

20Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. 21And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left." 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 able." 23He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father."

24And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers. 25But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 26"It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Ambition is exalted in our society today. Our non-culture. I don't think there's any culture left. just counter culture now.

We love winners. We hate losers. Our honor and respect are for the ones who can scratch and claw their way to the top. At any cost. We look at the carnage in their paths and we give them a pass. Necessary collateral damage.

We have 2 candidates for president that are both examples of what I speak. Collateral damage and carnage in order to achieve the end result is overlooked. Almost to be expected.

Ambition is the brother of pride. And God hates pride.

1 Peter 5:5 and James 4:6 both quote *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*

Why is that? What's the underlying reason?

First is that ALL Glory, Honor, Strength, and Power belong to God. He created everything. He owns it all. This is what we have prayed since we were toddlers.

For *Thine is the Kingdom*, (the authority to reign everywhere in the universe) *and the Power, and the Glory forevermore. Amen.*

And Satan in his original rebellion said what? I will **be like** the most High God. That's where ambition driven by pride is going.

Isaiah 14 12“*How you have fallen from heaven,
O star of the morning, son of the dawn!
You have been cut down to the earth,
You who have weakened the nations!*

13“*But you said in your heart,
‘I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
And I will sit on the mount of assembly
In the recesses of the north.*

14‘*I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.’*

15“*Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol,
To the recesses of the pit.*

16“*Those who see you will gaze at you,
They will ponder over you, saying,
‘Is this the man who made the earth tremble,
Who shook kingdoms,*

17*Who made the world like a wilderness
And overthrew its cities,
Who did not allow his prisoners to go home?’*

The sin of pride wants to usurp God. It wants to replace God with . . . me! It is an affront to God. Rebellion.

Now back to our word, ambition. Is there ambition that isn't coupled with pride?

Yes. It turns out that the soul that has given itself wholly to God, the person who is indwelt with the Holy Spirit and under God's authority and control can also have Godly ambition.

Our lives verse should be 1 Cor. 10:31 *Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* We should have that on the back of our eye lids so we see it when we sleep. This should be at the end of every motive, every ambition. Whatever it is we are doing, we should check our motive. Is this for the glory of God, or . . . me? Here are a couple.

1Tim. 3:1 *This is a trustworthy saying: If anyone **aspires** to be an overseer, **he desires** a noble task.*

Again Paul encourages Godly ambition when he writes to the Corinthians; 1 Cor. 12:31 *But **earnestly desire** the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.*

And what is the more excellent way. Chapter 13 begins here. Love. Selfless love. All Godly ambition is a dead end street. It ends in emptying self and loving and serving the brethren, so that all of the Glory goes to God.

We'll see that exact definition as the Lord answers this request of the Sons of Thunder.

Paul talks about noble ambition when he writes to the church at Galatia.

You'll remember that after Paul left Galatia, false teachers came in and taught them that salvation required law keeping. Salvation by works.

In his letter to them Paul talks about the motive behind the ambition.

Gal. 4:17 *They **eagerly seek** you, not commendably, but they wish to*

*shut you out so that you will seek them. 18But it is good always to be **eagerly sought** in a **noble** manner, and not only when I am present with you. 19My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you— 20but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.*

The judaizers have ambition to hold authority over the Galatians. It's all about control. Ownership. Self glory.

Out on the range where I work it's interesting to watch the horses. The males fight over control of the herds of females. Same dynamic. Not very pretty. And that's the road James and John are on. And not just James and John, all 12 of them are jockeying for pre-emminence. Top spot. Number 2. 3, 4, 5, and on down.

If Jesus had granted the request, how many minutes would go by before the 2 brothers were fighting over which would be at the right hand, and which would be at the left. And that's how it goes with worldly ambition.

20Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. 21And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She said to Him, “Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.”

Think about this for just a moment. In all other religious books, the Quran, or the book of mormon, the protagonists are strong. They go out and conquer. Not so in our book. Our heroes go get their mother to try to make a back room deal that undercuts everyone else. Downright slimey.

There's no temptation to try to show these men as strong conquerors. They did become strong conquerors, but only in a spiritual realm, and only with the help of God the Holy Spirit.

Matthew's version of this story is slightly more colorful than Mark's telling. In Mark 10 we have;

35James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." 36And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 37They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory."

We see that in both versions, Jesus answers directly to James and John. The mother card just makes it a bit more pathetic.

Ambition is ugly. Matthew shows the underbelly. Your mom? Really?

Matthew says she bowed down and made a request, and again Mark adds light. He says they said "*Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.*"

Jesus, the genie in the bottle. There's a lesson here for us about prayer.

The Bible says, *let your requests be made known unto God*. Jesus says, *Ask and it shall be given to you*.

Is that an incomplete doctrine? Or do we get in line behind Janis Joplin. *Oh Lord, won't you buy me, a Mercedes Benz. My friends all have Porsche's. I must make amends.* That song mocked christians.

James, the half brother of Jesus, not the James in this story, says: Jas. 4:1-3

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

We've got a blank check to fill out and spend on furthering the Kingdom of God in Satan's realm for the glory of God. Not to spend on our own lusts.

If you're praying for a 34 foot toy hauler that will hold two 4 wheelers and has air conditioning so you can go play on Sunday's, don't hold your breath. That's not what the blank check is for.

This is so juvenile we laugh. You get your mom to say, *Say you'll give us what we want and then we'll tell you what it is. "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You."*

Here's the man of sorrows, His face set towards Jerusalem, on His way to be sold out by a traitor, condemned to death by His own people who have rejected Him, and then be mocked and scourged and crucified. And now He's got to deal with comedians? This is tweedle dee and tweedle dum. And their mother.

This is like comic relief; except it's so pathetic. You don't know whether to laugh or cry.

We talk pretty bold on this side of the cross, don't we. Would we have done any better on that side of it? No Holy Spirit to indwell and guide us. Not yet.

So Jesus says, I'm not falling for the *give me my request before I ask it* deal; Think about that for a minute. What are they really asking in their method of asking? They are requesting Him to give up His sovereignty and give it to them. Just this one time. Let us be our own sovereign gods. We know what's best. He doesn't buy it. We're a little amazed at the grace here. He says:

21And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left."

There it is. What we want are the 2 pre-emminent places below you in your Kingdom. We'd like to be 2nd and 3rd most powerful in the universe. Please.

22But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking."

Stop right there. I think we need to update this to our current vernacular. *You don't have a clue.*

Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?"

We looked at that very cup, 2 Sunday's ago. We didn't really get down to the bottom of it. I did an incomplete job. What exactly IS the cup that Jesus speaks of here.

This is the cup of the fierce wrath of God Almighty against all of the sin and rebellion of men since the first man fell. We really don't have a clue on the depths of suffering in this cup that Jesus bore.

You can get some idea of God's wrath that we deserved when you read through the Book of Revelation. The seven seals opened. The seven trumpets that sound. And the seven bowls of wrath that are poured out on the earth. Those are a picture of God's wrath against sin and rebellion.

That's the cup that Jesus has set His face toward as He marches up to Jerusalem. That's the price set before Him to purchase us out of that world. To take the wrath that our sins deserve.

That's the price He will pay to sit on His throne in His Kingdom, with His beloved bride, the church.

Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able."

We marvel at their answer. Only because we have 20-20 hindsight, 20 centuries later. We have this book to further define what Jesus is talking about. They did not.

What they did have was an endearing child like confidence in Him.

This isn't very different from when Peter says; command me to come out of the boat and come to you on the water. Peter figures, I'm good to

go, as long as the Lord's making it happen.

And Peter's holy boldness in Mt. 26 *Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you* There's a lot of chest beating going on, but;

The disciples have this going for them, in spite of their child like ignorance of what they're asking, they have a child like faith. A Holy indestructibility. As long as I've got you, Jesus, sure, we can power through. As long as we've got Jesus, we are undefeatable.

That may be why later on, when the Spirit does come, and they grow up into mature christians, they turn the world upside down . . . and we don't.

23He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father."

Another prophecy. But the brothers don't really understand how this will be true.

After the resurrection, when the Holy Spirit has come and these brothers are empowered to take the good news of Jesus to the world, that same power will fit them for very real suffering for the kingdom of God. There's no way they can begin to comprehend what lies before them.

They certainly won't suffer to the extent that Jesus will, but these 2 disciples will have the distinction of being the first and the last to die for the cause of Christ. They will drink a portion of that same cup.

We are *Christ*-ians. Little Christs. So ordained in Antioch soon after the church began. And as such every one of us who are the true believers are in line for this very cup. I know that sounds weird to us in the 21st century.

Suffering wasn't what the salesman sold us. That isn't what we signed up for. Oh? Maybe you signed up for a different group than James and John did?

Beloved we are little Christs in a world ruled by Satan. He despises the air we breathe and the ground we walk on. He would tear us assunder immediately except he's restrained by the Almighty. The same sovereign Almighty who allowed him to kill James but said, nope, you can't have Peter too. Or John. Until I'm finished with what I've designed for them to accomplish. Then you can.

James was murdered by Herod. Peter was crucified upside down after many years of heralding the Lord Jesus. John was exiled to a small island to live out his days in isolation. The last to die.

The cup of suffering is what we can expect as enemy combatants in Satan's kingdom. It is why our constant prayer should be; *and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for, Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever, amen.*

You **didn't** sign up for a cup different than James and John. If you think you did, you may be in the wrong room.

but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father."

This is a display of the Sovereignty of God. He doesn't say those positions don't exist. He does say that God will decide who those persons are.

James and John have pitted themselves against all the saints in that chapter 11 of Hebrews. Abraham. David. Moses. Elijah. Really? And all the great missionaries that have left their babies and their wives in little graves in foreign lands for the sake of the Kingdom?

When you think about it a very little bit, you say, nevermind, Lord, I know it won't be me. I defer to these who have exhausted themselves in this world and ultimately died after they'd left every other thing dear to them behind, for the cause of the Kingdom of God.

Well, that's 20-20 hindsight again, because we have this book complete

and we have the vast array of centuries of saints who preceeded us that we'll never match. We realize the folly of these 2 brothers in their ignorance. They were immature, but maturity would come.

There's no privacy here. There's no back room dealing because there's no back room. So the other 10 disciples have just witnessed this whole coup. They've been the audience while James and John go for the undercut and overthrow.

And being much more advanced and mature than James and John they all think, oh, dear James and John don't realize the gravity of this request. Their hearts were right, but their thought process lacked maturity in the matter. That's what they thought, as mature christians, right?

Not. 24And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers.

They were incensed! How dare these 2 idiots try to broker a deal that undercuts ME! The nerve! The audacity!! Fie on you Zebedee's and a pox on your boat! May it sink with you in it! How dare you!

Remember we're still on the other side of the cross here. We christians would never act this way. Right? We would never have a church hierarchy that has about 40 different offices from the bottom of the pyramid up to the man who sits at the top and lords it over all. Not us!

25But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.

See, I'm right. The church would never do this because of what Jesus says here. This is how the fallen world works. Top dog. The meanest most brutal alpha dog in the pack calls the shots.

In our fallen world, this works equally well with dogs, horses, men. The most ruthless and brutally powerful gets to lord it over everyone else.

Of course I'm being facetious when I say the church would never do this. This is exactly what the church DID do. The church became the most powerful political force in the earth, with the most powerful man sitting at it's head. Exactly polar opposite of what Jesus commanded of it here.

That was why the reformation had to happen.

26 "It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The church is to be unique in this fallen dog eat dog world. It is designed by God to be polar opposite of what is natural to fallen men.

What is the polity of the church then, bearing in mind this command of Jesus. How is it to be constructed. How is it to be governed so that this worldly tendency to dog eat dog hierarchy is avoided, even rejected.

We look down through church history and we see mistakes. Massive mistakes, and corrections. One of the corrections that protestants instituted in the reformation is local autonomy.

We'll talk about this a lot in coming months and years. Because I believe **this** church (our church) has needed corrections to be in line with the Biblical model.

I haven't come in with guns blaring. We're 2 years in, and I'm patiently teaching you what the book says. But in time, my hope is to have this conversation amongst ourselves in this body.

What is the authority of leaders over members. How does the Biblical model set that up so that the leaders do NOT lord it over the members.

In this body we've over-reacted to the abuses of history that has preceeded us. Our constitution basically says there is no membership. There is no leadership. There is no authority. Governance is minimal

by a board of directors at the pleasure of the non-members.

We are outside the Biblical model, and in time, I hope to show you a better way. This is OK for now. It may become a problem though at any time. We are vulnerable how we're operating now.

Jesus says, there isn't going to be Rock Stars in the church. No celebrities. No top dogs wielding enormous power. No kings. No rulers. Listen again to what He says;

26 "It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave;

Is there an echo in the room. Does this not sound like a repeat of *the first shall be last and the last shall be first*? The higher up you go, the lower you go. The greater you are the more you fall deeper into slavery.

How does this work mathematically? Pretty simple. We don't have to consult Ted. If you're a positive number you're also an equivalent negative number. Great = Servant. First = Slave. Everything cancels out everything and we are all equals.

How very different from what is obviously and necessarily normal in this fallen world.

In Satan's kingdom, you won't last 5 minutes under these rules. But in God's kingdom, there is no King but Jesus. The rest of us are equals. The rest of us serve each other.

This is very weird. VERY weird. So weird in fact that if we were really doing this, the world would take notice because we would be . . . well . . . we would be . . . weird. IN a good way. IF the world doesn't look at us and see anything different from how the rest of the world does things; we're doing it wrong. That's a truth you can take to the bank.

Do we have an example? A pattern that we can follow?

Vs. 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Listen to Paul teaching these very words of Jesus to the church at Philippi. The parallels are astounding.

*Ppn. 2:1Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2make my joy complete by being of the **same mind**, maintaining the **same love**, **united** in spirit, intent on **one purpose**.*

Do you hear all of the same equality that Jesus is teaching His disciples in these words. Same mind. Same love. Unity. Single purpose.

There's no grand pubar's here. No kings. No princes. No rulers. No top dogs. No one riding in a bulletproof top dogmobile. We're equals with each other striving in love and unity towards a common purpose. Paul goes on;

3Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

There is indeed an echo in the room. This is exactly what Jesus just said. And the example is the same one that He gives to the disciples in Matthew 20. Here's our example in Paul's words;

5Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

OK, so there's our example. But one question remains. This goes against the grain of every motivation and perk this world has to offer.

Why would anyone do this? What's our motivation to cast this world and all of it's wealth and power and comfort and notoriety aside? Why would we do that??

9For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is who we're doing it for. If we empty ourselves here, we will reign with Him. Our payday is in another world. Another time. Another place.

Our motive will be the same both now, and in the next world. All of the Glory is to God. None of it is to us.

What was the motive behind James and John's request? Was it Glory for God, or glory for James and John? The house of Zebedee!

As we go out and do our every day work tomorrow, let's ask ourselves this question. Am I working for God's glory? Or am I scratching my way to a place of power for ME.

Somehow, every moment we live should be a moment that is furthering the Kingdom of our King, and glorifying Him. Even if it's just working for a worldly master so we can pay our bills and live quietly and in some dignity, we should do that with the end that Jesus will be glorified in our lives in His kingdom.

I forget this daily. I need to remind myself of this, every day.

Therefore, *Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*