



## **Matthew 20:17–19**

17 Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, 18 “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death 19 and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”

## Reflection

Spring is in the air. The barley crops are ripening, the fig trees are beginning to bear fruit and, like this time every year, the road to Jerusalem is bustling with people. The extra traffic is mainly due to Jewish religious pilgrims, many coming from as far north as Galilee, all heading up to Jerusalem for the annual Passover festival. The Passover festival is one of three annual festivals that requires God-fearing Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism to make the journey, or 'pilgrimage', up to Jerusalem. 'Up to' because Jerusalem is situated on Mount Zion.

Amongst the throngs of faithful Jews on the road heading towards Jerusalem is

Jesus and his disciples, as well as other followers including a faithful group of women who ministered to Jesus' needs. In tomorrow's passage we'll see that one of these woman accompanying Jesus is the mother of James and John who is also Jesus' aunt. It's likely that Jesus' mother Mary is also travelling with them as well as Mary Magdalene, a third Mary and Joanna.

Galilee is well behind them, most likely they're travelling through Perea before shortly crossing the Jordan river, passing through Jericho and beginning the ascent up to Jerusalem. In today's passage we read that,

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going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death 19 and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”

This is the third time that Jesus has predicted his death. It's his third Passion prediction, 'Passion' being a common Christian term used to describe the suffering and death of Jesus. Jesus gave his first Passion prediction in Matthew 16:21 during his ministry in the far north, in Galilee, before they began their journey to Jerusalem. The second time he predicted his death happened in Matthew 17:22–23, en-route to Jerusalem this time, but still in Galilee.

This third time around however they're much closer to Jerusalem which means things are becoming very real.

And yet we still have the impression that the reality of the situation has not sunk in for the disciples. After the first prediction you may remember that Peter reacted very strongly, refusing to believe what Jesus was saying, even going so far as to rebuke him. Next time around, the disciples were filled with grief at Jesus' remarks and yet in a heartbeat seemed to forget them, instead beginning to ask who amongst them might be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And in many ways that question about greatness has been the common theme throughout Matthew 18 to 20. As Jesus heads steadfastly to his death he's been teaching his disci-

ples about greatness and the kingdom of heaven by holding up the example of little children whom he held in contrast with the rich young ruler. And in yesterday's passage he taught us that the emphasis of the kingdom of heaven is far more grace than greatness with the parable of the workers in the vineyard. The common refrain throughout these stories has been that the first will be last and the last will be first in the kingdom of God.

Jesus continues this lesson today by telling his disciples in more graphic detail than ever how *the* first, the Son of God, chose to become the last, suffering and dying on a Roman cross, in an act that will see God pronounce him as the first and greatest in the kingdom of God. Perhaps no passage says this more clearly (and

beautifully) than Philippians 2:5–9. This is how you become great says the apostle Paul:

5 ... have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

The first (in the fullest sense of the word), in humility made himself last, so that through his service to all he could be acknowledged as the first and greatest in the kingdom of God. And the way this happened is prophesied by Jesus in great detail in today's passage, prophecy that is fulfilled to the letter as we'll see in Matthew 27.

New in this third prediction is the mention of the Gentiles (the Romans). And also the graphic description of being 'condemned to death' (which means a judicial process), tried by both the Jews and the Romans, found guilty and then brutally mocked,



flogged and crucified. Jesus is more graphic and detailed than ever and again, for the third time, he ends with the confusing prediction of after dying being raised to life on the third day. How can this be possible? And yet Matthew records no question, query or response from his disciples.

How can they seem to not react at all to words like these? Perhaps they simply won't let what Jesus is saying register, or perhaps they're blocking it out, preferring not face reality. Or maybe they are so caught up in their construction of who Jesus is and what they think he's come to do that what Jesus is saying simply doesn't compute. Either way, we'll explore this further in tomorrow's passage.

**Think & Pray**

But for today please take some time now to consider Jesus. Consider the humility of Jesus the Son of God who stepped down out of heaven to become a man, to become of us. But not just any one of us, he became the last of us, the least of us, the servant of all, who served us by suffering and dying a terrible death on the cross in our place. The first chose to become the last so that those humble enough to see themselves as the last might become the first. And by placing himself as the last, by being humiliated, torn and broken on that cross, God the Father gave him the name that is above every name.

How can you have the same mindset as Christ? How can you in humility consider yourself the last, the least, the servant of

all like Jesus? In what practical ways can you be servant of all in your church? The servant of all in your workplace? The servant of all who daily lays down your life for the good of all of those whom God has placed in your life? How can you lay down your life today for your wife, your children, your flat-mate, your employees, the children you teach in your school, the boss who continues to make unreasonable demands on you in the project you're already putting way too many hours into at the moment? What will having the same mindset as Jesus look like in your context today?

## **Pray**

Pray over the answer to this question. Commit the day to God. Pray for a servant heart. But also try and feel for a moment

the true cost of what was bought for you on that cross. Here's Jesus, it's not a flashback, it's a flash-forward, sharing with unlistening ears the graphic nature of his imminent torture and death – torture and death which was merely the entrée to the full and righteous wrath of God that was poured out on him in punishment for your sins and mine. Feel the cost this morning. The unimaginable cost of the grace that is so freely ours in Jesus. Thank him with all your heart and make the way you live today your heartfelt response.