

in general, there is no time at which these workers leave the Kingdom or control of the King once they have begun to work for Him. Thus, even if the grumbling legalists who insult God's grace end up in hell, they are still within God's domain and under His rule, although terribly last and finally lost. The fact that Jesus did not define the denarius specifically in His story leaves us to understand Him to mean that the denarius is what anyone is to receive from God, our pay.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What contextual signposts point to the proper interpretation of this illustration?
2. State what Jesus considers the main point of His story.
3. What local customs of Jesus' day must be known to appreciate the householder's hiring and pay practices? What is meant by "early in the morning," "the third hour," "the sixth, ninth and eleventh" hours? How much is a denarius worth in our money? Who in our society gets the equivalent of a denarius a day?
4. What is the ground of the complaint of the grumblers? What motivates them to complain?
5. What are the kind, cheerful answers of the householder to the complainers?
6. What texts in Matthew 18 find practical application in this section?

### Section 51

#### JESUS PREDICTS HIS SUFFERING A FOURTH TIME

(Parallels: Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34)

TEXT: 20:17-19

17 And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples apart, and on the way he said unto them, 18 Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, 19 and shall deliver him unto the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify: and the third day he shall be raised up.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you think Jesus took the Twelve to one side here?
- b. From what or whom would He be taking them aside?
- c. What effect do you suppose might ensue if Jesus made this declaration without this step?
- d. Why do you suppose Jesus provides so many explicit details while describing His suffering?
- e. How does this prediction prove that Jesus knew that He would be killed by the Romans, and not directly by the Jews themselves?
- f. Of what principles in Jesus' sermon on personal relationships in Matthew 18 is this section an illustration?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

When Jesus was on the point of going up to Jerusalem, while they were on the road, He was walking ahead of the disciples, and they were filled with misgivings, and those who were following were alarmed.

Then, taking the Twelve aside once more, He began to speak to them about what was about to happen to Him. He said, "Notice, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all the predictions that the prophets wrote about the Messiah will come true. The Messiah will be delivered to the high clergy and the theologians who will sentence Him to death. In fact, He will be handed over to the pagan Gentiles who will ridicule Him, insult Him and spit on Him. They will lash Him with whips and finally execute Him by crucifixion. But on the third day, He will be raised from the dead."

But they did not comprehend a word of it. His meaning was unintelligible to them, and they continued to fail to understand what He was saying.

### SUMMARY

During Jesus' last journey to the capital, His fearless way of going before His men filled them with apprehension about what might happen in Jerusalem. Once more Jesus gathered them around Him to announce that this is the prophetic journey of which He had so often spoken. However, this time He furnished even more detail, but the disciples listened uncomprehendingly.

## NOTES

## I. FOURTH PASSION PREDICTION

(20:17-19; Mk. 10:32-34; Lk. 18:31-34)

## A. SITUATION: Jesus and disciples on last trip to Jerusalem

20:17 **And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem.** The expression *méllon anabatéin* means "He was about to go up," however it does not settle whether it is to be taken geographically or metaphorically:

1. Metaphorically, it could mean He was about to journey to the highest point in Jewish thinking, i.e. to Jerusalem and the temple. However, taken with the expression *on the way* (*en tê hodô*), which Mark connects with "they were going up," it would seem less likely that Matthew intends it metaphorically here.
2. Geographically, *he was about to go up*, means that He had not yet arrived at Jericho where the final climb begins from -300 m (-1000 ft.) below sea level to 814 m (2600 ft.) above sea level. In this case, He would not have crossed the Jordan yet, so Matthew would mean that He was still in Perea. (See on 19:1.) This does not contradict Mark's assertion, "They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem," if we understand Mark to mean the journey to the highest point in Jewish thinking, but not necessarily on the final uphill climb from Jericho to Jerusalem.

Whereas the rich young ruler just barely caught Jesus as He was setting out on the journey and evoked the teaching relative to the perils of wealth (19:16—20:16), Jesus and His group are now finally on their way to Jerusalem. (Mk. 10:32) Mark also signals the peculiar boldness and decisiveness with which Jesus stepped out, a fact that unnerved the Apostles. This tense atmosphere and foreboding of approaching tragedy would be left unexplained, if we did not have John's account. In fact, he records the Apostles' earlier objections to the Lord's return to Judea to be at the bedside of Lazarus: "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" (Jn. 11:7, 8) And when they saw Him determined to go anyway, it was Thomas who courageously rallied the others with his exhortation, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him!" (Jn. 11:16) They referred to the violent opposition back in December. (Cf. Jn. 10:22-39) It was then that He had moved His center of operations across the Jordan to avoid precipitating the crisis before

the last Passover. After a lightning trip to Bethany for the raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11:1-44), He faded away back into the hills again, moving in the direction of the wilderness north-north-east of Jerusalem to a hamlet called Ephraim, where He holed up with His disciples. (Jn. 11:54) From there He kept on the move toward the north, then turning east along the border between Samaria and Galilee (Lk. 11:11), until He could mingle with the Jerusalem-bound Passover crowds. (Mt. 19:2; cf. Jn. 11:55-57) It was probably this gnawing uncertainty, this constant running from opposition that broke the Apostles' courage. Now "they were amazed," because the running is suddenly over: Jesus was walking boldly ahead of them, obviously on His way to the very death-trap they had been so studiously avoiding by their recent withdrawals! So it was this realization that He is no longer running from death, but deliberately walking toward it, that seemed suicidal to them. No wonder that "those who followed were afraid." (Mk. 10:32) But the Son of God moved on ahead of His people, His mind engrossed in thought about the great work He must accomplish in the capital; and, determined to complete His mission, He pressed forward to get it started.

Considering these circumstances, it may be that Jesus noticed the Twelve hanging back, whispering among themselves, and perceived their misgivings. At this point **He took the twelve disciples apart** from the crowds of Passover-bound travellers, so that the following communication could be given in private. This detail suggests that He had every intention of entering Jerusalem as a Messianic King (Mt. 21). Since any untimely dampering of the popular enthusiasm which figured in that scenario would be out of place, this Passion Prediction required privacy. This circumspection is one of His last efforts at Messianic reserve. (See on 8:4; 9:26, 30, 31; 12:15; 14:13 introductory notes and 14:22.) He is travelling in the company of hundreds of Galilean friends and sympathizers who, were they to learn this brutal truth, might well have been incited to riot by it, bringing only more bloodshed just to resist His arrest, and so hinder the plan of God. The two expressions *apart* and *on the way* depict the deliberateness of the Lord: although He speaks privately to the Twelve, they are already moving toward His destiny.

In the self-sacrificing predicted for Jesus in His prophecy, note how totally absent is the spirit that always calculates its own advantages: "What is there going to be in it for me?" This uncalculating altruism must condemn the ambition of the Apostles who not only ask, "We have sacrificed everything—what shall we have?" but

also demand to be exalted to the positions of highest honors. (Contrast Mt. 18:1-35; 20:20-28)

### B. JESUS' REACTION: Passion Prediction (20:18, 19)

20:18 **Behold, we go up to Jerusalem.** There it is: the official admission that this is the last trip. The running is over and this is to be the showdown. Luke (18:31) records the comforting word which proves that, however painfully unclear and unwelcome for the disciples Jesus' destiny might be, it was all planned by God: "Everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished." Note the power of prophecy to stabilize the wavering disciples:

1. He pointed them to their Bible to restudy the ancient messages of God's prophets concerning His Messianic mission. (Cf. His method with John the Baptist, Mt. 11:4f) This cannot but lend sound, Biblical perspective to the seemingly tragic fatality to be confronted in His suffering and death. (Remember Ro. 15:3, 4 for our encouragement too!)
2. He prophesied in detail what must, when fulfilled, become the strongest confirmation of His total mastery over circumstances. He knew what He Himself faced and conquered it by His glorious resurrection. He can empower us to do the same too. (Cf. Eph. 1:19f; 2:5f; 3:20f)

Note the precision even more evident in this prediction: 1. Betrayal; 2. Condemnation; 3. Delivery to the Gentiles; 4. Ridicule; 5. Torture; 6. Crucifixion; 7. Victory by resurrection. These words mark an escalation in the details of His prophecies concerning the end of His suffering. (Cf. notes on Mt. 16:21; 17:9, 22f) Lk. 24:6b, 7 may represent a rewording of the prophecies made in Galilee, made by Luke in the light of the fulfilment, rather than an actual quotation of a crucifixion prophecy prior to the one in our text.) From the standpoint of His disciples, the gradual escalation of information is an act of mercy that bares the gruesome details gradually to minds unable to bear the entire blow at once. (Cf. Jn. 16:12) But they must endure at least this much pain, not for the sake of the suffering it caused them now, but, having been forewarned before the fact, they might have the greatest confidence in Him after the fulfilment. (Jn. 14:29; 16:4) For them, this was fundamentally a

faith-building exercise.

However, the very precision of these details must have been a crushing load for Jesus to bear, since, although He is furnished with the infallibility of prophetic foresight, He is also forced thereby to anticipate mentally all that to which He must then voluntarily submit Himself. (Cf. notes on 8:10) No escapist, our Lord faced His own future squarely and courageously, and continued His march to Jerusalem and His forthcoming destiny. **The third day he shall be raised up.** The Lord never omitted this promise of victory, and every time He repeated it in connection with a Passion Prediction, He expressed His unshakeable confidence in the faithfulness of God who would bring it about. Further, by His own decisive example, He taught His people to deal responsibly with life's vital issues, facing with unflinching courage the questions, the problems and the forces of evil. Although He may certainly have been tempted to seek an easy comfort in anonymity and a tight-lipped indifference to the ever-present issues crying for solution, although He may have intensely desired that the world's sins could be eliminated in some other way, although He may have hated to choose His own death as the only workable alternative, Jesus Christ confronted His responsibility and accepted it. Overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God, He faced facts which would have crippled the vitality of anyone who did not trust the Father to keep His word.

As in the previous cases (Mt. 17:23b; Mk. 9:32; Lk. 9:45), so also now, "they understood none of these things; this saying was hid from them, and they did not grasp what was said." (Lk. 18:34) Their inability to comprehend Jesus is providential for us, since it proves that the hypothesis that they expected Him to rise again and therefore believed in His resurrection without concrete proof of its reality, ignores the evidence. (See notes on 17:23 = Mk. 9:32 = Lk. 9:45.) Thus, their mental block guarantees to the Church the gloriously solid truth of the resurrection facts.

Even if Matthew and Mark did not record the disciples' obtuseness and unwillingness to grasp this clearest of literal statements, they prove that this was really the Twelve's reaction, by their inclusion of the request for positions of glory made by James and John, as well as the angry jealousy of the other Apostles. This shows that they all, enamored with visions of future glories, refused to confront the reality Jesus pictured in this prophecy.

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. What additional details does Mark furnish to fill out the picture of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem?
2. In what peculiar manner did Jesus handle the disciples, preparing them to hear this prediction of His approaching suffering? Why would this particular treatment have been necessary at that moment?
3. What, in Jesus' words, is indicated about the time-period in which He was then speaking?
4. What are the details of His suffering that Jesus makes explicit now, details which before had been absent or only implied?
5. Show how Jesus' predictions harmonize with the Old Testament prophecies about His death, and how they differ. Cite some OT prophecies that predict His suffering.
6. What does the minuteness and accuracy of His predictions prove about His claims to be God's Son?
7. While Matthew and Mark do not report the disciples' inability to accept or understand Jesus' plain prediction, as does Luke, how do they prove that they do know about the disciples' failure to grasp it?
8. What texts in Matthew 18 find practical application in this section?

## Section 52

## JESUS REFUSES TO ESTABLISH HIERARCHY

(Parallel: Mark 10:35-45)

TEXT: 20:20-28

20 Then came to him the mother of the sons of Zebedee with her sons, worshipping *him*, and asking a certain thing of him. 21 And he said unto her, What wouldest thou? She saith unto him, Command that these my two sons may sit, one on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand, in thy kingdom. 22 But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? They say unto him, We are able. 23 He saith unto them, My cup indeed ye shall drink: but to sit on my right hand, and on *my* left hand, is not mine to give; but *it is for them* for whom