

Matthew 20:17-19

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As Jesus and His disciples are about to go to Jerusalem, He pulls them aside to remind them about His arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection which will take place soon after they arrive.

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 10:32-34 and Luke 18:31-34.

The end of *Jesus's* earthly ministry was drawing to a close. And *He* knew it. Before *He* went up to *Jerusalem* where *He* would be put to *death* and then resurrected to life again, *He* took the *twelve disciples* aside. *He* wished to be alone with *them* so *He* could prepare *them* for these terrible and spectacular events.

He started off saying *Behold* to get their attention. *He* informed *them* *we are going up to Jerusalem*. The city of *Jerusalem* was twenty or more miles west from the region of “Judea beyond the Jordan,” also called “Perea,” which may have been where *Jesus* was with His *disciples* as *He* told *them* these things (Matthew 19:1). It would have typically taken several days to make the *up-hill* journey from Perea.

The other place they might have been was the city of Jericho, located in eastern Judea (Matthew 20:29) which was between Perea and the capital city. *Jerusalem* was the cultural epicenter of Jewish life. It was where the kings of old ruled. It was site of the Temple, where God's presence had been located on earth. And it was the seat of political power of the entire region. It was the headquarters of the Sadducees and Romans.

This is the first and only time that Matthew records *Jesus* visiting *Jerusalem*, but according to Luke and John, *He* had been to *Jerusalem* on several previous occasions (Luke 2:41; John 2:13; 5:1; 7:10; 10:22). The Law of Moses required every Jewish male to attend the festivals (Exodus 23:15-16).

“Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.”
(Exodus 23:17)

God specified that once Israel entered the land, He would appoint a place for them to gather.

“But you shall seek the Lord at the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come.”
(Deuteronomy 12:5)

Initially the place designated by God to gather meant the tabernacle, which was located in Shiloh (Joshua 18:1). But later it meant the Temple located in *Jerusalem*. The *disciples* would likely have assumed that the main reason that they were going to *Jerusalem* at this time was to follow the Law and spend the Passover in God's city.

Because *Jesus* perfectly fulfilled the Law of Moses, He would have come *up to Jerusalem* many times throughout His life. A possible reason why Matthew does not mention these additional visits is because his narrative focuses on the Messianic mission of *Jesus's* life. The arrival of the Messiah King into His capital city of *Jerusalem* was a hope that deeply resonated within the hearts of Jews. Perhaps Matthew did not wish to minimize this greatly anticipated and glorious scene for his intended audience.

Jesus reminded *the twelve* what would happen to *the Son of Man in Jerusalem* after they arrived. In *Jesus's* time, the phrase, *the Son of Man*, had multiple meanings. It was a common expression that could mean “some guy,” but it also was a term that referred to the Messiah, as used in Daniel 7:13. Here *Jesus* is using it as a way to describe what must happen to Himself as the Messiah. By this point the disciples knew that *Jesus* was God's Messiah and *the Son of Man* (Matthew 16:16).

Jesus said three things would happen to *Him* when they were in *Jerusalem*.

The first thing was *the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes*. *Jesus* was not only foretelling His disciples that *He* would be arrested, but that *He* would be delivered to His enemies. To deliver here means to bring or supply. This deliverance does not explicitly specify betrayal, but it vaguely suggests it. Judas Iscariot was the disciple who betrayed *Jesus* (Matthew 26:14-16, 47-50). The Sadducees and Pharisees were *the chief priests and scribes* that *Jesus* would be delivered to (Matthew 26:47). They despised *Jesus* and His teachings so much that *they* plotted to kill *Him* (Matthew 26:3-4).

The second thing was *the chief priest and scribes would hand the Son of Man over to the Gentiles* who would *mock, scourge, and crucify Him*. The Sadducees and Pharisees did not have authority from Rome to kill *Jesus* themselves (Matthew 26:5). But *they* could convince the Romans who had the political authority to kill *Him*. After their secretive tribunal condemned *the Son of Man* to death, they handed *Him* over to the Romans. These *Gentiles* ruthlessly mocked *Jesus* as King of the Jews (Matthew 27:27-31). They flogged and scourged the skin off His back (Mark 15:15). And they crucified *Him* (Matthew 27:33-50).

But the third thing *Jesus* reminded His *disciples* would take place was that *on the third day* after these terrible events occurred, *the Son of Man will be raised up*. *Jesus* came back to life three days after *He* was killed (Matthew 28:1-10).

Jesus had previously spoken about these events. Throughout His ministry *Jesus* had alluded to His *death* and resurrection (Matthew 12:39-40; 16:4). And *He* had specifically told His *disciples* on previous occasions that many of these things would happen to *Him* (Matthew 16:21; 17:12; 17:22-23). The likely reason for *Jesus* reminding His *disciples* of these events at this particular occasion, was to notify them that the warnings *He* had been sharing with *them* for some time were going to happen soon. In effect, *He* was telling His *disciples*, this is the time when I will be killed. It will happen on this trip to *Jerusalem*.

But Luke revealed that *the disciples* did not understand what *Jesus* was trying to tell *them*.

“But the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.”
(Luke 18:34)

That something can be so plainly stated, yet so misunderstood, ought to be an encouragement to all of us. If the twelve *disciples* did not understand plain speech, then we should expect that there will be things in our lives that take time for us to understand. Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit that leads us into real understanding (Luke 12:12; John 14:26).

It is also worth noting the humility of the *disciples*. This is a wholly unflattering depiction of themselves. But it demonstrates that in time, they fully comprehended and embraced *Jesus*'s definition of greatness. In doing so, they are able to fully disclose to us their weaknesses and failures, that we might learn as they learned.

Biblical Text

¹⁷ As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve *disciples* aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, ¹⁸ “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, ¹⁹ and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify *Him*, and on the third day He will be raised up.”