

A Place of Honor in the Kingdom of God

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<https://www.abookofbiblestudy.net/>

joseph.f.harwood@gmail.com

[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

There may have been times when we wondered who will have the places of highest honor in Heaven, and what it is required of those who will be numbered among the greatest in the Kingdom of God. There are several Scriptures that give us insights and answers to these questions.

Jesus' Teaching in Mark 10

In Mark 10, James and John came to Jesus asking a favor of Him. In this passage we read:

James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.” And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?” They said to Him, “Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.” But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” They said to Him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. But to sit on My right or

on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” (Mark 10:35-40)

When James and John asked Jesus that one of them would sit at His right hand and the other at His left in His glory, they were in fact asking to have the places of highest honor in Heaven that any servant of Christ could have, being seated next to Jesus himself. Jesus answered them by saying that they did not know what they were asking. He then began to explain what is involved and what is required of those who will be considered great in the kingdom of God by putting this question to them: “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”

The “cup” that Jesus drank, or the “baptism” with which He was baptized, are metaphors that Jesus used to symbolize the sufferings He would endure in order to fulfill His Father’s will and purpose for His life. When Jesus replied to the request of James and John, He was teaching them that those who would be great in the kingdom of Heaven must share in His sufferings in order to share in His eternal glory. Jesus’ teaching here in Mark 10:35-40 is consistent with teachings that we have considered in depth previously when we studied John 12:24-26 and Romans 8:17.

After Jesus asked James and John if they were able to drink from His cup, or be baptized with His baptism, they answered Him saying that they could. Even though at that time they did not understand what was involved and what was required of them for their request to be granted, they were willing. And even though Jesus knew they did not yet understand these things, still He granted their request for a place of glory and honor in Heaven when He replied to them: “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” (Mark 10:39-40).

In addition to granting their request for a place of honor and glory in Heaven through their sharing in His sufferings, Jesus at the same time taught them that the places of highest honor in Heaven belong to those “for whom it has been prepared”. In other words, it is determined by the plan and purpose of our sovereign God who will occupy those places of highest honor.

A point to be made again is that even though Jesus told James and John that the places in Heaven at His right hand and His left were not for Him to grant, but for the Father, He did grant their request for a place of honor in the kingdom of

God. The lesson here for all of us as believers is that when we bring such requests to God in prayer, it is the Spirit of God who motivates such prayers, and we should understand that our request for a place of honor in God's kingdom will be answered and granted as He has ordained for each of us. We should also understand that in granting our request, we as well will be required to drink from the cup or be baptized with the baptism of the Jesus' sufferings, as He taught us in this passage.

Mark 10 continues with Jesus contrasting those who are great in the world with those who will be great in the kingdom of God, as we read beginning in verse 42:

Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45)

Greatness in the kingdom of God will be evaluated in a completely different way than greatness in the world. By the world's standards, servants are numbered among the least, taking their orders from those who exercise authority over them. However in the kingdom of God, those who serve will be numbered among the greatest.

Paul taught in Philippians 2 that our attitude should be the same as the attitude Jesus had during His life on earth. He took the very nature of a servant, being obedient to God to the point of death, even the humiliating death of crucifixion where He was stripped, beaten and nailed to a cross all according to the will of God, in order to accomplish for His people what they could not accomplish for themselves: the forgiveness of their sins and salvation (Matthew 1:21).

Just as Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve others and "to give His life as a ransom for many", and just as He took the form of a servant, humbling Himself and becoming obedient to the point of death, so we also as His followers are called upon to humble ourselves in submission and obedience to the word of God. And some of us will be called upon to do so even to the point of physical death. We will all have our share in the sufferings of Christ according to God's plan and purpose for each of our lives individually.

When we strive to obey God throughout our lifetime regardless of what it may cost us, and regardless of what we may have to give up in temporal gratification in order to be obedient, then we also have humbled ourselves by being obedient to God's word, as we deny ourselves or "die to" (Luke 9:23) anything we may desire that would involve sin. Whatever hardship that God allows to touch our lives, and whatever temptation to violate the principles in the Bible that we may experience, when we remain obedient to His word, then we also have taken the very nature of a servant, putting His will above our own.

Just as Jesus came to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many, so we also, even if in some very small measure, will be called upon to give our lives as a "ransom" so to speak for others. For example, we may give up some of the financial resources that God has given to us so that someone else may benefit from our sacrifice. We may also be called upon to give up some of our time in an endeavor that benefits others, when we could have spent that time doing something to benefit ourselves.

Giving of ourselves to serve others, even in some very small measure when compared to Jesus' sacrifice at Calvary, is for us a share in His sufferings and sacrifice, in that we too have given something of ourselves as a "ransom" for someone else so that they may benefit from our sacrifice. Such sacrifices are a manifestation of the mercy and love that will always accompany a genuine faith in Christ.

Other Insights from God's Word

From looking at the lives of God's servants as recorded in the Scriptures, we see that greatness in the kingdom of God is not often accompanied by wealth, prestige, worldly power or any of the other things prized and valued by the world. Such things were not possessed by Jesus during His life on earth, nor is there any mention of the apostles or their co-workers possessing these things. Jesus did not even possess a home of His own (Luke 9:58).

Jesus also taught in Luke 16 that we as His servants cannot serve two masters; we cannot serve both God and money. He then continued in this same passage to teach that the things which are highly esteemed among men are an abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:13-15). Jesus taught us that the things which are highly valued among men of this world: material wealth, worldly power,

prestige, position, prominence, worldly wisdom or ability, all of these things are detestable in God's sight.

The Apostle John also exhorted us as believers when he wrote: "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever." (1 John 2:15-17).

James wrote in his epistle: "But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away." (James 1:9-10). James gave us an interesting revelation in these verses as he contrasted the poor believer in humble circumstances, and the rich believer.

He taught that the poor believer living in humble circumstances should "glory" or take pride in the high position that God has chosen for him in His kingdom. At the same time, he taught that the believer who is rich in this present life should "glory in his humiliation", which means he should take pride in the humble position that God has assigned for him in His kingdom.

For poor believers living in humble circumstances, there are often many struggles, concerns and difficulties that will drive them to God in prayer. There is often a greater realization in the life of a believer in humble circumstances of experiencing what it is like to be a man or woman of sorrows, who is acquainted with suffering and grief (Isaiah 53:3). The hardships brought about through living in humble circumstances bring about a greater share in Jesus' sufferings, which will bring about for us a greater share in His glory, as God has assigned and prepared a place for each of us (Mark 10:40).

Jesus' Teaching in Matthew 18

In Matthew 18, we find that Jesus' disciples asked Him who would be considered the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus began His answer to their question by calling a little child over to them, and He had the child stand among them. Then He taught His disciples that unless they were converted and became like children, they would by no means enter the kingdom of Heaven. (Jesus here referred to being born again, not in the natural way, but being born again by the

Spirit of God, which is necessary for anyone to enter God's kingdom). Jesus then said to His disciples that whoever humbled themselves like the little child standing in front of them would be counted among the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:1-4).

What are the attributes of humility demonstrated by that little child, which one must possess in order to make them great in the kingdom of Heaven? The little child that Jesus called over to them *obeyed* Him, and he did what he was told to do when Jesus called to him. He also showed that he *trusted* Jesus when he obeyed and came to Him. Another attribute of humility common to little children is that they are dependent upon their parents for everything they need to sustain their lives.

God, as He works out His sovereign plan for our lives, may bring us to places where we realize that we have no choice but to cast ourselves upon His mercy, waiting for His provision and sustenance for our lives. Such conditions are often experienced by poor believers living in "humble circumstances". And again as James taught us, those believers who find themselves living in humble circumstances should "glory" or take pride in the "high position" that God has assigned for them in His kingdom.

In Summary

From the Scriptures we have studied here, an understanding of who will realize a place of honor or greatness in the kingdom of God comes into focus. As Jesus taught in Mark 10, those who desire to be great will, as all believers must do in some measure, drink from the cup and be baptized with the baptism of His sufferings.

Jesus also taught that those who will be great in the kingdom of God will not be numbered among those who are great in this world, but among those who serve. They must do in some measure as He did, which is to say that they must serve by giving of themselves "as a ransom" for the sake of others, so that others may be benefited from their sacrifice.

Jesus again spoke of those who would be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven as we see recorded in Matthew 18. He taught that those who humble themselves like a little child are among the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven.

These believers have been brought to the place where they realize their complete dependence upon Him; they trust in Him for their every need, and they obey Him.

James also gave us insight as to who would be among the greatest in God's kingdom. James taught that poor believers who find themselves living in "humble circumstances" should take pride in their high position in the kingdom of God.

Our God is sovereign over His creation, and He has ordained all of our days and all of the events and circumstances of our lives (Psalm 139:16). If God has placed us in humble circumstances, perhaps in situations and conditions in life where we find ourselves frequently before Him in prayer asking for His help and sustenance, then as James revealed, we have been given a "high position" in God's kingdom. And as James also said, we should "take pride" in this high position that God has assigned for us.

When sufferings and hardships of various kinds come into our lives as we are endeavoring to walk in obedience to God's word, let us understand that these things are for us a portion of the cup or baptism of sufferings that Jesus endured. And let us also understand that God has ordained that such things are necessary for a measure of greatness in His kingdom.

We have been assured through God's word that everything He allows to touch our lives is working together for our good and for our eternal glory. With this insight from the Scriptures, we can begin to understand why we are exhorted to give thanks to God in all of the circumstances of our lives. This thanksgiving reflects a trust in Him and all that He has promised in His word. (Romans 8:28, 1 Thessalonians 5:18)

The circumstances of our lives, and the giving of thanks to God in the midst of these circumstances because of the good that He is bringing from them, are both God's will for us as His people. Drinking from the cup or being baptized with the baptism of Jesus' sufferings is God's will for each of us as believers, and these sufferings will be experienced during the course of our lives in the measure that God has determined for each of us. The Bible teaches us that God has ordained it will be through these sufferings that we will realize a share in Christ's eternal glory, and a place of honor in the kingdom of God.