

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Thirty-Eighth Week -- Thursday

THE SONS OF ZEBEDEE

"Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, 'What do you wish?' She said to Him, 'Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.' But Jesus answered and said, 'You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They said to Him, 'We are able.' So He said to them, 'You will indeed drink 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 is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.'" (Matthew 20:20-23).

It was formerly explained that at the Passover the pilgrims from Galilee to Jerusalem very generally went by the route on the other side of the Jordan in order to avoid passing through Samaria. As that festival was now at hand, large bodies of pilgrims were already on the move from that quarter as well as from Perea, and Jesus fell in with this crowd.

The disciples now distinctly perceived that their Master intended to proceed with the pilgrims to Jerusalem. They held back in dismay, knowing that the ruling authorities there had determined to destroy him. Perceiving this, Jesus took them aside, not to remove their fears as groundless but to confirm their worst apprehensions. He hid nothing from them. He did not hide the gravity of what was forthcoming. He announced his betrayal and mentioned the very persons to whom He should be betrayed, namely, the Scribes and Pharisees. He foretold his condemnation to death, his delivery up to the Gentiles, his mocking and scourging, his crucifixion, and his resurrection on the third day.

The time was to come when they would understand all this well enough, but the evangelist plainly declares that they could not then comprehend it. They believed their Master to be the Messiah; and although their original views as to the nature of his kingdom had been considerably modified by what they had from time to time heard from Him, they still regarded it as essentially a temporal kingdom to be presently established. They were unable to connect the Messiah with the ideas of humiliation, suffering, and death. It was also unaccountable to them why He, knowing so clearly what awaited Him at Jerusalem, should persist in proceeding there. If they had duly pondered upon *all* that they had heard from Him, the bitter as well as the

sweet, they would not now have been so much at a loss. But they had for the present left shut up in the darker chambers of their memory all but what they liked to remember.

It was soon perceived by the disciples that a large portion of the crowd of pilgrims were favorably disposed toward Jesus and quite ready to hail Him as the king Messiah. There seemed, indeed, to be a general expectation that at this Passover some great event would occur and that He would at length stand forward openly in assertion of his Messianic claims. They perceived also with joy that their Master did not as usual avoid the attention of the people or labor to dispel their expectations. The fact was, that it was part of the Divine plan that He should claim the Messiahship as his right by his public entry into Jerusalem, and that this claim should be recognized by the people before the final scenes.

This being the case, the disciples presently forgot what their Lord had been saying to them and fixed their attention and their hopes upon visions of that power and glory, which they conceived the public enthusiasm would in a few days compel Him to assume. It is only in view of this that we can understand the incident that follows, and which all the evangelists agree in placing just after the prediction which Jesus delivered to his disciples.

Salome, the mother of Zebedee's children, that is, of John and James, presented herself with the profoundest homage before Jesus and asked Him to promise to grant whatever she might ask. Our Lord declined to make any such promise but desired to know at once what it was she required. And it then came out to be nothing less than that her two sons should sit, the one on his right hand and the other on his left, in his kingdom (evidently meaning the grand Messianic kingdom He was about to establish). The meaning was that they should, by his special favor, occupy the highest places--the places nearest to Him--in that kingdom.

The brothers had either instigated this application of their mother or had sanctioned it at her instigation. We incline to the latter view because the application has altogether a motherly aspect. Still, James and John had made it theirs, and to them Jesus addressed himself. He told them, "Ye know not what ye ask," and presently the ignorance and presumptuous confidence of the two brothers were manifestly shown.

Jesus asked them, "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?" This question involved no less than their spiritual strength and their capacity to suffer as their Master suffered. Yet they heedlessly and rashly answered, "We are able." But in his gracious indulgence to their weakness, Jesus passed over all this without notice and immediately answered that they should indeed be partakers of his sufferings; and although He withheld any direct information relating to them exclusively, still He now repeated that special honors and dignities were to exist in his *future* kingdom, and should assuredly be given to those of his servants and saints for whom God had prepared them.

The other apostles were indignant at this attempt of James and John to attain the superiority over them. Perceiving this, Jesus told them that although "the kings of the earth" gave such

distinctions to their favorites as those to which the sons of Zebedee aspired, it would not be so now among them. In his present kingdom the one who wished to be the greatest of all must be the one who is the servant of all.