

**Mark 10: 35-40; “To Sit on Your Right Hand”, Sermon # 87 in
the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered
by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 20th, 2011,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

What do you ask for in your prayers to the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you ask for great things? We sing that hymn by John Newton, #531 in our Trinity Hymnal, “Come my soul, thy suit prepare; Jesus loves to answer prayer; He himself has bid thee pray, therefore will not say thee nay; therefore will not say thee nay.” “Thou art coming to a King, large petitions with thee bring; for his grace and power are such, none can ever ask too much; none can ever ask too much.” And certainly this is the truth. But this request which the disciples James and John brought to the Lord Jesus, although it was not too much for Him to answer; He tells them that it was not His to give; to grant their request. We can see from this that some requests in prayer, although they are not impossible with God; they are not appropriate to ask for, because they are asking for something which God has already prepared in advance to do for someone else who is more worthy of them than we are. God knows who those persons are. Position in the eternal kingdom is not something which we should make request for. But this is what we find James and John doing here with the Lord Jesus. Holy ambitions are fine, but in this case these ambitions turned out to be somewhat selfish. So this afternoon we want to approach this passage in relation to ourselves and what we pray for. First, we will see that Jesus really is very interested in what we would have Him to do for us. Second, Jesus will test our willingness to suffer for His name’s sake in relation to the thing that we have asked for. And thirdly – Jesus will always give us the answer to our prayers in relation to His and the Father’s purposes.

1st – We see that Jesus really is very interested in what we would have Him to do for us. (verse 35-37)

“Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.’ “And He said to them, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’” “They said to Him, ‘Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left in Your glory.’” Now this was a very ambitious request. Why such ambition? Well turn over to Matthew 20, verse 20, and you will see. “Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.” “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.’” It appears from this passage that the mother of James and John was the one responsible for putting them up to this request. Or, it was that they did not want to appear themselves to be seeking honor and glory, so they put her up to this request. I tend to think the latter. The passage in Mark does not even mention her being there at all. (Which, by the way, is another indication to me of the order of the writing of these gospels.

I believe that Mark was written first, and then Matthew, and then Luke. Mark's gospel was the basis, the foundational manuscript, which both Matthew and Luke used and built upon, adding their insights as they went. I cannot prove this. But this is what I suspect.) Anyway, James and John and their mother were all very straightforward about it, and it appears that they brought this request to Jesus in the full faith that he would grant this request to them. They were going to hold the Lord Jesus to His promises. Their using this phrase, "do for us whatever we ask" was taken from the very words of the Lord Jesus to them on several different occasions in His teaching, which is why they refer to Him here as "Teacher".

Let's turn to one of them. Matthew 21, verse 20. Jesus had just withered a fig tree which had born no fruit, and he had withered it immediately. "And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, 'How did the fig tree wither away so soon?' "So Jesus answered and said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea, it will be done.'" "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive." James and John probably said to themselves, "We believe; we will make our request, and we will have what we desire. This is the broadest of promises given by Jesus, that He will answer the prayers of all of His disciples; whatever things you ask, when you believe, they will be given to you. However, this verse falls chronologically after our text where James and John came and made their request. So, is there another promise for the whatsoever things? Well, the Lord Jesus may have made mention of that same promise that I just read to you at other times as well, but you can see the broad, general, all-inclusive promise in Matthew 7: 7-11 – "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?" "Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent?" "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! Ah, they said to themselves, "Christ's kingdom of glory is coming!" "And we should get our bid in early, to be able to sit on His right hand and his left." Their mother went along with their thinking on this. Why should we not ask? The Apostle James would later write, "You have not because you ask not."

But there was something very wrong about this request. It was a request for personal honor and glory to be given to them alone. It was the highest seats of honor in the kingdom of eternal glory which they thought should be given to them. They may not have realized it, but it was selfish ambition and pride that had motivated them to bring this up. They knew that they were favorites of His; He had taken just them along with Peter up on the Mount of Transfiguration. They had heard Him mention just a short time before this, (Matthew 19: 28) that in the regeneration when the Son of man would sit on the throne of His glory, they also would sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel? Would it not be

reasonable to request that they could have the best seats? When He was raised from the dead, would not this blessed time of glory begin? And how easy it would be to simply ask now for what they really wanted in the long haul. Jesus was certainly able to see into their minds and hearts as they brought this request. And He knew that there was some amount of sinful, selfish ambition bound up in it, but He would know what they truly wanted. “What do you want me to do for you?”, He asks them. Jesus is still asking the question of believers today? He still wants to know what you would have Him to do for you. For He is the Risen, Living, Son of God. And He does have all power and authority in heaven and earth? He cares about your ambitions, your dreams, your desires to be with Him and near Him in eternal glory. He also thinks about what you might do for Him, and the questions that you have in that regard as well. Will you not see this afternoon, how truly caring our Lord Jesus Christ is. Cast all of your cares upon Him. Make your greatest requests to Him. Certainly nothing is too difficult for Him; nothing impossible for Him, if God should so will it to be so.

Now 2ndly – The Lord Jesus will test our willingness to suffer for His name’s sake in relation to the thing that we have asked for. (verse 38 and 39)

“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?” Jesus here directly links position in the heavenly kingdom with suffering for His name’s sake in this world. James and John didn’t know what they were asking for; they didn’t realize the tremendous suffering that it would involve to be considered worthy by God to be placed on Christ’s right or left hand. The sufferings of believers in many places, all of over the world, over many generations; even since the beginning of the world, should lead us to understand how difficult it would be to have the seats on either side of the Lord Jesus in that glorious Day. But still the Lord Jesus does not rule out that perhaps James and John might attain to a high position in the kingdom, if they were able to suffer for righteousness sake, for the gospel’s sake, and for the sake of the word of God. He asks them, “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” The cup and the baptism that Christ is referring to is the cup of His sufferings on behalf of sinners. You can see this if you will turn over with me to Matthew 26, verse 36. “Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, ‘Sit here while I go and pray over there.’ “And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.” “Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.’ “Stay here and watch with Me.” “He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’ The cup was the wrath of God against sinners pictured in the form of a cup; which punishments Christ drunk down in comprehending their awfulness in the garden as He prayed, and actually experiencing the punishment for the guilt of them, there at the cross.

The cup is a picture of Christ's active obedience, where He deliberately took the cup of the guilt of our sins, and drank it down to the dregs.

Turn to Psalm 75, verse 6. "For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south." "But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another." "For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down." That is what truly will happen when Christ's eternal kingdom of glory comes; for those who have rejected Him. They shall be forced to drink the cup of wrath given to them at that time of the Last Judgment. But notice how on that Day how the Christian shall rejoice. Verse 9 says, "But I will declare forever, I will sing praises to the God of Jacob." "All the horns of the wicked I will also cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted." This exaltation will take place during and following the Day of Judgment when the saints will judge the world with Christ. 1st Corinthians 6: 2 – "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" The Baptism which Christ was baptized with was His passive obedience; to be immersed in these sufferings which the Father placed Him into. Turn with me to Psalm 69 and you will see this. Verse 1 says, "Save me, O God!" "For the waters have come up to my neck." "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." "I am weary with my crying; my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God." And verse 15 – "Let not the floodwater overflow me, nor let the deep swallow me up; and let not the pit shut its mouth on me." All these are Christ's cries to God that He would be able to bear this baptism on behalf of all of God's Elect. He says in Luke 12: 50 – "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished."

Now the disciples, James and John, answered this question of the Lord to them by saying, "We are able" to be baptized with the same baptism. They understood that Jesus was speaking of their sufferings for Him; His kingdom and His cause of truth and righteousness. But we must understand that their sufferings were not the same as His. His were vicarious sufferings that merited the forgiveness of our sins. They were substitutionary; He suffered in their stead and in their place. They were sufferings on behalf of all of God's Elect; suffering the punishment due their sins. The sufferings of James and John would be the sufferings of martyrs; suffering for Christ cause of truth and righteousness. They believed that they could do this; but they did not understand yet, that it would take His dying for them first, before they could have the strength to suffer for Him. Dear believer, do you understand this this afternoon? The Lord Jesus suffered for helpless and weak sinners as we are, so that from His death would come the life and strength for us not only to be saved, but to do and to suffer and to die if need be, for Him. You cannot pick up your cross without His grace being given to you to do so. But Jesus verifies for us here that He would most certainly give that kind of grace to James and John. And dear one, Christ will give that kind of grace to you, as well, if you are called to suffer for His sake. You will indeed be able to be

baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with if He so orders it. In terms of the greatest things that you desire to do for God, and especially any offices in the church you desire to hold, or work that you desire to do; whether it is a Missionary, or a Pastor, or a deacon, or a Sunday School Teacher, or some work of service; still Christ will come and test you to see whether you are really willing to suffer, in some ways that He will show you, in relation to this good work that you desire to do, so that He will be glorified. Providentially things will not always work out in the way that you want them to. And trying to serve people or help people or teach people or leading people, is not often easy work. The trials in all of these works are meant to build character and patience in you, so that you can truly bear lasting fruit. Be willing to be a nobody in the eyes of other people so that you might be useful to Christ. If you pray to know more of the power of His resurrection in your work of service, be sure to add the rest of the prayer, as the Apostle Paul prayed it; that you might also know more of the fellowship of His sufferings. It is a fellowship which most of us have only begun to learn. But truly it is a joyful fellowship once entered in to. Have the faith to believe that this is so.

And finally - Jesus will always give us the answer to our prayers in relation to His and the Father's purposes. (verse 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.” Ah, dear Christian, you need not covet high positions in the heavenly kingdom. God the Father has already decreed who these persons shall be, and He has already planned it all out; who will sit on Christ's right hand and His left. Your focus should be on being a faithful servant to Christ your heavenly Master. Great positions are not to be coveted by the Christian, but rather great humility, to take the lowest position at the table of Christ's disciples. The Apostles had to learn this the hard way. And probably it will be so for a good many of us. But let us understand that our praying and making our requests to God for greater usefulness to Christ and His kingdom is always in order. And Christ will be asking you in your heart of hearts what it is that He can do for you; not so much “whatever you ask” in the sense of position in the church or the eternal kingdom, but in terms of your greatest desires to glorify Him.