

Mark 10:35-45

Jesus uses a request from his disciples, James, and John, to identify the priorities for his followers.

35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" 39 They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.

42 So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Have you ever watched children picking people to play on a team?

Who do they pick? Well, they pick either their best friends or the people they believe are the best at the game they are playing.

Adults are no different. The recent European cup had people in a frenzy when the manager didn't pick the players they thought should be picked, and the uproar afterwards that a young lad had been given the chance to score a goal was no body's business.

However, I think Gareth Southgate and Jesus would get on well. You see GS strategy while he obviously wants to pick the best players, he refuses to go with peer pressure. He sees what is needed and he chooses accordingly. He gives player the opportunity to grow and he takes chances on those others would rather leave out of the squad. Sometimes that pays off and sometimes it doesn't.

Jesus chose 12 men to show and teach God's kingdom, they weren't the most intellectual or the most popular-one of them was a tax collector. They asked scandalous things, they made some bad choices and often they didn't even understand what Jesus was trying to teach them. They had their own agenda, and sometimes they weren't going to listen to Jesus if it didn't match up with their agenda.

What do we do when we don't get our own way?

In today's story we hear a couple of the disciples making a quite scandalous request. Will you do whatever we ask?

I think many of us today can relate to that question- Jesus, we want you but only if you give us what we desire. Only if you give us the glory without the pain. Only if you let us take the goal but guarantee it will go in? Only if we can play on the winning team and end up with the most likes on face book or be the one that people in the church look up to have all the answers. Only if we can feel important and let others know things happened because of us.

So, do we feel the same about the question from James and John as we may have done when we look to our own heart's desires?

Do we want Jesus on our terms and not on his?

What do we do when we don't get our own way? Or maybe we don't agree with what God is asking us to do.

I love the story of Jonah. He is cross that God wants him to go and speak to a people who in his opinion not worth saving. He tries everything to get out of it and we know the story that the whale spews him out of his mouth after he had been thrown overboard while running from God. He eventually gets to Nineveh but it still not happy that God is willing to save these people. When they do repent and are saved his has another strop at God. God says these wonderful words after Jonah gets cross about a tree that God had planted for him to shade under die.

Jonah 4

⁹ But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"

"It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

¹⁰ But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹¹ And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

Do we throw a strop or sulk when we don't get our own way? Are we as bad as Jonah when God asks us to do something we don't want to do?

Now if we were to give James and John the benefit of the doubt, we may say that it was because they had been at the transfiguration and had seen, and more than likely felt something of Gods glory, they had had a taste of heaven and maybe this fact could be contributed to why they have a desire to sit as close to Jesus as possible.

Maybe that's why remarkably Jesus doesn't condemn them because he knows their hearts desire is to follow him.

We will never truly know but one thing we do know is that Jesus' kingdom wasn't going to look like any human reign, his Kingdom was going to be brought in by suffering and death.

When Jesus refers to the cup, he is more than likely referring to the cup of wrath prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:15-38) and then again, the cup which he asks his father to take the night before his crucifixion when he says let your will not mine be done!

Where are you in the story?

Do you relate to James and John and ask the question to give me what I want and when I want it? Maybe not in such strong words but maybe that's what we're thinking.

Maybe the part I touched on about wanting to see Gods Glory is where you are at? Maybe you are saying lord whatever the cost I need to be with you in your glory. Regardless of the cup I need to drink- be careful if you do pray that as God takes us a lot more seriously than we take ourselves.

Have a ponder for a moment. Be honest with yourself and God after all he knows what you hear this really like.

Can I encourage you if you don't have the desire to seek more of God then ask him to give it to you? We need to be a lot hungrier for God than we are for anything else this world can offer.

The final bit of today's scripture reading is a hard pill to swallow. We are not called out laud it over people if we do hold status or power, but we are to serve.

In fact, we are to serve regardless of the place we hold in society, the money we have or the platform we hold. All of this is given by God anyway and all of it is his to use in our lives for his Glory.

To serve means we often need to swallow our pride. Do we think we above doing some jobs? Do we serve anyone apart from ourselves? Or maybe we serve because we want others to say how wonderful we are- our heart is deceitful, and pride is the enemy of the Kingdom. It is the characteristic God wants killed off in all our lives.

The bible says.

Jeremiah 17:9
New International Version

⁹The heart is deceitful above all things
and beyond cure.

Who can understand it?

I am leading another Alpha course and it's such a wonderful experience. The group are great, and we have some amazing discussions. I always love the discussion on the topic of sin and what it is?

For those who never have thoughts about this before it's a huge challenge to try and come up with a definition or even things which are sinful. Often, they conclude that if you're not hurting anyone else then its not sin.

God doesn't see it that way. Sin is a huge deal with God and pride I think is one of the thigs he takes very seriously. However, pride can be disguised in several ways. People can put others down and make it sound like they have a valid reason to do that but it's because they may be jealous and filled with self-importance and pride.

CS Lewis once said

"Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man... It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition is gone, pride is gone."

Some people are truly deceitful, and pride is something that they wear like a badge of honour. They use it to manipulate, to intimidate and get only what they desire done.

Don't get me wrong its not bad to be proud of an achievement or be proud of something someone has done well; the deceit comes when we feel that that 'thing' means we can use it as a weapon or a privilege we should have against others.

We live in a world which is filled with those who desire fame and fortune regardless of the cost. They will trample over people and hurt people in order that they get what they want. Then when they get that fame and fortune, they think they have the right to anything they desire.

Tiger woods said Money and fame made me think I was entitled – I was wrong.

Jesus has a stark warning for anyone who thinks that is his way.

His way is service. His way to reach out the hand to the hurting and the lost. His way is not to keep them living in the sin they may find themselves in but to help them see a better way to live and how serving others gives the person as much better sense of worth than any fame could possibly offer.

Summing up.

What question are we asking God- Can we sit at your right hand because we want more of you? Or out of a desire to be important.

Maybe we need to ask God to stir up a hunger in us for his glory?

Or finally is he asking us to repent of pride and let it go so he can use us more powerfully than we thought possible.