

Chapter 81: Discipleship in Death and Resurrection

Matthew 20:17–19

As Jesus approaches closer to Jerusalem, he has several items of business that he must still address before his arrival. In this first story, Jesus speaks privately with his disciples to explain to them his third prediction that Jerusalem would be a place where he would suffer and die, but on the third day be raised from the dead. In this astonishing statement, Jesus continues to teach and prepare his disciples not only for what he must endure, but what they must endure as they follow him as his disciples. Through this passage, Jesus is still calling us to *seek Jesus' resurrection reward*.

The Cross to Carry (Matt. 20:17)

After Jesus' parable about the laborers in the vineyard, the transition into this next narrative is simple: “and” (καί; *kai*; v. 17a). This word gives the sense that this passage is building on what Jesus had said previously, where Jesus insisted that the last will be made first, while the first will be made last. There, Jesus had taught his disciples these things to warn them against being “preoccupied with rewards” when Peter had asked what material rewards the disciples could expect to receive after having left everything (Matt. 19:27–30), and when, in the next section, Jesus must address the “overt ambition” of the mother of James and John, whose mother asks Jesus that her sons might sit next to him in the kingdom (Matt. 19:20–28).¹ Notice that each of the three men within Jesus' closest circle all start to ask about what they might get from him! Thus, the context of this passage puts a particular contrast between the worldly aspirations of the disciples against the sacrificial intentions of Jesus.

This particular narrative takes place “as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem” (v. 17a). This may mean that Jesus' travels through Perea (i.e., the area to the east of the Jordan River; cf. Matt. 19:1) have come to an end;² however, because Jerusalem was at a high elevation on top of Mount Zion,³ Carson points out that “it had become customary to speak of ‘going up’ to Jerusalem regardless of where one was in Palestine, as in England one ‘goes up’ to London from every place except Oxford or Cambridge.”⁴ Regardless, the explicit mention of “Jerusalem” is the important point, since Jesus has already told his disciples that he must suffer many things in Jerusalem (Matt. 16:21). So, the parallel passage in Mark 10:32 tells us that Jesus' disciples were “amazed” and “afraid.” We find a similar kind of anticipatory dread in the story where Abraham journeys with his son, Isaac, to Mount Moriah, when we read that “On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar” (Gen.

¹ Hagner, *Matthew 14 - 28*, 574.

² Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 782.

³ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 306.

⁴ Carson, “Matthew,” 485.

22:4). Like Abraham on that third day, Jesus has not yet arrived at the place where the promised Son must be sacrificed, but the place looms ominously before him. Unlike with Isaac, however, this time the promised Son will not be spared (Gen. 22:16; Rom. 8:32).

Jesus does not waste this moment of his disciples' intense fear. Instead, Jesus continues to prepare his disciples for what will soon happen. He takes his disciples "aside" privately, so that "the report might not spread too widely before the time."⁵ As Carson observes, "Only the Twelve were even remotely ready to hear this passion prediction."⁶ Notably, Matthew alone tells us that Jesus taught his disciples "on the way" (v. 17b).⁷ Osborne draws special attention to the significance of this term: "The 'way' (ὁδός [*hodos*]) defines the journey to true discipleship as well, and here it is implied (as in 16:24) that Jesus is on the road to the cross; the passage is framed with the model of Jesus (20:17–19, 28)."⁸

The Suffering of the Son of Man (Matt. 20:18–19a)

Jesus reminds his disciples of the anguish that Jerusalem represents to all of them: "See, *we* are going up to Jerusalem" (v. 18a; emphasis added).⁹ Still, Morris reminds us of the incongruity of anticipating suffering at this time, since going up to Jerusalem for a festival (in this case, for Passover) was one of the highlights of joyful experiences for Israelite pilgrims every year.¹⁰ This Passover would be different, both in its pain and in its significance.

As Jesus foretells what will happen to him, he describes himself as "the Son of Man" (v. 18b). This is a reference back to Daniel 7:13–14, when "one like a son of man...was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." For this reason, Jesus' disciples must have struggled to hear what would await Jesus: "And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified..." (v. 18b–19a).

This is the third and final time that Jesus predicts his suffering and death in Jerusalem (Matt. 16:21; 17:22–23). The first time, Jesus did not describe himself as the Son of Man, although that instruction took place immediately after Peter had confessed Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Jesus said that he "must...suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes," but now Jesus clarifies that these men (comprising the council of the Sanhedrin) would "condemn him to death" (v. 18c)—that is, by a trial.¹¹ In the second time Jesus foretold his death, Jesus did describe himself as the "Son of Man" (Matt. 17:22), and that he would be "delivered

⁵ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 2:414.

⁶ Carson, "Matthew," 485.

⁷ Morris notes that Mark and Luke do not record this observation (Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 506).

⁸ Osborne, *Matthew*, 738.

⁹ "Does 'we are going up to Jerusalem' reflect the call to follow of 16:24–26 or simply mark the external circumstances at that point?" (Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 815.)

¹⁰ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 506.

¹¹ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 782–83.

into the hands of men,” but now Jesus clarifies that these “men” are the “Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified” (v. 19a).

Among these developments, the main piece of new information is that Jesus would be “mocked and flogged and crucified.” Jesus has twice told his disciples that their discipleship will require them to take up their cross to follow him (Matt. 10:38; 16:24).¹² Now, he will clarify that the image of a cross was not merely metaphorical. The “way” of Jesus (v. 17) will lead the Son of Man to an actual cross, where he will actually die. Although relatively few of his disciples will ultimately die in the same way, the suffering of Jesus on the cross sets tone for the pattern of discipleship that all his subsequent followers must endure.

The Reward of Resurrection (Matt. 20:19b)

As in Matthew 16:21 and 17:23, Jesus again concludes the prediction of his sufferings with the promise that the Son of Man “will be raised on the third day” (v. 19b). The passive language (“be raised”) points to the work of the Father in raising Jesus up from the dead.¹³ Nevertheless, we should not imagine that the Father acted alone in Jesus’ resurrection, for all the external works of the Trinity are indivisible among the three Persons. Elsewhere, Jesus claims that he will raise himself up from the dead: “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (John 10:17–18).¹⁴ Still elsewhere, we read that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead: “the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead...” (Rom. 8:11); and “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins...being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18 KJV).¹⁵ All three Persons of the Trinity act in raising Christ from the dead; however, the resurrection is primarily associated with the Father.

The resurrection from the dead is not an afterthought, but is bound closely to the crucifixion as the key means by which Jesus will accomplish the redemption of his people. Still, this promise certainly sticks out “incongruously” with the rest of what Jesus promises here.¹⁶ Even so, death and resurrection must necessarily remain together in our minds, just as much as the disciples needed this

¹² France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 754.

¹³ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 507–08.

¹⁴ See *Westminster Larger Catechism*, #52: “Christ was exalted in his resurrection, in that...he rose again from the dead the third day by his own power....”

¹⁵ Many translations (including the ESV) have “made alive in the spirit” as a contrast to “put to death in the flesh”; however, both translations are grammatically possible. Through the next chapter, however, Peter applies the death and resurrection of Christ to believers as sharing both in the sufferings of Christ “in the flesh” (1 Pet. 4:1, 13) and sharing in Christ’s “glory...revealed...because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (1 Pet. 4:13, 14). Thus, the contrast is not between flesh and spirit, but between suffering in the flesh and being made alive/glorified by the (Holy) Spirit.

¹⁶ “After this comprehensive portrayal of rejection (both by his own people and by their imperial rulers) and of brutal suffering and humiliating death, the almost matter-of-fact concluding statement (already familiar from 16:21 and 17:23) that he will be raised on the third day reads even more incongruously.” (France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 754.)

promise. Experientially for the disciples, this may not have soothed all of their fears, but Jesus knew that they needed at least this much hope: “he does not spare their weakness by deceiving them, but, candidly declaring the whole matter, points out the way to overcome temptation; namely, by looking forward with certainty to his resurrection. But as it was necessary that His death should go before, he makes their triumph, in the meantime, to consist in hope.”¹⁷ As painful as Good Friday would be, it is necessary that the Son of Man should suffer and be raised again as the gospel, which has become the great power of God unto salvation.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the transitional conjunction “and” at the beginning of v. 17 connect this passage with what has come before? How does this passage fit in thematically with the next story about the request from the mother of James and John? What awaits Jesus in “Jerusalem” (Mat. 16:21)? Why does Jesus take aside his disciples privately to tell them this? What might Matthew mean when he describes this teaching as happening “on the way” (v. 17)?
2. How does Jesus’ emphasis that “we” are going up to Jerusalem connect his own fate with the disciples? Why is it surprising that Jesus would tell his disciples that the “Son of Man” should suffer in these ways (see Dan. 7:13–14)? Who are the “chief priests and scribes,” and what is their role in Jesus’ suffering? How will the Gentiles be involved? What must happen to Jesus when he enters Jerusalem?
3. What kind of benefit is it that Jesus will be “raised on the third day” (v. 19b)? How does that simple description weigh against the lengthy description of all the suffering that Jesus must face? Why would Jesus willingly undergo such extensive torment for the hope of being “raised on the third day”? What does this tell us about the relative value and power of the resurrection? How should this shape our understanding of the resurrection?
4. What rewards are you seeking from this life? Where is your hope in this life and the next? Is the resurrection a comfort to you in your life right now? Why or why not? If so, to what degree does the promise of the resurrection strengthen you in the face of the specific nature of suffering that you are facing right now? How might you grow in valuing the resurrection increasingly more in the way that Jesus did?

¹⁷ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 2:416.