

**Status-Seeking**  
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**Original: 8-11-24**

**Text:** Mark 10:35-45 (see also Matt. 20:20-28)

**Gospel of Mark:** [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)

**UBS 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Paragraph Topic:** The Request of James and John

**Central Idea of Message:** Servants of Christ will be great, but slaves of Christ will be even greater in his kingdom.

**Introduction:** Episode 55. In this paragraph, Mark's narrative records a request by two brothers, which my professor on *The Gospel of Mark* at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. Billy Simmons, quoting John Calvin, called, "A bright mirror of human vanity."

Status-seeking is ego in action, pride on display, human vanity on exhibit. Here is what Jesus had to say about selfish ambition and true greatness.

**I. Worldly Standards of Greatness (vv. 35-40)**

- A. James and John prepare to make a request (v. 35)
  - 1. Brothers
    - a) Two sons of Zebedee
    - b) Fishermen
    - c) Their mother, Salome (Matt. 27:56 *with* Mark 16:1), may have been a sister to Jesus' mother (Mark 15:40 *with* John 19:25), Mary, thus making these two Jesus' first cousins
  - 2. Matt. 20:20-28 says it was their mother, Jesus' aunt, which suggests that they put her up to it and are thus credited with instigating the entire episode
  - 3. Address Jesus as "Teacher"
  - 4. "We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you"
    - a) Wait, what?
    - b) It sounds as if they tried to entrap Jesus into obligating himself to grant their request before hearing it
    - c) **"This is the final form of unacceptable prayer" (Luccock 812)**

- d) **"Prayer is always unacceptable when it says to God, 'You do what I want.'" (Luccock 812)**
- B. Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" (v. 36)
  - 1. Please note that Jesus did not say, "sure"
  - 2. Jesus first wanted to hear what the two conspiring brothers wanted
- C. The selfish request of James and John (v. 37)
  - 1. "Grant that we may sit in Your glory, one on Your right, and one on Your left"
  - 2. Such a petition betrays the fact that neither James nor John understood the nature of Christ's kingdom, and these were two from the inner circle!
  - 3. They perhaps thought that, since they were enroute to Jerusalem, Jesus would set up his earthly kingdom at that time
    - a) We love to have the attention
    - b) We love to sit in the most prestigious seats
      - (1) Front row
      - (2) Maybe even back-stage
      - (3) Penthouse suite
      - (4) Sky-box
      - (5) Positions of honor
  - 4. **Do some people follow Jesus for what they can get in terms of material gain, authority, or prestige?**
- D. "You do not know what you are asking for" (v. 38)
  - 1. Many of our requests to God are far above our paygrade
  - 2. **Many of our requests to God are not only self-centered, but also commonly fail to consider the consequences, challenges, and grief associated with the granting of the request**
  - 3. "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"
    - a) Cup and baptism are metaphors which reference suffering, grief, or loss
    - b) The drinking of the "cup" and the "baptism" of which Jesus spoke would come in due time
    - c) We greatly prefer to have our prayer requests answered both with a "yes" and done immediately!
    - d) But there are often steps we must take, phases that we must pass through before God grants a request
    - e) And sometimes God's answer is even "no"

- E. The response of James and John (v. 39)
1. "We are able": they were correct!
  2. Jesus acknowledged that each of them would drink of his cup and be baptized with the same baptism with which he was baptized
  3. I seriously doubt that either man understood the full import of what this meant!
    - a) This was a reference to suffering!
    - b) His mission was not a pleasant one, so neither will ours always be pleasant
    - c) Each man suffered in the future
      - (1) James was executed by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2)
      - (2) John was imprisoned and beaten (Acts 4:3, 18, 40) and later banished [exiled] to the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9)
      - (3) Both maintained their faith!
  4. **"Baptism is immersion with security against sinking" (Plummer 247)**
    - a) A perfect illustration of rising again from grief, conflict, loss, and then from death!
    - b) Baptism as used here not only anticipates hazards in life, but also, in the end, rescue by Christ!
- F. Some things are not Jesus' to give (v. 40)
1. "But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give";
    - a) This action is apparently reserved exclusively for God the Father
    - b) **Jesus purposely limited his privileges by his submission to his Father (cf. Lane 381)**
  2. "But it is for those for whom it has been prepared"
    - a) God the Father is the one who assigns rank, office, or status in his kingdom
    - b) Jesus acts in accord with the Father, not based on favoritism
    - c) No rank is given before being earned through faithfulness to Christ lived in loyalty to his message and mission

## II. Heavenly Standards of Greatness (vv. 41-45)

- A. Ten upset disciples (v. 41)
1. The other ten heard this dialogue
  2. They had all been arguing earlier about who was the greatest (Mark 9:33-37)

3. Selfishness is difficult to overcome completely!
  4. The other ten disciples were indignant [outraged] toward James and John!
    - a) Who do they think they are?
    - b) They are trying to get ahead in the line, even weaseling their way to the front!
    - c) The words "tense" and "awkward" come to mind right about now!
    - d) But the truth is that these other ten had the same ambitions, and this is why they were mad!
- B. Earthly authority (v. 42)
1. Jesus huddled the Twelve together in order to further instruct them
  2. "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them"
    - a) Lording authority over subordinates seems to be the common practice of most people
    - b) Jesus had already exhorted the Twelve to abide in a submissive, childlike spirit (Mark 9:36; 10:15)
    - c) **Despotism [heavy-handed overlordship] is clearly condemned by Christ**
    - d) **Jesus obviously wanted the Twelve, and all Christians for that matter, to behave far differently!**
- C. "But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant" (v. 43)
1. Greatness is measured by serving, not lording!
  2. Major paradigm shift for the Twelve and for us now!
- D. "Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all" (v. 44)
1. What?
  2. This is radical! Even revolutionary!
  3. Jesus uses the word for *servant* which is the most graphically bound [in bondage] term possible such that it is translated *slave*
  4. **Slaves of Christ become slaves of others on earth, and, in so doing, are esteemed as first in God's economy of classification!**
  5. **The paradox [apparent contradiction] of *supremacy* being exhibited in *subordination* [slavery] to Christ is stunning!**

- E. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (v. 45)
1. This is the greatest purpose statement for the coming of Jesus to earth, and it is done succinctly in a single sentence!
  2. Jesus' favorite title for himself was Son of Man
    - a) A title which somewhat veiled the fact that he is the Messiah
    - b) Jesus identified with the suffering servant of Isa. 53:5, 11-12
    - c) **Jesus' mission was to be the Servant-King, the Supreme Subordinate Slave**
  3. Jesus' life was given, not taken
  4. **Jesus gave himself as a ransom in the place of, instead of, and for the life of many (1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14)**
    - a) *Ransom* refers to the price paid to free one who is a slave (Lev. 19:20) or a captive (Isa. 45:18)
    - b) It is, then, the price of release
    - c) He paid a debt he did not owe
    - d) He paid the debt we could not pay
    - e) The *many* are those who accept redemption from Christ
    - f) And to whom was the ransom paid?
      - (1) The text does not say
      - (2) But what is most important is that those kidnapped by sin can be freed, because the ransom price has been paid!

**Conclusion:** Principles.

(1) **Selfishness is at the root of most of mankind's sin, to which the glittering attractions of worldly honor often cater themselves (v. 37).**

(2) **God rarely, if ever, answers selfish prayers (v. 38).**

(3) **Entrance into the Kingdom of God includes suffering [baptized with the same "baptism" as Jesus] (v. 39).**

(4) **Those who will one day reign with Jesus must also be prepared to endure loss and grief with him (v. 39).**

(5) **Baptism is both a picture of submersion in what can drown us, like hatred, pain, and death, and a picture of Christ's securing hands always on us (v. 39).**

(6) **All things are in God's hands, but many things are "also in man's hands as he fulfills the requirements of God - there are**

many such things in the spiritual life that are not alone God's to give but man's to fashion" (v. 40; Luccock 815).

(7) "Unless we know how to obey orders, we do not have the right to give orders. Before a person exercises authority, he or she must know what it means to be under authority" (v. 44; Wiersbe, *Exposition*, 1:148).

(8) Servants of Christ will be great, but slaves of Christ will be even greater in his kingdom (v. 44).

(9) The Christian life which follows closely the example of Jesus will be one of selflessness rather than selfishness, one of self-denial rather than self-seeking (v. 45).

(10) Jesus, the innocent one, substituted himself for the guilty ones (v. 45)!