

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. "*Promise that we may sit, one at your **right** and one 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 do not know what you are **asking**. Can you drink the cup that **I** am going to drink or be baptized with the baptism that **I** am going to be 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 that I am going to drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am going to be 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 at my left is not for **me** to give; rather, 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 God.”* So, let’s **not** be ambitious for places of **honor** and **authority**. Those things will come **later**, for Paul told the Romans, *“We **suffer** with him, so that we may **also** be **glorified** with him.”* When Jesus **returns**, and we are gathered before His throne, **then** and **only then** He will say to His children, *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, **inherit** the kingdom **prepared** for you from the foundation of the world.”*

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 considered rulers over the Gentiles **lord** it over them, and their great ones **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 be **great** among you will be your **servant**, and whoever wants to be **first** among you will be a **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 are like a filthy cloth.*" 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, "*You were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, not with things that pass away, such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot.*"

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, “*Let each of you look carefully not only to your **own** interests, but also to the interests of **others**. Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in **Christ Jesus**. Though he was by nature **God**, he did not consider **equality** with God as a **prize** to be **displayed**, but he **emptied** himself by taking the nature of a **servant**. When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, he **humbled** himself and became obedient to the point of **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 with **eagerness**, as for 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 **serving** 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! Enter into the **joy** of your master.*” 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.