

Bi132 The Gospels I

Lesson Bi132-43 Jesus and Greatness

Have you noticed that when people receive too much authority too quickly, it can change their behavior and character? This may be tragic; they can begin to think they are above the law and better than others. What is even more concerning is when believers receive new authority and abuse it. As Jesus journeyed for the last time toward Jerusalem and the cross, he saw this desire for authority arise in the disciples. They misunderstood exactly when the kingdom of God would be set up on earth. They didn't want to miss this opportunity to have positions of authority in this new kingdom. This lesson gives us the Lord's response to those closest to him, who sought to be like the rulers in this present world.

While the group was still traveling, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

"We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them all together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, 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" (Mark 10: 35-45).

The request of these two disciples for special position and prestige disturbed the others when they heard about it. Matthew's account says that it was their mother who first approached Jesus with this request, urged by her two sons. They thought the seats on each side of Jesus would be occupied by his two most important and powerful disciples. They wanted these places for themselves.

Jesus told them they did not really know what they were asking. In response he asked them if they could 'drink the cup' or go through the baptism of suffering and death required. Both these pictures referred to sharing the fate of Jesus—the pain of God's wrath against human

sin and rebellion that he would endure. He would bear the divine punishment of sins in place of sinful mankind. Jesus told them that they would have to endure similar suffering, but he couldn't give the honor of sitting on his right and left to them. Only the Father would determine who received those seats and authority.

Another time when the disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest, Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest" (Luke 9:48). A person will become great only as he looks away from self to please God.

Jesus explains that his kingdom will be different than those of the world. In fact, Jesus overturns the value structure of man. In this world, leaders control and tell people what to do. In Jesus' reign the greatest people would be those who served others. This person we call a 'servant leader.' Jesus came to this world as a servant. To be a servant, a person must think about the needs of others first and try to meet those needs. Such people are the truly great ones.

Jesus is our example, who came to earth to give his life as a ransom for all people. The word 'ransom' was used most commonly to refer to the price needed to redeem a slave. Christ paid the price of his own life, in our place, to free us from the slavery of sin. He gave himself for all, but not all will believe on him.

This **story is important** because it shows that even people who serve Jesus may fall into the temptation of desiring earthly power and authority for themselves.

The **main truth** of this story is that God gives spiritual authority to those who believe on him and become servants in his kingdom now—even as Jesus received his spiritual authority from the Father and lived a life of service to others.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What request did James and John make to Jesus concerning his future throne?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered that they asked Jesus to allow them to sit on his right and his left in his glory, you are correct.
2. How did Jesus answer the request of James and John?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered that Jesus told them these places belong to those for whom the Father has prepared them, you are correct.
3. What did Jesus say the disciples needed to become great?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered, "Jesus said that whoever wanted to become great among them must first become a slave to all of them," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story so you can tell it to someone else. After telling the story to a few of your fellow Christians, discuss ways that you can demonstrate servant leadership in your family, your church, and your community. How would Jesus be serving if he were among you today? How hard is it to be 'slave of all' or the 'least'?