacob and John.

James is always Jacob. So you will indeed drink my cup. He is talking specifically to the two who said they are able to drink it.

Now, Peter is going to get a different answer, isn't he? Lord, I will never leave you. Jesus doesn't say you truly will never leave me. You're going to end up being crucified upside down, et cetera.

He doesn't say that. He says, no, you're going to fail in your commitment. Interestingly, when James and John say they are able to drink the cup, Jesus says, you're going to drink it.

Very fascinating. Now, this is generally thought to be fulfilled later when you go to Acts and find out that Herod executes James. He's the first of the disciples after Judas, who is a suicide to be slain, slain for the name and cause of Christ.

James is first. John, of course, is going to survive all the way to Patmos and be given the revelation, the last book of our New Testament before he checks out. So they both die in

faithfulness.

But almost nothing is said about James except that he's arrested and slain. It doesn't say he gave a great speech. He's not Stephen with a whole chapter.

Chapter seven of Acts is Stephen's whole diatribe before he is martyred. It's a half a verse. James is put to the sword.

That's all you hear. So what is this cup? Well, you all know my answer to that question, and we'll look at it here soon. But the metaphor of the cup was also well known just as the symbolism of the right hand and left hand.

You can go back to Psalm 11, verse six, where David says, upon the wicked, he, God will rain coals, fire and brimstone and a burning wind are the portion of their cup. So this is physical destruction, coals, fire and brimstone. This harks back to the five cities of the plain, prominently Sodom and Gomorrah, destroyed with fire and brimstone.

This seems to be volcanic action and ash and flaming stuff raining down from the sky. And God rains these coals, fire and brimstone and a burning wind, this scorching, searing atmospheric phenomenon on the wicked. And this is the portion of their cup.

This is what is allocated, poured into the cup that they are made to drink. So this cup is judgment. It's a cup of judgment.

You go to Psalm 75, verse eight, in the hand of the Lord, there is a cup and the wine is red. It is fully mixed and he pours it out. Surely it's dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down.

So clearly in scripture, these were songs that were sung. People knew the words, they knew the lyrics. The cup is identified with God himself.

It's his cup. He fills it. He hands it to those who are going to drink it and they drink it down to the dregs from the brim to the dregs as Frank Sinatra sang.

And it was a very good year. Isaiah 51, verse 17, awake, awake, stand up. Oh, Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the Lord, the cup of his fury, you have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling and drained it out.

This is God's own people drinking this cup. You continue in that same chapter to verse 22. This is Isaiah 51, 17 and 22.

Thus says your Lord, the Lord and your God who pleads the cause of his people. See, I have taken out of your hand, the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup of my fury. You shall no longer drink it.

I gave it to you. You drank of it. Now I'm taking it away.

You think of Job saying, the Lord gives, the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord. He was talking about blessings. Isaiah is talking about judgments.

It is the Lord who decides who will be blessed, who will be elevated, who will be glorified. It is the Lord who decides who will drink the cup of judgment. Now, what's interesting is when you come to the Lord Jesus, he is not deserving of judgment.

He is drinking the cup of God's judgment on behalf of others. This is stated for the first time here in Matthew's gospel. As you come down to verse 28 in our chapter, the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

In all of the predictions of his arrest, trial, scourging, mocking, crucifixion, his death at the hands of sinners in Jerusalem, this is the first time Jesus has given the purpose. He will give his life a ransom. So he is drinking this cup, not on his own responsibility or for his own sin, of which, of course, he has none.

This is a unique cup. It is unlike the Old Testament cups of judgment that the wicked would drink, that the enemies of Israel would drink, that Israel and Jerusalem itself would drink at God's behest. The cup that Jesus is going to drink, that he tells James and John about, the cup I am about to drink, is unique in this regard.

It is substitutionary. It is suffered. The contents of suffering and judgment are on behalf of others.

And this is critical to understanding the fulfillment of Jesus' statement in verse 23, you will indeed drink my cup. If you turn to the Revelation, this, of course, is the pouring out of God's judgments on the entire earth. But remember, a big part of this judgment is allowing the Antichrist to have his sway and to have his way.

And there is a great amount of suffering. Remember the horsemen that ride forth in Revelation chapter 6? There is pestilence, there is death, there is famine. So by the time you get to Revelation chapter 11, John is given a reed like a measuring rod.

And the angel tells him, rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. We've seen this measuring rod idea in Zechariah, where there's a young man going out to measure the city, and the word comes, stop him. That's not going to be the way the city is allocated.

But here, this is the measure of the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. John is given this standard of measurement. Leave out the court outside the temple and do not measure it.

It has been given to the Gentiles. They will tread the holy city underfoot for 42 months. And I will give power to my two witnesses.

They will prophesy 1,260 days. 1,260 days. How long is that? Three and a half years, 42 months, 1,260 days.

These are all synonymous. How long was Jesus' public ministry of preaching and teaching and offering the kingdom to Israel? Three and a half years. He was about 30.

He's going to die at 33. And if you count the Passovers, there are four total. Three and a half years of public ministry on the part of the Lord Jesus.

These two witnesses are given power to prophesy that same length of time to the same people. I will give power to my two witnesses. They will prophesy 1,260 days clothed in sackcloth.

Sackcloth is the clothing of humility. It's not glorious. It's not purple.

It's not royal. It's humble. People put on sackcloth when they are in mourning, when they are grieving, when they are coming before God in sackcloth and ashes, in confession, in repentance.

It is a sign of and a symbol of humility. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth, olive trees and lampstands. We've seen this in Zechariah.

What is the significance of the olive trees and the lampstands? They stand before the God of the earth. So if they stand before him, do you think they're lined up in front of him single file? Or do you think there's one on the right and one on the left? There are trees and lampstands in front of God and to each side before the God of the earth. If anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies.

If anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. Do you remember that there is another request from Jesus to call down fire from heaven? Do you remember that? I didn't write down the reference for it, but if you look back in Luke 9.54, people have come to Samaria and the people there refuse to welcome him because he's heading for the Lord Jesus. When the disciples James and John saw this, this is Luke 9.54. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them? The only two guys who think they've got the juice to call down fire from heaven and consume the Samaritans are these two men, James and John can write it in the margin there in revelation.

Luke 9.54, if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. If anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy.

This harks all the way back. What is the introduction of Elijah in first Kings chapter 17? Elijah prays and the heavens are shut up and they don't rain again until he makes a

request. They have power over waters to turn them to blood.

Who does that remind you of? Go all the way back to the rod in Moses' hand, striking the Nile and to strike the earth with all plagues. Once again, Moses, this comprehends and mirrors in a chastically satisfying way, the beginning of the nation of Israel and their history. And here at its end, revelation 11.7, when they finished their testimony, they first testify, they first prophesy, they first demonstrate their veracity, their divine commission, the power of God that backs their message and miracles in the Bible back a message.

They're not done for their own sake. They're not just done to impress, to amaze, to confound. They support a message.

These are God's people. This is God's man. This is God's will.

So when they finished their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them and kill them. How does this happen? No human agency can stand against them. The fire of God comes out and consumes and kills anybody who opposes them.

But the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit, who's that? This is, you remember, you've got your unholy Trinity, you've got Satan, the beast and the false prophet. And when Jesus says, I and my father are one, the antichrist is going to say, I and my father, lowercase F are one. This is the satanically enabled and empowered beast.

He is going to be able to slay these witnesses. Now, how is this possible? Whose witnesses are these? To whom do they belong? Well, this is no more difficult than asking the question, how can the son of God be delivered into the hands of men and slain? How can God's mortal witnesses who have the power of God behind them and can control the weather and slay their enemies? What does Jesus say when Peter draws the sword, put your sword away. It's time for me to drink this cup.

Do you not know that I could ask of my father and he would send 10 legions of angels. It isn't that I don't have the power to resist. It is that I am going to voluntarily drink the cup and it is going to appear to be a victory for the bad guys, for Satan.

Satan has been attempting to thwart Jesus from his baptism forward, 40 days in the wilderness stones into bread, pinnacle of the temple kingdoms of the world. And it appears as though, by the way, who is it that inspires the betrayal who enters into Judas's heart? It's Satan who is going to inspire this beast and enable him to overcome these two witnesses, the very same Satan beast that comes out of the bottomless pit, makes war against them. He doesn't just trick them and instantly blow them up.

He doesn't just sneak up behind them and stab them. This is a war. This is a process of wearing down rejection, propaganda, disinformation and so on.

He makes war. War is a process. It's not an episode, right? He's got to not only get these guys out of action, but he's got to discredit them.

This is what happens in war. This is what the propaganda machine is all about. He makes war against them, overcomes them and kills them.

God allows these two witnesses to drink this cup just as he allowed his own son, just as he asked his own son. It's the will of the father that Jesus drink the cup. It is the will of the father that these witnesses be slain.

Why? What is clearer evidence of the guilt of mankind in general and the guilt of Israel in particular in slaying their Messiah? If God stopped it short, if God provided some glorious deliverance and exit, people could always say, we wouldn't really have done it. That was just a show of force. That was just a threat.

That was just assault. It wasn't murder. We were putting on a show.

There would be disavowal of guilt. When God allows this thing to go all the way to its fruition, that the law could be broken by those who claim to defend the law, to take innocent life, it's on the tables that Moses brought down from Sinai and all of the men who have committed their lives and claimed that they are the defenders of that law. The teachers of that law break it just as clearly as Moses smashing the tablets in actually killing the Lord of glory.

Same thing here, the ultimate rejection. This idea of war for these two witnesses is important because others are recruited and willingly serve and bring about the death of these witnesses. Satan leads it, but everyone is included just as Satan enters into Judas's heart, but everybody else that colludes and cooperates and brings about this death at the hands of the Romans, they're in on it.

So their dead bodies will be in the street of the great city, which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified, Sodom and Egypt. What happened to Sodom? Cup of God's wrath was poured out on the five cities of the plain. What happened to Egypt? The cup of God's wrath was poured out on those who were holding God's people in slavery.

Then those from the people's tribes, tongues and nations will see their dead bodies three and a half days and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. This is spectacle and notice all of the people are in agreement on this. It's a celebration time.

Those who dwell on the earth rejoice over them, make merry, send gifts to one another. It's Christmas. They're sending gifts to one another because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. These two men, why is

Jesus crucified? Very same reason. The very same guilt that is demonstrated in sending Jesus to the cross is demonstrated in this generation by sending these witnesses to death and refusing to even have their bodies buried.

So who do you think these two witnesses are? I'll tell you who I think they are. I think they are coming back. Remember there's going to be another conversation at the end of the gospel of John when Jesus is walking after his resurrection and he asks Peter, do you love me? Feed my sheep, feed my lambs, feed my sheep.

And then Peter says, well, what about him? And he points back to John. Still this idea of what is your role in the service of the master? What about him? And Jesus said famously, what is it to you if he sticks around until I come? And the idea that John is going to have a role immediately before the coming of the Lord and that James, who spent all of those years in training with the Lord Jesus, who was in the upper room, who was on the Mount of Transfiguration, who was with the Lord Jesus in the garden, and then has his career cut short. He doesn't get to do anything.

He's killed in the earliest days of the church. But when Jesus says, you'll drink my cup, I believe there's virtually no shadow of doubt in my mind that the sons of thunder will be coming back and will be these two witnesses. And there's a lot more evidence in the book of Revelation when the revelation of this comes to John and he weeps.

I think it's because he sees himself and his dead brother, the brother he hasn't seen in decades coming back and sees the faces of these two witnesses and realizes that he is indeed going to drink the cup just as the Lord foretold. Anyway, it's a wonderful thought in my mind. We need to pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to pick up and see how this lays the foundation for what's coming up in the next chapter. But in between, we've got two blind men, not one, but two. Why are there two? For the same reason, we've got two pericopes about misunderstanding the glorious king and his glorious kingdom.

We'll see that when we come back.