

A REQUEST DENIED

Mark 10:35-45

Intro: Once again as we come to our text for today I need to remind you that we are following in the Gospel of Mark, as we do also in Matthew, Luke, and John, what the Lord was doing to prepare His disciples for the life that He had called them to live and the work He had called them to do. But what I have neglected to emphasize is, that we see in the training the Lord gave to the twelve, much of what the Lord will be doing in our lives to teach us how to live and how to serve Him. And I say this with reference to all of us. None of us will ever be apostles. Probably not many of you men will be pastors. It would give me great joy to see that the Lord is pointing some of you young men in the direction of the ministry. But most of you will follow other professions and have other careers. However, all of us who know the Lord are continually in training under the Lord's leadership. The Lord is sovereignly working in all of our lives. And so if we are reading our Bibles carefully, and giving our attention when others are teaching the Bible to us, we are going to see ourselves reflected on the pages of Scripture as we learn how the Lord worked in the lives of the people we meet in our Bibles.

I am sure that later in life, since we are thinking these days about the early apostles, that as they got older they would have said to each other, "How could we have been so stupid about the Gospel as we were in those days?" Or with reference to our text for today, don't you imagine that there were times when James and John asked each other, "What made us think that we had a right to sit on the right hand and left hand of the Lord when He entered His kingdom?" Often we as young people got resentful of our parents thinking that they were too tough on us, as they watched what we were doing, and always wanted to know where we were going. But as we have gotten older we have wished that our parents were tougher than they were, and we have thanked the Lord that they loved us enough to be concerned about us.

We never get to the place where there is not more for us to learn. We are always capable to doing foolish, sinful things, but we all are, or were when we were young, prone to make the wrong decisions.

When I was in Seminary, one of my professors made a statement in class that I want to pass on to all of you today. I hope you will never forget it because it pops up now and then in my mind as I remember what he said.

He was talking about sin, and mentioned the fact that as we look on what people are doing in the world, we have the idea that we will be missing a lot if we don't do what they do. And so people fall into that trap every day. They learn too late that sin hurts you. Sin blinds you. Sin enslaves you. And ultimately sin will destroy you. And, in the process, sin makes you hurt others. Sin will drag you down, and it causes you to drag others down with you. And so my professor said this: "If you want to learn about sin, don't sin in order to learn about it because it will only make you more blind. Go to your Bible, and it will tell you all that you need to know about sin, and there you will get the truth. In the Bible you will see sin as it really is."

We are told a little about the sins of James and John, the sins of Peter and of Paul. Going to the OT we see some of the sins that Abraham committed, and some of Moses' sins, and some of David's sins. But they are not there because the Lord wanted to add to their shame. They are there as a warning for us that we will not do, or say, what they did. I am sure that we all have done things, or said things, that we wish that we had not done or said. Everybody except the Lord is in that position.

I had a friend, a special friend, when I was in junior high and high school. He was one of four boys in a family whose parents were very, very godly people. The father of this friend of mine gave him a Bible. Instead of printing his name on the front of his Bible, his father printed two lines in gold lettering. This is what they said:

This book will keep you from sin, or
sin will keep you from this book.

The Psalmist expressed it this way: "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee (Psalm 119:11).

Do you wonder why many politicians and judges and celebrities and many other people want to get rid of the Bible? It is because it condemns what they want to do, and they are too spiritually blinded to know that the Bible is right and that they are wrong.

So the Bible is for all of us. I need it. I need it every day, and many times a day. I can never get too much of it. And we are not going through the Gospel of Mark just to learn what the disciples did and the mistakes that they made and the truths that they did not understand. It is important for us to learn those things, but why? It is so we will understand more about what the Lord is doing in our hearts and lives. The Bible was not origin-

ally written *to* us, but it certainly was all written *for* us. So when we come to church to hear the Word of God, we ought to come with the prayer in our hearts that the Lord will show us what He wants us to see, and that He will cause us to hear what He wants us to hear. Children, young people, middle aged, and all of us old folks – the Bible is what we need, and in the years to come, you will do what I have done many times, thank the Lord for parents, Sunday School teachers, pastors, and friends who have prayed for me and taught me a little bit more about what was in my Bible. I wish that I had always responded to their teaching the way that I should have.

But now let me practice what I have been preaching so far. Let's learn what we can by a mistake, a big mistake, that two brothers made. And you know that I am talking about James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

We met them back in Mark 1:19 through 22. Let me read those verses to you again to refresh our memories on how they became disciples. (Read.)

There is no doubt but that these two brothers were honored by the Lord on more than one occasion. They were with the Lord along with Peter when the Lord took them up on the mount where He was transfigured before them. Later than this they were taken, with Peter again, when the Lord took them into the inner part of the Garden of Gethsemane where the Lord was ultimately arrested, and then crucified. So there is no question but that they had opportunities that the other disciples did not have.

But now let us look at their request.

I. THE REQUEST OF JAMES AND JOHN (Mark 10:35-37).

Matthew is the only other Gospel writer who records this incident. You will find it in Matthew 20:20-28. (First read Mark 10:35-37, and then read Matthew 20:20-21.)

We notice a difference in the two accounts. Mark says that James and John presented the request to the Lord; Matthew said that it was their mother. Which is the more accurate in recording what really happened? Was it their mother's idea, or did it originate with James and John? We can't really say because the Bible doesn't say. We can be sure that all three of them wanted to see this happen, and perhaps we need to look at the request from that point-of-view.

Suppose that it did originate with their mother. Perhaps I should have reserved this text for next Sunday, which is Mother's Day. How many mother's do you think there were in that day who even gave a thought to any relationship that her son, or sons, could have with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is very obvious that she wanted her sons' relationship with the Lord Jesus to be even closer than it had been up to that time. I am sure that such a desire as she expressed to the Lord, meant that she herself was one who was believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Her request was a prayer. She was addressing the Lord Himself, and that is what prayer is – talking with the Lord.

We don't know when this family of Zebedee came to the Lord, but from Mark 1 we know that when the Lord called James and John to follow Him, their father did not object. He did not try to convince them to stay with him in the fishing business. Where he was when this incident we are considering today took place, we don't know. Perhaps he was no longer alive. Or maybe he was fishing. It seems to me that if he had been alive, he probably would have accompanied his wife and their sons when they came to the Lord with this request.

But going back to the mother of James and John, she represents hundreds of mothers who have taught their children about the Lord, and prayed that throughout their lives they would get closer and closer to the Lord. I think she was a mother who ought to be honored on Mother's Day. How wonderful it would be if there were more mothers like Mrs. Zebedee. On the surface of things, I find it hard to be critical of her. She was like most of you mothers are who are here today. The Apostle John, years later, wrote those memorable words which you will find in 3 John 4 where he said, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." He was probably talking about his spiritual children, people he had led to the Lord. But don't we as Christian parents feel that way about our children, there is no great joy for us than to know that our children are walking in the truth. This is the greatest proof we have that they know the Lord, and that they love the Lord. I think that this is the way the mother of James and John felt about her two sons. She was thankful that they had been called by the Lord, and that they were walking with the Lord day by day. But, oh, how wonderful it would be if James and John would only be seated with the Lord when He, as she said, "in Thy kingdom."

I don't feel that she was thinking about other mother's sons who would not be seated there if that is where her sons would be. She herself was so

devoted to the Lord that she knew that her joy would be complete if the Lord would so honor them. A mother who would ask the Lord to do that for her sons, is worthy of our honor. And note that Matthew says that she came “worshipping” the Lord. The word worshipping means that she came adoring the Lord. The verb *worship* is formed, many grammarians think, from the word for dog, and would be illustrated by the way a dog lovingly licks his master’s hand. She came humbly and lovingly to present her petition to the Lord. I believe this is one of many scenes in Scripture which is packed with emotion.

But now let’s think about James and John.

Mark focuses attention on them. They were wholeheartedly in agreement with their mother, so much so, that they wanted what their mother wanted. What a blessing to have sons like that! And again let me ask the question about James and John that I asked about their mother. How many sons do you think there are today who are interested in drawing closer and closer to the Lord? Parents, isn’t this what we pray for? If you have a son who does not know the Lord, and is not interested in even talking about Him, what would you give to hear your son, or sons, say what these two sons of Zebedee requested? You know, it is possible to be so much in love with the Lord that all you think about is your own personal relationship with Him. The one who wrote the verse I am going to quote, had that idea in mind.

He and I in that bright glory, one deep joy shall share:

Mine, to be forever with Him; His, that I am there.

He and I – that will be heaven. We talk about all of the people we are going to see when we get to heaven, people we have known and loved here on earth, and the joy it will be to see them again. But what probably is going to be closer to the truth is that we are going to be so occupied with the Lord, seeing Him face to face, and worshipping Him, that we will be doing what everyone else is doing in heaven. They really haven’t missed us because they have found it so wonderful to be with Him. And so they don’t know that anyone else is around!

James and John wanted to be seated side by side with the Lord. Can you think of anything better than that? The fact is that He wants us there, and He wants us to long to be with Him.

The more I think about that situation on that day, the more my heart overflows with joy. Remember John 17:24 which we had just a week ago in

our Sunday School lesson, one of the requests the Lord made of the Father concerning you and me. Listen to the words:

24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world (John 17:24).

What was the Lord saying to the Father here? He was saying that the Father loved Him so much that He gave you and me and all of the other saints to the Lord Jesus before the foundation of the world.

But now for just a few moments let us look at:

II. THE LORD'S RESPONSE (Mark 10:38-40).

I hope you notice how gracious the Lord was in His response. And I wonder if we have not misinterpreted the Lord's words when he said, "Ye know not what ye ask." There may have been a very gentle rebuke in the request that James and John and their mother had presented to the Lord because the way to the throne is a way which involves humbling and suffering.

Notice the questions that the Lord asked James and John and their mother. "Can you drink of the cup . . . and be baptized with the baptism . . . ? What the cup stand for? And what did the Lord mean by "the baptism that I am baptizes with? Both stand for suffering, don't they? The sufferings of the children of God, and their baptism, not with water but with fire are not vicarious, but they are sanctifying.

James was the first apostle to be martyred. See Acts 12:2. Herod killed James the brother of John with a sword. John, on the other hand, we find in Revelation 1 on the Isle of Patmos at almost 100 years old "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:9). He was the lone survivor of the apostles. But the way was paved with suffering and persecution. Many students of Mark's Gospel believe that the Lord's words in Mark 10:39 were a prediction of the eventual martyrdom of John as well as James. Tradition holds that the Apostle John was finally killed by his Jewish enemies.

But I want you to look with me at words from the Lord Jesus Christ which were written by John and addressed to the church at Laodicea. The point that is especially applicable to our text in Mark 10 are the words

found in Revelation 2:21. Notice that the Lord did not speak about the right hand and the left hand of the throne, but He spoke of sitting with Him “in His Throne.” There will be room “in His throne” for all who faithfully survive the persecutions and afflictions that have always accompanied those who stand faithfully. James and John and their mother were looking at the goal. But the Lord was thinking of the way – a way of persecution and suffering for those who faithfully serve the Lord and stand for the truth.

Concl: Next Sunday, the Lord willing, I will go on to finish what the Lord has to say to all of the apostles, and to us, about the life that those of us who know the Lord are to live, lives that are patterned after the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is not only our Savior and our Lord, but also our Example.