

Who are those for whom the places at Jesus' right and left have been prepared, and why did Jesus respond as He did?

Answer:

To answer this, let's begin by reading from Matthew 20:20-23 (NIV):

20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

21 "What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

22 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

23 Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

Theological Reflection:

The request made by the mother of James and John (the sons of Zebedee) reveals a misunderstanding common among the

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disciples — that greatness in the Kingdom of God is achieved through status or favor. Jesus uses this moment to teach a fundamental truth: honor in God's Kingdom is not given through request or proximity, but through suffering, obedience, and divine purpose.

1. The Cup of Suffering (Participation in Christ's Suffering)

Jesus asks, *"Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"*

In Scripture, the "cup" is often a symbol of suffering and God's judgment (cf. *Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15; Matthew 26:39*).

Matthew 26:39 (NIV):

"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Here, Jesus refers to His impending suffering and death. When He tells James and John that they will drink from His cup, He means they too will suffer for the sake of the Gospel.

- James was later martyred (*Acts 12:2*).

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- John suffered exile on the island of Patmos (*Revelation 1:9*).

Their willingness to suffer does not automatically grant them positions of honor — it simply aligns them with Christ's path.

2. The Baptism of Christ (Total Identification with His Death and Resurrection)

Mark 10:38-39 (NIV):

“Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

The baptism here refers to more than water — it symbolizes Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection (see *Romans 6:3-5*).

Luke 12:50 (NIV):

“But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!”

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Though Christian baptism symbolizes union with Christ, the baptism Jesus refers to here is unique — His suffering and victory through death.

Only those truly united to Christ in suffering and perseverance will share in His glory (*2 Timothy 2:12*).

3. Appointed by the Father: Not Granted by Favor

Jesus explicitly says,

“These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.” (Matthew 20:23b)

This reinforces the doctrine of divine sovereignty — that God the Father alone appoints positions of eternal honor, based not on human ambition, but on His eternal will and foreknowledge (*Romans 8:29-30*).

This also aligns with the idea of rewards based on faithful service,

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not favoritism (*1 Corinthians 3:12-15; Revelation 22:12*).

4. Possible Fulfillment - The Two Witnesses (Revelation 11)

Some theologians view the *two witnesses in Revelation 11* as examples of individuals who fully share in the “cup” and “baptism” of Christ:

Revelation 11:11-12 (NIV):

“But after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet... Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here.’ And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.”

These witnesses suffer, die, rise, and ascend — reflecting Jesus' own journey — and may represent the kind of faithful servants for whom high positions are prepared.

Final Reflection:

Who are those for whom the places at Jesus' right and left have been prepared, and why did Jesus respond as He did?

Have you received Christ and committed your life to Him? We live in the last days, and Jesus is returning soon. Positions of honor in His Kingdom are not given to the proud or ambitious, but to those who faithfully suffer with Him, walk in obedience, and endure to the end.

Romans 8:17 (NIV):

“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

Maranatha – Come, Lord Jesus!

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