

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *Dealing With Messy Relationships: Serve*. Our fallen inclination turns us inward and causes us to view relationships for what we can get out of them. But Christ modeled another way, the counter-cultural path of service.

Introduction:

Questions are powerful things. You'll notice in this text that Jesus asks the same question to James and John as he asks to a blind man named Bartimaeus. And in this question their hearts and their theology are exposed. The question is simple. What do you want me to do for you? How would you answer that question?

That question that Jesus asks is quite the probing question isn't it? How we answer that question really says something about us. It reveals what we treasure. It reveals who we trust. It even has a tendency of digging into and displaying those parts of our lives where we've stopped hoping; those places where it might feel too big to ask about.

Here is the ultimate question of this passage: Do your desires match the culture of the kingdom of Christ? If God answered your every prayer what would things look like? Would you be epic? Would you be living large?

1. How not to be a servant

The word that is translated "came up to him" is one of those loaded words which likely points to them cornering Jesus and making this request. It's likely the same question the other disciples are thinking but these two are brave enough to ask it. They essentially ask Jesus for a blank check. And his response (what do you want) lays them bare. "Let us sit at your right and left in your glory" is their response. Let's analyze that a bit.

There is some good in this request. They are acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah. They are still dependent on him, after all they know they can't be part of the Kingdom apart from him. And they also are keeping Jesus central—they don't want to rule apart from Jesus. But at its core this is a pretty ugly request. It's really a means to self-glory. James Edwards explains it well:

"The brothers hope to honor Jesus while honoring themselves. How easily worship and discipleship are blended with self-interest; or worse, self-interest is masked as worship and discipleship. Ouch. Their desires aren't yet crucified. They are just seeing Jesus as a backdoor means to getting what they really want—prestige, power, and position.

James and John *are* Jesus-centered but they are Jesus-centered in the hopes that Jesus is going to be James and John centered. There is a way that we can serve others in the hopes that it will fulfill some sort of psychological need in us. We can ask that God will give us more positions for service but we're really stooping for our own ends. I think Ed Welch is correct:

"This explains why Christ is sometimes not enough for us. If I stand before him as a cup waiting to be filled with psychological satisfaction, I will never feel quite full. Why? First, because my lusts are boundless; by their very nature, they can't be filled. Second, because Jesus does not intend to satisfy my selfish desires. Instead, he intends to break the cup of psychological need (lusts), not fill it."

If our requests and our service doesn't match the culture of the kingdom then they will not bear God-honoring fruit. The kingdom is one of mercy and not so much of ruling (v42-44).

2. The making of a servant

Mark intentionally contrasts the story of the disciples with blind Bart. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He, like the disciples before him, is acknowledging that Jesus is the Messiah. And he also realizes that Jesus alone can help.

I'm convinced that Mark has placed these two stories together to highlight Bartimaeus as an ideal disciple: one who is desperate and sees Jesus as his only refuge. When you don't realize how utterly inadequate and miserable your condition is, you say wrong-headed things like, "make me epic". Or, "yeah, we can drink the cup of suffering—we've got what it takes, Jesus". And then you go back and fight with the other disciples about who Jesus loves the most.

I want you to notice what happens too. Here you've got the crowd shouting at this man to be quiet. Now why is that happening? Because he is insignificant. We all know Jesus is going to Jerusalem to claim his kingdom. He can't be stopped by some blind beggar. He's got business to take care of.

But this is the very reason that Jesus came. And it is here that we learn much about serving others. It's not dependent upon who they are. Jesus doesn't serve to further his reputation he serves because that's who He is.

3. Serving is an intentional lowering of self

There is a reason why Blind Bart and the disciples request is in the same spot in the New Testament. God had sovereignly orchestrated these events to teach the disciples and us about the nature of discipleship and service. Jesus asks the same question to both disciples. One realizes his desperation and the narrative places him "on the way" to Jerusalem. Mark wants us to see that Bartimaeus has joined the suffering Messiah on the humbling path of service.

This is what serving is. It's an intentional lowering of the self. Until this happens, we'll be like James and John and our prayers will be self-focused. We might still keep Jesus central but we'll do so in the hopes that Jesus will be centered upon us. The way we serve is a testimony to what is in our hearts.

Conclusion: Jimmy Needham in his song Nightlights has a phenomenal exposition of this principle. May this be our prayer.

Be Thou exalted over my reputation
'Cause applause is a poor form of soul medication

And I've tried it for years but my symptoms remain
Still fretting the day that they'll misplace my name
Still selling my soul for American fame
Treating the promotion of Jesus like a well oiled machine
Advancing His kingdom just to snag some acclaim

Now, I'm both comforted and haunted that it isn't just me though
I see a nation of people needing to feed their own egos
Parading status like steeples
Do we not know it's evil to love ourselves
More than both God and His people?

But see, here's where You turn this poem on it's head
'Cause the greatest among us came as servant instead
And You humbled Yourself to the point of Your death
Apparently love for the Father's glory runs red

So friends, will we point to the Son till our own flames grow dim?
Will our bright lights become merely night-lights near Him?
Words echo once, let them echo again
Be Thou exalted over my reputation

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