

Mark 10:35-45

What is **ambition** - is it a **good** thing, or a **bad** thing? Ambition is having the will and the desire to **do** something with your **time**, and to **make** something of your **life**, and certainly that's **good**. But ambition is not **always** aimed in the **right** direction, and that can be **bad**. For example, consider the man who was arrested for robbing multiple homes. He was **upset** when he got caught, because he wanted to set the **record** for most homes burglarized in a year. His ambition was obviously **misdirected**. How about **your** ambition? What do you want to make of **your** life? What is it you want to **accomplish**?

In our text for today our Lord Jesus **teaches** us about ambition, and gives us words to consider that might **surprise** our minds, and **stir up** our believing hearts. He **confronts** the kind of ambition which is so often found in our **world**, and challenges us to think in a completely **different** way. He teaches us to **Be Ambitious To Serve**.

As our text begins, two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, came to Him with a request. *"Let one of us sit at your **right** hand and the other at your **left** in your **glory**."* Jesus had often talked about establishing a **kingdom**, and entering into **glory** where He would **rule**. These disciples were confident that Jesus would **reach** His goal. They also figured that Jesus had a few **top** positions for a few **good** men, and they wanted to be first-in-line for those spots.

But the Lord proceeded to **correct** their thinking. Handing out positions of honor and authority was **not** what Jesus was about, nor was it what their minds should be dwelling on. Jesus said, *"You don't know what you are **asking**. Can you drink the cup **I** drink or be baptized with the baptism **I** am baptized with?"* The terms, cup and baptism, both refer to the **suffering** and **death** that Jesus would experience on the **cross** when the Father's wrath was poured out on Him as He paid for the sins of the world. *"Can you drink the cup **I** drink or be baptized with the baptism **I** am baptized with?"* He asked James and John. *"We **can**,"* they said, and Jesus responded *"You **will**."* Of course, Jesus knew that James and John would not suffer in the **same way** as He, the Savior, but they would certainly **suffer** because of their faithful **allegiance** to **Him**. **James** would be **killed** by King Herod, and **John** would be **exiled** to the island of Patmos. Jesus continued, *"To sit at my right or left is not for **me** to grant. These places belong to*

those for whom they have been prepared.” Jesus saw Himself as the **lowly servant** of God, a servant who had been sent to **obey His Father** in all things. It was **not** His role to grant positions of **power**. His **Father** in heaven would do that, in fact, the Father had already prepared **special places** in His heavenly home for **all** of His believing children.

Are we at times also guilty of seeking positions of **honor**, whether they would be here in our **earthly** lives or in **heaven**? Would we like Trinity to be declared “**Congregation of the Month**?” Maybe we would like to be recognized as “**Christian of the Year**,” or maybe we think we should be enshrined in the Christian’s “**Hall of Fame**?” If we have ever **had** those thoughts, then we need to be **corrected** just like James and John, because those are **not** the things Jesus has in **mind** for us. Rather, our lives here on the earth will be similar to the life of **Jesus** - lives that are marked by much **suffering**. The Bible clearly tells us, “*We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of heaven.*” So, let’s **not** be ambitious for places of **honor** and **authority**. Those things will come **later**, for Paul told the Romans, “*We share in Christ’s sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*” When Jesus **returns**, and we are gathered before His throne, **then** and **only then** He will say to His children, “*Come, blessed of my Father, take the inheritance prepared for you.*”

Jesus’ conversation with **James** and **John** also gave Him the opportunity to teach a lesson to **all 12** of the disciples. And, it’s a lesson for **us** to learn as well. We’re told that when the other ten had **heard** about James and John’s request, they became **upset**. So Jesus gathered them together and told them, “*You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.*” The disciples were **well aware** of how officials in the Roman **government** acted - they **lorded** their authority over their citizens. They used their high positions to **force** citizens to wait on **them**, and to indulge **their** whims and **their** egos. But Jesus told them that was **not** to be the case among **His** followers. He said, “*Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.*” Greatness in **Jesus’** family lies in **serving** one another. So, He encouraged His **disciples** and **us**, to **Be Ambitious To Serve**.

That’s exactly the **opposite** of how our **world** operates **today**, and it also runs **counter** to the way our **hearts** operate by **nature**. Greatness in the **world** involves being in a position of **power** - where **I** am the **leader** - where

I am the **head** of a major company - where I am so **wealthy** that I can hire **other** people to do all the work **for** me. Who wants to be a **servant**? Personal **pride** runs **deep** within our sinful hearts. It makes us turn **inward** - being only concerned about **ourselves** - asking “What’s in it for **me**?”

In order for Jesus’ lesson on service to take root in our hearts, we need to **repent**. We need to put to **death** our sinful flesh with all its **selfishness** and **ambitions** for **worldly** power. We need to look at **Jesus**, and see what **He** did with **His** life. Jesus said, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” Jesus offers **Himself** as an **example** of service. The Son of **God** - **equal** to the Heavenly Father in **everything** - humbly became a human being - not to be **waited on** by us, but to **serve** us, and all **mankind**.

You’ve probably seen movies where someone is **kidnapped** and held in **captivity** until a **ransom** is paid. Our situation was even **worse** than that. **Our own sins** caused us to be kidnapped and held captive by the **devil** - destined to live in the filthy dungeons of hell **forever**. And worst of all, we and our friends and our relatives don’t have the **resources** which are needed to pay the **ransom** which God has demanded to **release** us. The Bible says, “*All our righteous acts were as filthy rags.*” But out of love for us **God Himself** paid the price to set us free. And what **was** that price? It was the perfect life of **Jesus**, God’s **holy** and **innocent** Son. In his first letter, Peter tells us, “*It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*”

Jesus couldn’t have **served** us any **better**. He took on a human **body**, so He would be able to live a perfect **life**. Human **blood** surged through His veins, so He would be able to **shed** it on the cross in **payment** for the sins of the world. Jesus’ **death** on the cross pays the **ransom** for **every** sin of **every** person. His **sacrifice** has set us **free** to become the people of **God** - **children** of the Heavenly Father who will share life with Him in heaven **forever**. This loving **service** of Jesus captures our **hearts**, and spurs us on to **respond** to His service, by serving **one another**.

So, **Be Ambitious To Serve**. The apostle Paul writes, “*Look not only to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let your attitude be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself*

nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death - even death on a cross.” Let Christ’s act of serving you with His life lead you to wake up each morning with the thought, “Whom can **I** serve today?” There are opportunities for service **everywhere**. At **home** - at **school** - at **work** - in your **neighborhood** - **everywhere** there are people with **needs** - people who are **lonely**, or **depressed**, or wracked with **guilt**, or **afraid**. The Apostle Paul told the **Ephesians**, “*Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord,*” because in reality, that is **exactly** what we will be doing - serving the **Lord**.

And what’s the **reward** for our service? For that we turn to **Jesus** - the source of **all** true riches in life. The reward for **servicing** one another is the **joy** we have in our **Savior**. Jesus purchased and won us from sin, death, and the devil, so we could be **His own**, and live **under** Him, and **serve** Him in His kingdom. **Whatever** we do for one another in Jesus’ name will **last**, because on the last day He will say to His believers, “*Well done, good and faithful servant, come and share your master’s happiness.*” That’s the kind of **Savior** we have. That’s the kind of **rest** which lies in our future. And that’s what motivates us to **Be Ambitious To Serve**. Amen.