

The Jerusalem Road

1. Who's the greatest? [Sermon Notes]

Matt 20:17 Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 18 "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death 19 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!"

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."

People will do what they want, think what they want. They'll do anything except see things as God sees them.

Road movies - events that occurred during a journey.

Journeys are often significant because they are eventful and help us understand a bit more about life. This series is on Jesus' last journey. It was probably from Galilee along the usual route Galilean Jews took to Jerusalem - across the Jordan to avoid Samaria and then through Jericho and up the hills to Jerusalem.

A significant journey because despite the clear statement at the beginning of tonight's passage, it's pretty clear that the disciples didn't have a clue of what was going on. Missing the point is the preacher's greatest area of worry. It sometimes doesn't matter what you say, people have their own agenda. They hear what they want to hear - to the point where they will suggest back to you that you said the opposite of what you did, or worse suggest you are the origin ofropy doctrines that they have!

Disciples missed the point. They heard Jesus, but they did not listen to him.

Jesus was absolutely clear

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But the disciples?

Clear message to the disciples. But the response by James and John's mother and the response of the disciples to that shows that they had not really been listening. They wanted authority and greatness and thought that Jesus was going to establish that and as His disciples they would get exalted places.

So there was this approach from James & John's mother. Why? Was it her or was it prompted by them? Probably appointed by them because Jesus addressed them in reply. They were close to Jesus - John was the disciple Jesus loved so they thought it right that they should have a place of honour.

Had they not heard Jesus? They had heard the bit about the glory, but had not seen the cross. The glory, not the cross.

We want the glory, but we don't want the cross. Our Churches may have many self-seekers. People who want the attention, people who want the glory.

What sort?

Leaders of all sorts are in danger of this.

Those with gifts - teaching, sign gifts - who think that because they have them they are more spiritual or superior to others.

Those who think themselves spiritual because they live in a particular way.

The danger always is that people in this situation overstep themselves. They may have started in the Spirit but they've gone into the flesh.

James and John were in danger of this. Who had made them the people that they were - Jesus. Before that they had been a pair of humble fishermen in an unfashionable part of the holy land. They had experienced exciting times, been used mightily of God. In Mark 3 they were called the Boanerges - the sons of thunder - quite a nickname. But so had the other disciples been mightily used too. James and John were abusing their relationship with Jesus.

Jesus turns on them fairly roundly.

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."

And that says it all. You want the glory - can you drink the cup? I'm not sure they understood when they said they could - they did find out later. James was the first of the disciples to be martyred. Besides - whoever gets that authority in glory - that's decided by the Father. It is through His grace. And by implication of what Jesus said, whatever position of honour that they would get in glory was entirely through the Father's grace.

So you want to be great? God wants us all to be great because we are called to a high honour. We are children of the living God. That's amazing! That's exciting!

How do we often see greatness. Rather like the gentiles Jesus refers to.

Leaders who are profound.

People who are devout

People who seem well blessed - usually materially or in health.

Jesus is really radical

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."

- want to be great? - become a servant
- want to be first? - become a slave
- and be like Jesus? - who gave Himself a ransom for many.

The exciting thing is that to be great, we don't have to do great and mighty deeds, we do not have to be eloquent speakers BUT servants - of God and of one another.

Do we feel weak? Useless? Difficulties in life? The least of God's people? Greatness is not measured by our eloquence or our importance in this world. It's based on our service, or slave hood - our obedience.

The death of Jesus was the ultimate act of obedience. It's back to a familiar theme - obedience.

The Bible does things the other way around.

We say - I can't do this. We can't be like you. We don't have the energy. I don't have the skill. I'm an irrelevant and humble part of the church

God doesn't want you to be like someone else. And praise Him; God doesn't want you to be like me. God doesn't call you to do things that you are not equipped and gifted to do. But He wants you to serve and obey Him in what you can.

You want to be great in the eyes of God - obey Him. That is the challenge to you today.