

Reading: Mark 10:35-45 (NT Page 1015)

CONTEXT OF THE READING

THERE ARE A FEW THINGS WE NEED TO MAKE CLEAR IN OUR TEXT:

ZEBEDEE WAS a Galilean fisherman, the husband of Salome and the father of James and John. He seems to have been a man of some position in Capernaum, for he had two boats (Luke 5:4) and “hired servants” (Mark 1:20) of his own. No mention is made of him after the call of his two sons by Jesus. In Matthew 20:20 we read that James and John did not ask Jesus to be in a position of honour but their mother.

What were they asking? It seems as if they had a different perspective of the kingdom. It seems evident that they thought of the kingdom in worldly terms as an earthly powerhouse where they could rule as “viceroys” with Jesus. No wonder. The only examples they knew of governance was that of the Gentiles. Jewish people took notice of the Gentile model of authority: ancient near-Eastern kings had long claimed to be gods and ruled tyrannically; Greek rulers had adopted the same posture through much of the eastern Mediterranean. The Roman emperor and his provincial agents (who often showed little concern for Jewish sensitivities) would have been viewed in much the same light: brutal and tyrannical.

But Jesus looked into their hearts and He clearly understood what they were asking. So He first wanted them to hear what they were actually asking by telling them of the consequences of being associated with Him, namely, suffering and even death. Both of them said that they are willing to sacrifice and even die.

Then a remarkable turn happens in our reading. Jesus confronts their almost

hidden agenda by reminding them that seeking power was a Gentile practice. It was quite common for Jewish teachers to use Gentile practices as negative examples to deter their students from doing certain things.

Jesus is also telling them something about God and His kingdom. God's kingdom is different. In His kingdom it is NOT about power and honour, but about the willingness to serve others above yourself. In the kingdom the way to glory is sacrifice, service, and suffering. In the kingdom exaltation involves lowliness.

It was radical for Jesus to define greatness in terms of servanthood, because Jews and the Gentiles considered slaves to be socially inferior. Here Jesus emphatically stated that his disciples must not be like Gentile rulers but like "servants" (*diakonoi*), originally those who waited on tables, and like a "slave" (*doulos*, one totally owned by another and possessing no rights except those given by his or her master). A servant type of ministry, of which Jesus himself is the best example, is set forth.

By calling himself a "servant" and defining his mission as "giving his life a ransom for many," Jesus wanted to make clear to his disciples what His mission on earth is all about. It is not about creating a new earthly kingdom when they reach Jerusalem. It is about dying for the sins of others.

The sentence "for many" is a Semitism that means *all who are many*.

In Mark's gospel it is quite significant that the disciples had no idea who Jesus was and what His mission on earth was. In our reading Jesus addressed their ignorance, but also our own.

The question we need to ask ourselves is: Do we understand the consequences of Jesus' salvation on earth? Amen

REFLECTION OF THE READING

³⁷ They said to Him, “Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.”

After studying the text, and thinking about it, I could not help but notice that the other disciples were quite distraught by the question of the sons of Zebedee.

Why? I think the question can be answered in Jesus’ response by “calling them together” or addressing all of them at the same time. It implies that all of them had actually the same worldly vision of God’s kingdom.

John and James were just saying what all of them were thinking, namely, that when they arrive at Jerusalem Jesus will establish an earthly kingdom.

We also ask these questions of importance but in a different manner. I saw a very funny video clip that someone shared on Facebook of a minister who sat on an aeroplane. The lady asked him about his occupation. He then said that he is the executive of a large human management company who has franchised in every town and village in the UK, even in every town and village in the USA, in Africa, in Australia, and beyond. The company owns hospitals, hospices and schools. The goal of the company is to look after people from the minute they are born until they die. The lady said a loud WOW which made everyone around them turn in their seats. Yes, he said, they even connect beyond this earth....

She then very loudly said, Oh, you must be important. What is this company? He said, the Church!

Some Christian followers today still think of themselves as “being better even holier” than those who are outside the fold of the church. Even in congregations, it seems as if there is a constant battle for power - the power to be seen as “very important and very knowledgeable about God”. There is even a joke about it among ministers in South Africa namely, that when a new minister arrives to see who visits him first, and those who want, at all costs, to be seen as having his “ear”. This is also why in South Africa the title reverend is important – to distinguish ministers from being seen as “friends” to being seen as “servants of the Most High”.

Yes, in this land of ours, it seems as if divisions, opposite groups are ripping the Church apart and it is all due to POWER, because we forgot who we are!

So let’s admit it, we as believers we want to be seen as important within the kingdom of God. We expect recompense and honourable positions. But on this Sunday our Lord and Saviour is telling us that we are all under the final judgement of God. We have no right or authority to salvation but can only depend on the grace and mercy of God. In the meantime, we need to serve God and others in humility without expecting reward. Those who want power only serve themselves and will not be a servant to others.

In this congregation and all other congregations which make up the body of Christ, we need to acknowledge that God has the ultimate power over you and me. It is only God who can judge.

So let us not seek power anymore, within God’s kingdom, or his congregation, but seek to serve Him and others above ourselves. Let us be servants to one another, helping and caring with love.

Amen