

Bible Study Guide: Week of 10-11-2021

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Mark 10:35-45

³⁵James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” ³⁶And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” ³⁷And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” ³⁸But 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?” ³⁹They 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; ⁴⁰but 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.”

⁴¹When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. ⁴²So 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. ⁴³But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

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James and John continue the theme of competition and jockeying for power that we saw earlier when the twelve argued with one another about which one of them was the greatest. Jesus answers their initial question quite cautiously, not committing to doing whatever they ask of him. Their request makes it clear that they want positions of power and prestige in what they assume will be Jesus’ earthly kingdom. That is, when he enters Jerusalem and sets up his throne there, they want to be his main partners.

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Jesus knows that his road to Jerusalem is leading not to a throne, but to the cross. Just before this passage, in fact, Jesus made yet another of his passion predictions, telling the disciples that he was to go to Jerusalem, be handed over, suffer, be killed, and on the third day be raised. Therefore, he tells them, “You do not know what you are asking.” The phrase about one being on the left and one being on the right is reminiscent of the description of the robbers who were crucified with Jesus in Mark 15:27: “And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.” It was there on the cross that Jesus was mockingly identified and hailed as “King of the Jews.” His “kingship” looks significantly different than James and John expect. Jesus, in essence, tells them that his suffering will be too much for them to handle right away. He refers to his suffering using the metaphors of “the cup” and “baptism.” Jesus says later they will undergo the same baptism as him and will drink from the same cup—that is, they will one day suffer for their faith in him. James was, according to church tradition, martyred about a decade after Jesus’ crucifixion. John, tradition holds, lived a long natural life and died of old age, but still suffered greatly for his faith in Jesus. Jesus knows his followers will not escape the suffering he endures, but he also knows they cannot yet endure it.

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Once again, there is strife between the disciples because they are focused more on their own power and status than on Jesus himself. Jesus contrasts his rule or way with that of worldly leaders. Rather than vying for greatness and might the disciples ought to be vying to serve one another. Jesus says that he himself came for this purpose—serving rather than being served. Further, he says he came to “give his life a ransom for many.” The Greek word for “ransom” here is a noun that has its root in the verb *luo* meaning to loose or set free. It is a term that refers to a payment made to secure the release of a slave from servitude. Therefore, paradoxically, Jesus came both to set people free and also to call people to lives of slavery and servitude. As Martin Luther pointed out in his Treatise on Christian Liberty, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject of all, subject to all.”

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. Why do you think James and John asked Jesus for this favor?**
- 2. For whom (or for what sort of people) do you think the spots at Jesus’ right and left are prepared?**
- 3. In what ways do we continue in the false thinking that the disciples demonstrate in this passage? How do you think Jesus would respond?**