

Strength for Today

“Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, bowing down, and making a request of Him. And He said to her, ‘What do you wish?’ She said to Him, ‘Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left’” (Matthew 20:2-21).

Use of the power play in our personal dealings is incompatible with scriptural humility.

One of the most common tactics people use to get ahead is to draw upon the influence of family and friends. Even professing believers have not hesitated to “play politics” to get what they want. I know of a pastor some years ago who said that for his denomination’s annual meeting he always booked a hotel room near the top leaders’ rooms. He wanted to cultivate their friendships in hopes of receiving consideration for pastorates in larger churches.

Incredibly, today’s passage has two of Jesus’ closest disciples, James and John, coming with their mother to Jesus to ask a huge, unprecedented favor— that each brother be seated next to Him in His kingdom. It was even more amazing that this brazen, self-serving request came right after Christ predicted His imminent persecution and death. It’s as though James and John each let Jesus’ sobering words go in one ear and out the other. That’s because they were so preoccupied with their own interests and plans.

The three probably were trying to exploit their family relationship with Jesus. By comparing John 19:25 with parallel passages, we know that the disciples’ mother (Salome) was a sister of Mary, Jesus’ mother. That would make James and John His first cousins and their mother His aunt.

So the three undoubtedly were relying on their kinship to Jesus as they made their selfish request for greater power and prestige within His kingdom. Obviously, they still had not grasped Christ’s earlier promise from the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the gentle [meek, humble], for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). But such sublime teaching ought to be enough to convince us that the truly humble don’t need power plays to achieve greatness. They already have it in Christ.

Suggestions for Prayer

Thank the Lord for the many privileges you already enjoy as His child.

For Further Study

Read Matthew 23.

- What was Jesus’ general attitude toward the Pharisees’ motives and actions?
- List some specific characteristics you ought to avoid.

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