

Selfish Requests
Mark 10:32-52

Review: Our last message in Mark
The Rich Young Ruler

We learned about this young man who had it all together and wanted to add eternal life to his portfolio. But he learned that Jesus is not something we just add to our life. He becomes our life. He is our life. For the Disciple, all things bow to the Lordship of Jesus.

And just like many of us have done, **this man went away sad and disheartened** because he refused to give up His earthly goods and desires for the sake of Christ. To obtain Christ, we must give up... everything.

Mark 10:32-52 [32] *And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, [33] saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. [34] And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."*

[35] *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."* [36] *And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?"* [37] *And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."* [38] *Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"* [39] *And they said to him, "We are able."* And Jesus said to them, *"The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, [40] but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."* [41] *And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. [42] And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. [43] But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, [44] and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. [45] For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

[46] *And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. [47] And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" [48] And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" [49] And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." [50] **And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.** [51] *And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." [52] And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.**

I am so thankful for these 12 guys that are trying to follow Jesus

We get to see the whole story. From Beginning to end. All played out. These guys are living it.

Look back at your own life and it makes sense now right? But while we were in it... while we were experiencing it... not so much. We were moving ahead with limited information. And that's what these guys are doing.

It's easy for us to look at their questions and behaviors and judge them.

It's easy because we see the whole picture and we know what Jesus must go through and we know that in the end Jesus has the victory and we have Jesus. But these guys did not have the finished work of scripture in their hands like we do. They were living it one moment at a time and I am so thankful that we get a glimpse into their struggles and stories and their lack of faith and obedience as well as their successes and triumphs in the name of Christ. God has indeed blessed us with His infallible word. Praise God!

So this is the third time that Jesus tells his disciples about the road He must travel.

And while they still don't get it, they are starting to see that they don't have much time left with Jesus... so they start to think about their own standing.

And why not? Why shouldn't they think about themselves?

They have invested the better part of a couple of years in following Jesus. They have seen some amazing things but they are starting to sense that the end might be near... at least an earthly end. And Jesus keeps talking about this crazy idea that He must die. Jesus is going to be moving on and the future seems unknown. And these guys want some insurance. Some life insurance... a 401K... a pension. A promise that they won't be forgotten. They need to look out for themselves and their families and if the future is in heaven with Jesus... why not strike a deal now while they have a chance. Jesus is cool. He likes them. He could go for this idea... after all, you never know unless you ask.

In every way this situation smacks of an employee looking for a raise. Or even that of a child asking a parent for money and possessions before the parent has passed on. Where is the fear? Where is the reverence? Where is the respect?

Have you ever unadvisedly asked for something that you felt shameful about even prior to the asking? But you went ahead anyway. You asked and all the while you knew you shouldn't... but you did anyway. And maybe you got what you wanted, but you knew it wasn't right. Or maybe you were denied your request... and you thought... "I never should have asked". And you felt that your relationship was damaged from that point forward.

And even while we read this passage we feel ashamed for them. We want to take James and John aside and say... no guys... don't do it. Don't ask. It's just not right. You just don't ask that kind of thing of Jesus. But there they go. And they push through all the warning signs and ask for a share not only in leadership, not only in position and power... but they are asking for a share in God's own glory.

It's always the same isn't it? It's always the same sin. There is never anything new under the sun. Never any new tricks or situations. It's always the same. "You can be like God". "I can be like God".

And then the rest of the disciples react. They are mad and indignant... not in defense of Christ... but in defense of themselves. "What about me?"

Jesus now has the attention of all the disciples and He uses the opportunity **not to condemn** the sin of James and John... but to show them that their idol worship of self has no place in the Kingdom of God. **This kingdom is not like this earthly realm.**

The disciples have much in common with us. We live in a world dominated by an earthly kingdom. They had Rome... we have the good old USA. But unlike the disciples who feared and fought against Roman Tyranny. Most American Christians are very Nationalistic. We love America. We love how we think it was founded. We love the history of freedom. We love the idea of having a voice in our world. We like our parties and we look to our politicians to save us from evil and tyranny and give us justice.

But we rarely see that our freedom, our way of life, our political system, the American dream... it's all based on one thing. **Power over others.** It's all about who has the power.

And this is what we all want. We want to be our own boss. We move up the corporate ladder, we maneuver through our relationships all the while negotiating power. Who do we have power over? Who has power over us?

Have you ever "corrected" someone who thought you weren't as powerful as you are? You know... how you subtly drop an org chart across their email inbox or you floated a few names or suggested a few projects you've been in charge of. Just to make sure they knew of your standing in the pecking order. Just to let them know that you had power... and how much... and maybe even a bit of power over them.

It even happens in the arts. That last bastion of pure motivation. RIGHT... In the music world there is a lot of name dropping. I "shared the stage" with... I gigged with... We worked together on a project. I hired so and so for this event or gig or production.

We've all heard what Jesus said, "the first shall be last and the last shall be first". But most of us still don't have this. I know I don't. I don't think I ever put myself last. I don't think I ever have. Do I serve others? Yes. But I think most of the time I do it... we do it... to pay a price. We know we need to do something... so we do something. And we do something that others will see. We talk about what we do so others will know. We do it so God will see and be OK with us. We even do things because we think it will increase our standing with God.

We see that this Kingdom of God is all topsy turvey. That we are all messed up because we want rewards for our efforts. We want to be praised and given raises and bonuses and high fives and atta boys and atta girls. And Jesus says... No. that's not the way it is. **BUT THAT'S HOW WE'VE BEEN TRAINED!!!!**

We're Leaders! Have you ever noticed how many leaders there are in this world? We've all been told... we're leaders. But if we're all leaders... who are the followers?

It's interesting to see how misguided James and John are here. They are the new leaders of the faith. They are two of the most important leaders in this movement. If they were here today, they'd be writing books and speaking at conferences and doing online Q and A's.

And look where this desire for power is coming from... It's not coming from the crowd. It's not coming from Judas. It's coming from the inner circle. The closest followers of Jesus. It's coming from within the church leadership. The most famous ministers of the gospel that the world will ever know.

This proves that these thoughts and sins of pride and position will always be among us. Always in our hearts. And always in the hearts of our leaders as well.

We are all corrupt. We are all sinful. And we are all together in our sin. We are all part of it. We all misrepresent God. We are all wrong about something. We are all wrong about most things. In many ways, we're all wrong about everything.

James and John are familiar with Jesus. They've been with Him for awhile now. They seem to be the inside guys. The chosen leaders. The hierarchy.

*It happens everywhere. **We get familiar.** We contribute. We attain position. We have responsibility and we claim glory. We exalt ourselves to a position of leadership. Others agree with our "calling" and we revel in our success and notoriety. We wonder, hope and even scheme to be the "next" rising star to be promoted. This is America Jack! This is what we do... this is who we are.*

We run our business, our homes, our families, our lives and our churches... like corporate America. Like the worldly leadership that Jesus is railing against. We rate our success and failure by the world's standard instead of that of Jesus Christ.

*And why do we do this? Because we are always striving to show ourselves as good. As better. As best. While it is true that we have to judge one another on our behavior to some extent... **God never uses our performance for or against us.** He sees total sin... or total Jesus. There is no in between. **But we keep trying to add the middle ground.** And while we don't want to pay the price for our sin... we certainly want glory for our success. But Jesus says, if you want to be recognized in my kingdom, you must surrender all glory to me.*

And then you know what we do... we say... "hey, Jesus... look at me... I'm surrendering all to you... won't you please recognize me... It's an endless circle of sin.

And even now, we **as leaders** are looking at James and John and saying... that's messed up man. They should know better.

Pause.

The truth is this... we are not really leaders... not in this earthly American business sense of leadership. Not in the kingdom of God. The truth is... we are all just sheep. We have one shepherd in Jesus. There is no hierarchy in a flock of sheep.

Dominance. In a flock of grazing sheep there is little or no sign of dominance.

Social groups. Sheep form strong social groups that are stable and the social organization of the flock influences grazing patterns.

And sheep are ignorant... but they don't think they are ignorant.

One of our biggest stumbling blocks are exemplified in how we read God's word. Do you read scripture and hear God's guidance from the perspective of the wise man... or the fool?

Finally, we get to see a wonderful example of the one who desperately needs Jesus.

Blind Bartimaeus.

This man is not sitting with the inner circle of leaders. He is not on the team of disciples that have the privilege of hanging with Jesus every day. He can't even see what they look like let alone follow along on the road where Jesus is going. His need is simple... it's basic. There are no thoughts of glory for this guy. No brothers to sit and discuss theology with or ponder their future as rulers in God's Kingdom. He just has one need. His sight. And to Bartimaeus, his sight equals... salvation.

He doesn't pull Jesus aside and ask for a position of leadership or power. He cries out to Jesus. "Son of David, have mercy on me". And just like with James and John, Jesus asks the question that reveals our motives..."what do you want me to do for you?".

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What do you want Jesus to do for you today?

Do you want Him to make you a leader? Do you want to have a position in His Kingdom? Do you want to be known as someone who is theologically smart or strong in the hierarchy of God? Do you want to have control and power over yourself and others.

Or are you like Bartimaeus... Do you just want Jesus?