

We are now three Sundays away from Easter. Jesus is also heading towards his death on the cross and he continues to teach his disciples about discipleship and service and what involves true greatness. The disciples had been with Jesus for over three years now. They had seen him in action, they had experienced his power on numerous occasions and were also aware of the manner in which Jesus had empowered them. Jesus had also taught them on numerous occasions that he had come to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many. He had taught clearly that the Son of Man had to suffer, die and then rise again on the third day. The disciples however could not understand the idea of a suffering and a dying Messiah. In their minds Jesus was indeed the Messiah and he was the one who had power and now he was to exercise it so that they would be freed from Roman rule and that king Jesus would reign in Jerusalem and that the disciples would have important portfolios as he reigned there. This was the popular expectation of the disciples and it is in this context that James and John come with a request to Jesus.

James and John request Jesus saying, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' In Mark 9:33 we see that the disciples were arguing among themselves as to who was the greatest. Following that argument is this request. To sit at someone's left or right indicated power and authority. They were so concerned about their positions because they thought they too would reign in glory. They had completely forgotten that they were called to serve.

Jesus then tells them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then 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."

The cup refers to the suffering and death of Christ and so also the baptism to his death. Jesus was asking them whether they were willing to suffer and die for the sake of the gospel. James and John say that they are ready to suffer and die like him. Even then it was the Father who would decide about places for each and every one.

So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

The very purpose that God has created us is that we **may serve him**. God has a clear purpose for our lives. We have been placed on this planet to fulfill that purpose. We have been redeemed by God to do his work. We are not saved by service, but rather we have been **saved for service** as someone nicely put it. We serve God as an act of gratitude for what he has done for us. We owe him our lives. Through salvation our past has been forgiven, our present is given meaning, and our future has been secured. Because of this Paul appeals to the Romans saying, 'I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship' (Rom 12:1). We are called likewise to offer ourselves to the service of God and others.

Shalom

Paul Swarup