

³⁵ *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”* Mark 10:35 Matthew 20:20ⁱ tells us that this was at their mother’s instigation. Mothers naturally want the best for their children. Their mother saw that Jesus included her sons in the inner three. The other one of the inner three was Peter, and he was often brash and impetuous (8:33ⁱⁱ). Their mother probably thought it would be the obvious choice but wanted Jesus to commit to it. Remember, that He just told them He would be tortured and killed but rise from death (10:33,34ⁱⁱⁱ). If the mother heard this, she probably believed that after the resurrection Jesus would establish a physical kingdom. She was expressing strong faith.

Whenever we personally gain from a request of our Lord, we should be careful that it is not tinged with selfish desire. The kingdom of God is where the greatest is the servant of all. Does she realize what she is asking, or is her request along the lines of the cultural belief that the Messiah is another King David of physical conquest?

I cannot imagine going to Jesus in prayer and asking Him to do whatever I asked of Him. “Lord, would you promise to give me what I am about to ask of You?” We have the Holy Spirit who tempers our trust in ourselves. We should rather pray, “Lord help me to do whatever You ask of me” (Luke 17:10^{iv})!

³⁶ *And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?”* I will never forget the time about thirty years ago that the Lord spoke those words to my heart. This verse reminded me of it. I always thought it strange that God would ask that. I had forgotten this Scripture. When I heard it I knew the answer in my heart was to preach God’s Word, but I felt so unworthy because of my past. I dared not ask because I felt I was like David who could not build the house of the Lord because he shed so much blood (1 Chronicles 28:3^v). I answered the Lord with my request but added that I thought it presumptuous because of my past and did not expect Him to grant it. But when the response from the Lord was “I am willing,” I just broke down and cried. That is too gracious, too merciful! Having been so wrong in the past, how could I be sure of my interpretations? I thought of the Apostle after whom I was appropriately named, appropriate in that he was a great sinner with a load of guilt (Psalm 25:11^{vi}). How gloriously merciful is God! He chooses the worst to display the riches of His abundant grace! You can never be too bad to be beyond Jesus’ ability to turn you into His servant (Ephesians 3:8^{vii}).

³⁷ *And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”* Mark 10:37 This is like saying we want to be your chief of staff and attorney general. The person to the right of the king would be the one who makes sure that the king’s edicts are carried out. It is a powerful and respected position. People would treat that person as they would treat the king. The family of that person would eat at the king’s table. Maybe their mother had that little bonus in mind for herself. But it was also a dangerous position. If someone wanted to take over, these two men would need to be assassinated along with the king. Of course, that cannot happen to King Jesus when He returns to reign, but it was about to happen. That is what is behind Jesus’ warning that followed.

³⁸ *Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”*

Mark 10:38 Jesus does not deny that He will reign and honor people who serve Him seated at His right and left. The Matthew account of Peter asking what they would receive for leaving all to follow Jesus has Jesus begin the promise of one-hundred-fold with this: ²⁸ *Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* Matthew 19:28 But as for that honored position, it is the Father’s decision and comes at great cost. Even following Jesus in the days to come would mean hardship and eventual martyrdom. Jesus loved these men. While He wanted to honor them, He also did not want to see them suffer. In Jesus’ answer here I sense the heart of a father for his children. He wants what is best for them eternally, but He also sees what it would cost them. And perhaps of all the Apostles, these two suffered the least. James was beheaded in AD 44, and John was the only one of the twelve who did not die as a martyr. The Romans tried to boil him in oil, but the Lord miraculously kept it from harming him,^{viii} so they exiled him to an island.

Whether it was their mother’s idea or their own, they were trying out of ambition to beat the other disciples to those coveted positions. It was an act of blind-ambition. Yet, Jesus answers with a sympathetic warning that they did not realize what they were asking. They were thinking of honor and authority, but Jesus knows the Father holds those positions for two special persons who persevere to serve despite the persecution and suffering that comes with that service.

Jesus would later plead with His Father to take the cup of suffering away from Himself if possible (Luke 22:42^{ix}). The cup Jesus was asking them if they were willing to drink was similar to the cup Jesus was about to drink, a cup of torture and martyrdom. Even though Jesus had just told them what was about to happen to them, I do not think they fully understood the implications.

Even choosing to be a disciple comes with denying ourselves, taking up our own cross, and following Jesus (8:34^x). We follow Him to places of rejection, persecution, and even death. But what Jesus was asking them was on another level of intensity. We dare not answer such a question lightly.

³⁹ *And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized,* Mark 10:39 They seemed quite sure of themselves. But when Jesus was arrested James fled with rest of the disciples (14:50^{xi}). John and Peter, however, followed Jesus to Caiaphas courtyard (John 18:15^{xii}). “We are able,” sounds cocky and self-assured. Just as Peter’s confident expression that he would follow Jesus to death was misguided (John 13:37^{xiii}), the sons of thunder’ words would prove to be as well. We are all men of like nature. They had every good intention but faced with soldiers and swords they were unable to follow through. Jesus knew that after Pentecost the Holy Spirit would enable them to drink the cup and go through that baptism (Acts 1:8^{xiv}).

We think we are fully committed, but we will not know until the persecution comes. However, if we are filled with the Spirit, the Lord will enable us to persevere.

⁴⁰ *but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”* Mark 10:40 Apparently this place in the kingdom has been ordained for others that the Father has chosen. God has prepared them for that role. It is fruitless to guess who it may be as they may not yet be born. But we can know it will

be prepared for the people called to that role, servants who follow the Lamb wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4^{xv}).

⁴¹ *And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.* Mark 10:41 I think they were indignant because they did not ask before James and John did. Each probably thought they should hold that position. They may have thought, “How dare James and John think they are our superiors!” The disciples had still not understood the upside-down world of the kingdom. They still did not grasp Jesus’ example of constant service is what made Him great (10:36^{xvi}). A good disciple wants to be like his rabbi, but the twelve still had a worldly mindset of greatness.

How are *we* doing with that understanding? Maybe we know it in our minds, but when opportunity comes we want to be recognized as being special. Our old nature wants to be served rather than to deny ourselves and serve in love for our Lord and others. Hear in your heart what Jesus next said to them and to us.

⁴² *And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.* Mark 10:42 This is the way of the world. Exert yourself and take a position over others so that they obey your commands because you know best and are better than the peons around you. It reeks of pride and ego! The big boss orders around the little boss who tries to keep the big boss happy by ordering around the so-called unimportant people. What those in power rarely consider is that the One with all authority will judge them on how they used the authority He gave them (Ephesians 6:9^{xvii}).

⁴³ *But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,* ⁴⁴ *and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.* Mark 10:43,44 The kingdom of God way is very different from the world. You could say it is the opposite. Insisting on our way and bossing people around shall not be so among us. We lead by being an example. When we see a need, we jump in and start to meet it. Then others see someone leading by serving and join them. And if no one joins you, the heavenly reward is all yours. The Apostle Paul tells us that each person is rewarded according to his or her own labor (1 Corinthians 3:8^{xviii}).

It all depends on where our heart is. If our hearts are self-centered and focused on ourselves and the this world, we will avoid serving and instead seek to be served. That is the way of the natural man. It is perfectly normal for people whose hearts have not been changed by the Lord. I often remind myself of this when people are rude or demanding their way. We understand that is how we were and how we can be if we let our old nature take over.

The new nature wants to joyfully serve our Savior out of love and gratitude for all He has done for us (Psalm 100:2^{xix}). We serve Him by serving our brothers and sisters in Christ. ¹³ *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.* Galatians 5:13 We serve Him by following His lead to share with those who have not yet surrendered to His love (Matthew 25:40^{xx}).

Are the people around you fighting over airtime, wanting to be heard? Just listen and learn from the situation as you silently pray for them. Did people leave a mess on the table where you met? Jump in and clean it up. Has no one volunteered to watch the children who are distracting the class? You know what to do. By serving you are leading

and being an example. Maybe your unbelieving neighbor is sick, and her lawn needs to be mowed. Great opportunity to be a witness and show you care. The world gives to get. We give because we have been given so much and know the God who is all we need.

As Christians we must change our mindset from the world to that of the kingdom, for only then can we serve from the heart and with joy. When we read “slave of all” does our heart sink or rejoice? We need Jesus to rewire our brains to conform to the kingdom mind set. We need to get the eternal perspective regarding serving. And when we slip back into complaining and self-centeredness we need to be quick to yield to conviction, ask for forgiveness, and return to the heavenly mindset. Ask yourself if you would rather be whining or joyful? Then you will know what to do.

We do not live a life of service *for* heavenly rewards, but Jesus promises us that He will reward us. It is a bonus. We serve out of love expecting nothing in return, and yet He takes note and will repay us when He calls us home. Listen to Luke quoting Jesus.

³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Luke 6:35 Because God is just, and because He loves us so much, I believe He is noting every little thing we do for others to reward us (Revelation 10:12^{xxi}). He tells us that when we have done something to the least of our brothers, we did it *to Him!*^{xx}

I want to point out a few examples in our congregation. Of course there are our missionaries. I will not mention each one but will use Cathy as an example for them all. The post office gives you a pension. She completed her service of mail delivery in heat and cold. She could kick back and be with her mom and take it easy. She earned it. But instead, she is in Uganda helping those less fortunate with their needs which are so much greater than our own. She helps the elderly with Bible study, supplying the Bibles, eyeglasses, and medicines. She helps a local couple who evangelize. She goes to Kampala to show Jesus’ love to the homeless boys that live in the drainage system. Eventually she will retire, but even then I do not think she will stop serving. Servants never stop serving, though their place and manner of service may change.

Allow me to use my wife and the deaconesses as another example. We have our potlucks and BBQs four or more times of the year. Who goes shopping for all that meat and extras? Who sets up the tables and decorates? Who cleans up after all that? Who gives up their time to visit the sick and the shut ins? The servants of all! These are the great ones in God’s eyes!

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45 This is the clearest expression from Jesus of what He came to do. Heaven came down to save a sin sick world and in the process showed us selfish people the blessed way to live. First, we see that what He is telling us is that He set the example. How great is Jesus, King of kings, Lord of lords, Creator of all things visible and invisible, the One for whom all things were made (Colossians 1:16^{xxii})! His is the name above every other name (Philippians 2:9^{xxiii}). No other human comes close to the greatness of Jesus! His earthly life was one of continual service to God and man. After His step-father Joseph died, He supported his family. When the call came to begin His ministry, He submitted Himself to baptism and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness to be tempted at the end of a 40 day fast. He called His disciples after a night in prayer

asking the Father who to pick (Luke 6:12,13^{xxiv}). Then He went about teaching and healing throughout Israel, Samaria, southern Syria, and the Decapolis (Acts 10:38^{xxv}). And what did He gain personally? A good retirement? A nice steed to ride? An apartment in downtown Jerusalem? No, His reward for a life of service was the cross. But it was on that cross that His service to mankind changed the world and opened the gates of heaven to all who would enter in through Him (John 1:12^{xxvi}). There He took our sins upon Himself and died as a ransom for our souls, that we might be free from the judgment we deserve (2 Corinthians 5:21^{xxvii}). The ultimate judge paid the penalty, that He would have rightly inflicted on us, in His own body on that cross. In doing so He made a way for us to be His spotless, sinless bride without a blemish (Ephesians 5:27^{xxviii}).

He died for all of mankind's sins, but not all will accept the forgiveness He offers. That is why He used the word "many", *a ransom for many*. It echoes the suffering servant song of Isaiah. ¹¹ *Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make **many** to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.* ¹² *Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of **many**, and makes intercession for the transgressors.* Isaiah 53:11,12

You and I cannot match that kind of ultimate service, but what Jesus is saying is if our Creator served to that extent, then to what extent should we serve others (1 John 4:11^{xxix})? That great a service means He is that great of a Savior. He gave His life as a ransom for our souls. That is why every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:8-11^{xxx}). It is because He is the greatest servant.

What kind of a master do you want? Our old nature is a horrible master. It readily falls prey to Satan's enslaving passions that destroy us. Jesus, on the other hand, serves us in love and is the most wonderful Master you could ever desire. Why would you want any other? Let us follow His example, relying on the power of His Spirit in us to live a life of service to the One who died for us. Amen?

Questions:

- 1 What do you want Jesus to do for you?
- 2 What did their request mean?
- 3 What is the cup and the baptism?
- 4 Who does get those positions?
- 5 Why were the others indignant?
- 6 What is the world's idea of greatness?
- 7 Who are the great ones in the kingdom of God?
- 8 What does that look like?
- 9 How did Jesus exemplify that?
- 10 What does many allude to in verse 45?

ⁱ **Matthew 20:20-21 (ESV)**

²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. ²¹ And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."

ⁱⁱ **Mark 8:33 (ESV)**

³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

ⁱⁱⁱ **Mark 10:33-34 (ESV)**

³³ saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

^{iv} **Luke 17:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”

^v **1 Chronicles 28:3 (ESV)**

³ But God said to me, ‘You may not build a house for my name, for you are a man of war and have shed blood.’

^{vi} **Psalms 25:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ For your name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

^{vii} **Ephesians 3:8 (NIV)**

⁸ Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

^{viii} Herbert Lockyer, *All the Apostles of the Bible*, The All Series (Zondervan 2013) p 252 (Tertullian wrote of this in the third century so we do not know for sure if it is historically reliable.)

^{ix} **Luke 22:42 (ESV)**

⁴² saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”

^x **Mark 8:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

^{xi} **Mark 14:50 (ESV)**

⁵⁰ And they all left him and fled.

^{xii} **John 18:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest,

^{xiii} **John 13:37 (ESV)**

³⁷ Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”

^{xiv} **Acts 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

^{xv} **Revelation 14:4 (ESV)**

⁴ It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb,

^{xvi} **Mark 9:35 (ESV)**

³⁵ And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”

^{xvii} **Ephesians 6:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

^{xviii} **1 Corinthians 3:8 (ESV)**

⁸ He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.

^{xix} **Psalms 100:2 (ESV)**

² Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!

^{xx} **Matthew 25:40 (ESV)**

⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

^{xxi} **Revelation 20:12 (ESV)**

¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

^{xxii} **Colossians 1:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

^{xxiii} **Philippians 2:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

^{xxiv} **Luke 6:12-12 (ESV)**

¹² In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. ¹³ And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles:

^{xxv} **Acts 10:38 (ESV)**

³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

^{xxvi} **John 1:12 (ESV)**

¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

^{xxvii} **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{xxviii} **Ephesians 5:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

^{xxix} **1 John 4:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

^{xxx} **Philippians 2:8-11 (ESV)**

⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.