

to ask themselves.

- Jesus' heart must have sunk at her question. *"You don't know what you are asking,"* (Matthew 20:22).
- The worlds of self and self sacrifice collide and Salome is caught in the middle. *"Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"* (Matthew 20:22) Jesus asks James and John.
- James and John are focussed on ego, power, status and position whereas Jesus knows that the cup that he will have to drink will involve self sacrifice, crucifixion and death
- What about us, are we fair weather Christians? Do we anticipate and expect our Christian lives to involve sacrifice, hardship, persecution and strife? Will we keep going during the hard times as well as the good? Salome and the Disciples are in for a big shock!

2.6 To serve not be served

- The disciples, like the rest of world are more concerned with self, ego, power, status and position: *"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.* (Matthew 20:25).
- But Jesus turns the world's values up side down. In His new spiritual Kingdom *'whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave'* (Matthew 20:27-8). In other words the disciples could learn a thing or two from Salome!
- What would happen if everyone in this church was like Salome, having a passion to serve others and not to be consumed by self, ego, power, status and position?

3. Questions to consider at home

- 3.1 Why was Jesus *'going up to Jerusalem?'* (Matthew 20:18)
- 3.2 What do we learn from Salome that we can apply in our lives?
- 3.3 Why did Jesus say to James and John *'You do not know what you are asking?'*
- 3.4 How do we serve others? What does true servant ministry look like?
- 3.5 How would you describe your church, is it a place filled with ego, power, status and position or is it a place filled with servants who are seeking to put others before self?

Matthew Street 17th March 2024



The St J's Group

Matthew 20:20-28 - Self or Self Sacrifice?

Passage, Talk Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these talk notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during this week to consider the questions below.

1. Talk Passage – Matthew 20:20-28

20 *Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him.*

21 *'What is it you want?' he asked.*

She said, 'Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.'

22 *'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said to them. 'Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?'*

'We can,' they answered.

23 *Jesus said to them, 'You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.'*

24 *When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.*

25 *Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'*



2. Talk Notes

2.1 Introduction

- At the heart of this passage are two worlds. One world which is concerned with self, ego, power, status, and position and the other which is concerned with self sacrifice or serving others, building them up, seeing the best in them and ultimately being willing to sacrifice self in order to promote others.
- Everyday each one of us is challenged as to which of these two worlds we are going to inhabit. As a church family we are equally challenged, are we going to inhabit the world of self or the world of self sacrifice that seeks to serve others?
- As Jesus and his disciples head towards Jerusalem for the last time these two worlds collide in a spectacular way. The disciples are caught up in the world of self whereas Jesus continues to be focused on how he can serve others. It is poor Salome *'the mother of Zebedee's sons'* (Matthew 20:20) who gets caught in the crossfire.

2.2 The disciples and the world of self

- As the disciples head towards Jerusalem their minds are focussed on the world of self rather than serving others. They firmly believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah from the Old Testament and their thoughts have turned to what positions they may have in Jesus' new earthly kingdom.
- James and John who are cousins of Jesus, their mother Salome and Mary were sisters, have clearly got carried away in the world of self. Maybe because they were family, they thought that they would have the prime positions in Jesus' new government: *"Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."* (Matthew 20:21)
- It is also clear that the other ten disciples are jockeying for position as well: *'When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.'* (Matthew 20:24) no doubt concerned that James and John might get better positions than them.
- How often are we as individuals or as a church family, like the disciples, more concerned about ourselves? How much time do we spend in the world of self, absorbed by our own egos, worrying about our position and status versus others?

2.3 Jesus and the world of self sacrifice

- The disciples are absorbed by the world of self whereas Jesus is absorbed by the world of self sacrifice. Just outside our passage Jesus tells his twelve disciples, for the third time, that he is *'going up to Jerusalem'* (Matthew 20:18). Jesus tells them that he *'will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!'* (Matthew 20:18-9).
- Jesus knows that he is going to Jerusalem to inaugurate a new spiritual, not earthly kingdom, and that this kingdom will only come into being with his self sacrifice: *'the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many'* (Matthew 20:28)
- Jesus knows that the only way his 12 disciples and the rest of mankind can enter in the Kingdom of God is if he, Jesus, is willing *'to give his life as a ransom for many'* (Matthew 20:28)

- Jesus is therefore prepared to lay down his life in order that his 12 disciples and the rest of mankind can access spiritual life.
- What are we willing to sacrifice in order that others may access that same spiritual kingdom? Are we willing to sacrifice our time, our possessions, our preferences, our traditions or even our money so that others may come into God's Kingdom?
- Too often the focus in church circles can be about what we want. How we personally like to worship, what songs we like, whether we like a choir or not, the time of the service we like, the length of the service we prefer, the type of service we want, be it Holy Communion or Morning Praise, the place we like to worship in, the tradition we want and so on. Rarely are we concerned about what others want and how we can best serve them.

2.4 Salome - Who is she?

- Salome interestingly is someone who inhabits the world of self sacrifice more than the world of self and she is definitely one of the unsung servant heroes of the Bible.
- Salome and Mary (Jesus' mother) were sisters. She was therefore Jesus' aunt. She was married to Zebedee who ran a successful fishing business on the Sea of Galilee.
- Her two sons James and John were disciples of Jesus: *"Jesus saw James the son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him."* (Mark 1:19-20) and she was very likely to have been one of the group of women who were on the road with Jesus throughout his three years of ministry.
- The Bible never mentions her by name. But she is there at the Cross (John 19:25), along with Mary Magdalene, Mary, Jesus' mother, and at the tomb, when she goes to anoint her nephew's body.
- Salome is probably one of the women "of means" who supports Jesus in his ministry, and no doubt her finances came from Zebedee's fishing practice—he does, after all, have hired hands who are helping him, according to Mark 1:20.
- Salome is therefore one of those people, vital to Jesus' ministry, who was serving in the background, no doubt cooking and washing plus supporting her sons and her nephew Jesus.
- Salome perfectly models how to serve others more than herself.
- Who are the unsung heroes in this church? Who are the people whose names will never be mentioned but who are quietly and effectively serving the church family before themselves. Do we aspire to be like them or are we more concerned with ego, power, status and position.

2.5 Salome's gets caught in the cross fire

- So why does Salome ask Jesus 'the elephant in the room' question about what positions of government will her boys, James and John, have in the new Jewish kingdom that Jesus is about to set up in Jerusalem: *"Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."* (Matthew 20:21).
- She does so because she is serving them and they are probably too embarrassed