

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

MATTHEW 20

¹⁷As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside; and on the way he said to them, ¹⁸“Look, we are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and experts in the law, and they will condemn him to death. ¹⁹They will hand him over to the Gentiles to mock, flog, and crucify him. On the third day he will be raised.”

²⁰Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to him with her sons, kneeling and asking something of him. ²¹He said to her, “What do you want?”

She said to him, “Promise that in your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and one on your left hand.”

²²But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”

They said to him, “We are.”

²³He said to them, “You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not for me to give; rather these places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

²⁴When the ten heard this, they were angry with the two brothers.

²⁵But Jesus summoned them and said, “You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶It will not be that way among you. Instead whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave— ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”



Can you remember when you learned how to drink out of a cup? James and John thought they knew how. Like Peter, who would soon say that he’d NEVER deny the Christ, let alone three times; these brothers make an empty pledge to the Lord, “We are able to drink your cup. We can do it.”

What is it in the Bible to drink from a cup? Well, a person's cup is that person's fate. What would be His outcome?

These men would have cups to drink. They would have a baptism of blood to undergo. James would become the first martyr among the Twelve. John would live the longest, but endure imprisonment and many tribulations, and finally exile. Some legends say that John would be forced to drink poison and live through it; that he was tossed into a boiling vat of hot liquid but miraculously step out untouched. We don't need to make up myths. Each of these disciples would meet trials and pain and hardships and beatings and deaths for the sake of Jesus, because they shared the gospel. It is in that selfless service they would be great. So we all should ...

GLORY IN SELFLESS SERVICE

James and John used their mom's intercessory prayers for their own egotism. I've often seen these two as selfish, petty, and opportunistic. They seem to have sent their mother in for not only emotional support, but to prey on the Christ's emotions and pray for the glory of James and John.

But lately I've been thinking of James and John as less villainous, and more like real people. This request of their mother may have been well-intended. James & John may have just desired closeness to Jesus. Just imagine your friends wanting to sit at your right and your left as you rule the world. How much more in our times of "social distancing"? They just wanted to be close to Him ... albeit with a little semblance of power and prestige, greatness and glory.

James and John had no true conception of the kingdom of Christ yet, that it is a spiritual kingdom, one of the heart & that it is founded on His redeeming blood.

But not only did they misunderstand the kingdom. They misunderstood Christ's cup and His baptism. What are these? What would be Jesus' drink – something glorious and happy, or something suspect and deathly?

You know the cup Jesus would drink. The punishment of the world was stirred into Jesus' cup, His oncoming death. Satisfaction for sins. Jesus would be bathed in His own blood, and that would be THE baptism, HIS baptism.

These aren't villains. They were real friends of the Christ, but they just didn't know what they were talking about.

Perhaps there is a lesson for each of us. We hoped that we could get through life with this veneer of safety, this illusion of health. We have all these postmodern comforts and luxurious lifestyles. Many of us have really been wealthy with possessions and health and joy. But peel back a safeguard like health and wellness, and see how unstable this world is! Its pledges are empty and its guarantees are quarantined in houses built on sand. If we used to rely on medicine or government or mathematicians, it takes an epidemic to see that this world of sin is out of control. The unbelieving world dries up. God's wrath overflows according to the Law. The kingdom of Christ is different.

Can you drink a cup? Can you suffer for the cross? Can you forfeit your health and wealth for the sake of the cross of Christ? These are HIS cup. These are HIS baptism. HIS is much greater, filled with the world's sin and guilt and punishment. And the Christ was so willing to suffer through it.

The other Ten apostles felt slighted. They resented James and John for asking to be seated next to Jesus. Understandable. Greatness and glory were on the way. Jesus Christ told them each in Matthew 19, the previous chapter, that they would all sit on 12 thrones to judge the 12 tribes. But somehow they still felt the need to be ambitious and competitive. Instead of moving on with life after shooting down the idea of seeking glory in the kingdom of Jesus, the other Ten argued about glory in the kingdom of Jesus! They didn't understand the meaning of greatness and glory for Christ wasn't up for debate. They did not realize where greatness would be found in His kingdom. None of the Twelve were taking a mature view of Christ's mission and purpose.

What did they all need to learn? Did they need to learn that ambition is sin? No, surely all Christians should be urgent for the kingdom of Christ. Surely there's an ambition in our message of the gospel in matters of life and death.

Did they all need to defy government? Christ says "*the rulers of the nations lord it over*" and the hierarchies of this world crave power. They tyrannize. Did Christ mean that governments are bad and they should all be assassinated? Surely not. This was a statement of separation of church and state. It isn't a reversal of the Bible's teaching on government, that it is God-given and we must obey it unless it forces us to sin.

What were they missing? Here's what: They did not realize ambition in the church is not for oneself but for others. It's no mistake that leaders in the church are called "ministers," a word that means "servants." And servant leadership means taking on bigger burdens. The greater the leader, the more service for others. You want to climb up on the rungs of greatness and glory in Christ's church? You will need to shoulder bigger and broader burdens for more and more souls. More quiet acts of listening, more loving for the sake of loving, not for your blog or your popularity or for your sound byte on the news. Long hours listening, consoling, teaching to forgive. That is where greatness lies in the church of God. That is glorious.

How do I know? Look at your Savior, the Christ. Look at His life of love. Look at His death of selflessness. "*The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*" There is the quintessential example of servant leadership.

But Christ's cup and bloody baptism are also so different than His followers. He wasn't a martyr for motivation. He was an example, but not only that. He was satisfaction for our sins. His humble death covered over our opportunistic cravings for greatness and glory. He has forgiven them, nailing them to the cross, in service to you.

He was not ransoming the path for liberal religious thinking, new metanarratives on who the Christ really was, if you look at it a different way. Christ wasn't a liberator of new modes of thinking. He was the Word incarnate in order to serve. He has served us by placing His life into the hands of His enemies, egotistic, power-hungry sinners like you and me. He serves us still in advocating our case before the Father. He serves us even at a distance, when we cannot see Him beside us. He reigns at the Father's right hand, meaning His powerful presence is everywhere alongside you.

When we must distance ourselves from others, know that beyond a shadow of a doubt, the Christ and Savior who forgives you proclaims the gospel to you still. Jesus still serves you in Word and sacrament. Even in a pandemic when we are holed up at home, the Christ drank the cup, and so yours is overflowing. Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.