

Paying a King's Ransom
Lesson: Hebrews 5:7-10, Mark 10:35-45

"Teacher," they said, "there is something we want you to do for us. When you become King, can we be on your right and left side?"

We would never ask such a thing. Asking right out loud would be way over the top, ...so greedy.

It's all right to ask God for things, to ask for help, to ask for blessings, to ask for good things for the people we love. It's fine to ask God for the things that God has done for other people, especially the things in the Bible that Jesus does. Most of the time, we see God rescuing people from a crisis, or saving people from danger or even death. Or we see God, even Jesus, performing miracles to heal people from diseases or blindness. Sometimes Jesus even casts out demons - or cures mental illness.

Why wouldn't it be OK to ask for something like that? That is a small thing compared to asking Jesus for second-in-command power in the whole nation (with all the perks that go along with having a post way up there in the government, like a cabinet position or being a senator - palaces and guaranteed income and well, better medical coverage than practically anyone had.

Teacher, there is something we want you to do for us. Come to think of it, you can't blame James and John for asking. Wouldn't it be nice if we had just one chance to ask God for a luxury we want instead of thinking that we have to live with the limits of what we need, or what we really need that we can't get for ourselves? It's right there in the Bible. Jesus himself says that if we can ask for anything in his name, he will to it. Just once, I'd like to ask for ...hmm, **a billion dollars** "in Jesus' name, Amen."

I'd be set forever, and I could help so many people with the leftovers. Think of all the good I could do. I could feed the hungry in Africa and rescue the children in sex slavery in Asia. I could build schools in South America. That's doing good on three continents. I could find some really good work right here at home in Texas, and I wouldn't even ask them to put my name on the building like those greedy people do. I'm not sure about sending money to Europe, though. They had their chance, and I just don't think they are deserving. After all, we rescued them once from Hitler, and what thanks have we gotten for that?

Gosh, if God made me a billionaire, I would have enough to give a tithe to the Lord! Sam Walton was a billionaire and a Presbyterian, and he never tithed. I'd do better. Well, I couldn't possibly just write a check for \$100 million and put it in the offering plate. What would our little church do with that much money? Everyone else would stop giving at all. I have to keep them responsible, don't I? I'd spread it around.

Of course, I'd have to be a good manager and make sure the places were deserving. I've heard how people are always asking you for crazy things when you have power and money. Someone might even want some of my ninety percent? They might want to get close to me and quit

working and become irresponsible. They might even want to sit by my side and just keep taking advantage of all I have done. They would become the undeserving. I can't let that happen to them.

Oh, I know I didn't earn any of it, but having God give you so much is such a burden! God has blessed me so much, and I want to be a blessing. But there are too many people who just ask for the moon ...and the stars, too! If I said "yes" to everyone, or even just the deserving, I'd give it all away and be right back where I started. Christ wouldn't want that, would he?

Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking for. Can you drink the cup of suffering that I must drink?"

I've read the Bible pretty carefully - as a follower and as a minister, as a scholar and as a person who made some vows to Christ. In all these years, there are a few things that bother me, and one of them is how James and John could have been so clueless.

After all that time of Jesus choosing to be with the poor, the outsiders, going to the homes of people who were shunned, touching the unclean, making friends with sinners... After all that time, of respectable people criticizing his lack of respect for tradition, debating the fine points of his sermons, trying to trap him into treason, plotting a conspiracy to bring him down - how in the world did they think that Jesus was there to give them "the good life" - a comfortable house, a safe neighborhood, a pleasant retirement, miracle-after-miracle to make them happy?

If I had been with Christ every day for a couple of years - I mean most *all* of every waking and sleeping moment, not just seeing the miracles but seeing HIM - wouldn't I have realized that there was something else going on here beside some political campaign to win the palace and take over church and state in Jerusalem? I mean ...if you have ever read just one of the gospels start-to-finish like it was a short story, you would have figured out before Palm Sunday that Jesus is not going to take care of his friends when he becomes King and put them in high places because they were loyal. How could they be so blind to who he was? Why did they still think he was there just to make life better for them? After all this time, why do we think Jesus is a Savior, and forget that he told us he has to be our Lord and Master?

"You don't know what you are asking for." Jesus tells us that being close to him is not going to get us what we are asking for. It is going to get us *"a cup of suffering."*

The two thieves on crosses left and right were closer to Jesus than James and John were on that Good Friday. Where were they? They were all disappointed and depressed - and distant! The followers defected and denied. Jesus is drinking his cup of suffering with a couple of undeserving characters on the left and right, and with enemies all around.

I'm trying to figure out why he put up with them all that time. I'm trying to figure out why he came back to them after he had gone through death with them distant. I'm trying to figure out why he stayed faithful to them - not just his hope in them - when they did not stay faithful to him, when they did deserve the cup of suffering he went through for them.

Deep down in the place of my honesty with God I know why. It had nothing to do with my deserving or undeserving. It had nothing to do with my worthiness or not. It had nothing to do with me in the final analysis, in the final hours of the cup of suffering or in all the hours before. Waking or sleeping, he did it for God. We are foolish to think that we are so important that he would die for us. He lived and died in faithfulness to God. He did it all for God. He was a servant, a slave to God. Every slave suffers, so why not him. He came to serve and that is what he did. That is why he did it.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to ransom many people."

Do you know what "a king's ransom" is? It is enough money to get back a king when he has been captured by the enemy. Maybe more than a Billion?

Do you know what a king's mercy is? It is a king's ransoming the life of a person who is undeserving of the king's favor. It is Jesus coming back to a bunch of deserters. It is Jesus being faithful to who he is, to the very people who are less than faithful to him.

It is Jesus, looking at us and not asking whether we are deserving or not. It is God loving us. Nothing we can give will make God love us more, and all we may keep from God will not make God love us less. Christ takes a risk and pays a ransom for people who are slaves instead of kings, just hoping he will get us back. He tells us that if we return his love and love others like he loves us, we will surely drink from his cup and we may wind up on some cross, but we will always be close to him. That is a better place than a palace.

If one of you wants to be great, you must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to be first, you must be the slave of all.

What happened to James and John, wanting a place above others and a good life of success well earned for their loyalty? What happened after they saw the cup of suffering? Well, after they saw the suffering and after they saw he had suffered for them... James became the leader of the first church of Jerusalem, the model of slavery to a gracious master who taught that faith without works is dead, belief without living to back it up is a waste of a life. John? Well he is the one who wrote "God so loved the world that he gave his Son... He did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the whole world would be saved through him."

A King's ransom! More than a billion. Here's the question: since Jesus says we must be the slave of all, what are we going to do with the ransom? Will we give our all?