

“Ambitious Servants”

<sup>35</sup> Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” <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.” <sup>38</sup> “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?” <sup>39</sup> “We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “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.”

<sup>41</sup> When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. <sup>42</sup> Jesus called them 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. <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. <sup>45</sup> 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.”

There’s really two different opinions one might come to in reaction to James and John’s actions. One person might think, “Now there’s a couple of go getters. Those guys are bold and ambitious. Those guys have the guts and mindset that makes a good leader.” Another person might react in the same offended, insulted, and displeased way that the other ten disciples did. “Can you believe the arrogance and selfishness of James and John? Who do those guys think they are?”

The main opinion in this case, the one that matters above all others, is Jesus opinion. I find it interesting and telling that Jesus doesn’t chastise James and John for making the request that they did. It seems Jesus is trying to tell James, John, and all Christians that he wants us to confidently approach God with our requests. And Jesus wants us to be ambitious people. People who set goals and strive to be the best they can be. I think that is a great concept for us to consider this morning. We all know people who give less than their full effort in life, who waste their abilities and blessings from God. We see it happen at school, at work, at home, at church. We see it among strangers, acquaintances, family and friends. Instead of giving 100% effort, instead of doing the best job possible, instead of having a positive attitude about what is being done – laziness is on full display, doing the bare minimum, acting like it is such a chore to use my God given gifts. We have all seen this in others and sadly other people have seen it in us. This is not the way it should be among Christians. The most ambitious people in the world should be you and me! And the reason that is true is because of the Savior that we follow. Listen to what Jesus told his disciples immediately before James and John made their request. **“We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise” (vs. 33-34).** Talk about being ambitious! Talk about setting difficult goals for yourself! Jesus had just left the mountain of Transfiguration so that he could let everyone mistreat him without retaliating. Jesus didn’t just set out to take responsibility for a few people’s sins – he made it his goal to pay for every last sin of every single sinner including yours and mine. Jesus set his mind on suffering the full wrath of God against sinners in Hell. Jesus wasn’t just satisfied to die, but he also made it his goal to save the world and conquer death by rising from the dead. When it came to our eternal salvation, Jesus dotted every “i” and crossed every “t,” he gave it his 100% effort. And his attitude the whole time was one that was positive and willing.

When we reflect on the blood, sweat, and effort Jesus put forth so that sinners like us might enjoy peace with God and a future in heaven – I hope we are moved and motivated to be ambitious goal setting Christians. I hope we have conversations with God like James and John did. **“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” (vs. 37-39).** Maybe our conversation is a little different, but hopefully it is just as ambitious. Jesus, help me to be the best spouse, the best parent, the best son or daughter, the best friend, the best student, the best worker, the best church member, the best Christian the best \_\_\_\_\_(you fill in the blank) – that I can be! Help me to give my best effort all the time in everything.

Jesus didn’t discipline James and John for their ambitiousness, but he did give them two things to keep in mind when it comes to being ambitious Christians. **Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,’...When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John” (vs. 39, 41).** Striving to be an ambitious servant of Jesus is not going to be easy. James was the first of the 12 disciples to die a martyr’s death. John lived the longest of the 12 disciples but he had to experience the pain of seeing the other 11 die. Plus, he himself was in and out of prison and came close on several occasions to dying for being an ambitious servant of Jesus. Striving to be goal setting ambitious servants of Jesus is not always going to be well received by others. Putting forth your best effort might make others feel uncomfortable as they encounter God through you as you ambitiously live your faith or they might feel guilty that they aren’t doing the same – so they respond by giving you a hard time, or accusing you of arrogance and selfishness, or they don’t react at all to your ambitiousness seeming to care little about your efforts or if you burn yourself out serving. Don’t be surprised when this happens because Jesus says, **“You WILL drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,’ (vs. 39).** The second thing Jesus wants us to keep in mind when it comes to being ambitious Christians is this – **“Jesus called them 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,<sup>44</sup> 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” (vs. 42-45).** There’s no doubt that Jesus was ambitious, but did you notice why he was ambitious? It was for the benefit of others. Why didn't Jesus tell the blind and sick and lame to bow down and worship him? Because he was too busy healing them. Why didn't Jesus tell the 5000 to bring him some food after he shared God’s Word with them? Because he was too busy serving them food to the point that they were all full. Why didn't Jesus relax on a throne and tell his followers to entertain him? Because he was too busy exhausting himself helping others spiritually and physically. Why didn't Jesus ask the waiter at the Lord's Supper to bring him more wine and more bread? He was too busy, on his hands and knees, washing the feet of his disciples. Isn't it amazing, that the one who is pure and holy serves sinners like you and me? Do you know what the biggest act of service is, in the history of the world? Some talk about Bill Gates and how his foundation gives billions of dollars for good causes. Some talk about people like Mother Theresa who spend their lives taking care of the poor and needy. But the biggest act of service is what has happened to you and me. Jesus took care of our sin problem as the eternal consequences for all of our selfishness is forgiven and gone, paid for by Jesus Christ on the cross. He gave up his life to save us! We will never experience a greater act of service than that! Jesus wants us to be ambitious too, but he invites us to use that ambition to serve others. Do you know what's ugly in the eyes of God? It's when a person is using what God blessed them with just for themselves. Do you know what's beautiful in the eyes of God? It's when he watches you and me serve another person out of thankfulness for our Savior Jesus.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let’s be ambitious servants of Jesus who persevere and who strive to selflessly serve others in every aspect of our lives. Amen.