

What We Want vs What Grace Does

Mark 10:35-45

Halifax: 31 May 2020 AM

Introduction:

Today we will continue our sermon series in the Gospel of Mark.

- Last week, we looked at Mark 10:32-34 where Jesus' disciples were unnerved when they saw the intensity and resolution on their Master's face.
 - His face was set like a flint to go to Jerusalem.
 - He knew He must go there even though He knew what awaited Him
- Jesus, seeing the fears of His disciples, called them aside to tell them once again what was going to happen to Him at Jerusalem—now with more detail than ever:
 - **Mark 10:33-34: “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; ³⁴ and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.”**

As has been the pattern all along, despite these clear words, the disciples now show, in our passage for this week, that they still do not grasp His mission.

- This time, it is in James and John that we see just how out of touch they are with their Lord as He heads to the cross.
- Yet, once again, their confusion is all to church's advantage because it means that we get more teaching from Jesus about the ways of His matchless kingdom and about the grace that comes to us to enable us to live in the ways of that kingdom.

Listen as I read our text from Mark 10:35-45:

Mark 10:35-45: Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.” ³⁶ And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?” ³⁷ They said to Him, “Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.” ³⁸ But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” ³⁹ They said to Him, “We are able.” So Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; ⁴⁰ but to sit on My right hand and

on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those* for whom it is prepared.” ⁴¹ And when the ten heard *it*, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. ⁴² But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. ⁴⁴ And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His infallible Word.

I. In the selfish desire of James and John, we see our own desire reflected.

- God's word is like a mirror where we see our own face.
 - Calvin calls this "a bright mirror of human vanity." Ouch!
- A. Their opening request sums up what we so often want, but are ashamed to admit: **"Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask."**
 1. That's quite a thing to say, isn't it? "Whatever we ask"???
 - That's quite a tall order!
 - I rather think that they didn't quite mean for their request to come out like that.
 - They were nervous about what they were coming to ask Him—Matthew tells us that they even brought their mother with them.
 - They were going to ask Him if they might sit on His right and left hand...
 - But in their nervousness, they beat around the bush a little bit and out came this ridiculous request... "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask."
 - Ironically, what came out was really a perfect summary of what we so often want from Jesus—"I want you to do whatever I ask."
 - 2. Doesn't that very much describe the way it is with you?
 - You want Him to take away your sickness at once, to give you that raise, to change your spouse to be the way you want him or her to be, to deal with that difficult person at work, to take away your loneliness...
 - Teacher, I want you to do whatever I ask!
 - Sadly, I know people who are no longer walking with the Lord today because He did not give them what they wanted.
 - They will tell you, "I tried the Lord, but it did not work for me."
 - He didn't do for them what they wanted, so they moved on.
 - Most people who are agnostics or atheists will tell you that the main reason they don't believe is because they don't like the way God does things—there's too much trouble in the world—so they deny Him.
 - But with those of us who truly know Him, we want Him to do whatever we want and it does not occur to us to trust that He knows best when He doesn't take away our troubles or give us our desires.
 - And of course sometimes our desires are right—for example, if we want Him to make us more like Christ—that is a good desire that we should continue to pray for...
 - But we all know that there are many selfish demands that we make as well—and that even the right things we often want in the wrong way—that a colleague would be saved because they are so hard to get along with.

3. Jesus does not make the foolish mistake in responding to His disciples of saying, “Sure, whatever you want,” but instead asks, “What do you want Me to do for you?”
 - He forces them to put their request in plain words—so they do.
 - It’s a good thing to remember when someone says, “Will you do me favour?”
 - Don’t say, “Sure,” but say “What is it?” before you commit yourself.
 - Don’t answer until they tell you what they want.
- B. Their specific request is for the places of highest honour beside His throne:
- Verse 37: **They said to Him, “Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.”**
1. They continued to envision that He would shortly set up His throne in this world.
 - James and John may have felt that they had an edge now because they were one of the three disciples in the inner circle with Jesus along with Peter.
 - For example, they were the ones that Jesus took with Him on the mount of transfiguration, and the event was a secret entrusted to them only.
 - Besides that, Peter had recently been soundly rebuked for rebuking Jesus about going to the cross.
 - And of course after the mount of transfiguration, the other nine disciples had been unable to cast out a demon.
 - Everything seemed to be shaping up for James and John to have the places of highest honour.
 - They just wanted to check with Jesus to make sure that these places would be theirs.
 - “You know—You recently told us that we would have thrones and we were just wondering if You can confirm that these places of honour will be ours now as we are headed up to Jerusalem where You will take Your throne.”
 2. Isn’t it a funny thing: When you get a little honour and your peers have a failure—you can easily start to swell with ambition.
 - If you get a hint that you are favoured above your peers, it is kind of exciting and it kind of stirs up your pride? Yes?
 - You think, “I am finally being recognised! I am getting the respect that I deserve.”
 - You can do this even if you are not a high achiever—if you feel that people are, perhaps, finally starting to understand how difficult your life is compared to others...
 - “I only want people to give me a little respect. At last, it looks like they are starting to recognise my worth.”
 - Since the 70s, we been told how important self-esteem is, but in the history of the church, self-esteem has always been seen as a sin—albeit a very common one.

TRANS> So James and John are just wanting to confirm their places of honour in Jesus' coming glory.

C. Jesus informs these two disciples that they are ignorant in making this request.

- In verse 38, He says: **“You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”**

1. They completely missed what He had just told them of His sufferings.

- He wasn't going to Jerusalem to take a golden throne—He is was going there to be betrayed, rejected by the church, and then delivered over to the Romans to be mocked and spit upon and crucified.

- James and John were very insensitive—they passed over the shame and suffering their Master was about the face as if it was a very little and insignificant thing.

2. Jesus' question in verse 38 points them back to His sufferings.

- “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink? To share in the sufferings that I am about to experience? To be baptised with the baptism that I am about to be baptised with?

- “You who are looking to be on my right and My left—are you ready to be on My right and My left when I am on the cross? Are you ready to be on the crosses on My left hand and on My right hand?

- “You have no idea what you are asking.

- “My greatest glory will be in being lifted up on the cross to save the world.

- “It is in the cross that My glory will be revealed—it is here that you will see love exhibited in self-sacrificial service.”

3. Their response only exposes more ignorance when they say, “We are able.”

- They were not at all able!

- They were not ready at this time to bear their cross or to stand with Him when He bore His cross.

- They are certainly feeling loyal and devoted to Him, but they are not ready to drink His cup or to be baptised with His baptism.

- They add to their ignorance about what it means to be at His right and left hand the ignorance of their own ability and readiness to follow Him.

- Their desires are still far too much for the world.

- It is a great danger for us—to overestimate our own ability and suppose that we can with ease meet the demands that following Christ will put upon us.

- We cannot. Not in our own strength.

- There are many flaws in us—many more than we recognise in our pride and selfishness.

TRANS> Ah, but let's take a look at our Saviour with delight.

- In ourselves we see sinful desires...

II. In our Saviour's response we see His marvellous wisdom and grace!

A. Look at how He responds to His disciples' boast that "we are able."

- Verse 39: **So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized..."**

- This is brilliant!

1. Consider first of all what He does not say here.

- He does not say, "Indeed you are able."
 - Clearly they are not, as He will soon tell them that they will all deny Him.
- Yet, neither does He blast them by saying, "You are not able."
 - He does not want to crush them.
 - He does not slam the door on them to overwhelm them with discouragement.
 - He does something far better than that.

2. He assures them that they will indeed drink the cup that He drinks and be baptised with the baptism that He is baptised with!

- They are not at all able to do that... but they will do it because the Lord will enable them to do it.
 - There is so much hope here for all of us!
- His grace will transform them so that they will not be what they are now.
 - He will deliver them from their own pride and selfishness and then they will no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and rose again.
 - You know, like it says in 2 Cor 5:15: **and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.**
- These selfish disciples who are seeking their own glory will become men who lay down their lives for the kingdom of Jesus Christ.
 - That is what grace does in the life of those who come to Jesus!
 - It is not what they are, but it is what grace transforms them to be.
- They had no idea how different they would be in the days to come.
 - They had no idea about how different they needed to be—and neither do we—but that will come soon enough.
 - As God works in us, we are able to look back and see how off we were—and seeing that, we ought to realise that in the future we will look at what we are now and realise that same thing about our present level of sanctification and love for our Master.

3. How gently and how wisely our Lord deals with us.

- He does not crush us.
- Instead He gives us hope—that yes, we will give ourselves for Him...

B. But look—He does set them straight about their request for honour.

- He does not deal with their mistaken estimation of themselves—but He does deal with their most blatant error—their request for personal favours.
 - In verse 40, He says: **“but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared.”**
- 1. They had approached Him as if He were an earthly monarch.
 - They figured that since they knew Him, they could request some favours from Him—
 - that He would give them these positions of honour at His right and left hand as a personal favour.
 - Earthly kings like to show their sovereign power in appointing their friends to special positions—to show what they can do for them in their regal splendour.
 - They love to say, “Ask me whatever you will, and I will give it to you.”
- 2. But Jesus tells them that it does not work like that in His kingdom.
 - He had no favours like that to give out.
 - The places of honour in His kingdom are for those from whom they are prepared—in the plan of God.
 - They are places that you grow into, not places they you are given as an entitlement because you know the right people.
 - You know how earthly rulers give their friends positions that their friends are not qualified to fill!
 - Jesus gives us the places that have been prepared for us in the plan of God.
 - They are places that we grow into by His grace as we serve Him in this world... places of service to others that we find... not positions that we receive.
- 3. This teaches us that we must not ask the Lord for positions in His kingdom.
 - We won’t be able to handle them if we were to get them in that way.
 - We should rather look for ways that we can serve the Lord and pray for grace and opportunity to serve and then He will place us in the positions our Father has prepared for us.
 - The world aspires to positions, we ought rather to aspire to service and devotion to our Lord and our neighbour.
 - Service is love in action.

TRANS> But no sooner does Jesus say this than the other ten disciples come along and show that they are just as bad as James and John.

- Verse 41 says: **And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John.**
 - They were not displeased with James and John for asking such an insensitive question when Jesus had just told them of all the things He would suffer at Jerusalem.

- No. They were indignant because James and John were vying for positions that either they wanted for themselves or thought that someone else ought to have.
- They were filled with the same ambition and pride and self-centeredness that focuses on what they will get instead of how they can serve.
 - It is such a universal problem!

III. Jesus now (as might be expected) describes the places of highest honour in His kingdom—He describes what the seats of honour in His kingdom look like.

A. First, He explains that they are not like the places of honour in the kingdoms of this world. Not at all.

1. In the world, the place honour is the place of authority over others.
 - The place of honour is the place where you can order people about and get them to do whatever you want.
 - You tell one to go there and he goes, and another to come here and he comes.
 - You make decrees to build a city and it is built, or to destroy an enemy and he is destroyed.
 - You want a new palace and you order it to be built and it is built.
 - The more power you have, the better.
 - If you are an athlete, you are the one who wins the gold medal.
 - If you are in business, you have the most success.
 - Getting what you want is the goal.
 - Jesus is not necessarily saying that being in charge in the way the world admires is wrong—it is not wrong to be king and have authority.
 - It is just that in His kingdom, that is not what makes you great.
 - You can be a king who is not at all great if you are an oppressor, but very great if you pour out your life for others.
 - Likewise, if you are janitor, you can be great in His kingdom if you pour out your life for others, but not great at all if you live for yourself.
 - Jesus describes it like this in verse 42: **But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.”**
 - In the Greek, there are two compound words that being with the word *kata* which means *down* as in *down from*.
 - The first one is translated *lord it over* and the second one is translated *exercise authority over*.
 - The idea is that you talk down to them—you rule down upon them and you exercise authority down upon them.
 - In other words, you have control of them so they do your bidding.

- The greater you are in the kingdoms of the Gentiles, the more people you have under your control.
 - That is how greatness is measured.
2. But Jesus tells His disciples that it will not be that way in His kingdom.
 - He says simply, in verse 43, **“Yet it shall not be so among you.”**
 - Notice that He is not simply forbidding them to measure greatness the way the nations of the world do...
 - He is declaring that in His kingdom greatness will not be measured in this way—by how many people are under your orders!
 - He is not describing a situation where we will have different values and ways of measuring what is honourable.
- B. The place of honour in His kingdom will be measured by one’s service rather than by one’s status.
- verse 43-44: **“Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant (deacon—one who serves food). ⁴⁴ And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave (doulos—a slave who does the will of another) of all.”**
1. This is beautiful!
 - In Jesus’ kingdom the ideal citizen is the one who does the most for others—where you pour out yourself for others.
 - Instead of everyone clamouring to rule, everyone will be seeking to be a blessing to others... each will find their delight in serving and doing good for others.
 - Think about a family like that—where everyone lives to please the others in the home and to serve them!
 - What a beautiful home that is!
 - What a beautiful marriage that is!
 - But how rare it is—
 - The most honoured one in His kingdom will be the one who takes the least and gives the most.
 2. This is entirely opposite to what James and John—and, as it turns out, the other disciples—were looking for.
 - And too often it is the opposite of what we are looking for.
 3. But I stress again, Jesus is not here ordering us embrace these ideals in His kingdom.
 - He is telling us that this is how it will be in His kingdom.
 - He is going to change us to be like this... to live by a different standard.
 - We don’t enter the kingdom because we are what we should be; we enter because we are not what we should be.
 - That’s the reason we need a Saviour.

- We are full of pride and selfishness—we want to control the people around us—we want them to do what we want...
- And we spend very little time trying to do what is good for others—trying to be a true blessing to others.
- He brings us into His kingdom to change us, not because we have changed ourselves.
- Your hope is not in yourself—it is in Jesus Christ and His grace.

C. Jesus Himself is the one who epitomises this greatness that He has described.

1. He is the One in the kingdom who is the slave of us all!

- In verse 45 He says, “**For even the Son of Man** [that’s Jesus of course] **did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**”
- The very reason He came was that He might perform the service that we needed—a huge service—a service that would cost Him everything...
 - to give (donate) His life (His very soul) a ransom for many.
 - He came not to be served, but to serve.

2. We were in desperate need of this service.

- We were in desperate need of it because we are all like James and John,
 - living for ourselves, living ugly lives in God’s world in which we want to have control of others and want the Lord to do whatever we want.
 - We became that way as a human race when our father Adam turned away from God to do what he wanted instead of what God wanted.
 - What God wanted was for us to live this beautiful way that Christ told His disciples about where the honour goes to those who give the most.
 - What Adam turned to instead is what we have now where everyone lives for himself and seeks to control others.
- The fall put us all in the place of bondage to this self-serving way—it is what we became—it is what we are.
 - It made us unfit for communion with God and unfit for the world that He had made for us.
 - It was our death, our ruin, and it brought God’s sentence of condemnation down upon us.
 - We need to be rescued from ourselves—delivered—and we needed a pardon.

3. The Son of God was the only One who could deliver us.

- And that is what He came to do in the only way it could be done.
 - He came, as He says here, to give His life a ransom for many.
 - He is going to the cross to die (donate His life) as a payment for our sins—a ransom that equalises things.
 - He came to fully pay the penalty for the wrongs that we have done... to bear the just punishment that belongs to us.
- This is the most beautiful service of all!

- This very act that meets our need for pardon is also the act that exemplifies the service that Jesus is describing more than any other.
 - He pays for our sins by His death on the cross so we can be pardoned.
 - And at the same time, He shows us what it means to be give ourselves for others.
- And by His grace, He transforms us to be like He is!
 - The promise is that we will be like Him.
 - You come to Him, not because you are like Him, but because you are not like Him.
 - He pardons your sin on the basis of the ransom of His soul.
 - And then He transforms you so that you become like Him

Conclusion:

In this kingdom, you start out like James and John looking at how you can gain a position where everyone serves you,

- But you end up like Jesus where you are changed into someone who gives yourself for others.
- It is a very good thing that we have a Saviour like Jesus.
 - If we didn't, we would be stuck in our selfishness forever.