

Guided Bible Study

The Twelve Disciples

(Week 6)

Matthew 20 v. 20 – 28

An adapted version of Life Builder Study | Douglas Connelly

Welcome

For the purposes of our Bible Studies, we will be using Life Builder Study Series (Inter-Varsity Press). Our theme for these studies is: The Twelve Disciples. The studies were originally written by Douglas Connelly, but we will be modifying them in order that they become more usable for home study as we seek to transition between the church building and our homes during the next several weeks.

These studies give us the opportunity to study the Bible in a greater depth and to reflect on what it is saying to us. If you will be doing the studies at home, it is suggested that you do the study on Wednesday morning, for an hour, starting at 10.30 am. Get yourself a tea or coffee, a Bible pen and paper (for any notes you want to make) and begin studying.

Hope that you enjoy it!

Pastor Ian

Context

Jesus had about three years to mould a dozen fearful and faithless men into the pillars of a worldwide movement. Despite this brief window, time spent with Jesus had a transforming effect on each of them; most would be inspired and emboldened to proclaim him as the saviour against great opposition. Through these ten studies, we too can experience the deep change that only time in Jesus' presence can bring.

Some Thoughts To Help You While You Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the concepts of leadership and success as they are expressed in Jesus' kingdom.

The mother of James and John was not just their mother; she is also likely Jesus' aunt, named Salome (**compare Matthew 27 v. 55 – 56 with Mark 15 v. 40 and also John 19 v. 25, where she is called Mary's sister**). In the biblical world older women were given special respect, and they could make awkward requests that men could not. Salome was asking Jesus to give her two sons the places of prominence and power in his kingdom. Jesus had already promised that the disciples would sit on twelve thrones (**Matthew 19 v. 28**), and she wanted to make sure that her sons would have the most important places. Later in his Gospel, Matthew uses the same phrase to refer to the thieves crucified with Jesus '**one on his right side and one on his left**' (**Matthew 27 v. 38**). The place of honour that James and John desired so strongly were given to two criminals!

The 'cup' is the cup of suffering that Jesus would soon drink. The cup Jesus would face was not the cup of glory and power, but the cup of pain and agony. John and James would indeed share Jesus' cup. In Jewish thought, a '**cup**' was an experience or destiny. They think Jesus is talking about glory, but in reality he is talking about sorrow.

Eventually James will be martyred (**Acts 12 v. 2**) and John will be exiled to the prison island of Patmos (**Revelation 1 v. 9 – 11**).

The disciples had embraced a serious error about how things work in Jesus' kingdom. Jesus points out that the ways of the rulers of the 'Gentiles' (used here in the sense of unbelievers) are not the way of the kingdom. Those in places of authority in the worlds use threat and intimidation to get things done – they '**Lord it over**' other people. The disciples thought the same principles would apply in the realm of Jesus' kingdom.

Greatness in Christ's kingdom is the exact opposite of greatness in the secular world. Citizens of the kingdom are never to be marked by a lust for power over others. Instead greatness is attained through servanthood, as demonstrated by Jesus himself. The word servant in **verse 26** is a translation of the Greek word **diakonos**, meaning a household servant. It became the basic term in the early church for a deacon – someone who was marked by a willingness to serve others. The idea is intensified in **verse 27** by the use of the word slave (**Greek: doulos**). In the world 'the greatest' and 'the slave' are opposites; in the realm where Jesus reigns, they are the same.

A person's attitude in describing how he or she serves others can tell you a lot. Bragging about it so that we get acclaim from others takes our actions out of the realm of servanthood and into the realm of using others to make ourselves look good.

Study 6 - John

(Seeking To Be The Greatest)

The Bible paints a dramatic **'before and after'** picture of John the Apostle. In his later years John was called the apostle of love. In his New Testament writings John uses the word Love eighty times. He gave us the best – known verse in the Bible: **'For God so loved the world'** (**John 3 v. 16**) and from John we learn Jesus' new command to **'love one another'** (**John 13 v. 34**) and hear the great declaration that **'God is love'** (**1 John 4 v. 8**).

But John was not always a man marked by love. He and his older brother, James, were called **'sons of thunder'** by Jesus, and they threatened to call down fire from heaven on those who insulted them. In his early years John was quick to judge and was set on revenge against anyone who didn't agree with him.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: As Christians we are commanded to love one another. Why is that so difficult to do? Reflect on how you have changed over the years. What has brought about the change? Have you mellowed or become hard? In what areas do you still need to change?

John's early spirit of pride and self – promotion revealed itself one day when his mother asked Jesus for special privileges. Jesus' response may have been the factor that started John down the long path of transformation and change. **Read Matthew 20 v. 20 – 28**

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

What does the passage tell us about how each person or group

reacted to John's mother's request? Imagine the look on each one's face: John & James; The other disciples; Jesus.

Rewrite this mother's request in the context of today. What was she really asking for?

Do you think John's mother made this request on her own or was she put up to it? Explain.

What did Jesus mean when he asked John and James if they were prepared to '**drink the cup**' Jesus would drink (**Matthew 20 v. 22**)? Was their answer honest? Was it realistic?

How does Jesus characterise the leadership of people in authority in the world (**Matthew 20 v. 25**)?

How do authority and influence reveal themselves in the realm of Christ's kingdom (**Matthew 20 v. 26 – 27**)?

Jesus points to himself as the model of this kind of servant leadership. What qualified Jesus '**to be served**' by others?

In what ways are you expecting others to serve you? How did Jesus serve instead?

In what ways are you serving others?

Now or Later

Reliable church tradition says that John lived a long life in the city of Ephesus. He was the only apostle to die a natural death. As an old man he was exiled to the prison island of Patmos, where he received the visions recorded in the Book of Revelation. John also was moved by the Holy Spirit to write the Gospel of John and the three New Testament letters of John. The church father Irenaeus says that John died a natural death during the reign of the Emperor Trajan (ruled A. D. 98 – 117).

Another church father, Jerome, recorded several centuries later that in his last years John was carried to church by the young men of the community. John would simply say to the gathered Christians, **'Little children, love one another, love one another, love one another.'**

Ask God to reveal the potential he sees in you in the realm of servant leadership.

Be willing to pursue the transformation that Jesus points out to you.

