

Monday, March 30, 2009

For weeks the people of Fargo and other river-side communities in the upper Midwest of the USA have been frantically fighting rising rivers. Nothing can stop the river and you can't accurately predict how high it will rise. Floods often bring floating trees, parts of broken houses, even ice jams in early spring, all of which can break through the dikes or destroy almost anything in its path.

Floods often last weeks, thus agonizingly long battles with home and business owners living on the edge of exhaustion and fear. One week from today will be Monday of "Holy Week". It's fair to say Jesus' final weeks before that Passover were similar to what you see on TV about the river battle. Unlike the army of sandbaggers working to save homes and communities, Jesus fought His battle alone. Despite His clear statements of atonement purpose, His disciples didn't understand the battle raging inside Jesus as He walked toward the cross!

Matthew, one of the disciples, (Matt. 9:9-13) recorded Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem, including the conversation between Jesus, James and John, we considered this weekend, Matt. 20:17-28.

Zebedee was evidently a successful businessman with fishing boats on Lake Galilee (Mark 1:16-20). Simon and Andrew may have worked for or with him on occasion. James and John, Simon Peter and Andrew likely knew each other well as fellow fisherman on Galilee. Some scholars believe Salome, Zebedee's wife and mother of James and John may have been a relative, perhaps even sister to Mary, Jesus' mother. For these reasons Salome, who may have been traveling with Jesus and His disciples toward Jerusalem for Passover, apparently felt some freedom to ask Jesus for special recognition for her sons. Do you sometimes fall into that trap believing God owes you some special blessings, some consideration of your efforts, some response to your prayers? Try Isaiah 40:6-31 and Exodus 34 for proper perspective. Presumption is dangerous with Almighty God!

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

With royal position comes great privilege. As President Obama has transitioned from relative unknown to presidential candidate stumping for votes, to US President, did you notice the increase in media attention, secret service protection, motorcades, etc? Now he lives in the White House and is pampered as perhaps the most powerful man in the world! While we didn't see it, we can imagine 'jockeying for position' was taking place months ago out of public view, as the possibility grew that he would be president and would appoint people to significant roles.

That is exactly what was happening with Jesus. When the crowds became large, Jesus selected 12 who would be with Him continually. Luke 6:12-16 tells us Jesus prayed all night about these selections, for to them He would entrust the privilege of explaining Him and His mission to the world after He was gone!

From the 12, Jesus apparently invited three to a deeper, more trusted relationship with Him. Peter, James and John were with Him when He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (Luke 8:51), and they alone experienced the miracle of Jesus' "transfiguration" on the mountain (Matthew 17:1-9). A few days after the Matt. 20 conversation, it was these three Jesus invited to a deep prayer time in the Garden of Gethsemane the night of His betrayal (Matt. 26:37). Following His resurrection these three clearly had the special respect of the multitudes that believed the story of Jesus and became the first Christians. (Acts 1-6)

Do you see a difference between their relationship with Jesus and the relationship of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel or David with God? We often wish God were right here with us, so we could see Him, talk with Him . . . but could this be one reason He isn't? Did the three sometimes forget who Jesus is, Sovereign God, and lose perspective on His purpose and their role in life? How do you maintain a proper relationship of humility with Jesus?

Wednesday, April 1, 2009

What do you think of when you hear the word 'kingdom'? Jesus often used the phrase "kingdom of heaven"; in fact He began using it in His first "speech", the "sermon on the mount", Matt. 5, 6, 7. What is it? Where is it?

For most listeners in Jesus' day, they would have understood it meant "heaven", the place where God lives and rules as Sovereign. Jesus' prayer, often called "the Lord's Prayer" reflects that: "*Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed (holy, honored) be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. . .*" (Matt. 6:9, 10).

Many Jews believed God would bring His kingdom reign here to earth, and "Messiah", God's selected, anointed, empowered leader would rule over this "kingdom" and Israel would of course be the priority people, perhaps the only people, in this earthly kingdom. If you view the questions in Matthew 18:1, or 20:21 from that perspective, they take on new meaning don't they?

Jesus, however, consistently spoke of the "kingdom of heaven" not as an earthly political or military movement, but both a heavenly kingdom and earthly spiritual kingdom over which God reigns. Paul refers to our "citizenship" being in this "kingdom" if we have trusted Jesus Christ to be our Savior, (Phil. 3:20; Eph. 2:19; 3:14, 15; Col. 1:13, 14) and we have been rescued from the dominion of Satan in the dark kingdom and come into the "kingdom of the Son."

Matthew records a dramatic conversation which had perhaps taken place only a few days before and may well have stirred James and John to think about positions of power in God's kingdom (Matt. 19:16-30), note especially vs. 28. Revelation 4:4; 11:16 speak of 24 "Elders" on thrones in heaven. We must be careful about interpretation of the vision John received of the "kingdom of heaven" in Revelation, but clearly God reigns from a "heaven" where He is Sovereign, where His angels do His bidding and where His people celebrate His Holy Lordship. At death, those redeemed by Jesus go there (2 Cor. 4:14-5:10; John 6:40).

Thursday, April 2, 2009

One week from today will be "Maundy Thursday". That Passover week it was the evening of Jesus' last supper with His disciples, His betrayal and beatings. In Matt. 20:20-28 Jesus was having a troubling conversation with James and John about their desire for positions of influence in His "kingdom". Jesus had just spoken of what awaited Him in Jerusalem (vs. 17-19), but the disciples had not understood. Their request was assuming an earthly kingdom of power and certainly it would include positions of authority. For human entry into God's kingdom, their rescue from Satan's kingdom was necessary (Colossians 1:13, 14), and that rescue required the full sin debt payment (Romans 6:23; Ephes. 2:1-6) of death.

As Jesus looked forward to Jerusalem, He knew the payment process awaited Him. James and John's request was met with Jesus' forthright challenge "*can you drink the cup I am going to drink?*" Foolishly their response was "we can". You'll recall however, first they slept while Jesus agonized, then they fled the Garden in fear (Matt. 26:56). Remember Jesus' tearful request of the Father regarding this agonizing "cup" of atonement sacrifice? (Matt. 26:39, 42)

Jesus knew the Father's Redemption plan required full payment of the sin debt for all humanity . . . the full wrath of God must be poured out on sin, and Satan's full hatred for God would also be poured out upon Jesus paying the sin price. That is the horror of Isaiah 53, our Easter theme verses, read it again.

When Jesus said "*you will indeed drink from My cup . . .*" (Matt. 20:23) He was referring to the fact that James and John would suffer greatly as followers of Jesus. James would be executed by King Herod (Acts 12:1,2) as Herod attempted to control the "Christian movement", and John would be exiled to the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9) where he died after traveling throughout Palestine proclaiming his followership of Jesus for more than 60 years, and writing John, 1,2,3 John and Revelation!

Friday, April 3, 2009

Contrast is a good word for Jesus, don't you agree? Nearly everything He did or said was in contrast with what most people expected and certainly what the norm was of His day.

One week from today is "Good Friday" and we'll honor Jesus Christ's crucifixion with a noon time Prayer service, an evening worship concert and 9:00 p.m. showing of "The Passion of the Christ", do you remember that movie? It's graphic! The brutality poured out on Jesus was more than "graphic" it was gruesome. I urge you to walk with great reflection, these next days.

Jesus used the Matthew 20:20-28 conversation to again draw a great contrast for His disciples as He explained "*whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant . . .*" In Matt. 18:1-4 Jesus had explained it was innocence like little children not pride or arrogant leadership which was honored in God's paradigm. In Matt. 18:15-35 God's way was forgiveness not vengeance. In Matt. 20:1-16 it was generosity not man's perspective of fairness, and finally it was humble service not dominance. Have you discovered how different life lived Jesus way is as compared to the normal pattern of the world? Maybe that's one reason Jesus said "*in this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:33).

Do you notice Jesus' statement regarding His purpose for coming to earth (Matt. 20:28) "*to give His life as a ransom for many.*" Ransom was understood as the price paid for purchase of an ordinary slave (about 30 pieces of silver). Jesus was saying the human race is so valuable to God, that even though in slavery to sin, condemned to die (Rom. 3:23; 6:23) Jesus would pay the full ransom price for any and all persons to be free, and that price was not silver coins, but His life! Do you see the contrast of what Judas was paid to betray Jesus (Matt. 26:14-16) and what Jesus paid for you . . . Matt. 26-28?



Pastor Doug Anderson

March 30 – April 3, 2009



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