

MARK — Jesus Questions the Disciples' Wish List

Pastor Perry Burkholder

| What do you want me to do for you? — Jesus

How would you seriously respond to that question?

They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

“**What do you want me to do for you?**” he asked.

They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

“We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 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.”

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mk 10:32–45.

The Third Prediction of Death

Jesus paints this stark picture of the fact that he will be handed over, flogged, spat on, and beaten to be killed at the hands of the Jews.

In their limited capacity, the disciples are trying to figure out how this Messianic conqueror is going to actually bring the Kingdom Dominion to earth.

And we see a glimpse of how that is turning over in their minds when James and John ask for honor and ruling power over this new Kingdom Dominion. But was this request for now or in the age to come?

- This could mean in Jerusalem, that after Jesus dies, they’re wanting to be with him in glory.

- Alternatively, they could have ignored that third death prediction and they're just keeping focused on the ruling domion power and want that glory
- Or it could also mean that in the age to come, they're asking for rule next to Jesus.

Regardless of if they mean one or all of those senses of the request, the beauty is how Jesus responds to their requests.



One reflective application of this passage is to put yourself in the place of the disciples: approach him like a child, and you ask, “we want you to do whatever we ask of you,” and he entertains you and responds, “what do you want me to do for you?”

Are You Able to Handle It?

Jesus responds to them with an inquiry to interrogate their own motives.

In a loose paraphrase, “Can you handle what you’re asking for — to drink the cup and be baptized with my baptism?”

And the disciples think they can.

The Cup As A Symbol of Blessing or Curse

The cup has been used in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament as a symbol for authority, blessing, and provision (see the cup of the King in Genesis, see also Psalm 16, Psalm 23).

But also, 15 times in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, “the cup” refers to the condemnation and judgment on sin. To drink the cup is to drink the cup of God’s wrath against injustice. Jesus throughout the gospels uses this symbol to mention his imminent death.

Jesus is laying out for the disciples that the path through glory will be drinking the cup and being baptized into death.

And he affirms that they will drink the cup and be baptized, but that they will not receive the glory they asked for.

Authority As a Means of Revealing Our Inner Motives

Jesus then turns and gets them to think about what true glory is by having them consider how authority is handled in the world: Lording it over others. The Kingdom of self.

But Jesus reminds them of what he's been saying since his first prediction of death: If you want prominence and power in the kingdom, there is nothing wrong with that, but in my Kingdom Dominion, the greatest are servants. In fact, they are slaves. They are also the children. They are the lowest of society. They are the greatest in my kingdom.



Make your purpose and your identity all about serving other people, and sometimes in ways, drinking a cup you don't want to drink.

This whole time, Jesus has been trying to teach his followers and disciples the way of living in his kingdom. And just so that we're clear, Jesus clarifies: "I came not to Lord it over others, but to be that servant, that slave of all."

What would happen if we took this example set by our King into our homes and our places of work?

And this is completely counter to how we are conditioned by our culture. Every Ad given to us tries to shape us into a people whose identity is that of, "we must be served our way, every day, always, right now."

Our culture and media is conditioning us to be consumers. But Jesus is challenging that script here: Greatness is achieved through identifying as a slave.

And this is a huge ouch moment. Don't think this is an excuse to stay in an abusive situation. Consider the context: How do secular rulers use their authority vs. how Christ followers are to use their authority? Being in positions of power isn't evil, but King Jesus demonstrates for us his ethics for how we use that authority.

And Jesus will call us to drink the cup and be baptized in ways we don't want to. And it's not because he wants to torture us or completely forfeit our humanity. He calls us to those situations because he is calling us to follow him in obedience into restoring our humanity into life.

Life Through Death

The way to life with Jesus is through death.

Pastor Perry shared about how he did not want to serve high school ministry, but Jesus called him into that in order to shape him into the heart of a pastor. Like David tending sheep, it was there where God developed his heart and moulded him into humility and deep character. Even though Pastor Perry hated serving in youth, God filled him with love for the kids and prepared him for being a pastor.

God doesn't call us to prominence and position and glory through great political platforms, but through serving others who sometimes don't deserve to be served.

Jesus paved the way for us; "please take this cup from me, but not my will, but yours Father," And in those moments of desperation and pain and discomfort, God meets us there, moulds our character, and forms us into Christ's image.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Php 2:5–8.

I didn't come to be served but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom.

— Jesus (*Would you take up this mantra for your life?*)

Practical Opportunity to Serve

We have a great need for servants in kids' ministry. It's not just babysitting, it's discipleship. If you sense the Holy Spirit calling you to serve the children in our church family, please contact angie@everynationseattle.org.