



Sermon Series: Mark: Living Everyday With Jesus

Sermon Title: Jesus: The Heart of the Matter

Date: 3/15/2026

**Big Idea: Following Jesus doesn't automatically redirect your ambition**

### **1. They Knew Better and Did It Anyway**

Right after Jesus describes His arrest, suffering, and death in detail, James and John pull Him aside and ask for the top positions in His kingdom - one at His right hand, one at His left (**Mark 10:35-37**). They heard Him. They understood. And they still made their move.

These are not outsiders. James and John are in the inner circle - present at the transfiguration, with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, men who left everything to follow Him. Matthew's account notes their mother came and spoke on their behalf. Many scholars believe she was Jesus' aunt, making them His cousins. They came with relationship, thinking it might give them an edge.

Jesus responds in Mark 10:38 by asking if they can drink the cup He drinks or share His baptism. Both images carry weight. In the Old Testament, the cup is tied to God's wrath in judgment - **Isaiah 51**. The baptism image points to being submerged beneath that judgment - **Psalms 88**. In **Luke 12:50**, Jesus says He has a baptism to undergo, under great constraint until it is completed. He is describing the cross - bearing the full weight of God's justice for sin.

They answered without hesitation: "We can." Whether courage or overconfidence, it reveals where their hearts still were - thinking in terms of achievement. If suffering is the price of rank, they would pay it. Jesus confirms they will suffer: James becomes the first apostle killed, executed by Herod in Acts 12. John is exiled to Patmos for the gospel (Revelation 1:9). The path was real. They had not grasped the weight of it because they were still focused on what they could gain.

### **2: They All Had The Same Heart Issue**

When the other ten heard, they became indignant (**Mark 10:41**). They were not troubled that two friends were chasing position while Jesus walked toward a cross - they were furious because James and John got there

first. The same ambition drove all of them. In that moment, all twelve are unmasked.

So Jesus calls all twelve together. In **Mark 10:42-44**, He points to the system they grew up watching - rulers who built greatness through power and self-protection. Then He says not so with you. In His kingdom, greatness looks like a servant. First place looks like a slave - someone who no longer lives for themselves. He is not lowering the standard. He is redefining what greatness looks like.

### **3: Jesus Lived Out What Greatness Looks Like**

**Mark 10:45** is the foundation: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." That word "even" matters. If anyone deserved to be served, it was Jesus - the one with all authority. Yet He stepped down, entered our world, and gave His life in place of people who were still arguing about rank.

The word ransom - lytron in Greek - was the price paid to free a slave or captive when they could not free themselves. Paul writes in Romans that everyone is held captive under sin and death. Jesus did not come to inspire better effort. He came to pay the debt we could not pay, to stand where we deserved to stand, and absorb the judgment we deserved. His life instead of many - that is substitution.

That is why servant-shaped living is not just a leadership principle. It flows out of what Jesus actually did. James and John were loyal insiders with front-row access - and they still went straight for position the moment an opportunity appeared. It is possible to believe the right things, serve faithfully, and still keep a quiet scoreboard running. That does not get fixed by more information. It gets addressed through surrender. Following Jesus doesn't automatically redirect your ambition - but surrender can. Wherever your heart is still reaching for position, that is where it needs to be offered up to Him.

### Discussion Questions:

1. James and John knew what Jesus had just said - and still asked for the top seats. Where do you find yourself doing the same: knowing better, but still going after what you want?
2. The ten were angry not because the request was wrong, but because they didn't make it first. Where does that same dynamic show up in your own life - serving, but keeping score?
3. Jesus redefines greatness as servanthood, rooted in what He actually did. How does understanding the ransom change your motivation to serve?
4. Think about an area where ambition or the desire for recognition is still driving you. What would surrender look like there specifically?
5. Jesus went to the cross for people who were still arguing about rank. How does that shape the way you think about His love for you - and for the people around you?