

Self-Glorification from Above or Humble Service from Below?
Based on Mark 10: 32-46, 3/22/15 David Jahnke

Today's passage is the culmination of a theme running through at least three chapters. Jesus told the disciples at least three times that when he went into Jerusalem, he would be rejected, suffer and die.

The first time was right after Peter was the first to proclaim that he was the Messiah. So Jesus lets him know what that will mean. Peter rebukes Jesus because messiah-Kings do not die in the place right when it is his time to reign in glory. Jesus tells Peter that he is thinking of the things of man, not of God.

Shortly after this, Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain where he is transfigured before them and filled with glory. He talks with Moses and Elijah and Peter is ready to set up base camp for all of them, in their march to drive out the Romans and bring the Kingdom of God back to Israel.

So after coming down from the mountain, Jesus needs to tell them a second time that he would be rejected, suffer and die. And right after this, the disciples started arguing with each other and later Jesus asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" They had been arguing about who was the greatest. So Jesus told them that "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

I imagine them thinking or saying, "Yes, Jesus. We look forward to being great servant rulers once the Kingdom is established."

So as they near Jerusalem, Jesus decides that he better tell them a third time. And it is just astonishing what again follows. "Uhhh, Jesus, these strange parables about dying and rising are interesting and deep. And maybe one day you will explain them to us. But we have an important and practical matter for you to take care of. Can John and I sit at your right and left as you are enthroned in Jerusalem?" Jesus lets them know that they would be enthroned like him—drinking the cup he would drink. In other words, they would learn the meaning of the cross personally. But those on his right and left during his enthronement would be criminals.

James and John and Peter had seen such glorious and wonderful things from Jesus. 2. They had given up so much to follow him. 3. And they had a natural human desire to win and receive power, glory and honor. So they just could barely hear, much less understand or accept what Jesus was saying about the cross. Nor did they understand the absolute need for servanthood from below rather than authority from above.

What resulted from James and John wanting a special place of authority? The other disciples were very angry with them for thinking they were better.

I watched the movie Whiplash the other night. A young man is a wonderful jazz drummer. He has made it into the top college-aged jazz band in the country and he is the youngest in the band. He goes home for a quick family reunion. His aunt asks him about his drumming and before he can really say anything, his cousins come in with a lot of fanfare. The focus and praise turn to their success in football. So the drummer's ego is hurt and this leads him to blurt how they are playing division 3 football; not even D2—and that his cousins will make great school board presidents one day as he strives to become one of the greatest musicians in the country.

Winners and losers...; some up on top and others below them; rivalry and opposition leading to conflict, brokenness, division in our homes, communities, churches.

I was sharing a devotional based on this passage with a presbytery resolution team I am working with. Two of the three largest churches in the presbytery are wanting to leave the denomination because a progressive theology and social policy has been gradually winning the day. And if you did not hear, our denomination has now redefined marriage as being between two people, traditionally one man and one woman. And about half of our denomination is rejoicing and half grieving this decision. A million or so on each side and tens of millions of brothers and sisters in Christ on each side of the matter in our nation!

As we talked about the disciples' desire for power and glory, despite hearing from Jesus and seeing who he hung out with for years, one of the guys from the New Providence Church said that we are no different; that even though we have not walked and eaten with Jesus, we have the benefit of His Word always before us. And we are also on this side of Easter and Pentecost as well so we know the resurrection and have Jesus' Spirit. But we still set our own agendas that often have much to do with our own authority; rather than following God's agenda for the sake of his glory. Of course we often conflate these two, presuming that our agenda is God's. The disciples were doing this as well.

The disciples were not stupid, and neither are we. It is just that our vision, our intelligence, our faithfulness, our compassion and justice...are all limited and distorted by sin. So Jesus smiles down upon our self-righteousness and reminds us, "Your ways are NOT my ways. Your thoughts are NOT my thoughts. You think you are so different from others out there? So much better or more faithful? There is no comparison between how different I am from you vs. how different you are from people with different politics or theologies or religions. And yet I humbled myself for all of you. So will you not humble yourselves before me and before each other?"

It felt like we were doing this during the devotional at the New Providence Church. I kept nodding my head and saying amen as folks from their church said valuable and meaningful things as did the presbytery representatives. We have so much in common that my heart just grieves at their departure. But these commonalities also remind me that we will always remain brothers and sisters.

But Jesus insists that we do things differently from the world. "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **43** Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you...must be slave of all.

All includes our opponents. Jesus was silent and forfeited against his accusatory brothers and sisters on the council so that we all might win. He chose to forgive and bear with his opponents, rather than prove himself right by calling down the justice of God. He lost everything in order to go into the places where all of us lost children might be found. And find us he did and heaven rejoices and points us back to him and to the cross. And we are humbled and called back to loving service from below which unites and transforms and builds everyone up in the ways of Kingdom where mercy triumphs over justice...