

Introduction

1. Be careful what you ask for!
 - a. There once was a man who found a dirty old lamp. He began to clean it up hoping he could sell it as an antique. As he was rubbing it with a cloth, POOF! -- out popped a genie! "I shall give you three wishes" the genie said, "You may wish for anything you like." The man thought for a minute and said, "I wish I had a billion dollars." "And so you shall," said the genie as suitcases filled with hundred dollar bills appeared beside the man. "Anything else?" the genie asked. The man answered, "I wish I had a red Ferrari with all the works." The genie replied, "Your wish is my command," and a red Ferrari appeared with all the works. The genie then said, "What is your last wish?" The man said, "Hmmm. I think I'll save it for a rainy day." "Okay," said the genie, "Just be careful what you wish for!" "Don't worry, I will" said the man. The man put the suitcases of money in the Ferrari and peeled out for a drive to show all of his friends. As he drove he tried out the new car stereo. As the radio came on, he heard the jingle of a familiar commercial. Before he realized it, the man began to sing along with the tune, "Oh, I wish I was an Oscar Meyer Wiener." Immediately he was transformed into a wiener, the car crashed, and the money burned. It was the most expensive wienie roast of all time!
 - b. The man in the story wasn't careful what he asked for and got something he didn't expect or want.
2. James and John thought that they had found a magic genie in Jesus who would make their wish for greatness come true.
 - a. Instead of granting their wish, Jesus revealed that self-satisfying honor and glory are not to be foremost in the minds of kingdom disciples but instead they must seek out ways to serve others and suffer self-sacrificially.
 - b. **Read Mk 10:35-45.**

A. A Special Request (35-40)

1. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached Jesus their "Teacher" (Gk. *didaskale*) with a special request (35a).
 - a. They said to Jesus, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." (35b)
 - b. They had been with Jesus since near the beginning of His ministry (cf, Mk 1:19-20) and were part of the inner circle of three at the Transfiguration (cf, Mk 9:2-13). They may even have been Jesus' cousins, if their mother Salome was Jesus' aunt as some commentators speculate.
 - c. Jesus humored James and John by listening to their request without agreeing in advance to grant it.
 - d. Jesus said, "What do you want me to do for you?" (37)
2. Their request: "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory (Gk. *dokse*)" (37)
 - a. James and John wanted the best seats in the coming kingdom of God which Jesus came proclaiming.
 - b. Their request seems selfish at first as if they wanted all the glory without any thought of suffering.
 - c. However, they may have simply been asking only for the best seats according to a promise that Jesus had already made. Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler in Matthew's account, Jesus said to His disciples, : "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things when the Son of man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28).
 - d. Even if it was only for the best of promised seats, they were still selfish and wanted to be elevated above the other ten disciples in the end.
 - e. Selfish reactions surface after each prediction by Jesus of His suffering and death.
 - 1) Peter argued selfishly for Jesus to quit talking about suffering and death (cf, Mk 8:32-33)
 - 2) The disciples argued among themselves about who was the greatest (cf, Mk 9:30-34)
 - 3) Now James and John asked selfishly for the best seats in the kingdom.
3. Jesus told James and John that they didn't know what they were asking and posed a question to them: "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" (38)
 - a. You see, the way to the glory that they wanted lay through a valley of suffering and death.

- b. Daniel Akin writes, “James and John get one thing right but everything else wrong. They are correct that Jesus is headed for glory. But as for how the glory would come, they don’t have a clue. They still don’t get it. They need a discipleship lesson on a cup and a baptism” (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 230).
- c. The “cup” (Gk., *poterion*) that Jesus would drink would be the cup of God’s wrath for sinners.
 - 1) In the OT, the cup is often a symbol of God’s wrath on sinners (cf, Ps 75:8; Isaiah 51:17-23; Jer 25:15-17; Ezek 23:28-34).
 - 2) Jesus’ spoke of this cup in Gethsemane when He prayed “*Abba*, Father . . . everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mk 14:36)
- d. The “baptism” (Gk., *baptisma*) Jesus underwent began with His commitment to complete His kingdom task with His baptism in the Jordan (cf, Mk 1:9-11) but would culminate with His ultimate baptism of death and resurrection.
 - 1) In Luke 12:50 Jesus said of this baptism, “But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed.”
 - 2) Paul described this baptism of Jesus to the Romans when he said, “. . . don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Ro 6:3-4).
- e. Jesus knew that the path to the glory of resurrection lay through a dark valley of suffering but James and John did not. They wanted glory without suffering.
- 4. James and John quickly and easily answered Jesus question with a sure “We can.” (39a)
- 5. Jesus gave a final insight into the meaning of being His disciple (39b-40).
 - a. “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with” (39b).
 - b. The cup of John and James was not necessarily a cup of death on a cross but certainly a cup of self-sacrifice for others in the kingdom of God.
 - 1) According to Acts 12:1-2 James died for his faith as the first Christian martyr. “. . . King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword (Ac 12:1-2).
 - 2) Jesus in His answer to Peter’s question about the fate of John said, “‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.’ Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?’ (Jn 21:22-23)
 - 3) James Brooks notes that the early church fathers believed that “. . . John the apostle lived to a very old age and died a natural death in Ephesus in Asia Minor. His death, however, came after suffering exile and torture during the time of the emperor Domitian ca. A.D. 95)” (James Brooks, *Mark*, 169).
 - 4) Sometimes it is harder to live for God than to die for Him.
- 6. Jesus told James and John that the places of honor in God’s kingdom are in the hands of the Father.
 - a. “These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared (Gk., *etoimastai*)” (40)
 - b. Jesus’ response clearly indicates that God has a plan and is in ultimate control.
 - c. God’s plan requires His disciples to follow obediently even though it leads into suffering.
 - d. Ultimately, God’s plan ends in glory for His followers just as He planned from the beginning.

B. Reactions to the Request (41-45)

- 1. By the disciples (41)
 - a. “. . . they became indignant (Gk. *aganaktein*) with James and John.”
 - b. They were probably jealous that they hadn’t thought to ask for these places of honor for themselves.
- 2. By Jesus (42-45)
 - a. Jesus once again turned a time of conflict into a teachable moment as He had done with the other conflicts that arose after His prior two predictions.
 - 1) After rebuking Peter for worldly thinking, Jesus taught His disciples that “. . . Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mk 8:34).

- 2) After their argument on the road about who was the greatest, Jesus taught His disciples that “. . . Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mk 9:35).
 - 3) In this third teaching time Jesus both confronts the worldly thinking of His disciples and calls them to be kingdom servants.
- b. Jesus contrasted the way of the world with the way of God’s kingdom.
- 1) The disciples are thinking like the world.
 - 2) Jesus told the disciples, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.” (42)
 - 3) Warren Wiersbe comments that “Like many people today, the disciples were making the mistake of following the wrong examples. Instead of modeling themselves after Jesus, they were admiring the glory and authority of the Roman rulers, men who loved position and authority. While there is nothing wrong with aspiring to greatness, we must be careful how we define ‘greatness’ and why we want to achieve it” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 126-27).
 - 4) In contrast, the disciples should be thinking like members of God’s kingdom. Jesus told them, “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great (Gk., *meGas*) among you must be your servant (Gk., *diakonos*), and whoever wants to be first must be the slave (Gk., *doulos*) of all” (43-44).
 - 5) This teaching was a re-emphasis to the disciples of Mk 9:35 which they still didn’t get!
- c. Jesus pointed to Himself as the greatest example of a kingdom servant when He said, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve (Gk., *diakonesai*), and to give his life as a ransom for many” (45).
- 1) This verse is viewed by many commentators as the highpoint of this gospel.
 - 2) Remember that the name “Son of Man” was Jesus’ favorite term for Himself.
 - 3) Wiersbe insightfully shares, “God’s pattern in Scripture is that a person must first be a servant before God promotes him or her to be a ruler. This was true of Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Timothy, and even our Lord Himself (Phil. 2:1-11). Unless we know how to obey orders, we do not have the right to give orders. Before a person exercise authority, he or she must know what it means to be under authority. If Jesus Christ followed this pattern in accomplishing the great work of redemption, then surely there is no other pattern for us to follow” (Wiersbe, 127).
 - 4) In this saying, Jesus reinforced the prediction of His impending death and added detail about its purpose when He said it would be “a ransom (Gk., *lutron*) for many.”
 - a) Jesus is the Suffering Servant first identified by Isaiah. “. . . He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isa 53:4-7).
 - b) Brooks writes, “The word translated ‘ransom’ was often used in secular Greek to refer to purchasing the freedom of slave or a prisoner of war. The emphasis was on the price that was paid. . . . Jesus understood his approaching death in terms of Isa 53 He viewed his death as a vicarious sacrifice for sin. In fact, the word translated ‘for’ properly means *in the place of* and not merely *on behalf of*. . . . to say the least, Mark presented Jesus’ death as a substitutionary offering for the sins of others” (Brooks, 171).
 - c) Akin provides an important observation on the theology of Christ’s ransom when he writes, “There is no thought in the Bible that the ransom was paid to Satan. At the cross Satan received only one thing: his defeat and ruin. Also, the price Christ paid was not taken from Him. He freely and, as Hebrews 12:2 says, joyfully gave it. He was the great giver and not the pitiful victim” (Akin, 232).

- d) William Lane adds, “Jesus, as the messianic Servant, offers himself as a guilt-offering (Lev. 5:14-6:7; 7:1-7; Num 5:5-8) in compensation for the sins of the people. The release effected by this offering overcomes man’s alienation from God, his subjection to death, and his bondage to sin. Jesus’ service is offered to God to release men from their indebtedness to God” (William L. Lane, *Mark*, 384).
3. Ultimately, Lane concludes, “That John, the son of Zebedee, ultimately understood Jesus’ intention is clear from I John 3:16: “He laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren”” (Lane, 385).

C. Questions for Reflection

1. Are you seeking kingdom glory without suffering?
2. How have you suffered for the kingdom? What sacrifices have you made in finances, time, relationships in order to share the gospel with others?
3. What is your cup of sacrifice and baptism of death which you undergo to the glory of God? Remember that it is often harder to live faithfully for Jesus than to die for Him.
4. Who are you following? Who are you leading? How are you leading others—as an authority or as a servant?
5. To whom are you a servant and slave for the sake of the gospel?
6. How does being a servant or a slave go against our human nature?
7. How do we get away from thinking like the world and consistently think like Jesus? Where does our help come from to do this? How long does it take?