

20:17 *Going up*- This could refer to the uphill journey, but 'going up' was a technical term used for going up to Jerusalem, particularly to keep a feast- Passover, in this case. Mark adds: "And Jesus went before them, and they were amazed; and as they followed they were sore afraid".

*To Jerusalem*- From Jericho, 19:15. Hence they went "up", uphill to Jerusalem. These small details all support the position that the Gospels were written by eye witnesses and were not created many years later by people who were not present. They were going the opposite direction of man in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who went *down* from Jerusalem to Jericho. We may be able to infer that the Lord intended us to read that man as one who was not going in the way of the cross, who was going away from Jerusalem rather than towards it- and who was still saved by the grace of the Samaritan / Jesus.

*Apart*- The implication is that there were others travelling with them, and the Lord wished to explain the reality of the cross to the disciples alone.

*In the way*- It could be inferred that "the way" is the way to Jerusalem and the cross; the disciples were following Jesus in that "way" without appreciating what it really involved and where it ultimately led, and that can be true for us too.

20:18 *We go up*- This was stating the obvious, but He wanted them to perceive their part in the journey to the cross which He was making; for His path to death and resurrection was to be theirs, as it is ours too.

*Betrayed*- The Greek means literally 'to hand over'; the idea of betrayal was maybe implicit, but not as explicit as in the English word 'betrayed'. It's the same Greek word as in :19, translated "deliver". The word is very common on the lips of the Lord, as if He saw the moment of 'handing over' as the quintessence of all His sufferings- the hand over from God's Providential protection to the powers of darkness.

*Condemn Him to death*- Exactly fulfilled, using the same Greek words, in Mk. 14:64.

20:19 *Scourge*- The Lord's predictions of His sufferings are detailed. The question arises as to whether this knowledge was beamed into Him by Divine revelation, or whether He worked it all out from Old Testament anticipations and prophecies of Messiah's sufferings. All the details could indeed have been understood from the Old Testament.

20:20 *Then...*- So often, the Lord's predictions of the cross are responded to in most unspiritual ways, as if the message really failed to penetrate. As with us today, people turned off at the message of the Lord's death. Whenever this happens, we must enquire as to *why* we turn off; for it surely has a psychological basis. Why does our attention wander so easily when reading or hearing discussed the crucifixion passages? The psychological, subconscious reason may well be that we realize that whatever is true for the Lord is to be true for us; His death there is the pattern for our death to self today. And we would far rather not be reminded of that.

*The mother of Zebedee's children-* The mother of James and John. We can identify her with Salome, who was likely the mother of Mary the Lord's mother (see Jn. 19:25; Mk. 15:40; Mt. 27:56). They were His cousins, and in the culture of nepotism in which they lived, it would be normal for them to have some honourable place in the future Government of their relative. But the Lord's answer was that such fleshly connections were irrelevant; there was no short cut around drinking His cup and suffering with Him.

20:21 *What do you want?*- These are the very words the Lord goes on to use to the blind men in :32 as He left Jericho, and to the blind man He met as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:41). The similarity in the stories of the blind men He spoke to is surely for the same reason as His repetition of "What do you want?" both to them and to Salome and again to her sons. It's all to build up the impression that He is asking people to focus upon what their dominant desire really is. And such an approach is not unknown in depth psychology today. The Lord uses the same word for "want" in asking the crippled man if he 'wanted' to be made whole (Jn. 5:6). Of course he did, and the Lord knew it. So His question was to elicit in the man a sense of what his dominant desire really was. The Lord raised him up, and went on to comment that as the Father raises up people, so His Son enlivens whom *He* wants [s.w. - Jn. 5:21]. The 'want' of the man and the 'want' of God's Son coincided, just as can happen for us all- if our dominant desires are His. Therefore later in Jn. 15:7 the Lord almost comments on the incident with Salome by saying that if His words abide in us, then we shall ask what we wish [s.w. "want"] and it shall be done [s.w. 'do']. There was no blank cheque promise, as Salome and her sons had wrongly implied. It was often His style to focus people on what they were asking for, encouraging them to verbalize and thus define their deepest desires. This is why He made as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus, why He appeared to be sleeping during the storm, and in another storm appeared to intend to walk past the disciples (Mk. 6:48). All this was to elicit from His people an awareness of their need for Him. He works the same today, through providential circumstance in our lives, to make us ask ourselves what we really and essentially want. He has just spoken in detail of His sufferings, and so His question was rhetorical. 'If I am going to do all that for you- what else could you ask for?'. The wonder of salvation for us as sinners is such that we should see all our other requests in that context.

Mk. 10:37 makes it clear that the brothers themselves went on to request this, having tried to manipulate the Lord through the use of a female. Here is a classic example of where reading the entire Bible gives us a wider and fuller perspective. But a caveat needs to be sounded about such intertextuality, as it is called- the practice of interpreting a text in the light of other Bible texts. Of course, to get the wider and truer picture, this is a quite necessary and legitimate way of studying the Bible. But remember that the vast majority of believers over history have been illiterate. They heard the Gospels read to them. The text as it stands spoke to them- there are no Divinely inspired footnotes which signpost us to one of the parallel Gospels for the fuller picture. The easy use of computer-assisted analysis of the Biblical text is unique to our age, but one downside of this is that it can too easily be assumed that such endless chasing of connections

with other Scripture is in fact how the text was originally designed to be read. It clearly was not. The fact the text of the entire Bible stands up to such analysis and indeed glows with glory under it- doesn't mean that this is the only nor even the intended way to receive the text. The ability to perform such detailed intertextuality just wasn't there for the illiterate; they heard the text of the Gospels as it was read, and there was a message within the text as it stands which they were intended to perceive.

*Grant-* Literally, 'say'. The same word is used in describing the Lord's response; He "answered *and said* [s.w.]" (:22). What He gave or said was not directly what she wanted, but rather an invitation to die with Him, and to share in whatever consequences arise from that.

*May sit-* She surely had in mind the Lord's recent assurance that the twelve would sit upon twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel (19:28). But even that wasn't enough. She wanted even more. The record leaves us gasping at her: 'What? Even that promise, and the prediction of the Lord's death for you- still not enough for you??!'. This is intended to put all our requests and dominant desires in a different context. If we have been promised the Kingdom and the Lord has died for us- then what other dominant desires should we have? Surely none. For those things should be the dominant issues within us.

*In Your Kingdom-* Mk. 'In your glory'. This confirms that she had 19:28 in mind, where the Lord had promised a sitting on thrones when He sat "in the throne of His glory".

The mother of James and John wanted them to have great reward in the Kingdom. The Lord's basic answer was: 'Take up my cross, follow my example, focused as it is on getting *others* to the Kingdom' (Mt. 20:21,27,28). They were to be to others examples of selflessness. In the parable of the labourers, the hard, all day workers came expecting their pay; they were sent away, it could be, in rejection. But those whom the parable appears to commend worked having made no agreement nor mention of the reward they would receive. Thus when James and John clamoured for a reward in the Kingdom, they were told instead to go away and serve; this was what it was all about, being the minister of others, serving for nothing- not badgering the Lord for a reward in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:20-26).

Mark records the brothers asking: "Master, we would that You should do for us whatsoever we shall desire"- presumably trying to tie the Lord to His words in 18:19 about the successful prayer of "two... who should agree as touching anything they should ask". But of course the Lord's context there was quite different. It was about restoring the lost to the way to the Kingdom. So often we likewise can seize hold of the Lord's words and try to twist them to as it were manipulate God into response. This sort of thing goes on *ad nauseam* in many Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, taking Bible phrases out of context and aggressively holding God to words He never uttered in the context required of them by the audience. They had the focus all wrong- they wanted to be in the Kingdom "for us". Our motive for wanting to be in the Kingdom needs

to be analysed. Is it for God manifestation, or mere human salvation from death that we are interested in [to paraphrase a well known quote from John Thomas]?

20:22 *You know not*- The statement that men 'know not' is usually and extensively on the Lord's lips in a negative sense. We can therefore read Him here as deeply disappointed in her. Note how the Lord uses the plural 'you'; He clearly saw that the question was being asked by the sons through their mother, and the parallel records show Him asking them directly what *they* really wanted. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26) seems to be some kind of allusion back to the mother of Zebedee's children asking Christ to get her two sons the best places in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:22). He basically replied 'You know not what you pray for', in the sense of 'you don't appreciate'. It may be that Paul in Rom. 8 is saying that in our desire for the Kingdom, in our groaning for it, we don't appreciate what we ask for as we ought, yet Christ nonetheless makes powerful intercession for us to this end.

*The cup*- The Lord's death was therefore His cup, and also His 'baptism'. He asks us to be baptized with His baptism and to regularly drink His cup in the memorial meeting. These things are easily performed, and yet they are an agreement to die His death. We too can far too easily say "I am able...", when like the disciples, we fail to perceive the horror of the cross and what is being asked of us. We therefore participate in these symbols, these metaphors, with bowed head, deeply aware of our likely failure to carry the cross to the end, but grateful for our participation in *His* cup and baptism, the One who did in fact die the death of the cross.

*I am baptized*- Note the present tense compared to the future tense of "the cup that I shall drink of". And yet in Lk. 12:50 He speaks of the baptism that He must still be baptized with in crucifixion. His death on the cross was in essence lived and died by Him throughout His life. This is why the prophecy of His death in Isaiah 53 is also quoted about experiences during His life. And there is an ongoing element to baptism, just as Israel were baptized "in the cloud and in the sea" as they passed through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1), and yet lived beneath the cloud throughout their wilderness journey- as if their baptism was ongoing. We likewise die and resurrect with Christ in an ongoing sense as we die to the flesh and progressively experience His new life breaking through into our mortal experience (2 Cor. 4:11). Note too how Paul speaks of baptism in the present tense in Rom. 6:4- we *are* buried with Him by baptism, although Paul has just said in Rom. 6:3 that we *were* baptized as a one-time past even. If Paul were simply referencing the point of their baptism in Rom. 6:4, he would have said 'We *were* buried with Him'. The sense of Col. 2:12 and 1 Cor. 12:13 may be similar- "By one Spirit we are all [present tense] baptized into one body". The whole language of baptism by the Spirit surely suggests a process rather than a one time event of immersion in water.

The Lord spoke with arresting continuous tenses of how ‘The good shepherd *is laying* down his life for the sheep... *I am laying down* my life of myself’ (Jn. 10:11,18). He *would be* delivered up, but in principle He went through it in His daily life beforehand. He speaks of “the cup that I *shall* drink of, and... the baptism that *I am* baptized with” (Mt. 20:22). This sheds light on four occasions in John’s gospel when the Lord appears to use tenses in a confusing way. He speaks of how He *will* go to die on the cross, but that in a sense “I am” there already.

*We are able-* The Lord surely remembered their childlike over confidence when He Himself prayed for that cup to be "able" (AV "may" s.w.) to pass from Him so that He didn't have to drink it (Mt. 26:42). Yet the Lord is so generous spirited to them. He says that they will indeed be "able" to drink His cup (:23)- but the places of honour in the Kingdom were solely for the Father to give. He alludes to this in telling Peter that he was not "able" (s.w.) to follow Him to death on the cross at that time, "but you shall follow Me afterwards" (Jn. 13:36). We would likely have told them to take more seriously the Lord's predictions of His death by crucifixion which He had just uttered, and be more realistic about their own failure to suffer and die like that. But He is so more positive and gracious.

The Lord Jesus Christ's sensitivity to our thinking that we really have borne His cross comes out here. Those men, with all their unspirituality, could quite coolly state that they wanted the highest place in the Kingdom, and could say with confidence that they could shoulder the cross of Christ. The Lord's reply was gracious and generous spirited indeed: "Ye shall indeed drink of my cup" - 'when you're a lot more spiritually mature', He could have added. We *sense* rather than are explicitly told His sensitivity to men thinking they can shoulder His cross; for He alone knows what the cross of Christ entailed and entails. And in speaking of our own sufferings, we too need to learn these lessons, and compare our sufferings against Christ's with the utmost caution, with the sensitivity to *His* feelings, recognizing that we must act as men and women who have been *counted as if* we shared His death, and not as those who have actually "resisted unto blood (in our) striving against sin". To confidently identify some of our brethren as tares is only one example of the way in which we can hurt our Lord's feelings, by acting and thinking in ways which are only appropriate for He who did actually carry the cross.

20:23 *You shall indeed drink-* Seeing even the Lord balked at drinking that cup in Gethsemane, this is an incredibly positive comment to make. But none of us, including the twelve, die the death of the cross as Jesus did. He may have seen this as true insofar as by baptism into His death, His personal death and resurrection are counted to us, as if we have participated in it. As

we reconstruct in our own minds His death, every fibre in our being cries out: 'I would not have endured that'. The wonder is that by baptism into Him, His death, that death, even the death of the cross, is counted to us. And with that we should be content, rather than seeking for grandeur in the resurrection age as the disciples were doing. When it came to actually giving the twelve His cup to drink, the Lord invited them: "You- drink all of it" (Mt. 26:27). The force of *pas* there appears to refer to all of the cup, the whole cup- rather than inviting all of the disciples to drink, because it was surely axiomatic that they were to all drink it. The Lord was saying that He counted them as having fully drunk His cup- a cup which He Himself flinched to take. This is the degree to which we are in Him and counted as participating in His death by reason of our status "in Him". Another possibility is that the Lord spoke these words specifically to the twelve and envisaged that each of them would die through crucifixion- although whether they did is not historically confirmable.

*Drink of My cup-* John's equivalent of this is the Lord's word that unless we drink His blood and eat His flesh, we can have no salvation (Jn. 6:53). This therefore has reference to our participation in His death, and our symbolic acceptance of this in the breaking of bread. To drink the Lord's cup is parallel with partaking at the Lord's memorial table in 1 Cor. 10:21. The breaking of bread means many things, and each time we do it we may likely focus on different aspects. But it is not easy for us, or it should not be easy for us. To drink that cup can never be done in a blase spirit of 'Yes, we are able'. Rather with humbled hearts do we accept that our being counted as having participated in it is by grace alone. Peter was amongst those who thought he was able to drink the Lord's cup, and yet the Lord had to rebuke Peter for seeking to deter Him from drinking it- "Put up your sword... the cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (Jn. 18:11). Peter's desire for the Lord not to drink it was psychologically rooted in his recognition that the Lord's cup was to be his cup.

*Left hand-* When the disciples foolishly sought to have what they thought were to be the favoured places at His right hand and His left, the Lord could have answered: 'You foolish people! Those on my left hand will be condemned!'. But He graciously didn't comment on their glaring error. He pushed a higher principle- that we should not seek for personal greatness, seeing that God is the judge of all (Mt. 20:23). Yet sadly, so much of our preaching has been solely concerned with pointing out the errors of others without being sensitive to what little faith and understanding they *do* have, and seeking to build on it.

*Not Mine to give-* A profound rebuttal of the primitive and mistaken equation of Jesus with God which is found in Trinitarian theology.

*Prepared-* A specific future is being prepared for each of us in God's Kingdom (22:4; 25:34; 1 Cor. 2:9; Heb. 11:16 "He has prepared for them a city"), a unique place prepared in the Kingdom

for us by the Lord's death (Jn. 14:2,3) and yet *we* are likewise being "prepared" (s.w. Lk. 1:17,76; 12:47; 2 Tim. 2:21; Rev. 19:7; 21:2 "His wife has *prepared* herself"). God is preparing a unique destiny and role for each of us in His Kingdom, but that preparation work is in terms of how we are being prepared in this life. Therefore all our present experiences are specifically intended to prepare us for the kind of person and role we shall eternally have. In this lives the the ultimate significance and meaning to human experience if we are indeed Kingdom people. A huge amount of intense preparation is being packed into a very short space of time in this life. The lack of meaning and significance attached to even is what causes the depression which dogs each secular person, especially as they grow older. The Lord's point was that He was going to the cross to prepare places for them all in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:2,3 s.w.). He had just predicted His death. This was where their focus was to be, rather than seeking something for themselves.

It's often been commented that God is beyond or even outside of our kind of time. God pre this present creation may have been like that, and He of course has the capacity and possibility to be like that. But it seems to me that particularly in connection with those with whom He is in relationship, He chooses to not exercise that possibility. Instead, God Almighty throws Himself into our experience, by limiting Himself to our kind of time- with all the suspense, hope, excitement, joy, disappointment which this involves. Time and again we read of how God says He is "shaping evil against you and devising a plan" against His enemies (Jer. 18:11; Jer. 26:3; Jer. 49:20,30; Jer. 50:45; Mic. 2:3; 4:12). For the faithful, He says that He is making plans for them for good and not for evil, "to give you a future" (Jer. 29:11). The Lord Jesus had this sort of thing in mind when He spoke of how the Kingdom will have been being *prepared* for the faithful from the beginning of the world (Mt. 25:34; Mt. 20:23).

John the Baptist was to "prepare" the way for the Lord's coming- evidently a process- in reflection of how God had been working a long time to "prepare" [same Greek word] the way for His Son's coming (Lk. 1:76; Lk. 2:31; Lk. 3:4). We likewise, in our preaching work in these last days, are working in tandem and in step with God. The idea of God 'preparing' implies that there is therefore a gap between the plan being made, and it being executed- hence "The Lord has both planned and done what He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 51:12; Jer. 4:28; Lam. 2:17; Is. 22:11; Is. 37:26; Zech. 1:6; Zech. 8:14).

20:24 *When the ten heard it-* This suggests that the favour asked was asked secretly. The Lord sensed or overheard their anger, and called the group to Him (:25). The ebb and flow of the disciples to and from Jesus is noted especially in Matthew, probably another indication of their own weakness which formed such a major part of their witness. For the ideal was to abide in Him, to constantly follow Him, and not come to Him and then go from Him in squabbles and jealousies amongst ourselves.

20:25 *But Jesus called them*- This is in response to the anger of the ten against the self-seeking manipulation of the two. He now taught them the spirit of absolute servanthood as an answer to feeling resentful against the unspirituality of our brethren. Even if they are indeed so terribly wrong and simply 'don't get it', as the two brethren clearly didn't, our response should not be anger but rather servanthood towards them. This is all to be found in the implication of the word "But...".

*The princes*- The *archon*, literally, 'the first'. The Lord had just taught in the parable of the labourers that a principle of His Kingdom was that the first were to be last.

*Exercise dominion*- Gk. *katakuriuo*. Literally, to be *kurios* over, to be as Lord over. His idea was that if He is our *only* Lord, then there can be no lording it over others even when they are clearly unspiritual as the two brethren were at this time. This is where our belief in the Lordship of Jesus really cuts deep. For we naturally would like to think that we are superior to those who 'don't get it' about the spirit of Christ. But we are to see Him as total Lord, and ourselves as servants. Our natural anger and indignation at others' weakness is to be replaced by servanthood. And yet the body of Christ is littered with the wreckage of believers angry with others who refused to serve them but rather stormed out from them or rejected them- rather than staying to serve them, realizing that they are under the Lordship.

The style of leadership / control known in this world isn't to be exercised by the elders of God's flock (Mt. 20:25,26; 1 Pet. 5:3); ecclesial organization shouldn't reflect the structures and practices of big commercial organisations, e.g. Leadership is to be based upon spiritual attributes and the ability to change and convert the lives of others, rather than secular skills such as fund raising, computer literacy, management etc. Yet sadly many ecclesias and Christian organisations seem to confuse the difference between management skills and spiritual leadership. The two things aren't the same. An executive director of a company may very well not be the right brother to lead an ecclesia. The Greek language is full of words containing the compounds *kata-* and *arch-*, implying power over others, as part of a hierarchy. The leaders of the Roman world used these terms (Mt. 20:25), as did the synagogue leadership. But never does scripture use these kind of words about those who are 'elders' in the true ecclesia. It's a pointed omission. On the other hand, there are many *sun-* prefixes: fellow-worker, fellow-citizen, fellow-soldier, fellow-heir etc. The New Testament emphasis is certainly on what we have in common rather on the fact that in practice some are more capable of organising, or deserve especial respect for their evident spirituality and "for their work's sake". And the teaching of the Lord Himself was more concerned with how to follow Him than how to lead others. Likewise, there were many



contemporary Greek words used to describe religious gatherings, e.g. *heorte*, *synodos*, *koinos*. But instead the word *ekklesia* is used, meaning a gathering together of town citizens with equal rights to discuss a matter. This is how the word was understood at that time.

*They that are great-* The *meGas*, the mighty, the strong, the superior. The context is the sense of spiritual superiority felt by the ten against the spiritual weakness of the two brethren and their mother.

*Exercise authority-* They have *exousia*, power, control, over their inferiors. It is the Lord Jesus who is *the* Lord, and who has this *exousia* uniquely over His followers and indeed the whole world (Mt. 7:29; 9:6; 21:24; 28:18 etc.). For us to be indignant and superior against the unspirituality of our brethren is thus to usurp the unique role of the Lord Jesus. Quite rightly should we refer to Him as "the Lord", for this is who He must be in daily life and thought. The failure of others does give us in a human sense this *exousia*, this control, power and superiority- but the Lord goes on to say that it must *not* be so amongst us (:26), we are to resign this for servanthood. The Lord repeated His teaching here almost verbatim in Lk. 22:25- and He states it there immediately after predicting that one of the twelve would betray Him. He did so because He did not want them to be angry and superior over even Judas- He wanted them to instead resign those feelings for servanthood.

20:26 *Whosoever will be great-* This is in the singular- for "let *him* be your minister". The Lord may not be intending 'If any of you wants to be the greatest, then be the servant'. He may instead be developing the theme of His absolute and unequalled Lordship by saying that *the one* who shall be great shall be the minister- and He had solely Himself in view. He knew that He was to be the greatest in the Kingdom, the one with ultimate and total *exousia* (see on :25). And the path to that was through servanthood, and He invited His men to likewise participate in that servanthood.

*Let Him be your minister-* The idea may be an appeal for the disciples to allow the Lord to be their minister. This appeal had to be repeated at the last supper, when He wished to wash their feet, to be the ultimate servant, and Peter didn't want to "let Him" be his minister. So instead of thinking about what they could personally get out of the Kingdom [as the two brethren], or being spiritually superior over their weaker brethren [the ten], they were to instead accept the Lordship of Jesus and His ministrations to them. And the form in which He was supremely a servant was in His death on the cross. And yet as so often, the Lord is speaking to Himself on one level, as well as to the disciples on another level. He is the one who to be great had to make Himself a minister of all, and yet He invites all those in Him to pass through the same process. For all that is true of

Him is to be true of us. Hence He goes on to say that "Even as" He ministered, so should they (:28).

One of the commonest allusions to priesthood in the NT is the idea of ministry. Time and again, the Old Testament speaks of the priests *ministering* in the priest's office. The priests are specifically called God's ministers (Is. 61:6; Jer. 33:21; Ez. 45:4; Joel 1:9,13; 2:17). The early Christians would have heard and read many of the New Testament references to ministers and ministry as invitations to see themselves as a new priesthood. The Lord said that we should aim to be a minister, a priests, to every one of our brethren, not expecting them to minister to us, but concentrating on ministering to them (Mt. 20:26). This is exactly against the grain of our nature, and also of the concept of religion we find in the world. People *expect* to have others spiritually ministering to them. They expect a priest-figure to do all their thinking for them. But our Lord said that we are each other's priests, we're not here to be ministered ('priest-ed') to, but to minister, and give our lives in service to each other.

When James and John asked to have the senior positions, the Lord didn't rebuke them; he just told them that the greatest would desire to be a servant (Gk. *diakonos*) of all (Mt. 20:20-28). The utter degradation of the cross, and the Lord's willing humbling of Himself to accept it, is a pattern for all who would take up His cross. The "servant of all" would make no distinctions concerning whom or how he would serve; such servanthood was a complete and unqualified act of surrender. And this is taken by the Lord as a cameo of His mindset on Calvary. In conscious allusion to this, Paul could speak of how he had become a slave of all men, that he might help some to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19). He was a slave of the Gospel, a slave of the kind who was lower than the least of all others, i.e. a slave of all (Eph. 3:7,9). He didn't preach himself, but rather preached that he was a servant to all his brethren, for the sake of the fact that he was in Christ, the servant of all (2 Cor. 4:5). Thus he almost advertised his servant status; he preached himself as a slave. Paul wished to be perceived by his brethren and the whole world as merely a slave of Jesus (1 Cor. 4:1). In our talking to each other, or in our writing, it does us good to analyse how many personal pronouns we use; how much we are preaching ourselves rather than Jesus Christ. Any who may appear to be leaders or organisers are serving *Him*, who debased Himself to that depth. There can be no room *at all* for any sense of superiority amongst us. We are servants *of all*, not just of those individual brothers or ecclesias whom we happen to get on well with.

20:27 *Will be chief*- The *protos* (chief) amongst the disciples was clearly the Lord Himself. So again, the Lord may not necessarily be inviting His followers to seek greatness in the future Kingdom, but rather inviting them to focus upon His Lordship and achievement through His upcoming death. Instead He may have Himself in view- the One who is to be chief is to be the

servant of the disciples, which the Lord did through His death on the cross. And it is His death there which is the context for this whole teaching, seeing He has just given a detailed prediction of it. However, the Lord's teachings often have reference to both Himself and to the disciples, and we have noted a number of times where He seems to have specific reference to Peter. For Peter was the *protos*, the chief disciple, according to Mt. 10:2 [s.w.]. And within the Lord's words there is the nod to Peter that he must learn the spirit of servanthood if he is to be worthy of that special calling as the leader of the pack which the Lord clearly had in mind for him. The Lord has just had a lot to say about the *protos* being last in the preceding parable of the labourers, using the word three times in 20:8,10,16. He is perhaps answering the question which arises from that parable: How practically can we be the last? The answer is by serving as He served, by identifying ourselves with the "last" labourers rather than the "first" who thought they were spiritually superior over their weaker fellow labourers.

The Lord Jesus was the supreme example of spiritual ambition in daily life. When the disciples debated about who would be greatest in the Kingdom, Christ said that "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be... servant of all" (Mk. 9:34,35). Christ was the "servant of all" because He *desired* to be the greatest in the Kingdom. It was this ambition which motivated His endurance of the daily cross of His life: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: *even as* the Son of man came... to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:27,28). He was drawing on the ideas of Hos. 13:1, where Ephraim exalted himself when he humbled himself to speak to God with the trembling of a true humility. The Lord Jesus was not esteemed by men in His death (Is. 53:3); the same word occurs in Dan. 4:17, concerning how Yahweh will exalt the *basest*, the least esteemed, to be King over the kingdoms of this world. That made-basest man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted. Peter had his eye on this fact when he asks us to humble ourselves, after the pattern of the Lord, that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). Christ desired greatness in the Kingdom, and so can we; for the brighter stars only reflect more glory of the Sun (1 Cor. 15:41). This very thought alone should lift us up on the eagle wings of Spirit above whatever monotony or grief we now endure.

*Your servant*- Consider the influence of Christianity on the Greek language of humility. The Lord taught that the leaders, the great ones, in His Kingdom, would be the humble servants (Mt. 20:27). Christ spoke of himself as a humble King, which would have been a contradiction in terms to the first century Greek mind. Consider the following commentary by Alan Hayward: "The ancient Greeks had no time for humility. In fact, their language didn't even have a word for it until well into the first century... the early Christians evidently had to coin a word for it. It's a clumsy, long word, made by sticking together the Greek word 'low-down' and the Greek word 'mentality'. The sudden appearance of this new word in Greek literature during the first century is

generally attributed to the influence of the early church" [Alan Hayward, *The Humble King*, 'The Bible Missionary' No.131, January 1994].

20:28 If the Lord was speaking of Himself as the One who was to be the minister so that He might be great, it is possible that verse 28 is a commentary from Matthew rather than the words of the Lord- pointing out that in fact the Lord had Himself in view in the preceding verses.

*Not to be ministered unto*- Surely the Lord develops this teaching when He characterizes the rejected as insisting that they had never missed an opportunity to minister unto Him personally (25:44). Putting these teachings together, perhaps the Lord means us to understand that He did not come to be personally served, but rather does He 'come' to us in the form of His needy brethren, each encounter with them is an encounter with Him. People did of course minister to the Lord in His life (27:55; Mk. 1:31; 15:41; Lk. 8:3 s.w.), but He surely means that He didn't come *so much as to be ministered to* as to Himself minister to others. In this the exquisite beauty of His Lordship. He is indeed Lord, but He didn't come to be personally treated as Lord but rather His psychological focus was upon what He could do for others. And this is His comment upon the desire of the two brethren to have a grand place in the Kingdom "for us", they were seeking something for themselves, whereas the example of the Lord which they were to follow was of focusing upon serving, rather than having an eye upon the reward.

*But to minister*- The Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. His focus in His life was upon serving others, and yet the word is used of how He who served at the last supper shall also 'come forth' [s.w. "the Son of Man *came*", Mt. 20:28] to "minister" to His people at the future Messianic banquet (Lk. 12:37).

*A ransom*- The Greek *lutron* is only used in this place in the NT, although the LXX uses it for the Hebrew *pidion*, the ransom payment for human life (Ex. 21:30; Num. 3:49-51; Num. 35:31). The word means literally 'to loose'. The idea may be that something [a life, an eternal life] was potentially prepared for the "many" which was tied up [by human sin], which the Lord's death would unloose and make available. But why use this particular term in this context? The connection is clearly with the idea of being a servant, a slave of the lowest order. And what did they loose? The sandals of the guests at meals, after which they washed their feet. There is clearly a connection of thought between the Lord's teaching here and His washing of the disciples' feet at the last supper, whereby He visually fulfilled the picture of being a servant and not being ministered unto, despite Peter's objections. His unloosing of the disciples' sandals and cleansing their feet, dressed as He was on the cross, having laid aside His outer garment and being clothed only with a loincloth, was all a prefigurement of His death on the cross. He invited us all to do as He had done- to participate in His death by dying for others that they might live. And that has various fulfilments day by day, in self control, not demanding from our brother, forgiving, rebuking, caring for, teaching... telephoning, emailing, and so forth.

20:29 *Departed from Jericho*- The healing of the two blind men as they left Jericho must be compared with the healing of Bartimaeus as He left Jericho (Mk. 10:46), and the healing of a blind man as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:35). These accounts are not in contradiction. One of the two blind men was Bartimaeus, and he is the one Mark focuses on. The healing of the first blind man is indeed described in the same terms as the healing of the other blind men, but the similarity of the language is in order to demonstrate how the Lord worked in the same way in different lives at slightly different times. And there are other examples of incidents repeating in Biblical history but being described in similar language. We are left with an abiding impression that what happens in our lives has been in essence repeated in other lives. And surely the healing of the first blind man inspired the others to take the same leap of faith, just as we are to be inspired by the way others have responded to the Lord's hand in their lives.

*A great multitude followed Him*- The section began with the idea of the Lord now being on His journey to death in Jerusalem, and bidding the disciples follow Him on that path. The crowd followed, but not in that deeper sense. The same term is used of the healed blind men- they too "followed Him" (:34), but the implication is that they followed Him with understanding. The parallel Mk. 10:52 records that one of the men, Bartimaeus, "followed Jesus in the way". That last phrase would surely be redundant unless it was pregnant with some deeper meaning, and that meaning surely rests in the idea of following the Lord in the way of the cross which led to Golgotha.

20:30 *Sitting by the way*- Mk. 10:52 speaks of how at least one of these blind men followed Jesus "in the way", using the same word *hodos* as used here for "the way". Their sad position, sitting maybe for years day by day *para* or by, next to "the way", was in fact putting them in a position when at the right time, they could get up and follow the Lord along that "way". See on :34 *Followed Him*.

*Have mercy on us... Son of David*- These were exactly the words of the two blind men of 9:27, who were likewise cured as the Lord "departed" from a town, just as here the cure happened as He departed from Jericho. The similarity and connection is obvious. From God's side, we see how He works according to pattern in the lives of people. And humanly, the blind men had somehow passed on to other blind men the truth that there was mercy / grace in the Son of David, which could be manifested in the restoration of sight. In this lies the significance of the fact that according to Lk. 18:35, another blind man had very recently said exactly these words and made exactly this request as the Lord *approached* Jericho. Far from being [as supposed by the critics] a jumbling up of material by uninspired writers, we see rather the development of a theme- that blind men at various places and times approached the Lord with the same words, and made the same connection between His mercy and Him being the Son of David. They may simply have thought that as the Son of David, He had the characteristics of David- which

included remarkable mercy and grace to his enemies. We also see how once a community is broken into with the Gospel, it spreads within that community, expressed in the words and concepts which that community understands, and in the style which originated with the first ones in the community who accepted the Gospel. I have seen this happen in communities of the deaf, Gypsies, HIV patients, ethnic minorities under persecution, language groups etc. And so it happened amongst the blind beggar community in Palestine. Such communities have amazing links to each other and paths of communication.

The connection between "the son of David" and "mercy" is surely rooted in the description of the promises to David as "the mercies [*chesed*] of David" (Is. 55:3; Acts 13:34; 1 Kings 3:6; 2 Chron. 1:8; Ps. 89:49 "The mercies which You promised unto David"; Is. 16:5 "In mercy shall the throne be established... in the tent of David"). These promises were utter grace; "mercy" translates *chesed*, which is about the closest the OT comes to the NT concept of grace. David rejoiced in this *chesed* / mercy shown to him (2 Sam. 22:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; Ps. 101:1). Solomon pleaded for grace on the basis of the fact that God had shown such covenant mercies to David (2 Chron. 6:42 "Remember the mercies of David"). The mercies of David surely also refer to God's mercy, the mercy of grace, shown to David in forgiving him the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah- he begged for forgiveness on the basis of God's "tender mercies" (Ps. 51:1). It could be argued that David's forgiveness was on account of his pleading for the mercies shown to him in the Davidic covenant to be continued to him. For in that covenant God had promised that *chesed* would not depart from David (2 Sam. 7:15), and David therefore begs for forgiveness on the basis that grace / *chesed* would indeed not be withdrawn from him (Ps. 51:1). From all this, David pleaded in crisis towards the end of his life to fall into God's hands because "His mercies are great" (2 Sam. 24:14). In response to the *chesed* ["mercy", or grace] shown David, he too was characterized by humanly senseless *chesed* to his enemies in the family of Saul (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:15; 2 Sam. 2:5 "you have shewed this kindness / *chesed* unto Saul"; 2 Sam. 3:8; 9:1,7) and to Hanun his Ammonite enemy (2 Sam. 10:2 "I will shew kindness / *chesed* unto the Hanun"). What is so impressive is that the network of blind men, from Galilee to Jericho, had figured this out, or at least part of it. They saw the connection between grace and David, and were inspired to throw themselves upon the grace of David's Messianic Son. There was in those times [as there is in much of the world today] a deep belief that blindness was the direct result of sin (Jn. 9:2). These blind men almost certainly felt that their blindness was a result of their sin, and so they felt a moral need for forgiveness, so that the blindness would be lifted. According to Mk. 10:46, one of the blind men was called Bartimaeus, literally 'Son of the unclean'- doubtless this was what he had been dubbed by others, for no Hebrew mother would have named her son that. And they believed that Jesus could indeed cleanse them, morally forgive them, and thereby restore their sight. This would explain why they screamed [Gk.] "Have mercy on us!". This was a moral request; they didn't simply call out for healing.

20:31 *Rebuked them*- This is yet another example of where the Lord is presented as eager to

accept, when men [including disciples] are more eager to reject. The same word has just been used in 19:13 for how the disciples rebuked the little ones from coming to the Lord- and were in turn rebuked. The impression is that in the disciples' exclusivity, they weren't being [as they supposed] more spiritual than the world around them, but rather were they being simply as that world. Soon afterwards, the Pharisees told the Lord to "rebuke" His disciples, and He replied that it was impossible for them to "hold their peace" (Lk. 19:39,40). These are all words and phrases taken from this incident. Now it is the disciples who refuse to be quiet, and it is the Pharisees who want them to be quiet. Again the point is made that the desire to silence and exclude others is from the world, and not of Christ. The Lord's acceptance of people is consistently painted by the Gospels as being far more inclusive and extensive than that of men. The human tendency to reject and erect barriers is simply not there in Christ.

*But they cried the more-* This fits with my comment on 20:21 *What do you want?*, in that this could be seen as piquing their sense of urgency for Christ.

20:32 *What do you want-* See on 20:21 *What do you want?* The Lord a way of focusing men upon their need. Thus He would have passed by the desperate disciples as they struggled in the storm, He would have gone further on the road to Emmaus, and He asked the blind men the obvious question: "What will ye that I shall do unto you?" (Mt. 20:32). He only partially cured another blind man, to focus that man's mind on the faith that was needed for the second and final stage of the cure (Mk. 8:23-25). He elicited from the father of the epileptic child the miserable childhood story of the boy- not that the Lord needed to know it, but to concentrate the man on his need for the Lord's intervention (Mk. 9:21). He wanted them to focus on their need: in this case, for sight. He let Peter start to sink, and only then, when Peter's whole heart and soul were focused on the Lord, did He stretch forth His hand. The Lord deliberately delayed going to see Lazarus until he was dead and buried; to elicit within His followers the acuteness of their need. And was He *really* sleeping in the boat with the storm all around Him? Was He not waiting there for them to finally quit their human efforts and come running to Him with faith in no other (Mk. 4:38,39)? Only when men were thus focused on their desperate need for the Lord would He answer them. The Lord further focused men's need when he asked the lame man: "Wilt thou be made whole?" (Jn. 5:6). Of course the man wanted healing. But the Lord first of all focused his desire for it.

20:33 *The one thing* he wanted was to see (Mt. 20:33). Those healed blind men are types of us. True understanding (seeing) should be the one thing we want. "Wisdom is the *principal* thing; therefore get wisdom" (Prov. 4:7). See on 20:21 *What do you want?* This was obviously a rhetorical question, and it succeeded in the intention of making the men verbalize their dominant desire. Likewise the Lord works with us to make us focus and understand what is our dominant

desire- and then seeks to reposition that focus. In this section He has done that by placing all human desires and requests in the shadow of His death for us. For how could we want anything 'extra' after He has done that for us, with all it enabled.

20:34 *Jesus had compassion*- So often we read this, indeed the Greek word is only used for the compassion of Jesus during His ministry; and it is never in itself because the object of the compassion had some great spirituality or was somehow worthy of that compassion. Rather was it basic pity, which is the idea in the Greek; pity at the human condition. It is exemplified in how the Samaritan had compassion upon the wounded man, and how the Father has compassion on the prodigal (Lk. 10:33; 15:20). In this case, as explained above, the blind men did indeed have quite some spiritual insight. But that of itself didn't elicit the Lord's compassion. The Lord who is the same yesterday as today was and is simply moved by human need- and responds.

*Touched their eyes*- Which were likely secreting ritually unclean emissions. Again the Lord shows an eagerness to identify with human uncleanness rather than avoid it. He could, after all, have cured the men in a different manner. This was the same manner in which the Lord had cured the two blind men in 9:29. The critics love to see here a confusion in reporting a singular incident twice. But it seems perfectly likely that the Lord rewarded the fact that these men had heard of the faith of the other blind men, come to share it- and therefore the Lord treated them likewise. There is a continuity and similarity in the way in which the Lord works in human lives, which is why our sufferings are designed so that we can share what we learnt from them with others who are suffering in the same way (2 Cor. 1:4). It likewise explains the otherwise uncanny similarities which there are between the experiences of believers, both with those contemporary with us and personally known to us, and others in the past or of whom we read in the Bible.

If indeed there are major bloomers in the Gospels and in the Bible generally [as the critics suggest regarding these incidents of healing the pairs of blind men], then naturally the question arises as to how reliable the Biblical text really is. Liberal Christians tend to argue that some is, other parts aren't. But no basis is given for deciding which parts are reliable and which are not. Nor does there seem any reason why God would inspire some parts of the Bible but not others. But the wonder is that the Bible, and the Gospels particularly, can be analyzed at depth and found not to contradict but rather to dovetail seamlessly in a way in which no human piece of writing ever could. This is particularly seen in the four Gospels, and it is this seamlessness and lack of contradiction which led sceptics like Frank Morrison in *Who Moved the Stone?* to become committed believers in the bodily resurrection of Christ. In musical terms, the whole united record reads as a symphony. There is no need to remove one note from it, or a few notes here and there. The overall wonder is lost by doing so, to the point that it is a desecration of the Divine product. If there are passages which we cannot reconcile, the way of humility is surely to accept that we are still waiting for more insight and understanding- rather than arrogantly



insisting that Divine inspiration somehow faltered at that point.

*Followed Him*- See on :30 *Followed Him* and :30 *Sitting by the way*. Mk. 10:52 adds that at least one of the blind men "Followed Him *in the way*". But He told the man "Go *your way*" (Mk. 10:52). The man's way was now the Lord's way, the way of the cross. There's surely a play on words here, for *akoloutheo* translated "followed" means literally 'to be in the same way with'. The Lord told the man to go *his way*, but the man followed Jesus in *His way*, the way which has been defined in :17,18 as the way to the cross. Our way is His way, not in that He dominates and subsumes our individuality beneath His own, but in that we each follow Him in our own particular and unique way. That is not to say that we each have our way in life and that journey must of itself be the right one. It's axiomatic that every man has his own path in life. As believers in Christ, our path must be *following Him*, and not just wandering around in life; but each one in Christ follows their Lord in their own unique path.