

10-17-21

Sermon: Who Knows What Evil Lurks?

Scripture: Mark 10:35-45, Psalm 104:1-9

Hymns: 74, 33, 75

Theme: We are called to live a life that brings glory to God when we live in harmony with what it is that He has called us to do and to be. We can only be successful at it when we are willing to be genuine and authentic to our calling in humble service in Christ's name. Is our secret ambition to earn the praise of men or to live our lives in such a way that all we do and all we are gives God the glory?"

I. How many of us would be comfortable having an artist paint our portrait in such a way that it would reflect our flaws?

There is the story about a painter who was painting a picture of Oliver Cromwell. When Cromwell saw the painting he was not pleased because he did not think the painting was genuine. He therefore told the court painter to take it back and paint him warts and all. What Cromwell wanted was an accurate representation of who he was.

A. What we see in the portrait that is painted for us by the words of scripture in Mark 10:35-45 is a picture of who both James and John really were. Their request comes across as being conceited, arrogant and insensitive. Jesus had just told them where it was that they were headed and why. In the words of one theologian, "they had a different object in view from the one that they ought to have". What did he mean by that statement?

To answer that question, consider how a telescope is made. Look through it the way that it is designed, it magnifies things. When it comes to discipleship, we have to look through the telescope backwards. John the Baptist put it this way: Jesus must become greater and we must become less (**John 3:30**).

For James and John to ask for this special request from Jesus shows their presumptuousness. Prior to this conversation, Jesus had told them for a third time about His suffering and death while they were on their way to Jerusalem.

For them to make this request is terribly insensitive. They seemed to possess the same kind of ambition as the Pharisees who always wanted the best seats in the synagogue (**Luke 11:43**).

How often does our ambition resemble theirs? They had an ambitious request that Jesus addressed with a shocking reply.

II. THE AMBITIOUS REQUEST

A. They wanted a spot that would guarantee their rank.

They had asked Jesus to say yes to a request before Jesus even heard what that request was. These two wanted to guarantee their place in rank. They were a part of the inner circle. Maybe they were thinking that this would be helpful in putting them ahead of the game.

The other disciples seemed to get mad at both John and James. Why? Perhaps, they got mad because they were thinking that they, too, might get a special place. If that is the case, then they got mad at both James and John because they were moving in on their territory and seemingly threatening their chances for the seats on the right and the left.

Or, maybe they got mad at James and John for having the audacity to even mention their request because it was selfish. Benjamin Franklin once said, "Nothing is humbler than ambition when it is about to climb".

It is unfortunate that our society today seems to teach us that there is no place for inferiority. In sporting events there must be a winner as well as a loser. The loser usually walks away with a certain amount of shame while the winner goes on to play the fame game along with all of the glory that goes along with it. Some act is if there are no trophies for second place or second best.

B. The seat of honor that both James and John were lobbying for was a trophy--- a first place. The seat on the right was place of honor. The seat on the left was also a place of honor, but not as highly regarded as the right.

There is something wrong with having ambition for selfish reasons (**Philippians 2:3**). It reminds us that the crown always precedes the cross. It also reminds us that those who follow after Christ's example must also carry their crosses because we must lose our lives in Christ through denial of self and selfish desires versus gaining favor with the world (**Mark 8:35-36**).

It never ceases to amaze me just how ambition might come about in getting to enjoy something as simple as a candy bar. I remember when I was little, my sister Cheryl and I could not wait to devour the last Snickers candy bar.

To make things fair, my father told me to cut the candy bar while remembering that my sister would get the largest half. That decree made me be selfish in reverse. I did not want her to get any more than me so I cut the candy as close to being exactly in half as I could.

III. THE SHOCKING REPLY

A. Jesus told these two that they did not know what they were asking for. Jesus told them that what they were asking was not for him to decide. It was God's decision. After all, Jesus said that He was the vine and that God was the vine dresser as he likened His disciples to being branches (**John 15:1-17**).

We have to remember that Jesus left the glory of heaven and "humbled Himself even to the point of death on a cross" (**Philippians 2:8**).

These two Disciples were praying out of harmony with God's will for their lives. They were asking selfishly. Jesus told His disciples and He tells us that we can ask anything in His name and He will do it (**John 14:13**).

In John **14:13-14** Jesus said: "Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it (RSV).

B. This means that if we are going to ask for something in Jesus' name, that what we are asking for must be in harmony with who Jesus is in His character. Obviously, Jesus would not and will not answer a prayer that goes against His own nature.

The catch is that what they were asking was not going to bring glory to God but rather to themselves. They were asking selfishly. **James 4:2** says "You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (NIV). Jesus was telling them that they were asking with the wrong motives.

Jesus asked them if they could drink from the cup He drank from and be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with. The cup in this instance was a symbol of suffering.

In the Old Testament the cup was used as a symbol of both joy and suffering, but it is the latter and not the former that Jesus was speaking of.

C. We must remember that is precisely why Jesus was asking God if the cup could pass Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. In colloquial terms Jesus was asking, "Hey, God, is there not another way that we can accomplish this thing?"

The context of the baptism of which Jesus is speaking here is also about suffering. Jesus had condemned the Pharisees for the desire to have recognition. Jesus condemned them because that went against the example of humility that Jesus lived by.

The Pharisees were always pulling rank, but Jesus taught the opposite that greatness is found in loving and serving others.

There is a story of a lowly corporal who pulled rank. As preparations were being made for battle in the Revolutionary War, a corporal arrogantly ordered his men to lift a heavy beam. A

man in civilian clothes who was walking by said, "Why don't you help them?"

"Sir," he replied indignantly, "I am a corporal!" The man in civilian clothes apologized for his misperception, stripped off his coat and helped the soldiers himself.

When the job was finished, he said, "Corporal, the next time you need your men to help, call on your commander-in-chief. I'll be glad to help."

With that George Washington put on his coat and left. Like every truly great leader, he understood the principle of serving and receiving. (Herb Miller. *Actions Speak Louder Than Verbs*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989, p. 121).

IV. There are times when the Christian way of doing things will clash with those whose ways are self-seeking and self-serving.

A. Christians are to live their lives in such a way that God gets the glory. Remember, the ways of the Christian life are foolish to those who live by the world's standards.

James 3:16 says, "For where you have envy and selfish-ambition, there you will find disorder and every evil practice" (NIV). It is the order in the lives of Christians that provokes those of the world in their disorderly ways because it is the light of Christ that exposes their darkness.

Christians are called to live their lives in such a way that we call what is good, good and what is evil, evil. This charge to those who live according to the ways of the world is what enables them to live the lie that calls good evil and evil good (**Isaiah 5:20**).

Jesus answers them by telling them that they will share in humble ways of living in a lifestyle of self-denial, sacrifice and service. But, what they are asking for (the seats beside Jesus in Heaven) is not for Him but God to decide. Jesus came to do the will of His Father in Heaven.

B. God would decide who would have the place of honor---the seats beside Jesus in Heaven. Jesus was making it clear that this was a decision that was for God and God only to

decide. History tells us that later James was beheaded and John died of natural causes. However, both of them spent their lives in Christ's service.

Tradition tells us that John wrote both the Gospel and the Epistles that bear his name as well as the book of Revelation. In fact, John wrote Revelation while he was in exile in Patmos. Had they lived their lives for their own glory they would have failed in their witness.

We might not lose our heads or live in exile for our faith in Christ as some of Jesus' disciples from the inner circle--the original twelve. But, we will live a life that brings glory to God when we live in harmony with what it is that He has called us to do and to be.

We can only be successful when we are willing to be genuine and authentic to our calling in humble service in Christ's name. **We therefore must ask ourselves "What is our secret ambition- to earn the praise of men or to live our lives in such a way that all we do and all we are gives God the glory?" Amen? Let Us Pray...Amen? Let us Pray...**