

*<sup>20</sup> Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. <sup>21</sup> And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." <sup>22</sup> But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." <sup>23</sup> So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; 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 by My Father" <sup>24</sup> And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. <sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. <sup>27</sup> And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

Text: Matthew 20:20-28 A 3-1-26 Passion History, part 2 Psalm 97 Responsive Psalm: 100  
Hymns: 172 (1, 2, 4, 6, 8), 421, 409, 175 (1<sup>st</sup> tune)

## RETURN TO SERVING

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

“Look Mom, no hands.” So exclaims the boy to his mother as he rides his bike without using his hands. By nature we want to be praised and told how good we are at something. By nature we want glory. By nature we don’t want to be controlled, we want to be in control. It’s against our human nature to humble ourselves before God or anyone else. It’s against our human nature to serve God and others.

As our text opens the mother of two of Jesus’ disciples, James and John, asks Jesus, “*Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.*” Wow! James and John wanted positions of glory in heaven. They had the nerve to ask the Son of God for such glory. But that’s the way they wanted it at that time.

We’re told, “*When the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.*” The rest of the disciples were upset with James and John. Were they upset because James and John were being sinfully proud? Were they upset because they wanted positions of glory in heaven for themselves? We don’t know what the other disciples were thinking because the Bible doesn’t tell us.

James’ and John’s request for glory points out one of the many flaws of our Old Adam – our sinful flesh – our human nature. We are not humble by nature. From little on we have to be taught to think about others and how we might help them and serve them. The Bible asks us, “*What do you have that you did not receive?*” (1 Cor. 4:7). Everything we have and are that’s good is from God. By nature we want to use the gifts God has given us to serve and glorify ourselves. Sometimes the

Lord has to let us struggle and suffer to teach us humility. Standing before the holy, almighty, perfect God, do we think we're so great? That's as ludicrous as James and John asking the Son of God for special glory in heaven. In heaven, we won't concern ourselves with positions of glory. We'll simply be happy to be there.

Jesus told James and John, *"You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"* As the Son of God, Jesus would undergo a 'baptism of fire,' so to speak. Jesus would face a terribly unfair trial by the Jewish leaders, judging Him to be guilty before the trial started. People would hit Jesus. Some would spit on Him. Jesus would be whipped half to death. He would have a crown of thorns pressed onto His head. He would be cruelly made fun of. Jesus would be nailed to a cross. Much worse, Jesus would bear our sin and guilt, face His Father's anger and punishment for our sins, and be forsaken by His Father. Jesus would humbly, willingly, submit to it all in obedience to His Father and in order to save us. *"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."* (Is. 53:4-6)

When Jesus asked if James and John were able to suffer the way He would suffer, they replied, *"We are able."* They meant no disrespect. They had no idea what they were actually saying. There was no way they or anyone else could suffer what Jesus suffered. Only the suffering and death of the Son of God can save us.

Jesus told James and John, *"You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with."* As Jesus would suffer for their salvation, so they would suffer for Jesus' sake. Later the Roman king Herod had James killed (Ac. 12:1-2). John was later exiled to the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9). James, John, and the rest of the disciples would all suffer because they were Christians and taught people about Jesus.

Jesus says, *"Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Mk. 8:34-37). As Jesus suffered and died for us on the cross, so He sometimes calls on you and me to suffer for His sake. If we let this life and what we have and what we do become so important to us that we turn away from God, we lose eternal life. But if we have Jesus and His Word as the center of our faith and life, we have eternal life. Joshua told his fellow believers, *"Fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth.... And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD"* (Josh. 24:14-15. See also Josh. 24:31). We say with Paul, *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* (Ro. 8:18)

Jesus had just talked to His disciples about His coming suffering and death. It was right after that that James' and John's mother, with their knowledge and agreement, asked Jesus for glory for them. Jesus called all the disciples together and told them, "*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.*" "*Lord it over*" and "*exercise authority over*" in the original both include the idea of force, of the wants of one being forced upon another, of subjects being forced to act in one way while wishing they could act in a different way. It's the way of the unbelieving world to want such control over others.

A person may have billions of dollars and be in control of many people. But if he doesn't believe in Jesus as his Savior from sin, what does he have? When he dies he can't take his billions with him, or control anyone. When he dies he faces an eternity of suffering in hell for his unbelief.

Jesus told the disciples, "*It shall not be so among you.*" It's not right to want to control others. Jesus says, "*Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave.*" True greatness is not found in having power over others. True greatness is serving others for the Lord's sake. Jesus helps us to humble ourselves before Him, and to be humble in the way we treat others.

Jesus says, "*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" The Son of God didn't lord it over others, He came to serve us. The apostle Paul says, "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*" (Philip. 2:5-8).

Since the Son of God humbled Himself for us, what right do we sinful human beings have to seek glory for ourselves? In place of our sinful desire for glory, we have Jesus' perfect life of humble service. We have Jesus' example of humility to follow in the way we treat others. We can't save ourselves. We trust in Jesus, who humbly offered His life on the cross to save us.

Trusting in Jesus and following Him, we have eternal life in heaven to look forward to. In heaven we'll serve our Lord and one another in perfect humility. One commentator observes, "We can correctly say that heaven is a place where individuals don't do anything they don't want to do. ... Heaven is full of individuals who don't want to do anything except what the King of heaven wants them to do. ... Worldly dominion rarely develops an undivided allegiance of the heart. Heavenly dominion never fails to do so." (Sermon Studies On The Gospels, Series A, p. 148, NPH, ©1989)

"Jesus, Son of God, Who humbled Yourself to save us, help us to humbly follow You. Help us to be humble in the way we treat others. We so look forward to perfectly, humbly serving You and each other in heaven." Amen.