

A TEACHABLE MOMENT
MARK 10:35-45

INTRDOUCTION

TEXT: Mark 10:35–45

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."

36 And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?"

37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

James and John, hearing Jesus talk about Jesus' upcoming suffering and rising from the dead, are concerned about one thing: When the battle for Israel is done, and you are anointed the king of Israel, and God brings in the new age of Israel's dominance on the earth, who will sit on your right hand and your left? How about us? They are asking to be the two most powerful men in Jesus' Kingdom, right after Jesus.

James and John are two of the most prominent apostles mentioned in the New Testament. John was a disciple of John the Baptist and followed Jesus from the beginning. James and John both answered the call to leave their nets and follow Jesus at the same time Peter did. James and John were known to be in Jesus most inner circle of men. Not only did they have their place among the 12 Apostles, several times Jesus called them out for unique experiences with Him. For example, when healing Jairus' daughter, only Peter, James and John were allowed to accompany Jesus into the little girl's room to witness the miracle. These three likewise were called aside to experience the mount of transfiguration. James and John, along with Peter, had every reason to believe that Jesus singled them out above the other 9 apostles.

So it is natural that they would consider their place in the leadership of Jesus' organization. They wanted Jesus to clarify their leadership positions. John seems to think about such things frequently. It was John, back in chapter 9, who tried to centralize the governance of Jesus' ministry by rebuking someone who was preaching Jesus but not traveling with them. John desired clarity. *"Who is in charge in your org-chart, Jesus? After You, I mean? Me?"*

James and John are the kind of guys who would boldly put themselves forward. The other guys had a nick-name for them: "Sons of Thunder." One time, when a Samaritan town would not let Jesus travel through, James and John asked if they could call fire down from heaven and destroy them all! These are men of action. They want to settle the matter. There are twelve leaders under Jesus, that's clear. "Jesus, you've been grooming us to be in charge, haven't you? Well, let's just get the details settled."

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?"

John and James did not realize what position they were asking for. Jesus is Lord of all. Lord of all heaven and earth. Lord of all the angels. He sits at the right hand of God the Father. Their

thinking is too small. They do not have in mind the vastness of the authority that they are requesting.

So Jesus asks them one question, in response. Are you able to drink the cup? Be baptized? Jesus' cup and baptism? What is He referring to? He does not specify, but He is on His way to being rejected by the Jews and by the Gentiles, to be subjected to imprisonment, mistreatment, torture, and even death. Are they ready to walk into that kind of suffering for the sake of the Kingdom? Up till now, they have had it pretty good.

39 And they said to him, "We are able."

What else would they say? Drink from the king's golden cup? Sure. Baptized with water? No problem. They could not know what they were agreeing too.

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,

Approximately a decade after this conversation, James would be seized by Herod, and slain with a sword. John would suffer many times being beaten, jailed, and exiled for the name of Jesus. Jesus was speaking to the future difficulties that would come upon them as His Apostles.

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."

God the Father makes the org-chart. This is the word of God the Son. He is not concerned with the org-chart. God will handle that. And so, James and John get no other answer.

41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

So now the bickering begins. The other ten take offense at the idea that James and John feel like they are so wonderful that they should rule over them. Now all 12 of them are consumed with the org-chart. Even if they did not all ask to be 2nd and 3rd in command, they are offended that anyone would lift themselves above the rest.

This becomes a teachable moment for Jesus:

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.

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.

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."

PRINCIPLES FROM JESUS' TEACHABLE MOMENT

1. There is to be a contrast regarding leadership in God’s Kingdom and the kingdoms of man.

“You know,” says the Lord, that the rulers of the Gentiles, “Lord it over them,” and that their great ones, “exercise authority” over them. To say it another way: You know that the normal way of the world is like this: The greater you are, the more power you have over other people.

And so it is. The desire to be the top dog is the motivator for leaders. People fight for promotions over others, and those they lead exist to accomplish the goals of the leader. That’s how governments work. That’s how armies work. That is the norm. Always has been. Always will be.

But Jesus makes a contrast by saying:

43 But it shall not be so among you

And really, that is not the most literal translation. Rather, like the NASB translates:

“But it is not this way among you,” –10:43, NASB

The Kingdom of God does not work like the governments of men. What James and John are asking for, what they think they want, is a position that does not exist in Jesus’ Kingdom. They want to be recognized for their greatness and rewarded with responsibilities to lead, because they are better than others and should be in charge.

And the others are jealous because they have the same concept in their hearts. Jesus is letting them all off the hook. “Don’t worry guys, you don’t need to scramble for the top position, nor be jealous of anyone who has it.” Why not?

Because of the next principle:

2. Leadership in God’s Kingdom requires the sacrifice of the self to serve others.

The great ones in God’s kingdom are the servants. The greatest ones in God’s Kingdom are worthy of last place. To lead in God’s Kingdom, you have to lead like Jesus does. How does He lead? Well, they are about to find out, aren’t they?

They are on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover. Do you know how that week begins? It begins with an event we call “The Triumphal Entry.” This is when Israel, after waiting for centuries for her Messianic King to arrive, finally has her King enter the city in triumph! But He does not come in on a beautiful war-horse or in a royal carriage. He is not attended by thousands of soldiers and official servants with jewels and gold. Instead, how does the King of Israel arrive in their nation?

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. –Zechariah 9:9

One of the reasons that the leaders of Israel, and all the world, did not receive Jesus as the King of all things is because He didn’t look like we imagined. There is more planning and fanfare

for the arrival of the Bride in the simplest wedding than was made ready for the Lord of Glory when He revealed Himself as the King of Israel! He rode in on one of the least impressive animals you could ride in on. When cowboys ride in to save the day, if they were on a donkey they'd be laughed out of town. Here He comes, the great King, on a donkey. The peasants and the children seem to make a big deal out of His coming. But no trumpets. No red carpets. No royal entourage. No officers of the city at attention waiting to greet Him.

Jesus is their greatest One. He is everyone's greatest One for that matter! He does not need to ask for a position of power. He has it. He is Lord of all. And He comes in on a donkey. James? John? Do you see what you are asking to be second in command to?

Then, He further demonstrates His greatness by getting betrayed, arrested, beaten, cast out of His nation, given to the Romans, who mock Him, spit on Him, and kill Him naked in the streets by nailing Him to wood and letting Him hang like meat. And all this goes according to His plan. And He is our Great One!

James? John? The others? Do you want to be great too?

"But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (v.43b-45)

The King, who deserved all praise, described His function as being here to serve and to give His life a ransom. Let's explore that for a moment.

For three years, all that Jesus did in His ministry made Him locally famous. But every single action and word was an act of service. Towards whom? Bad people. Sinful people. Stupid people. Stubborn people. Silly people. Angry people. People. Just plain people. This is what He came to do. Yes, people loved Him and wanted to follow Him and serve Him and said great things about Him. But He was not there to exploit His position. Instead, He was there to serve.

What does it mean to serve? It means to act for the benefit of the one you are serving. He served the 12. He served His mom and His brothers and sisters. He served the Pharisees and Scribes who opposed Him in what He said to them. He served the demon possessed. He served the sick. He served Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus. He served even Judas. He came to serve.

And His death? That was the greatest act of service of all. He died to "ransom" the many. Jesus served me on the cross. He went to the cross to benefit me (and you!). I had no way to be saved from my own faults, weaknesses, and sinfulness. I was in bondage to sin. I was owned by my guilt. I owed a debt to God that I could not pay. So, He served me. He stepped in to pay the debt. What was the cost? His life. He paid it why? To serve me. Which one of us is greater: Jesus or me? Well, the question is absurd. Jesus is the greatest One. So why would He serve me, even die for me? He had been sent to do so, by God the Father, who was motivated by love for me.

I've been talking in the first person singular. But the same is true if I talk in the second person singular. He came to serve you. Why? Because you are greater than Him? No. Here's why:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” –John 3

Jesus was on a mission from God the Father. That mission required the Greatest One to become the servant of the least ones, so that He could buy them back for His Father.

3. We are invited to a radical re-orientation of our lives.

What was the lesson then for the Apostles? They wanted greatness expressed in a position of leadership over others. They were normal men.

But Jesus said, “No. It’s not like that. It is different.” In their minds, James and John saw themselves as “Sons of Thunder!” God’s powerful ones! God’s great ones!

Jesus said, No. Change your view of yourself radically. Want to be the greatest? Yes. Then be like Jesus. In your own mind, see yourself as existing for the benefit of the other people in your life, even if it costs you your life.

Did John the Apostle take this to heart? The great son of thunder? By the time he was an old man, with a broken body, he would be carried to see the churches in different towns. His message was always the same: Love one another; little children, love one another.

He rightly had learned that the following of Jesus is reduced to this one practical point. And to do this well, one must forget about himself as great –and see himself as living not for himself, but for the benefit of other people.

What is your orientation now? What do you live for? For yourself and your own goals and dreams? What are your goals and dreams founded on? Greatness for you? Are you a Christ follower?

It is time to do a head-check. It is time to re-orient your mind to see yourself as living for the benefit of all others. Why? Because Jesus has sent you do as He did, so that all may know that God has sent Jesus, the Savior of the world.