

The Lord's Third Major Prediction, The Selfish and Ambitious Request of James and John

Mark 10:32-45

We'll study this passage in two sections: verses 32-34 and verses 35-45.

Section 1 - Mark 10:32-34 – *“Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: ³³ “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; ³⁴ and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.”*

Background Notes (for section 1)

In these verses we have our Lord's third major prediction of His coming rejection, death, and resurrection. The first two predictions were in chapters 8 and 9.

“They were on the road going up to Jerusalem.” The Lord and His disciples were in the area of Jericho at this point. They were on the way up to Jerusalem for the last week of our Lord's earthly ministry, and the disciples were both amazed and afraid. They were amazed because the Lord was so determined and bold, even though He knew there were hostile forces in Jerusalem – powerful forces that were against Him and wanted to put Him to death. And the disciples were fearful because they knew that their own lives would be at stake when they arrived in Jerusalem.

Doctrinal Point #1 (for section 1)

1. The Lord Jesus was omniscient during His earthly life.

“Omniscient” means *all-knowing*. Even though Jesus was a real Man, He was also God, and thus He was omniscient throughout His earthly life. Our Lord's omniscience is taught in these verses. The Lord knew exactly what was going to take place when they arrived in Jerusalem. He knew that He would be delivered to the Jewish leaders – the chief priests and the scribes. He knew that He would be condemned to death. He knew that He would be delivered over to “the Gentiles” – the Romans. He knew that He would be mocked. He knew that He would be speared. He knew that He would be spit upon. He knew that He would be killed. And He knew that He would rise again the third day.

The fact that the Lord knew that He would be delivered over to the Gentiles is certainly an indication that He knew of His coming crucifixion. The Jews put to death by stoning, but the Romans used crucifixion as their method for executions.

The Lord knew that the Jews were out to take His life, and He also knew that the Sanhedrin (the governing body of the Jews that did not have the authority to take life) would turn Him over to the Romans for scourging and crucifixion.

The Lord Jesus knew all these details, not just because He knew the Old Testament Messianic prophecies and could see the way events were shaping up - He knew all these details because He was God, and thus He was omniscient.

There were times when the Lord chose not to use His omniscience during His earthly life. Those times were predetermined in the eternal councils of God. But if we strip away the Lord's omniscience during His earthly life, we would make Him less than God. The Lord Jesus was omniscient during His earthly life because He was, and is, **fully God**.

Practical Application #1 (for section 1)

1. Don't let fear keep you from following Christ.

The disciples were afraid as they followed the Lord up to Jerusalem, but they continued to follow Him anyway. They followed because of their attachment and love for the Lord Jesus. They didn't let fear keep them from following.

What about us? Following Christ is not always pleasant. There may be many fearful times. Once I was assigned to witness to a large group of non-Christian college students, and it was scary. We may be laughed at, mocked, persecuted, or even suffer loss for the sake of Christ. There will be fearful times - but don't let fear keep you from following Christ.

The Lord didn't want His disciples to be fearful, and He doesn't want us to be fearful either. 1 John 4:18 says, "*Perfect love casts out fear.*" But let's face it, we don't always measure up. Let's at least be like the disciples - they continued to follow. Even though they were afraid, they didn't stop following the Lord. Don't let fear keep you from following Jesus Christ.

Section 2: Mark 10:35-45 "*Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask."* ³⁶ *And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"*

³⁷ *They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."* ³⁸ *But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"*

³⁹ *They said to Him, "We are able."* *So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; ⁴⁰ but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared."*

41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. 42 But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Background Notes (for section 2)

In verse 37, James and John's request to sit on the Lord's right hand and left hand when He would come in His glory was a selfish and ambitious request for a higher rank than the other disciples. In fact, what they wanted was "top rank"! The parallel account in Matthew 20 indicates that their mother was also involved in this selfish request.

The fact that the other disciples were greatly displeased at this request (v41) indicates that the other disciples were not completely free of selfish motives either. (Are we?)

In verse 38, the "cup" and "baptism" of which the Lord spoke were His coming suffering and death: the cup of suffering and the baptism of death. After James and John said that they were able to drink the cup of suffering and undergo the baptism of death, the Lord predicted that they would indeed drink that cup and undergo that baptism (v39).

James was martyred. He was put to death by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2). John was not martyred, but he suffered exile on an island in the Aegean Sea (Revelation 1:9).

The Lord took the opportunity of their selfish request to once again teach that greatness in the kingdom is determined by **service** - by *servicing others*, not by serving yourself! Serving others is not the way the world sees greatness, but it's how God sees greatness.

Doctrinal Points 2 & 3 (for section 2)

2. There are future rewards, but they are earned.

In verse 40, the Lord's response to the selfish request of James and John leaves no doubt about this truth. Verse 40: *"To sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared."* Notice that the Lord didn't say, "There's no rank" or "There's no reward in the future." He said that rank and reward will go to those *"for whom it is prepared."*

In other words, there are positions of honor in the future kingdom of God, but they are not arbitrarily bestowed. They are earned by faithful service, and the Lord proceeded to once again teach His servants what faithful service is all about.

3. The death of Christ was substitutionary.

Where is that that truth taught in this passage? Right there in verse 45: *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”* The Lord was not only the model Servant, but He gave His life as a ransom for many.

The word “ransom” here has to do with the price of redemption for slaves. We were slaves to sin and to Satan, but the Lord “redeemed” us – He paid for our redemption with His own life. The little preposition “for” here means “instead of” or “in place of”. The Lord gave His one perfect life instead of, or in place of, or in substitution for **us**. We deserve to die because the penalty of sin is death, but He gave His life as a substitute for our lives when He died on the cross. The death of cross was substitutionary.

Practical Application #2 (for section 2)

2. How mature is your faith?

We tend to wonder, ‘How could James and John be so selfish’? They were more interested in rank and reward than in serving the Lord. The idea of being great by humbly serving others was completely foreign to their way of thinking. Their faith was immature.

What about us? How mature is our Christian faith? In verse 42, the Lord said that with unbelievers, greatness is measured by power and positions of authority. However, that way of thinking was **not** to characterize believers! *Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant” (v43).*

How mature is our faith? Do we crave the upfront positions in our church, or in other areas of Christian service? Do we want to be in charge and boss our fellow believers around? Or are we willing to become great by humbly serving one another?

How mature is our faith? When James and John asked Jesus to grant a request, the Lord said, *“What do you want Me to do for you?” (v36)*. But when they disclosed their selfish and ambitious request, the Lord had to deny the immature and inappropriate request!

The Lord has to deny many of our immature requests as well. Let’s learn a lesson from the fact that the Lord had to deny James’ and John’s request. Let’s become mature in our Christian faith!