

## **“Paradox of Christianity” Mark 10:35-45**

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

**And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”**

**Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And they said to him, “We are able.” And 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, 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.”**

**And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.**

**And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

Can you really believe when it is said that we, Christians, need to be different than the world around us. That even if we are in this world, we are not of this world. That we need to live according different values and different principles.

Are we actually able to describe some of these different values and different principles? Yes, we actually can describe them very clearly, and today’s Gospel reading can be of great help.

You know that since the apostle Peter in the power of the Holy Spirit confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus begun to teach His disciples what His true mission was.

That He “must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.” (Mark 8:31)

It is so interesting to see, how Mark describes the disciples’ reaction to this teaching. The first time, when Jesus told them what is going to happen, Peter took Him aside and rebuke: “Far be it from you!” For he wasn’t setting his mind on the things of God, but on the things of men.

Next time when Jesus taught them about His mission, soon after He had finished, the disciple begun to argue who is the greatest among them. They still had no idea that Jesus was launching a new kingdom, with new rules and new principles.

And right before the events described in today's gospel reading, Jesus had tried to teach His disciples again that His mission is not about glory and power in this world, but about sufferings and rejection, about death and resurrection.

Soon after He had finished "James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." Just think about this question! They definitely didn't suffer from shyness.

They are giving Jesus a blank check and asking to sign it. And then they'll put in what they want. This is like children asking parent: "Just promise that you will do for me whatever I want." What were they thinking?!

Then Jesus said: "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." According to power structures of that times, the one who was the greatest sat in the middle, the second greatest sat at his right and the third greatest sat at his left.

Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking." What were they asking for? They were after power and influence. After fame. They wanted to be great in this kingdom that Jesus would establish, as they pictured it.

We need to admit, that quite often we may talk as pious Jesus disciples, and regularly worship like true followers of Jesus, but what we truly are after is – power, influence, fame, and great name for ourselves.

We may want to be the best Christians, the best people, the most accomplished and acknowledged in our ministry. So that everyone would know how wonderful persons we are.

We may be tempted to use our status as Jesus disciples and members of His Church to bolster our own ambitions to be somebody. This is exactly what John and James asked for.

Then Jesus asked them: "**Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?**" What He meant was His mission, His sufferings and death, when He took upon Himself the sin of the world, including yours and mine.

"And they said to him, "[Yes, yes] **we are able.**" "Of course, Jesus, whatever you ask, just promise that you will give us what we desire." "**And 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, 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."**"

Indeed, as you know, latter they really got to drink the same cup, and to be baptized with the same baptism – with sufferings and death for the sake of their

Lord. All the apostles, but John, were violently murdered because they wouldn't stop witnessing about Jesus Christ and what He has done for us.

**“But when the ten [disciples] heard [what James and John had asked for], they began to be indignant at James and John.”** Of course, how did they dare to ask for something that they all desired. What a shamelessness!

At that time none of them had understood that Jesus had called them to live according to very different principles. Totally opposite to what we have in this world. That's why Jesus used this situation to teach them again.

He called them and said: **“You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

Does it make sense? Just be honest with your answer! How can this make sense: **“whoever would be great among you must be your servant”**? Tell me how can this possibly make sense?

This is one more of Christian paradoxes. This is where we can see how different it is to be a Christian. We have different values and different principles for our lives – set by our Lord and Savior. As one pastor wrote:

“It is as if the world and the kingdom of God are parallel universes with different laws of physics. In the world, life is about getting. If I am great, that means that I am higher than you and I have more for myself. In the kingdom of God, on the other hand, life is about giving.”

When we understand what Jesus teaches, it actually makes perfect sense. Let me rephrase what Jesus said. ‘Whoever among you *is* truly great, will be your servant. That is, if you *are* truly great, your greatness will be expressed as service to others.

Let's unpack it. How does this greatness stuff work in this world? The higher you are, the more power you have, the more people serve you, the greater you are. That simple. Who are the greats of this world? People with power and influence.

And if you want to be great, this is what you need to strive for. More power, more influence, more people serving you. That's a simple formula, this is how you can build your greatness. This is what so many in this world try to do.

We also know that power and glory are always about me. They are supposed to lift me up, to make me greater. They are the very opposites of ‘love your neighbour’ and ‘consider others as more important’.

In this world the concept of ‘being a servant’ or ‘serving others’ is considered as something lowly. To be clear when we as Christians talk about ‘servant’ or ‘serving other’, we don’t mean jobs or tasks that are demeaning and humiliating, and which people are forced to do to earn for living.

We talk about voluntary attitude, where we try to love others, by serving them and considering them as more important. And this, in fact, is not about being lowly. It is the very opposite.

The truth is that you can’t properly serve others if you are not already great. If you are not already great, then you will focus on how to build up your own importance. Your good works, even if done for others, will ultimately serve to build up you.

To make you feel that you are such a good person. Then you can’t truly and selflessly care for others, for you still need to take care of yourself.

The calling to serve is a royal calling. It is a calling only for those who are already great and don’t need to worry about it. I’ll say it once more, only someone who is already great can truly serve others for he doesn’t need to worry about his own greatness anymore.

Look at Jesus! He served everyone. He served you. He even went to the cross and gave up His life so that only you could live with Him in the age to come. He gave His life as a ransom for many.

We may wonder, how was this possible? How could He empty Himself, how could He humble Himself to such extent?! The answer is very simple. He knew who He was. Beloved Son of God the Father. The heir of God’s eternal Kingdom. He already had everything, therefore He could serve others so self-sacrificially.

And the same is true also about you. Yes, about you! You are already as great and important as you could possibly be. It is given to you by God, for you are great and important to your Creator and Redeemer.

First, you are created in God’s own image to be His own representatives where He has put you. Each of you in your unique situation. Second, you are great for you are so important, so worthy in eyes of Jesus Christ.

Remember, He gave up His life for you. For you! Just let it sink in. You are as great and important and valuable as any human being could possibly be. You have it all already. You are a member of Jesus eternal family.

You are sons and daughters of God the Father. You are heirs of God’s eternal Kingdom and co-heirs with Jesus. All of this is already yours. You don’t need to toil and sweat for greatness and importance.

And because you are great, you don't need to use others to bolster your greatness, you can be servants for others. You are free to take up this royal calling. As the apostle Peter said: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation..."

As we can see, we, Christians, we indeed live according different rules and principles. For we are citizens of God's Kingdom, of this parallel Universe, where everyone already has everything and where the greatest is the one who serves.

It may seem challenging to follow different rules while we are still in this world. Sure, it may be challenging. It may be challenging for our old Adam, for our old sinful self who cares more about us than about others.

It may be challenging for our greed, for our thirst for splendor and recognition in this world. We need to be clear that we don't follow Jesus because it promises us great gains and benefits or will help us to feel that we are such a good people.

We follow Him because He is the King of this everlasting Kingdom. He is the truth and the way and the life, we follow Him, for thanks to Jesus, we already are as great as we can possibly be.

Amen.