

35* James 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."36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"37 They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory."38* But 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* They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized.40* "But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

Just before they drove the nails through his hands and feet, the execution squad offered him a cup to drink. It was a gesture of mercy. In the cup was a sedative drink; there was some primitive but quite effective analgesic in that cup. It was offered to him to deaden his pain. This soporific mixture was immediately identified and rejected by Jesus. One little taste was enough for him to know he couldn't take it. He had to go the whole way, from the throne of highest glory to the cross of deepest shame. He must suffer to the utmost, and consciously, for those he individually and personally loved. He must feel the full sting of death. No anaesthetic was possible. There was a saving work to be done. He wouldn't have a dulled brain while he redeemed us from our sin. He would pray for those tormenting him. He would commend his mother to his friend. He would grant mercy to the dying thief. Loving his own who were in the world he would love them to the end.

The Christ of God did not waver. He knew that he had to endure the great baptism of judgment. So the soldiers came, carrying a sword in one hand, but in the other a soothing cup, but when God came to Golgotha he had a sword of judgment in one hand and another sword of judgment in the other. Christ was not doped on Golgotha. He would not be insensible or inattentive to what he was doing there. He would not allow a drowsy body to affect the great transaction of himself, body, soul and spirit as he became the Lamb of God and took away the sin of the world.

Then Jesus speaks some extra and final words to them, and it is almost as if he changes his mind. First there was this question, "Can you drink the cup I drink?" The true inference is that that is impossible. No way! Jesus must make atonement all by

himself because he alone is free from sin. Every other man needs a Savior from his sin, but not God's son, Jesus. It must be Christ all alone who affects our redemption. Then notice the change in thought, so revolutionary, as the Lord says these words to James and John, "'You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with'" (v.39). What is he saying? It is not a change of mind that after all they will share in making the atonement. That cannot be so, let me say again, for he has by himself purged our sins. He trod the winepress of the fierceness of God's wrath alone. There was none with him to share his redeeming love on Calvary. So the cup and the baptism that James and John were going to know is not the cup of providing redemption, but rather that same cup that all Christians know who experience the fellowship of Christ's suffering. Those who stand with Christ, and live like Christ, will also know a cup and a baptism. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you for my sake! That is the cup that James and John were going to drink. All who live godly in Christ Jesus will know that.

Have you ever asked why in the gospel narratives the names of these brothers are always written like this, 'James and John.' Always James' name is first, though James is not nearly so significant a figure in the New Testament as John. John is singled out as the disciple whom Jesus loved. John writes five New Testament documents, his gospel, three letters and the book of Revelation, whereas James his brother wrote nothing. In the book of Acts John is the one supporting Peter in leading the work in the early chapters. There are almost ten references to John in the Acts, but besides the list of apostles in chapter one there is only one other reference to James, and that is in chapter twelve and verse two. Let me read it to you: Herod had "James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword." That is unlikely to mean that they cut off his head. The Roman method of execution was that three soldiers came to you, one each side held your arms while the third with a short sword struck upwards through your solar plexus and your heart and severed your spinal cord. That was the cup that Jesus told James he would surely drink.

The baptisms with which John was baptized were his early whipping by the Sanhedrin's orders, and his late imprisonment on a bleak flat island in the Mediterranean called Patmos, away from friends, away from churches, away from preaching, away from the people in their needs, the world to hear the gospel, and the congregations, to receive pastoral help. Isolated on his windswept prison island John lived out his days. That was John's cup and baptism.

James is mentioned nineteen times in the Gospels, in this order, 'James and John' - both men shed their blood for Jesus. That was the cup God gave them to drink, the baptism of pain they endured for him. So must all true Christians in one way or another who refuse to be ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul says, "I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church" (Col. 1:24). Those trials, which Paul went through, were not redemptive afflictions. Christ suffered contempt and hatred during his ministry, but that did not exhaust the world's wrath towards our Lord. Paul, following the Master and preaching the same gospel, knew the same afflictions coming upon him from the world for the sake of Christ. Christians will at times be reproached for the name of Christ, and if they are then they are to be considered blessed.

One last thing Jesus said to the brothers; "to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared" (v.40). Jesus says two things by way of further clarification. Let the disciples learn that no one is granted glory in the kingdom of God by organizing a pressure group, by solicitation, through the influential people who'll put in a word on their behalf, by the influence of a mother or a mother figure. It will not be by petitioning for it, or by clamoring, or by solicitation. Jesus does not grant places in the kingdom of God because of anything like that. "To sit at my right or left is not for me to grant." It is not in Jesus' will or power to grant honors in his kingdom through partiality and patronage. You must go just as you are, and with your own words, and in confession of your own sins, you must bow before the Lord Jesus Christ and yield your life to him in faith and repentance. That is the effectual way.

Then the other statement of Jesus is interesting. What does he mean when he says that the high rewards of heaven "belong to those for whom they have been prepared" (v.40)? God has prepared their glorious end, but what has been their preparation for those thrones? How has God prepared them? I would think that it is the cup they've had to drink and the baptism they've had to endure. Paul puts it like this, "we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that sufferings produce perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Roms. 5:3). The hope is that soon our sufferings are going to be over, and we'll be made meet by the blood of Christ and by our own trials to sit in the midst of the throne of God with Jesus Christ.

Throughout our sufferings we've cried out to God night and day. God does not settle all his accounts at the same time as his people suffer. God keeps long accounts, as one of the old writers said; God also keeps precise accounts. The day is coming when the books of his accounts are going to be opened, and he will fully, gloriously, and finally avenge his own elect. Through all they've endured for his name sake they've been prepared to sit with Jesus on thrones in glory. No suffering of the people of God is ever in vain, no cup they've had to drink, no baptism they have had to endure will ever be proved meaningless. It's all prepared them for the glory that awaits them.

We are often grieved when we see the godly at the end of their days. They are fearfully frail; they are losing their memories; they are getting increasingly confused, yet all their lives they've loved and served the living God. Why this? What is God doing? He is preparing them for glory. There is a place belonging just to them. The Puritan John Preston said, "Blessed be God, though I change my place I shall not change my company. I have walked with God living. I shall walk with him dying, and I go to my rest with him." In life the Christian is in Christ, in death he is in Christ, and there he will be with Christ in the midst of the throne, for to die is gain. Where are you now? Are you in Christ because he has drunk your cup in your place? Then you can say, "My Savior has gone to prepare a place for me, and he is now preparing me for that place, and when he calls me I will be ready and go to be with him for ever."

"41 Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. 42 Calling them to Himself, Jesus *said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 "But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. 45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'" Mark 10:41-45, NAS95.

They're not the great ones in God's kingdom. Who then is? The Lord tells us, and his words seem such an anticlimax, it is the person who serves. "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" (vv.43&44).

So we might all have a yawn, and settle down to think about the week ahead, because who is going to get excited about the joys of slavery and the excellence of serving other people. This is not a subject to grab us. It is a theme our flesh finds tedious. Many of you are thinking, "It will take more than this preacher to motivate me to become a slave?" And you are dead right. It will take the blood of God the Son and the power that made the universe. "Holy Spirit I will need you especially today if we are going to be changed by these mighty words." Only his empowering and illumination and energizing can kill us and quicken us. Let me tell you first of all about the one who is speaking these words. The Holy Spirit always draws men to the exalted Jesus.

1. KNOW ABOUT THIS GLORIOUS SPEAKER.

1. This is the Son of Man. That is how he has introduced himself to these men when he talked to them about his end in Jerusalem (v.33), and now as the one who has come into the world it is as the Son of Man (v.45). The one Daniel speaks of in the seventh chapter of his prophecy, coming in the clouds with glory, and receiving from God an everlasting kingdom that will not pass away, a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

This is the one. The apostles were highly favoured being on the spot when divine prophecy was being fulfilled. This mighty one has arrived and it is none other than their own rabbi and healer and friend, Jesus of Nazareth.

2. This is the Servant of the Lord. Jesus says he came to be their servant (v.45). This is the one whom God spoke about in Isaiah 53, in one of the great prophecies of the suffering servant, saying, "my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities . . . For he bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:11&12). Maybe you haven't read Isaiah chapter 53 but you might have heard Handel's oratorio "The Messiah" where these words are sung, "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." and again these words, "Surely he hath borne our sins and carried our sorrows. Surely! . . . Surely!" Those words are from Isaiah 53 and they are about the Lord Jesus. There was once a man from Ethiopia in Africa and he was reading those words. "About whom does the prophet write this?" he asked aloud, and a Christian named Philip heard him and sat with him. He "began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus" (Acts 8:35). So the one speaking these words is the Son of the Man spoken of in Daniel, and the Servant of the Lord spoken of in Isaiah.

3. This is the one who has "'come'" into the world. Jesus did not say that he was 'born' to serve, but that he had come to serve (v.45). In other words, unlike all of us he was already in existence before he was born. He has come. He was in the beginning with God as his eternal Son and now he has come into this world. The promised seed of the woman has come. The Messiah who would bless all nations as the seed of Abraham is this one who has come. The eternal Son of God has taken frail flesh having come to this world. He has become man while yet remaining the mighty God, two natures in one eternal and indivisible Person. Jesus is that coming one.

J.C.Ryle says, "Had my Savior been God only, I might have trusted him, but I could never have come near to him without fear. Had my Savior been man only, I might have

loved him, but never could have felt sure that he was able to take away my sins. But, blessed be the Lord, my Savior is God as well as man, and man as well as God - God, and so able to deliver me - man, and so able to feel with me. Almighty power and deepest sympathy are met together in one glorious person, Jesus Christ my Lord."

4. This is the most extraordinary of teachers. What words we have read so far in the gospel. No one spoke like this Prophet. It was his Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, who was actually with the old prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and psalmists when they spoke and wrote. They could only speak as they did because he was inspiring them. As we listen to him preaching in Galilee that claim makes sense because nobody had ever spoken like Jesus. The Buddha never did, and neither did Mohammed, and neither did Karl Mark or Sigmund Freud or any of the so called great minds of the 19th and 20th centuries who have exercised such woeful influence over the world. Which of them ever said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am meek and lowly of heart and ye shall find rest to your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light"? But Jesus said that and much more than that. Listen to our text and its sublime words, "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 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" (vv. 43-45). Where will you ever find in human literature such concepts? You will only discover their echoes in the best of man's writings which have been influenced by Jesus, but when he spoke words like that they were newly minted and fell with the freshness of a new day on these disciples. But more.

5. This is the almighty and omnipotent one. Everything that had any form of existence had to submit to him. A fig tree, a herd of pigs, a shoal of fish, winds and waves, bread, dried fish, water and wine, disease, a mob and even the demons - every created thing did exactly what the Lord told them to do, in every single case without exception. They were utterly incapable of resisting his will. A platoon of soldiers fell down at his feet when he said, "I am!" The devil is like a strong man who has his prisoners locked up in

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his impregnable fortress, but Jesus is stronger and with his little finger he can bind the evil one, open the doors, break every chain and release the lot. Satan is powerless to prevent him. When Christ is confronted with the temptation of the world with all its glories being offered to him he spurns it. When sin would persuade him most powerfully to obey he rejects sin utterly and always. This is mighty Jesus.

I will tell you one thing more about his power, that the Lord is stronger than death. Lazarus tells us it is so, and so does Jairus' daughter, and so does the son of the widow of Nain. Our Savior always knew that he had the power to lay down his own life and raise it again. Let me explain to you what death is. Life is the union of the body and the spirit. Man is body; man is soul; one person. Death occurs when that union is destroyed. The outer man is then laid in the ground and the inner man is brought to its Maker. That is what death is, that profound disruption of our persons. When the Lord Jesus Christ hung on the cross he breathed his last, and death, which had dared to approach him, severed the bond between Jesus' soul and Jesus' body. But then advancing, marauding, killing death met another bond in Jesus Christ which it found it could not destroy, though it tried with all its might. There was a bond which had been established for over thirty years between Christ's divine nature and Christ's human nature. Death could take out its sword and hack away at that for ever, but it could never destroy that union. Jesus as to his body was in the tomb; Jesus as to his spirit was in heaven. God gripped his body in one divine hand and his spirit in another divine hand. After death Christ yet lived. Death was impotent to destroy the God-man, and on the third day God reunited body and soul by the Spirit of holiness in his resurrection from the dead. Jesus was all-powerful in death. So there is nothing in heaven or earth or hell that can resist this Lord Christ. He is Omnipotence incarnate.

So this is the glorious and mighty one whose words we are reading here. He reigns at the heart of Christianity, not Moses, and not Elijah, and not Paul, but Jesus Christ. Knowing him is the beginning of Christianity, and a developing relationship with him and

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a growing submission to him is the Christian life. Listen further as this glorious person
now tells us what greatness is: