

## Growing in our Willingness to live Sacrificially Mark 10:35-45

When you were a young child  
did you have a dream about what you wanted to be when you grew up?  
My first dream about my future life was an unconventional one:  
I wanted to be a marathon runner! A high level athlete!  
But not just any form of athletics like football or cricket,  
I wanted to run the marathons!

I think it was because in 1982 I was 5 years of age,  
and the Commonwealth Games were held in Brisbane.  
And this was a time when Robert De Castella was at his peak.  
Do you remember Robert De Castella?  
An Australian marathon runner from the 1980s,  
easily identifiable with his big bushy moustache.  
He won gold in the Commonwealth games marathon  
and as a five year old child this fired up my imagination.

Then my interests changed; I became interested in dinosaurs as lots of children do.  
And so I wanted to dig up dinosaurs as a job

Then when I was in high school I loved the idea of building and constructing things  
and so engineering became an interest.  
And so I studied my maths and physics and chemistry,  
only to think to myself at the end of year twelve  
"I've had enough of all that thanks!"  
Lots of different plans when I was a youngster,  
All them born out of my imagination of what was interesting.

These days it seems that there is another factor in the mix  
as young people dream about their future.  
In 2009 a British survey discovered that the top three dream jobs  
for children aged 5-11 were: Sports star, pop star, actor.

Now, aspiring to be a world-class athlete is something I can identify with  
(since I myself wanted to be the next Robert De Castella),  
but given that the next two responses were pop-star and actor,  
it would appear that the focus is perhaps on the *fame*  
that comes with high level athletics  
rather than the physical *achievement* that it represents.

In fact, the survey compared these top answers  
with the top answers from a similar survey 25 years earlier.  
Teacher, banker and doctor were the top answers in 1984.

All of a sudden it's the desire for fame and glory that's driving our children.

And I think we adults of an older generation are not immune to this.

Having an interesting job is a wonderful thing,  
but even if we are lucky enough to have that  
we soon start desiring other things from life, don't we?  
Perhaps more recognition, perhaps more power, perhaps more money.  
And so I wonder, what exactly is it that *you* desire form *your* life?

Today we reach the halfway point in our series in the NT Gospels,  
a series asking the question: if we are wanting to grow to be more like Christ,  
then what is that kind of growth going to produce in us?  
What is this Christ-like shape that we are growing into?

And in today's passage Jesus articulates the big goal, as he saw it, of his own life.

In a sense it's very appropriate that his passage sits at the centre of our series  
because so many of the others are based in what we hear Jesus say today.  
Jesus describes a purpose for his life that personally I find very challenging,  
but I take comfort in the fact that the disciples found it challenging as well.

And it's with the disciples that we begin, as we open up Mark 10, starting at v35.

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." A brave move, asking Jesus basically to write a blank cheque. But Jesus knows better than to give an unqualified yes <sup>36</sup> "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. <sup>37</sup> They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

The seats at the right and left were the seats of honour,  
the seats reserved for those at the top of the invitation list.  
What James and John were asking was to be the Head Prefects of Heaven,  
The co-captains of eternity.  
A bold request if there ever was one. (Stott: worst prayer ever recorded!)

So what was it that drove these brothers to issue such a bold request?

We know from the Gospel accounts  
that these guys were from a well-to-do family,  
they had left their family business up in Galilee to become Jesus' disciples;  
perhaps they were feeling a twinge of regret in giving up their past life  
and saw an opportunity to climb to the top again.

Or maybe it was a calculated move to push Peter out of the inner circle.  
Out of the twelve, Jesus had already formed a closer circle of three disciples:  
James, John and also Peter.  
Were James and John feeling threatened by Peter's rising status?  
We will never know for sure about the reasons,  
but what is clear is the intended effect of this request:

Prominence, power, and pre-eminence above all other Christians,  
be they past, present or future.

Now, my assumption is that this is a desire that is familiar to all of us.

In fact, if you were to say to me that a desire for some kind of glory  
is a desire that is totally foreign to your way of thinking,  
I admit that I'd have a hard time believing you.

But while this is a universal hunger,

It's also true that it can manifest itself in different ways.  
As we'll see in a few moments time,  
for James and John the type of glory they were seeking was a glory of power.  
The kind of glory you get from being able to boss others about.  
As they imagined taking their seats at Jesus right and left,  
they imagined sitting not on a stool or chair but on a throne.  
I wonder, is this the type of glory you might be tempted to grab on to?

For me, I think it's the type of glory that comes with fame and influence.

I confess that like many of our young people  
I myself am susceptible the spirit of our age, the spirit of celebrity.  
I realized this during a conversation after church a few years back.  
One of my colleagues had just preached a very challenging sermon on  
humility, and as we discussed what we had heard a friend said to me "As a  
member of the clergy it must be very hard for you to not desire a higher  
calling, like becoming a Bishop or an Archbishop." And my immediate  
reaction was to say "I don't want to be an *Arch*bishop, and nor do I really  
want to be a Bishop. But I tell you what I do want. I want to be the guy whose  
sermons are listened to around the world. Power doesn't excite me that  
much, fame and influence and the reputation of having things worth listening  
to. That's something I would love." What a dark heart I have lying within me.

Maybe for you it's the glory of being handsome and attractive.

Maybe it's the glory of having the most possessions,  
of racking up the most achievements  
of being the smartest, of being your parent's favourite,  
of being your child's favourite.  
Maybe it's the glory you seek through your children's successes.  
All of these are variations of the same theme, aren't they?  
And maybe like James and John we can find ourselves praying  
the same prayer: *Lord, grant us this glory.*

And so how does Jesus respond?

Remarkably gently actually.  
Such arrogance could have called forth a response of 'fire and fury',  
(to quote the American President),  
But Jesus leaves the indignation to the other disciples

and simply responds with a reality check.  
And it's a reality check that comes in two parts.

The first is that heavenly glory, glory as God understands it,  
is the very opposite of what the world thinks it is.

v 38 "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?"

James and John were bold but not entirely stupid.

They knew the first and foremost position was being reserved for Jesus;  
they wanted to be at his side while he remained in the centre.

But they failed to recognize the type of path Jesus would take  
in order to arrive at the centre.

It was a path where Jesus would drink from a certain *cup*.

Do you remember what we discovered last week?

The cup is an OT image symbolizing God's righteous anger upon human sin,  
an anger that Jesus would turn aside on our behalf as he hung upon the cross.  
And it was Christ's willingness to do this that secures his eternal glory.

Likewise it was a path that involved a certain *baptism*.

In Jesus day the word *baptism* had a much wider meaning

that what it does today.

These days we understand baptism to refer to the religious ceremony where  
a new Christian is received into the church.

From there we get another meaning when we use baptism to speak about a  
new beginning in a more general sense;

for example we sometimes speak of a 'Baptism of fire' when speaking about a  
rough start to a new chapter in your life.

But in this case to be baptized means to be overwhelmed by disaster,  
to be overcome by calamity.

There's a remnant of this meaning in our religious ceremonies

when people are baptized by full-immersion;

they are overwhelmed by the water as they are dunked under.

At the cross Jesus would be overwhelmed by the sin of humanity

and by God's righteous judgment.

And again, it's on account of this baptism that he secures his eternal glory.

And so when Jesus asks his disciples

"Can you drink my cup and can you receive my baptism?",

he's basically asking "Can you suffer the things that I am about to suffer,  
because that's the path that eternal glory requires.

Those who'll sit with me will have to suffer with me as well."

James and John are still brimming with confidence.

"We can," they answer Jesus in verse 39

So Jesus offers the second part of his reality check,

as he informs his friends that glory is controlled, not by us, but by God.

"You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, <sup>40</sup> 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."

James and John aren't going to be given a choice,

they *will* have a share in the sufferings of Jesus,

even though the true nature of glory is something they are yet to

comprehend.

And as the NT runs its course

we discover that James is put to death not long after Jesus in Acts ch12,

and John will escape the sword but will live out his days banished in exile.

And Jesus speaks of both these fates as being already determined,

as are the positions of honour that James and John were after;

it's already been resolved as to who will sit in those places.

My bet is that they'll be people we've never even heard of,

People who served Christ with great distinction

but with virtually no worldly recognition.

The lesson here is that true glory is a God given thing,

It's futile to try and reach out and grab it or build it from our own resources.

The best path forward is to serve God as best we can with the abilities and opportunities that he's given us, and to leave the rewards in his hands.

If there is one thing he asks of us, it's to be willing to take up the role of a servant, to be willing to live not for glory, but to live sacrificially.

The final verse of our text Jesus makes very plain the path that he has chosen, A path the very opposite of what James and John were seeking after

For even the Son of Man (a title Jesus used for himself) did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

True glory, the glory that is recognized in heaven,

is a glory that comes at a cost – for Jesus it was the cost of his own life.

For James and John it would mean giving up their dreams of ruling over the others

V 41 tells us that the others became indignant with James and John.

Was it because they were disappointed with their friends' selfishness,

or was it because they were annoyed that they didn't think of this first?

Maybe it was the second reason,

because Jesus calls them *all* together to hear the following lesson:

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

What might imitating the selfless Jesus look like? Giving up power is one answer.  
Do you find that you always need to get your own way?  
Do you find it hard to allow others space at work or perhaps in your family?  
Are you too busy, or is your time too precious,  
to stop and stoop to a lower level,  
helping another out in a task that's below your pay grade or capability?  
This is worldly view of leadership...may that not be so with us,  
may we always be mindful of opportunities to serve and not be served.

And sacrifices are called for in other spheres of life as well.  
The whole of Mark chapter 10 is a great read  
because you get what I call the big three temptations: sex, money and power,  
all of which require certain sacrifices from us.

Verses 1-12 has Jesus teaching about divorce.  
The culture of the time was that divorce was relatively free and easy, if someone captured your eye and you were already married, then securing a divorce was fairly straight forward, especially for men. And then once free you could take up with your new love interest. But Jesus reminds people that God's intention for marriage is that it's for life. Divorce was only ever intended as a concession  
for those times when it was really necessary.  
And so following Christ will mean sacrificing and not acting upon each and every physical desire that we are tempted by.

In verses 17-31, we have the well-known interaction between Jesus and a man of great wealth. He says he wants to follow Jesus, but Jesus tests his resolve by asking him to give up all his money. God will not put up with any competitors, be they other religions or the God of money, and so some sacrifices will have to be made. We will not be as rich as we otherwise might be, if we are following Jesus. If Jesus gave up his life, then surely its no big thing to give up our power, our desires, our wealth.

About the same time as I was dreaming of becoming the next Robert De castella,  
I also opened my first bank account.  
It was one of those Commonwealth Bank accounts for school children.  
Do they still do banking in primary schools?  
I remember when the bank rep came to talk to us about it.  
She handed out the passbooks, which were brightly coloured  
with pictures off all this cool stuff: bicycles, electrical goods, toys and gadgets.  
And she asked us to look at these pictures and she said to us.  
“If you put money in the bank each week,  
you’ll be able to buy some of this stuff!”

In many ways an important lesson about saving,  
but Jesus has something else to add doesn't he?  
"If your life's goal is to follow me", he says,  
"then some of those things you will have to sacrifice".  
Can't remember if my Scripture teacher ever said that.  
I hope she did.