

## Mark 10:35-45 – What Would You Ask For?

If you could ask Jesus for one thing, just one thing, what would it be? If Jesus came here to you today and asked: What do you want Me to do for you, what would you say? I'm sure many things are going through your minds. Maybe healing for you or a loved one you are worried about. Maybe peace in this crazy, murderous world. Less stress in our lives. More time to spend with loved ones. Some, I suppose, would ask for riches.

Well James and John get that opportunity, we heard today. They get to ask Jesus for whatever they want ... and they already had what they wanted in mind. They wanted to sit at Jesus' right and left in His glory. They wanted the greatness, power, honor, and authority of those two places.

Now before we ridicule them too much, perhaps their request made some sense. They were, after all, two of the three disciples that made up Jesus' inner circle, along with Peter. They were the three Jesus had taken up the mountain to see Him in His transfiguration. They were the three Jesus was going to take farther into the Garden of Gethsemane with Him to pray. And Peter had already screwed up. Maybe they thought that disqualified him. For the first time Jesus spoke of His death to His disciples (which we heard a couple weeks ago), Peter rebuked Him, to which Jesus had to say: Get behind me, Satan! The second time Jesus brings it up, the twelve begin to argue about which of them is the greatest. So now when Jesus brings it up again a third time, James and John seek to settle the matter. In a way, it just makes sense that they should have those two places. Worldly sense, anyway.

Well, thankfully, God does not ask us such a question. Thankfully, I say, because I'm sure I would screw it up. What I would ask for would probably depend on the time of the day, the day of the week, what was going on right at that time, whether I was feeling good or bad, angry or sad, and a whole host of other things. I would probably blurt out something and then regret it later.

So, thankfully, God does not ask such a question to us and that's good for two other reasons as well.

First, because He tells us to pray for anything and everything—not just one thing. Ask, Jesus says. Pray without ceasing. If you have a need, come to the one who can help. Don't give up. Pray like dear children ask their dear father. We have been given such a great gift in prayer and the promise of our Lord that He will hear. We don't get just one chance. We don't have to worry about screwing it up.

And notice that Jesus does not rebuke James and John for asking. He rebuked Peter, when Peter denied the cross, but not James and John. He corrects them, He teaches them, and He doesn't give them what they asked for—and we'll get to why in a moment. But it's okay to ask. Your Father loves it when you pray ... even if we sometimes ask for the wrong things and He has to say no.

But here's the second reason—and this is really the point of the readings today: God gives us what we should have asked for.

The Old Testament reading from Jeremiah spoke of this first. The people of Israel had screwed up. They had turned away from God and were worshipping idols. Though God sent prophet after prophet, culminating in Jeremiah, to preach to them and turn them to Him in repentance and faith, they would not listen. So finally, God was about to send them into exile from their home. For 70 years. A hard but necessary discipline. Because they had broken the covenant. And during those 70 years, if God had asked them what do you want me to do for you, they probably would have said: we want to go home.

God didn't ask. Instead, He proclaimed through Jeremiah that He would give them what they needed. The Father being a true father. Giving His children a new covenant, where He will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

That's the answer, you see. If we have only one thing to ask, that's what it should be. Forgive me, O Lord. Forgive me, a poor miserable sinner. That's our greatest need.

Did you think of that at the beginning of this sermon? If you did, good for you! I don't think many do. But that is the gift above all other gifts. That is the forever gift. Everything else will go the way of the world, of decay and death, but forgiveness lasts forever. Forgiveness is why the Son of God came into our world to be, as the Epistle said, our high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. The forever priest who would sacrifice Himself for the life of the world. For all people, no matter when they lived. Who would give His life to ransom you from sin and death. That is why Jesus and that is His glory.

When James and John ask for the places next to Jesus in His glory, they really don't know what they are asking for. They are thinking of the greatness and glory they know, but Jesus is going to show them the greatness and glory they do not yet know: of the cross.

During Lent, we tend to view the cross as a place of death and sorrow. But if we would see it as God intended it, we would see the glory and the love of God for us. For the cross is where we see His love that makes His cross glorious. His love that would rather He die than we die. His love that would take our sins and hold them against Himself rather than hold them against us. To take our condemnation and death and give us His forgiveness and life.

Now too, the world knows something of this, praising those who heroically lay down their lives or give greatly of themselves for others. And the world will even praise Jesus as an example of this, who laid down His life for a cause. To teach us, to show us. But Jesus is much more than that. For He didn't lay down His life for a cause, He laid it down for you. To be more than an example—to be your Savior. Not to show you how to do it, but to give you what you need the most: the forgiveness of your sins.

Which, if you think about it, is the only thing Jesus asked for while on the cross. Now, some scholars think that the words recorded for us that Jesus spoke while on the cross are indications of much longer prayers; of Jesus praying the psalms, since many of them are snippets of psalms. And that may be true. But if you consider just the seven last words as

they are recorded in the Gospels for us, of what Jesus spoke while on the cross, there is one question and five statements, but just one request: Father, forgive them.

That's what Jesus is all about. The healings, the miracles, even the resurrection are all about forgiveness—undoing sin and giving life. For when you are forgiven, you have everything, and all that you need. Now and forever. That we do not think of forgiveness that way is an indication that we too, like James and John, have something still to learn.

So, Jesus asks them a question, to teach them. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? How would you answer that? It's not really a fair question, since we know a bit more than James and John did at that point, when they eagerly answered yes! We know that Jesus was baptized into our death. We know that cup Jesus was about to drink was so dreadful that He would shortly ask His Father to take it from Him, if possible.

But we know especially that we don't have to, that Jesus transformed those things through the glory of the cross. He who is life is baptized into our death, so that we who die are baptized into His resurrection. He who is sinless drinks the cup of wrath against our sin, so that we who are sinners drink now the cup of blessing, of forgiveness. In every baptism and in every Supper, Jesus' one request from the cross is fulfilled: we are forgiven.

James and John and you and I are, in fact, baptized with Jesus' baptism and drink of His cup—but only after He transforms them from death to life for us. For that is His glory and why He came. That not just James and John, but all of us have seats around Him when He comes again in glory.

But those seats at Jesus' right and left in His glory, that James and John asked for? Turns out there were two criminals they were prepared for. James and John really didn't know what they were asking. It was good Jesus did not give those places to them. He gave them places even greater. Places He has prepared for you too. And if Jesus has done all that and provided all that for you, you are free now to serve and forgive others. To be great and glorious for others. For in Jesus, you already are.

So, these last two weeks of Lent, we learn again of the glory of your Savior, the glory of His love, the glory of His cross. We learn again of the glory of His service and the glory of ours. And we learn again of the glory of His forgiveness. And we learn to pray: Father, forgive me. Father, forgive them. And culminating on Good Friday and Easter, we will hear His glorious answer: Done.