44 Mark 10:35-45 The Request of James and John

Discussion: How do you react when someone "pushes in" to a queue (e.g., in a supermarket)?

Mark 10	Matthew 20	Luke 22
The Request of James and John **35** 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 mother's request*** **20** Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him.	**24** A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

Mark 10	Matthew 20	
36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. **37** They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."	**21** 'What is it you want?' he asked. She said, 'Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.'	
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?" **39** "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, **40** 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."	**22** 'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said to them. 'Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?' 'We can,' they answered. **23** Jesus said to them, 'You will indeed drink from my cup, 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 by my Father.'	
41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.	**24** When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.	

42 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.	**25** Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.	**25** Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.
43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, **44** and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. **45** 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."	**26** Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, **27** and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – **28** just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'	**26** But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. **27** For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

Comparison

- The Gospels of Mark and Matthew offer a similar account of the event, except that James and John make the approach to Jesus in Mark's Gospel, while it is their mother making the request in Matthew. Luke reports only part of this event, presenting it as a dispute between all the Disciples and locating it at a later date (after the Last Supper).
- The scene is in two parts; 1) their dialogue with Jesus about who will be the greatest, and 2) Jesus takes the Twelve aside and makes pronouncements.[98]

Context

- After all three passion predictions in Mark (that he must suffer, be killed and rise on the third day), there followed a dispute between the Disciples where they appear to be jockeying for position and prestige. Each time, Jesus was required to take the Twelve aside for private teaching.[99] This occasion was perhaps the most blatant example of their self-centredness in contrast to the self-sacrifice of Jesus.[100]
- This is the only time in Mark's Gospel that James and John are mentioned apart from the Twelve. Peter is side-lined here, leading commentators to speculate that the source for this story is probably Peter.[101] To speak of *sitting* rather than *reclining* (as at a banquet table) implies a royal throne with a place either side of it, leaving no room for Peter.[102]

Key Points

- The audacity of their request is more apparent in Mark, where it is a *demand* they make of Jesus. In Matthew's account, it is unlikely that the mother of James and John acted alone as Jesus makes his response in the plural, to *them*.[103]
- Jesus first asked "What is it you want me to do for you?" which exposed their true motives, revealing that they were seeking their own glory rather than that of God.[104]
- James and John had become fixated on power. Along with Peter, they were part of Jesus' 'inner circle', maybe leading them to feel they had a higher rank and therefore deserved seats of honour over the others.[105] As they would soon arrive in Jerusalem, they may have felt this is to be a last chance to get their request in to Jesus.[106]

- You may recall that in Session 42 (The Rich Young Ruler), Peter said "We Have left everything to follow you". In Matthew's Gospel (19:28), Peter additionally asked "What, then, will there be for us?", to which Jesus replied:

  "'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'"

  However, in Session 43 (the Third Prediction of His Suffering, Death and Resurrection), Luke 18:34 confirms that a true understanding was hidden from the Twelve. It is likely, therefore, that they still perceived Jesus as a David-like Messianic figure who was about to miraculously overthrow the Romans when they arrived in Jerusalem the following week.[107,108] They were thinking in terms of political power and had misunderstood the roles Jesus has given them and that of Jesus himself.[109] While they had since answered for themselves the question *"Who is this man?",* they did not comprehend *how* his mission would be achieved. They recognised Jesus to be the Messiah after witnessing his miracles, plus Peter's confession and the Transfiguration, but had not grasped from any of the three predictions that Jerusalem will involve suffering, not earthly glory.[110]
- In the OT, the cup is sometimes used as an image of blessing (Ps. 16:5, 23:5, 116:13) but more often represents judgement (Ps. 75:8, Jer. 25:15-29, 49:12, Ez. 23:31-34, Hab.2:16) as it is also used in this manner in the NT (Rev. 14:10, 16:19).[111] When James and John stated that they could drink of that same cup, they little realised their own shared destiny of future suffering. James, for example, would be martyred by Herod (Acts 12:2) while John would be exiled to Patmos for his faith.[112] While this imagery of a cup would have been clear to those hearing Jesus' words, the reference to baptism would have been less so.[113] Jesus spoke of baptism in this context as being *immersed* or *plunged* into the difficulties and suffering ahead, of being *overwhelmed*.[114] Later Christianity would develop the vocabulary to infer *dying* to this world, being *born again*, and *suffer*ing with Christ for the sake of the Gospel, including martyrdom.[115] Jesus used the term baptism in a new way here, a prophesy that James and John would, like himself, endure suffering. By the time that Mark wrote his Gospel, the martyrdom of James would most likely have been well known to his readers, while the fate of John was a prophesy of an event still yet to occur.[116]

- Jesus informed them that it is the Father who determines the places of honour in the Kingdom, not himself.
- The remaining ten Disciples were angry to hear about the request, and while this remains unexplained, it may be that they each had their own aspirations for glory in the kingdom and were fearful of the two brothers gaining some advantage over them.[117]
- Jesus turned on its head the concept of greatness. The *Gentiles* refers particularly to the Romans who ruled with a heavy hand, subduing the population while simultaneously demanding that they be honoured.[118] Leadership in the kingdom of God does not involve being master over others but instead becoming their servant (with slave being an even lower status than that).[119]

Going Deeper: The use of the term *Benefactors* in Luke

Benefactors is a word derived from the surname of some of the Ptolemies of Egypt (Ptolemy Euergetes, i.e. the Benefactor). Regardless of how tyrannical or oppressive these rulers might have been, they were called *benefactors* by those who depended upon them for their provision, e.g., soldiers who were given land at frontier posts across the empire.

- The final verse has, from the earliest times, been the subject of much debate. The word *ransom* would evoke, for Mark's readers, payment to secure the release of a slave or captive, to save their life.[120] However, it does not say to whom the ransom is paid. The early church father Origen argued that payment was to Satan, but that is not a view held anywhere in the NT. More typically it is seen as a sacrifice by Jesus that seals a covenant with God, without explaining the precise mechanism. Some have argued that Jesus's sacrifice is a *substitution* where he stands in our place, purchasing our lives or paying our *debts*.[121] The entire verse points to Isaiah 53 which describes the *Suffering Servant*. However, while it speaks of the necessity of Jesus dying for us, it also describes our own journey of servanthood, to follow the example Jesus modelled for us.[122]

Discussion: What are you views on the topic of Atonement. How do you understand the death of Jesus (as dying *in the place* of guilty people, Jesus *paying* to set people free from a form of imprisonment *from which mankind cannot free themselves*)?