

## Preparing – Matthew 20:17-28, Tregear 28.3.21

You know those shows on TV – they show you someone being murdered and then you go back 24 hours before and the whole show is about what led up to the murder. Well today it's a bit like that this morning. We saw the video of Jesus coming into Jerusalem and the great excitement there was among the crowds as they welcomed him. There was this kind of expectation that something big was about to happen – Jesus is about to bring in his Kingdom, finally.

But what we're going to do now is go back a few hours; maybe even 24 hours or 2 or 3 days as Jesus sets out on the journey to Jerusalem. As Donna has said we're thinking about preparing today.

There are two ways of preparing that feature in this story today. As Jesus is with the crowds that are coming to Jerusalem for Passover he is preparing himself and he is preparing his disciples for what is ahead. But there is a mum who thinks that Jesus is about to be made king so she's preparing for her boys to be at the top of the pile when this happens.

So here we go.

v.17 – Jesus is going up to Jerusalem. It's Passover time – lots of people all over Palestine are going to Jerusalem. So Jesus sets out with his 12 disciples. And there were other followers of his men and women. And as

they moved down from Galilee, a 3-4 day walk, others joined them. They're walking along, talking, sitting around the campfire at night. There is great excitement, anticipation. Jesus has been healing and teaching and raising the dead for three years now. He didn't often go to Jerusalem – maybe this was the appointed time for Jesus to establish himself as king.

v.17-19 – **First story of preparation:** Jesus takes the 12 aside, on their own, and explains what this trip to Jerusalem is going to involve. He wants to prepare them for what lies ahead. This is the reason that he came to earth. Notice that he has already been doing it for a while. Back at the end of Chapter 16, Matthew tells us that Jesus began to teach his disciples and tell them on a number of occasions that he was going to be put to death on a cross, he would suffer. And so again, Jesus outlines what will happen this Passover – he will be given to the chief priests and the teachers of the law; they will condemn him to death; they will give him to the Roman governor to be mocked and flogged and crucified. And on the third day he will be raised to life. Jesus is now giving some quite specific details about what's going to happen to the disciples. They now know clearly that he will be crucified; before there was vague talk about taking up your cross.

But it seems, even after a number of explanations that the disciples still don't get it.

At this stage we can see that Jesus continues to be obedient; he prepares himself by being obedient to the Father. And he tries to prepare his

disciples; they won't be suffering like him, but it will still be a shock. And so Jesus seeks to lessen the blow for them by telling them in quite a detailed way the various aspects of the suffering he will go through.

We've come from reading the Sermon on the Mount the last three weeks. Jesus outlines there what will be involved in living in the kingdom, for us to be in his family. We will be peacemakers; we will love those who are our enemies and pray for those who persecute us; we will be poor in spirit; meek, content with what we have and who we are; we will count ourselves blessed when people persecute us and make false accusations against us. Yes, yes, yes, ok. But Jesus is at the height of his powers; people are amazed at his teaching; amazed at his miracles. He's the Messiah, the Saviour – he's going to rule. All this stuff about the Son of Man dying, being mocked, flogged and crucified. It must be some kind of parable that he is saying; I mean he often speaks in riddles, we don't always understand what he is saying.

Look at the crowds coming to Jerusalem. This must be the time for him to announce his kingship.

**Second story of preparation:** And so a mother comes to Jesus. She is one of the ladies who accompanies Jesus and his disciples. They help prepare food and assist in various ways. Her sons, James and John, are two of the three disciples most close to Jesus. She makes the request, but I'm sure that her boys were aware of what she was doing. They were there with

her. She treats Jesus as the king by kneeling down to him but her request reflects what everyone is thinking. Jesus is ushering in the kingdom; he's about to do something big. He's going to conquer the Romans. That means he will have a throne (and Jesus had talked about this at the end of Matthew 19, just a few verses earlier). So how is she preparing – Well, she's trying to get the best seats next to Jesus; the most prestigious seats next to the king, on his right and left hand.

But she has no idea what she is asking for.

But Jesus makes it plain in v.22 – “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” It's worth stopping here to understand what Jesus is saying. The Old Testament prophets speak quite darkly about the cup of YHWH's wrath (in Isaiah, Jeremiah and some others). These passages talk of what happens when the one God, grieving over the awful wickedness in the world, steps in at last to give the violent and the bloodthirsty, the arrogant and oppressors, the reward for their ways and deeds.

It's as though God's holy anger against such people is turned into wine: dark sour wine which will make them drunk and helpless. They will be forced to, as it were, “drink the cup”, to drain to the dregs the wrath of the God who loves and vindicates the weak and helpless.

The shock of this passage – and it becomes more shocking as we go forward from here – is that Jesus speaks of drinking this cup himself. He is going to drink it; he is going to drink the wrath of God. No wonder the

disciples couldn't grasp the idea! They were thinking of positions of power, prestige. They were in fact becoming a bit arrogant- they'd forgotten the Sermon on the Mount. And Jesus rams this home to James and John and the other disciples when he gives another biblical picture from Isaiah 53. In v.28 Jesus explains another model for the kind of kingship that he has in mind, and it's the one which sees the king as the servant, giving his life as a "ransom for many". This comes up in v.28.

A 'ransom', in that world, is what someone might pay to give freedom to a slave. Jesus saw his approaching death as the payment that would set free those who were enslaved in sin, that's all of us, including James and John.

In other words, Jesus is saying to James and John, can you endure the same cup of suffering that I will endure, and that I've just told you about.

'Oh yes, yes, we can". Come on guys do you even know what you are saying? So Jesus tells them Yes, you will indeed drink from my cup. Jesus had been promising persecution and hardship for anyone who became a follower of his right from the start. Both James and John do suffer persecution – James is executed and John was sent into exile.

I love the response of the other disciples when they find out what James and John had done. What! You asked Jesus for those positions of power and you didn't tell us. But you know I'm thinking that they were thinking

why didn't I get in first. So Jesus gathers them all together. And he tells it to them straight in these amazing words which also resound to us 2000 years later on.

“Yes I'm going to be the king. And you want to be great. Ok The way you can be great is to take on the values of the Kingdom. What are they? You will be great as you become a servant; if you want to be first you must be a slave to the others. You are not to act like the rulers of this world – you are to be the exact opposite.” And then these amazing words in v.28 – You've got to act “just as the Son of Man (that's Jesus) did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Wow.

How do you prepare yourself?

Jesus invites you to a life of shame and death. You don't follow him because you'll have a better life; or to be successful or powerful. You follow him because he is the king. You follow him as you serve others. It's one thing to serve God ; that's noble and I know he's greater than me. It's another thing to serve each other though isn't it? Look at the way they act; they don't deserve it

In this last picture, the crowds have swelled since they left Galilee. There's a lot of excitement, anticipation. Jesus is coming to Jerusalem. So they're leaving Jericho and there's two blind men sitting on the side of the road. They're calling out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us.” The

crowd think of them as two insignificant men, they're only blind, they can't do much, in fact they're a burden on their families. Keep quiet you two. This is Jesus, someone important. Stop shouting out.

Here is Jesus surrounded by people, he's the hero; in addition he's on an extremely traumatic journey – he's going to die in five days, a cruel and painful death. The Messiah has many things on his mind.

But look at Jesus. HE STOPS. HE CALLS THEM. All his attention and the crowds attention is focused on these two men. And Jesus, with all that is going on for him says, "What can I do for you?" "How can I serve you?" Nothing is going to stop Jesus serving others. This is not a Messiah that is wanting political power or some kind of earthly status. Even with all that is going on for him; it does not get in the way of him serving these two insignificant blind men. Jesus has compassion on them, touches their eyes and they follow him into the city. What an amazing Saviour we have!

Donna was right when she said we should prepare ourselves for Easter. It's good to take the opportunity of this special time each year to remind ourselves of Jesus' great sacrifice but I want to suggest another preparation. Every day is a gift from God to us. An opportunity for God to be changing us, preparing us for meeting the King. One day we will die physically and if we are Kingdom people, if we are followers of Jesus we will be going home. Earth is our temporary home. How can I prepare for this home? Well, one way that Jesus points out is to be serving. Let us be

like Jesus and be serving others; but let us be like those blind men who have no hope except in Jesus, so they cry out to him. And they keep crying out, he is the only one who can heal them, they will keep crying out until he stops and gently says, ‘What can I do for you?’ This is our God, the servant king.

Three stories; three ways of preparing; how will you prepare this Easter?