

Commentary on Mark 10:35-45
By L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, February 20 , 2011**, is from **Mark 10:35-45**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the *Bible Lesson Commentary*. The **[International Bible Lessons](http://internationalbiblelessons.org)** can be read at <http://internationalbiblelessons.org>.

Mark 10:35-45

35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”

James and John knew that Jesus was the Messiah and they had seen Jesus transfigured. They had great expectations for Jesus and themselves; after all, Jesus had led them up to see His transfiguration, along with Peter, leaving the others behind. Therefore, they may have thought there were special, handpicked leaders of the twelve and they could expect special favors.

36 And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?”

Even though Jesus knew what was on their minds, He wanted them to verbally state their request out loud. Sometimes saying something aloud helps us see that

our attitude or thoughts may be off course or wrong. Jesus did not immediately say, “Okay” or “Of course not,” when He knew beforehand what they wanted. When they told Him what they wanted, it almost sounded like a demand. It seems they may have made this request in the presence of the other disciples. It may be that in some of our prayers we want Jesus to do whatever we ask.

37 And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”

James and John wanted to be second only to Jesus. To sit at Jesus right and/or left hand would put them in power over everyone but Jesus, the Messiah. They interpreted Jesus’ glory as the time when He would take His rightful place on His throne in Jerusalem and rule the world. It appears from Jesus’ answer that He believed His time of glory was giving His life as a ransom for many when He died on the cross (and of course His resurrection from the dead and ascension, later).

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 be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

They did not know what they were asking, because they had disregarded Jesus’ earlier comments about

His suffering and death. Jesus would come into glory when He obeyed His Father even unto death and defeated Satan and all his schemes to defeat God's purposes. The cup He would drink reminds us of the Last Supper and the new covenant in His blood. Baptism reminds us of our dying to an old life and being raised to new life in Jesus Christ. Jesus literally died, was buried, and rose again to make new life and life beyond death possible for us. At this time, James and John had no concept of this.

39 They replied, "We are able." Then 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;

They thought Jesus meant drinking out of a cup at a great celebration or feast. They also knew about baptism with water, which John the Baptist had done and Jesus' disciples practiced. Therefore, they said, "We are able." Jesus then told them indirectly that they would suffer persecution, as He would suffer. James did die a martyr's death and John was put into exile on Patmos. Tradition, not the Bible, states that at one point someone tried to poison John, but the poison turned into a snake a crawled out of the cup. They both drank out of the cup of the new covenant at the Last Supper. Below is a picture of the shield of the Apostle John from <http://www.cassidybros.com/leftGate/>



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.”

Some crosses that were used for crucifixion had a small seat to prolong the victim’s suffering and death. We do not know if Jesus’ cross and/or the crosses of the two criminals that died beside Him had seats or not. God had prepared in advance who would be crucified beside Jesus in fulfillment of prophecy, and the two criminals knew that they were being crucified justly; whereas Jesus was not a criminal: “But the other [criminal] rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong’” (Luke 23:40-42).

41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.

It appears James and John asked this favor in the hearing of the other disciples. If Jesus granted their

request, this would make James and John the rulers over all the rest of them. The only kingdoms they had ever seen or studied were those of the Romans, of Herod, and the kingdoms in their history as a nation. They assumed Jesus intended to set up a similar kingdom.

42 So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

Jesus asked them to think about the kingdoms of this world and how the rulers use their positions of authority to meet their own selfish needs rather than serve the people they ruled. Too often rulers of this world become tyrants and misuse others for their own benefit.

43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,

We learn here why Jesus needed more time to teach His disciples about His kingdom and His mission before He had anyone announce publicly that He was the Messiah, which He did himself on Palm Sunday—though He gave many hints along the way that led to great expectations among the people. Just as He came as a servant, Jesus expected His followers to become

servants. His expectations have not changed over the centuries.

44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

In Jesus' kingdom, greatness is measured by the service one gives to others. To be first, one must become lower than a servant and become a slave—obedient to Jesus without complaint and doing whatever Jesus' asks—knowing that He will never request that we violate the law of love, love of God and our neighbor. The slave does not have the luxury of selective obedience to Jesus. Some key words to remember are “first among you;” the first among the circle of Jesus' disciples is a slave of all His followers under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Jesus did not use the exalted title “Son of God” in speaking to them about His purposes. The title “Son of Man” is exalted, but as the One whom God has sent to serve the human race and to give His life so many could be saved from sin, the power of the devil, and death. If a payment is given to a kidnapper, the kidnapper is supposed to release his captive after receiving the ransom payment. Sometimes this is not done, sometimes the captive is killed, for the

kidnapper is a liar, just as the devil is a liar. But by His death on the cross Jesus freed believers, “many” believers from Satan the kidnapper. This analogy does not mean that Jesus paid the devil anything by His death, and the Bible does not satisfy our curiosity about the details of the transaction; perhaps thinking in general about the analogy is sufficient, for no higher price could have been paid for our lives than the life of the Son of God.

[Feel free to leave your comments, conclusions, and thoughts as a Comment on the Bible Lesson Forum. We can learn from one another.]

Five Questions for Discussion

1. How many people come to Jesus or pray to God, even as a primary part of their prayers, saying, “We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you”? How can we avoid falling into that habit?
2. What would happen to the churches where you live and to the churches in other places around the world, if people were encouraged to come to Jesus and join the church based on the promise that Jesus will do whatever your want? How might this promise be preached today in ways that can be harmful?
3. If Jesus pledged to give you whatever you wanted, what are some of the things you would want from Him? Why would you make these requests of Him?

4. Think of the politicians where you live (people from more than fifty countries read these Bible lessons). In what ways are politicians today similar to or different from what Jesus expects from His followers?

5. What leadership qualities did Jesus say a leader of His followers should maintain? Are these qualities still relevant in the church today? Why or why not? How might we help leaders in the church today become better leaders?

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