

## **“SELF-SERVING VS. SELF-SACRIFICING.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**April 14, 2013, 10:30AM**

**Scripture Texts: Mark 10:35-45**

### **Introduction.**

As we return to Mark's Gospel let me point something out that we overlooked before. Three times before getting to Jerusalem Jesus foretold to His disciples His torture, death and resurrection. After the first time, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him for such talk. After the second time the disciples were heard by Jesus to be arguing about who was the greatest.

Now after the third foretelling of what would happen to Him in Jerusalem, Jesus got a request to sit next to Him in glory. Clearly before the crucifixion and resurrection the disciples didn't get what Jesus was talking about.

The disciples clearly had a mental block about the Messiah being a suffering servant. It just didn't make any sense to them. All they seem to comprehend was some sense of a coming kingdom with glory and they were grasping and jockeying for some part of that glory.

If this confusion and ignorance was possible with two of Jesus' closest disciples, James and John, how much more is it possible with us?

This story is a picture of all Christians. Aren't we all a mixture of faith and ignorance? We have clarity about some things and complete cluelessness about other things. Are we not like them, committed to following Jesus, submitting to His ways but then carried away with some greed or pride or self-righteousness?

### **Mark 10:35-40.**

James and John start by asking Jesus to sign a blank check. This betrays that they may not feel very good about what they are asking. Jesus doesn't write blank checks. Jesus makes them say out loud what they want, he makes them show their hand and reveal their motives.

They ask Jesus flat out to let one of them sit on His right hand and the other to sit on His left hand in glory. They must be thinking that this glory is just ahead in Jerusalem. Little do they realize that His right hand and left hand will soon be occupied by two thieves on crosses.

But before we get to that, let's notice what they do get right. They aren't completely off base. There are some good things here that are noteworthy.

*First*, they desire to be in glory with Jesus. That's the very best gift and a gift to be coveted. Seek, strive for, desire and ask for this. Long for heavenly glory above all earthly gifts.

*Second*, they are right in going to Jesus with their requests. When we want to ask for something, Jesus is the one to turn to. Take all your requests to Him. Turn all your desires over to Him.

**Third**, they are absolutely right in believing Jesus is the King of Kings and that one day He will be enthroned on high and will reign over all the earth. This is faith, especially since there was nothing in Jesus yet that resembled a magnificent kingdom and throne.

They are to be commended for that much. And it seems Jesus sees some good in their request and He doesn't rebuke them too harshly.

But all is not well. There's much faith in their request but there is also much folly. They are in need of correction and rebuke. They have some blind spots, some character flaws that need serious attention.

Think about that with me for a moment. Do you know that you have some blind spots, some character flaws, some besetting sins, some spiritual weakness? Do you know that about yourself? What are you doing about it? Ignoring them, excusing them, being defensive about them, comparing yourself to people who are worse and deciding you aren't so bad after all?

Why are we so comfortable with our blind spots and flaws and sins? Why do we resent God's discipline when He exposes one or more of our sins or shortcomings? Why do we resent being humbled and corrected when God does it out of love and to produce the fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:5-11)?

It's the love of God and the kindness of a friend when someone comes to us and opens our eyes to a blind spot or confronts us with a sin. Faithful are the wounds of a friend (Proverbs 27:6). In fact, that is the true measure of a friend, one who speaks the truth to us in love. Do you have a person in your life that you can trust to do that for you?

Jesus asks them a simple question that exposes their hearts and their understanding of themselves and of what they are asking. "***Are you able to drink the cup that I drink and to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?***" In one question Jesus sets before them the cross and all the sufferings that await those who follow Jesus.

James and John didn't know their hearts, they didn't know the path that was set before them. They really didn't know themselves or what they were made of or what would be required of them. They would find out soon enough and Jesus was patient.

Most Christians are like James and John. Most Christians have a poor estimation of their ability to be patient or to endure trials and temptations. Most Christians think their religion should give them certain joys and pleasures, certain rights and benefits. Most Christians think they can have the crown without any cross, the throne without the thorns.

Calvin said it well, "It is the laziest soldiers who are greediest for the loot" (*Harmony of Gospels, Vol. II*, p. 272). We want the rewards but not the trouble of fighting the battles that lie in the path to those rewards. How can we share Christ's spoils if we do not drink from His cup and undergo His baptism and carry His cross and die His death? Jesus said:

**Matthew 7:14** The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

**John 16:33** In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

**Acts 14:22** ... through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus did not suffer so that we would not have too. Jesus suffered so that our suffering might also be redemptive and fruitful and lead to glory.

The great English preacher Charles Spurgeon once remarked rather astonishingly, "I dare say the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health ... with the exception of sickness. If some men that I know of could only be favored with a month of rheumatism it would be God's grace to mellow them marvelously."

"I'm afraid that all the grace that I have got of all my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might [be worth] a penny but the good that I have received from my sorrows and pains and griefs is altogether incalculable. Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house. It is the best book in a minister's library."

**Hebrews 5:8** says about Jesus, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered."

**I Peter 4:12-13** Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

Suffering comes before glory and suffering leads to glory.

#### **Mark 10:41-44.**

When the other ten hear about this request do they rebuke James and John for their folly and their sin? Are they dear friends who confront their sin and lead them to repentance? Is their indignation a righteous indignation? No, they show they are filled with the same folly. They're just angry that James and John got ahead of them.

This serves as yet another opportunity for our Lord to expose their diseased hearts and to teach and instruct and correct. Can we hear it and will we receive it?

There is hidden in each of us a fire that can be fueled by the least provocation. A desire to be first, a desire to advance beyond others, a desire for recognition and rewards. The flames of ambition for power or position must be put out by the waters of humility and modesty from the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says all our ideas about greatness are built on a faulty foundation, on a worldly foundation of domination, entitlement, pride, and self-interest.

Consider the example of John the Baptist when his followers tried to stir up jealousy about Jesus.

**John 3:27-30** John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' 29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease."

How do you feel when someone is honored or esteemed more than you? What goes through your mind when a friend or family member is praised or promoted? Are you jealous, envious? Do you feel overlooked or passed by? Do you try to steal some of the spotlight?

Or are you sincerely happy for them and rejoice in their success?

Our default settings are toward self, toward self-serving and self-centeredness. We have to fight our natural urges to push to the front or to be noticed or recognized.

**Philippians 2:3-5** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

Jesus says true greatness is found in modeling Him who came not to be served, though He was God, but to serve, even though He was God, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

**Mark 9:35** “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”

**Mark 10:45.**

**Mark 10:45** “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus uses Himself as the supreme example. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to show the world what kingship should look like, to show what service looks like, to show what humility looks like. He does what He calls us to do.

Jesus’ service was not abstract, but very concrete.

Jesus did the humblest of all task, He stooped to the lowliest of positions, He took on the greatest hardships and the most unpleasant of all work.

God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. Jesus didn’t come to get but to give, and in His giving He gives salvation and life. Jesus gave His life as a ransom for many.

### **Application and conclusion.**

Let me close with some concrete applications.

*This is a call to careful, thoughtful, cost-counting prayer.*

Have we ever asked God for something thoughtlessly?

Have we ever asked for something selfishly?

Have we ever asked for something without counting the costs?

For instance, we ask for salvation and eternal life for someone, say our children or grandchildren. That’s a very good thing to ask for, what could be better? But what is the cost, what will the answer look like?

Before the crown there will be a cross to carry. A cross of suffering, a cross of persecution, a cross of being hated by the world, a cross of being called bigoted, intolerant, narrow minded, full of hate. The cross of losing the world and its temporal pleasures. The cross of dying to sin and no longer participating in it.

Are we prepared for our children or friends to be hated by the world and at odds with our culture? Are we prepared for them to carry a cross all the days of their life?

When we pray such a pray, does Jesus say to us, “You do not know what you are asking.”

Do we pray the prayer that God would make us pure and good and holy? We know that the pure in heart will see God, we desire to be more like Jesus, we desire that our old man be put off and the new man put on. But do we know that we are asking?

How painful will be the sanctification of the Holy Spirit? What will that purifying process take us through? What if to remove the world from our hearts and lives, God has to discipline us by affliction, sickness, losses and much heartache?

Trials, trouble, heartache, losses, deaths, afflictions, sorrow, misfortune, complaints, all of these things can be used of God to prepare for Himself children delivered out of ignorance and naiveté.

**Ecclesiastes 5:1-2** Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. 2 Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter.

***This is a call to humility.***

We are a fairly big church. We are the First CRC church in Lynden, the first CRC church west of the Rockies. We have been around a long time. We have a nice facility and we are getting ready to add a really nice addition to it. We don't have some of the problems that some other churches have.

All of that is a recipe for pride and pride is a very dangerous sin and one God regularly disciplines. Are we consciously killing pride and striving for greater humility?

Humility serves, humility gives, humility gets down on its hands and knees, humility helps others, humility seeks to serve the least, the lost, the lowly, the lonely.

Without humility we won't put our faith in God.  
Without humility we won't bow to worship God.  
Without humility we won't submit to obey God.  
Without humility we won't think more highly of others.  
Without humility we won't be a servant to anyone at any time.  
Without humility we won't serve or we won't serve from the right motive.

**I Peter 5:5-6** Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.

***This is a call to servant leadership.*** We will be electing elders and deacons soon.

Jesus is not teaching that there is no such thing as rulers or leaders. He is saying that those who hold such offices must do so in a manner that serves and gives and helps, not in a manner that domineers or controls or abuses or rules out of self-interest and selfish gain.

Those who would lead in Christ's church must think differently from the way the world thinks. Let your idea of greatness be in the greatness of your service, let your power be exercised in helping. Let your supremacy be seen in your surrendering yourself for the sake of others.

Spiritual leaders are called to conform their lives to Christ. Spiritual leaders are to follow the example of Jesus in humility, love, and service, attending to the needs of the flock. Elders are called to rule, but their ruling will be most revealed in serving.

**I Peter 5:1-11** So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Are you willing to serve? Are you willing to do whatever task the Lord calls you to do? Are you willing to do something menial, lowly or unpleasant? Are you willing to serve without recognition or reward? Are you willing to set aside your own desires?

Do we desire to do good or to be great?  
Do we desire the glory of God or our own glory?

True greatness is found in serving others.  
True greatness is found in promoting someone else's happiness.  
True greatness is found in helping another person advance.  
True greatness is found in lessening someone else's sorrow and in increasing their joy.  
True greatness is found in sacrificing ourselves for the sake of others.  
True greatness is found in leaving this world and those in it better.

The life that is spent for the sake of others, the life that is sacrificed in service will be truly rewarded in the life to come, thirty, sixty and a hundred fold.

We don't all have the same knowledge or gifts or talents or abilities, but we can all serve, we can all put the interests ahead of our own. We can all live up to the example of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve.