

20:20–28 A Mother’s Request About the Kingdom

LOOKING FOR A KINGDOM. RICHARD TAVERNER: She comes therefore to Christ with her two sons. They had heard Christ say a little before that they which would follow him in the new birth, when he should sit in the seat of his majesty should also sit upon twelve seats judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And that all they which had left house or brothers and sisters, father or mother, wife or children or their lands for his name sake, should receive a hundred times as much and should enjoy everlasting life. They therefore, being as yet imperfect and having little understanding of the spiritual kingdom but thinking rather that Christ’s kingdom should be a worldly and temporal reign, came with their mother, requesting of him that the one of them might sit on the right hand of him in his kingdom and the other on the left, meaning that they might be in some high authority with him.... Truly (as says Chrysostom[†]) our Lord knew that they could follow his passion, but he asks them this, to the intent all we might hear and know, that none can reign with Christ, unless he follows in his passion. For a precious thing is not gotten but with a precious price. We call the passion of the

Lord not only the persecuting of the heathen but also all violence which we suffer striving against sin. This passion and cross we be all bound to abide, if we will be counted to be of Christ’s flock. Yes, and when the glory of Christ requires we must also not refuse to suffer corporal death for his sake. THE GOSPELS WITH BRIEF SERMONS.⁷

MISUNDERSTOOD RESURRECTION AND THE KINGDOM. JOHN LIGHTFOOT: The order is plain of itself, and yet the connection is somewhat strange, for in the last words before, Christ had foretold of his death, yet the sons of Zebedee here desire to sit on his right hand and left in his kingdom.... The disciples sometimes were mistaken, conceiving that Christ presently after his resurrection should obtain the scepter of an earthly kingdom, whereupon some of them ambitious of priority above the rest desired to sit on his right hand and left.... It is true indeed that the Jewish nation, and the disciples with them, erred in judging about the Messiah in his kingdom, but they erred as far also about the Messiah in his resurrection, till experience had informed them better. Therefore, it cannot well be imagined that the wife and sons of Zebedee thought of Christ’s resurrection in this their request, but conceived of his tempo-

[†] Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, NPNF¹ 10:380.

⁷ Taverner, *On Saynt Andrewes Day: The Gospels with Brief Sermons* (1542), xxvi.

ral kingdom according to the notions of the rest of the nation about it. What therefore our Savior had spoken instantly before of his being scourged, crucified, killed, and rising again, they understood it not in the sense that he spoke it. It may be his naming these two the Sons of Thunder gave them some blind encouragement to such a request. Christ foretells his own death and their suffering martyrdom under the title of baptism. THE HARMONY OF THE FOUR EVANGELISTS.⁸

BAPTISM AND THE CUP. GIOVANNI DIODATI: To arrive to the glory of my kingdom, you must pass through many combats and troubles, following my example. Therefore, before you seek after the reward, you should examine yourselves how you are disposed toward the combat. “To drink,” an ordinary term in Scripture to signify the afflictions and calamities distributed to each one as it were for their portions. “Baptized,” this kind of figure is taken from the ancient manner of baptizing, plunging the whole body in water above the head. So Christ has been wholly plunged in anguish and torments. And it should seem that Christ had a relation to the two sacraments of the Christian church, which are signs and tokens of grace on God’s side, and on the human side binds him to imitate Christ, as 1

Corinthians 12:13. “We are ...” [is] an ignorant and presumptuous answer.

“You shall drink,” not truly by your own strength and power, as you presume at this present, but by the help and special grace of my Spirit. “Is not mine,” namely, in the quality of mediator in which I do converse here in the world, I have no charge to give degrees of the glory to come, but only to gain my church’s salvation. “It is prepared” the honor to sit in God’s kingdom with Christ is not given for kindred’s sake, or any other by respect, but out of pure grace and favor, according to the purpose of choosing those whom the Father approved from the beginning of the world. PIOUS ANNOTATIONS.⁹

AN IMPROPER REQUEST. JOSEPH HALL: It was a sore check: “You know not what you ask.” In our ordinary communication, to speak idly is sin; but, in our requests to Christ, to be so inconsiderate as not to understand our own petitions must be a foul offense. As faith is the ground of our prayers, so knowledge is the ground of our faith. If we come with indigested requests, we profane that name we invoke.

To convince [of] their unfitness for glory, they are sent to their impotency in suffering: “Are you able to drink of the

⁸ Lightfoot, *The Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (1644), 52*; citing Acts 1.

⁹ Diodati, *Pious Annotations* (1643), E4r*; citing Ps 69:2; Eph 1:4.

cup whereof I shall drink, and to be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized?” O Savior, even you, who were one with your Father, had a cup of your own: never was a potion so bitter as that which was mixed for you. Yes, even your draught is stinted: it is not enough for you to sip of this cup; you must drink it up to the very dregs. When the vinegar and gall were offered to you by men, you did but kiss the cup; but when your Father gave into your hands a potion infinitely more distasteful, you, for our health, did drink deep of it, even to the bottom, and said, “It is finished.” And can we repine at those unpleasing draughts of affliction that are tempered for us sinful people, when we see you.... When they talk of your kingdom, you speak of your bitter cup, of your bloody baptism. Suffering is the way to reigning. “Through many tribulations must we enter into the kingdom of heaven.” CONTEMPLATIONS.¹⁰

THE HUMILITY OF A CHRISTIAN LEADER.

JOHN MAYER: The scope of Christ here is to pacify the men who had indignation at the two, desiring superiority; and how does he pacify them? Truly by showing, as Chrysostom[†] has noted, that they who desire superiority are the more debased, becoming servants to all, so that there

¹⁰ Hall, *Contemplations on the Historical Passages of the Old and New Testaments*, 4:547*.

[†] Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, NPNF¹ 10:383.

was no cause, why they should envy them this their desire. And as it was necessary upon this occasion, he teaches them, and all Christians, not to desire preeminence as an honor, but to account of it as a burden, the greatest is he, be as he ought to be, being a common servant to all, as he himself was, howsoever among the rulers of the Gentiles it was otherwise. So that, as I take it, this saying does not pertain to ecclesiastical persons only, but to all Christians, it being not their part to affect worldly honors, as the heathen do, but if any be promoted to use their preferment to the benefit of others, and not to magnify themselves by ruling tyrannically and exacting upon those over whom they are set.... The princes of the Gentiles rule over them, and by all means seek their own honor and not the good of their subjects; but I would not have you like unto the Gentiles, but contrary unto them. Therefore, set not your minds upon honors and dignities, striving to be one above another, but upon my example, the greater any of you be, the more intending to serve, though with great labor and danger of life for the common good of others. TREASURY OF ECCLESIASTICAL EXPOSITIONS.¹¹

KINGDOM GREATNESS. DIRK PHILIPS: In addition, [in [Matthew 18](#)] the Lord Jesus

¹¹ Mayer, *A Treasury of Ecclesiastical Expositions ... upon the Scriptures* (1622), 242.

reprimanded his disciples who argued and disputed with one another about who should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven and said: Truly, truly, I say to you, except you turn around and become as children, you will not come into the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself as this child—which he had set in the midst of his disciples—that one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever accepts such a child in my name, that one accepts me. For if anyone confuses one of the least of these who believe in me, it would be better for him that a millstone be bound on his neck and he would be drowned in the deepest of the sea.... Read this with understanding of what the Lord's meaning is. When the mother of the children of Zebedee desired from the Lord that her two sons might sit beside him in his kingdom, the one on the right and the other on the left hand, and as the ten disciples heard that, they became indignant at her. Then Jesus called them to himself and spoke, you know that the worldly princes rule and the authorities have power, but it shall not be so among you; rather if someone wants to be the greatest among you, that one will be your servant. And whoever will be the chief, that one is your servant. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and he gave his life as a deliverance for many. THE FRISIAN-FLEMISH DIVISION.¹²

THE PERFECT RANSOM. PHILIPP

Melanchthon: This is a remarkable thought that is considered carefully as we think, how great a thing our sin is, in turn how great the severity of God's justice is, and then how great his mercy is. Therefore, first we say this, "We acknowledge ourselves to be infirm and hard, that we are not greatly terrified by thinking of our sins, nor do we see how great a thing our sin is and the anger of God." ...

But we lament this, our hardness, and rightly we are exceedingly terrified, and we think God to be angry by all the sins of the saints and ungodly. For God is just and we do not think him to remit sins from levity, as if he is not truly angry. But they are the same, truly he is angered by sins, and yet he spares his own creatures, and he does not want him to die. At the same time, he is both just and merciful. And this wonderful mixture of justice and mercy, no one is able to express enough, but we will learn in eternal life. And yet this is the beginning of doctrine. For the Scripture so often says that the Son is the ransom and compensation for us. When such a ransom is paid, it was necessary for the anger to be great against sin. These things are often considered much.

Then is considered, "By what means was the work by a ransom and so great a sacrifice?" To this is responded, "God has these two virtues: justice and mercy." And

¹² CRR 6:482.

a wonderful thing retains only both. And it is justice to be angry about sin and to punish it. Therefore, when God wanted to spare the human race and yet not to omit justice, he resolved that as a son who was an intercessor for us he might carry the penalty for the whole human race. And truly he wanted his Son to take on the nature of humankind, because with the human race he would be an accused. It was proper for someone in the human race to carry the penalty, and it was needful for this one to be innocent. And as such a one carries the penalty, he might be worthy, sufficient, and equal, and as he was able to conquer death, it was needful for this one carrying such a load, to be God, because by human nature alone, he neither would be sufficient for a ransom, not able to carry the penalty, nor to conquer death....

But after God's justice was satisfied through punishment of an innocent one, he exercised mercy toward the human race, and he saved the remaining. Truly Christ said this, to make himself the ransom (*lytron*). ANNOTATIONS ON THE GOSPELS.¹³

¹³ MO 14:937–39.