

AN UNWISE PRAYER

BIBLE TEXT: Matthew 20:20-28; James 4:1-3

LESSON 184 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Matthew 20:20-28

²⁰ Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping *him*, and desiring a certain thing of him.

²¹ And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

²² But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

²³ And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared of my Father.

²⁴ And when the ten heard *it*, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

²⁵ But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

²⁶ But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

²⁷ And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

²⁸ Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I An Unwise Prayer

1 James and John's mother came to Jesus, worshipping Him, with a request, Matthew 20:20

2 She asked that her two sons might sit beside Jesus in His Kingdom, Matthew 20:21

3 Wars and fighting's come through lust, James 4:1, 2;

Romans 7:23

²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Galatians 5:17

¹⁷ For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

1 Peter 2:11

¹¹ Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

4 Prayers are unanswered because of improper motives, James 4:3;

Psalm 66:18

¹⁸ If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear *me*:

II Reward According to Service

1 Jesus replied to the request, asking if they were willing to follow Him, Matthew 20:22;

Matthew 12:50

⁵⁰ For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Mark 14:36

³⁶ And he said, Abba, Father, all things *are* possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.

2 He told them what they could expect to experience, and whence promotion comes, Matthew 20:23;

Matthew 19:28

²⁸ And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Matthew 25:34

³⁴ Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

III Christ's Mission

1 Jesus explained the difference between positions of authority in the earthly kingdoms and in the Heavenly Kingdom, Matthew 20:25-27;

Matthew 23:11

¹¹ But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

1 Peter 5:3

³ Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

2 He came as a servant, to minister and give His life a ransom for many, Matthew 20:28;

James 4:1-3

¹ From whence *come* wars and fightings among you? *come they* not hence, *even* of your lusts that war in your members?

² Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

³ Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume *it* upon your lusts.

Isaiah 53:10-11

¹⁰ Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

¹¹ He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

John 11:51-52

⁵¹ And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation;

⁵² And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.

John 13:4

⁴ He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.

Philippians 2:7

⁷ But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

1 Timothy 2:6

⁶ Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

Titus 2:14

¹⁴ Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

NOTES:

Our lesson opens with the account of the mother of Zebedee's children coming to Jesus with her sons, James and John, and worshiping Jesus. Her worship apparently was not entirely of praise to Jesus but was more in the form of a request from Him. Knowing this, Jesus asked her, "What wilt thou?" She answered: "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom." We can see that this was a very ambitious request and was, no doubt, prompted by the two sons.

High Personal Aspirations

Parental ambitions for us, or our own personal aspirations, should not be the motivating force and power of our lives. Our aim and motive should not be a desire for the Gospel to set us on a pinnacle, or exalt us above our fellows. Jesus once said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." The purpose of the Gospel is the exalting of Jesus, so that all men might be drawn to Him. If we are striving to have the Gospel elevate us to a lofty position, we are falling far short of God's plan for us. Paul said: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14). He also said that they who were guilty of this work of the flesh would not inherit the Kingdom of God (**Galatians 5:20-21** ²⁰ Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ²¹ Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.).

Shortly before this, James and John, with Peter, had been taken by Jesus to a mountain, and there they witnessed that glorious scene of the transfiguration of Jesus. Perhaps this had thrilled the carnal nature still present in James and John to the extent that they thought they were exalted by Jesus above the other nine disciples. Therefore, Peter was the only one who could possibly be exalted above them, and perhaps they thought that if they would

ask in time they would be granted those positions to which their hearts were, aspiring.

As Little Children

When once the devil has slipped into a human heart a desire for honor, or position among men, he has something on which to build his work in that heart, to draw that person away from God.

It had not been very long before this that the disciples had disputed among themselves as to who should be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. In answer, Jesus took a little child and set him in their midst and said: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." The heart must be cleansed from all carnal ambitions, if we are to be godly and righteous. It must be as free as a little child from all desires for worldly supremacy, place-seeking, and that which loves the praise of men. These things have entered to corrupt the heart of many followers of the lowly Nazarene when they yielded to the temptation of the devil.

Self-exaltation led to rebellion, and that brought leprosy to Miriam, the sister of Moses. It will bring spiritual leprosy to the soul of anyone who allows it to enter and remain in his heart. The Bible instructs us that we are to live always "in honour preferring one another" (Romans 12:10).

Warring Against the Spirit

The desires and tendencies of the flesh war against the Spirit of God. If we pray with fervency and sincerity of spirit, God will always hear and answer us, if we do not ask improperly. If these desires of the flesh remain unchecked, they will also cause strife and contention to come. And when we strive against our neighbor, seeking to advance our own self, this warring (sometimes without our knowledge) fights against our own soul as well as against the Spirit of God. These desires and tendencies must be mortified by the Christian as soon as they are manifest in even the smallest degree.

It is not enough to ask for good things, but we must ask with the proper spirit and intention. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." If we pray aright, all our wants will be supplied. The improper cravings which produce "wars and fightings" will then cease.

Offenses that Come

To show how detrimental these selfish ambitions could become to the spiritual life, the Lord discoursed at length on this subject. He told them that offenses must come, but He pronounced a woe upon that man by whom the offenses would come. "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire." Jesus said, "Have peace one with another" (Mark 9:50).

Strife for Chief Seats

In a previous lesson we studied about the time when Jesus saw that the people sought the chief rooms at feasts, and He said: "When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say

unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:7-11).

The disciples had heard Jesus upbraid the Pharisees for loving the uppermost rooms at feasts, chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets. But how soon those wonderful teachings are forgotten when self takes the pre-eminence and the true Spirit of God leaves the heart.

A Cup to Drink

In replying to their petition, Jesus told James and John that they did not know what they asked; and He asked them if they were able to drink of the same cup He would drink of and be baptized with the baptism He would be baptized with — inferring there would be much suffering connected with their discipleship. They answered that they were able to drink of the same cup, and their future lives proved that to be true; but their steadfastness was only by the grace of God. James was beheaded by Herod, and John was banished to the Isle of Patmos for the Gospel; and tradition tells us that John was also cast alive into a pot of boiling oil, but God intervened and spared his life.

We are told that Paul, lest he become exalted because of the abundance of the revelations that God gave him, was given a thorn in the flesh — a messenger of Satan — to buffet him. He besought the Lord thrice to remove it, but the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9).

A Different Kingdom

In the kingdoms of this world, those who are great exercise dominion and authority over those under them. But it was not to be that way in the Kingdom Jesus was establishing in the hearts of His disciples. Jesus said: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." And what a ransom that was! Jesus proved His humility, and His passion, as He went to the cross. There He suffered and died in our stead, that we, the guilty and condemned sinners, might not have to pay the penalty for our sins. How pure, how clean, how unadulterated, how adequate, and how far-reaching, is this glorious Gospel! "The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad" (Psalm 34:2).

Since Jesus came as a servant, to give His life a ransom for many, we must remember that we all are to be humble servants for His cause. We know that we must walk in Jesus' steps and be a partaker of His sufferings while we are here on earth if we are to be like Him when we go to be with Him there in Heaven (**2 Timothy 2:11-12** ¹¹ *It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with *him*, we shall also live with *him*:* ¹² *If we suffer, we shall also reign with *him*: if we deny *him*, he also will deny us:* **1 Peter 2:21-23** ²¹ *For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:* ²² *Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:* ²³ *Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously:).* A true minister's place is one of willing service to God and to the work of the Kingdom of God now here on earth. Some have misused the office and its privileges, feeling they were lifted above those whom they were called to serve. It is true that those who labor in the ministry are to be given double honor (**1 Timothy 5:17** ¹⁷ *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine*), but this is not for the purpose of exalting them -

especially in their own eyes — to a pinnacle of self-esteem that is contrary to the commands of Jesus or to the example that He set.

So far as we know, this lesson forever settled the carnal aspirations of James and John to be leaders. They became humble men of God, but fearless, and proved worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called; for at the Last Supper, after Jesus drank of the cup and gave it to His disciples, He said to them: "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28-30).

QUESTIONS

- 1 Whence come wars and fightings among people?
- 2 When do we ask amiss?
- 3 What was the name of the father of James and John?
- 4 What was the mother's petition?
- 5 Did Jesus grant it?
- 6 What did Jesus say in regard to that question?
- 7 What caused indignation among the disciples?
- 8 Who was to be the chief among them?
- 9 Did Jesus come to minister or to be ministered unto?