

Mark 10:35-45 Let us serve the Lord who served us! October 21, 2018

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God's grace and peace are yours in Christ Jesus your only Savior from sin. Amen.

We learn about right and wrong motives for prayer and for serving others in Mark 10:35-45

These are your words heavenly Father. Teach us to serve you as you deserve. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Christian friends,

Have you ever wondered why God doesn't always answer the prayers of believers the way they want? Many people in Wisconsin may have been praying last Saturday for the Milwaukee Brewers to win, but God didn't let it happen. We should not blame God for saying "No!" His wisdom is far above our wisdom. His will for people in this world has a much greater purpose than just to win game 7 in a series. He has an eternal plan for His people. And He wants us to go to His Word so we can better understand His will and pray that it be done. Also when we pray, it shouldn't surprise us that God may include our actions as part of the answer.

Let us serve the Lord who served us!

First, we're not serving the Lord to earn anything from God. Why would the brothers, James and John, presume that they could claim places of high honor with Jesus in His Kingdom? Jesus had a special relationship with them. Earlier, He had them witness when He brought a dead girl back to life. They also were with Jesus when He was glorified on the mountain and they saw Moses and Elijah and heard God's voice. But, the fact that Jesus had asked them to be witnesses was far from telling them that they should ask: *"Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory"* (v. 37).

Sometimes, His disciples had expected too little of Jesus, like in the feeding of the 5,000 when they said, Here are a few loaves and fish, but what are they among so many? But, this time, the two disciples asked for too much. Jesus said, *"You don't know what you are asking.... To sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared"* (v38, 40). God the Father from eternity had planned people's salvation in Christ. He knew who would be saved and what positions of honor to give them in heaven. The sacrifices that the disciples made as they left their jobs or friends to follow Christ, the amount that they suffered for Christ, even if they died for the sake of Christ, it would not win a position for them in heaven. Whatever they were to receive from God was based on His grace in Christ. St. Paul wrote, *"At the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace"* (Romans 11:5-6).

What should we learn from these words of Jesus? We want to be able to pray so that Jesus doesn't have to say to us, *"You don't know what you are asking"* (v. 38) If we are praying with sinful motives or are praying against the will of God, there is no way He will answer us. If we think that we can earn blessings or favor with God by our actions or words, we shouldn't be surprised if God says "NO!" to our prayers.

If we were James or John, what should we have prayed to Jesus? We should begin our prayer like Peter, who was awed to be with Jesus at the miraculous catch of fish: *"Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man"* (Luke 5:8). We should say: O, holy Lord, we cannot live in your presence as sinners. Like the tax collector in the temple we should say, *"God have mercy on me, a sinner"* (Luke 18:13). We do not deserve to have you bless us in life and certainly we do not deserve to be with you in heaven. By your grace through your Son, you have promised to prepare a place for us. We want to be with you forever but only on the basis of the sacrifice of your Son who has taken away our sins. We would be so grateful if by your grace we entered heaven at all, even if it was the farthest corner from your throne. Thank you Lord, for your saving love us that depends on Christ alone!

Those words show people who have faith in Jesus. Yet, James and John had faith. They trusted in Jesus as their Savior. They were willing to “drink the cup” of suffering or even die for Jesus’ sake, at least they thought that they were ready to do that. Yet, because of their sinful natures, they still found it hard not to think that there was something in them or some action that they needed to do to influence God to accept them.

So, what should we do – no good works at all? Should we just live like the worst sinners, so God’s grace will shine even more? By no means! Paul reminds us, “*You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness*” (Romans 6:18). Because of Jesus’ sacrifice for us, we thankfully serve to honor our God.

Second, we will serve the Lord because of Jesus’ free gift of heaven! Think of the humility Jesus had to win our salvation! God’s Son became one of us. He humbled Himself to serve us and place Himself under God’s law. He kept that law perfectly earning a place in heaven for Himself. He humbled Himself even more by experiencing what He called the “*cup*” or “*baptism*” (v. 39) of suffering and death. He suffered the agony of hell as He hung from the cross with our sins laid on Him. He said, “*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45). Christ alone could make the payment to satisfy God’s justice for our sins.

Out of thanks for what Christ has done for us, we are motivated to serve others in whatever way God allows us to serve. Knowing what Christ has done, we want to be humble servants. Several times, the disciples argued over who would be the greatest. Once, Jesus took a little child and said to them, “*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). We can serve our God and everyone when we put others first for the sake of our Savior. We can learn to be humble by following Christ’s example.

As we see by Jesus’ disciples, being humble is not easy in our attitude or actions. But, Jesus does offer encouragement. He speaks in several places of rewards. The rewards from God are not earned, but rewards promised by God’s grace for the sake of Christ’s perfect life. God offers blessings here on earth. Christ forgives our sins so we have peace God. That helps us to forgive and show kindness to other people. In the Old Testament, when Joseph was made 2nd in command in Egypt, which he didn’t ask for but God put him in that position, Joseph was able to forgive his brothers who had hated and harmed him and he even showed them great kindness to save their lives from a famine. When we have that same trust that God is working everything for our good, we can forgive and show kindness, too.

Also, what a comfort it is that through faith in Christ as our Savior we are the children of God. We will inherit eternal life by God’s underserved love in Christ. When we arrive in heaven we will be amazed that God will praise us. We can’t all have the highest places in heaven, but honor waits for those who serve the Lord by faith. In the parables in Matthew 25, Jesus quotes the master who doesn’t owe his servant anything, yet by his kindness he said, “*Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!*” (v. 23). Later in Matthew 25 Jesus praises believers who show acts of kindness to people, saying that what they did for others, they did for Him (v.34-40). Jesus promised that we will “*eat and drink at His table in His kingdom...*” (Luke 22:30). We don’t earn the blessings of God’s grace, but we will have them because Christ Jesus suffered and died and rose to prove His promises for us are true.

So, whether God answers our prayers about baseball teams or not, we will keep praying that God’s will be done. We will keep on serving our Lord, because our Savior served us and gave His life to set us free from sin. In Christ, we are His forever! Amen.