

The Demands of Discipleship
Mark 10:32–45 March 18, 2018

Have you ever signed a contract, or a made verbal commitment only to discover later that you didn't know what you were getting yourself into? (cite "floor committee") The British musical "Oh What a Lovely War," illustrates this as England enters WWI. In response to circus-like recruitment, young soldiers enlist as if they were going to summer camp. Later scenes darken as the disillusionment of war crushes their optimism. It wasn't such a lovely war after all, as no wars ever are.

Did brothers James and John know what they were getting into by asking Jesus for positions of glory in his kingdom? For the 4th time Jesus had told them that he will suffer, be killed and rise on the third day. To their credit, they took Jesus at His word and believed He would triumph even after his suffering. Yet, they wanted to share in His glory as if it would not also mean suffering for them. They knew the destination but not how rough the road would be to get there.

Jesus turns this request into a lesson about humility, about Himself and ultimately about us.

What does their request sound like when we ask it? We want glory, but not the hardship that is often the price. For instance we may pray, "Lord, spare me from sorrow and pain: *I don't want to have to grow in patient endurance. Give me victory over my sin: So I don't have to humbly grow in your unmerited grace.* Lord, give me all I want: *so I don't have to settle for what you know I need.* Spare me from evil people and temptations, *so I don't have to love my enemies, and prayerfully struggle against my sinful desires.* You get the picture. We want our path to be as glorious as our destination.

Jesus told James and John that seating assignments in heaven are not in his job description. He tells us that sparing us from suffering is not his goal for us. What He did instead was demonstrate true greatness by serving, not being served, and giving His own life for our salvation at the price of intense suffering.

So, He asks them, are you willing to drink the cup from which Jesus drank? Prophets Isaiah and

Jeremiah make it clear that the cup refers to suffering. Jesus prayed before His arrest, *“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.”* When Peter drew His sword to defend Jesus, He told him, *“Put your sword away; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”* Likewise, baptism in this context symbolizes suffering.

They answer yes, because up to that time it is still a vague challenge in some unknown future, not a present reality. Indeed, it’s easier to say you are willing serve or to suffer than it is to actually do either one.

When the other disciples hint by their anger that they too harbor dreams of glory, Jesus speaks clearly to all about the true greatness of humble service. So great is it that even He, the greatest ever to live, humbled himself to suffer and die. Not as a victim, but as a willing servant. He had a choice in the matter, but he chose to say, *“Father, not as I will, but as you will.”*

What did you sign up for as a Christian? Cheap grace that demands no obedience in return, or gives an excuse not to do the heavy

lifting of love Christ did for you? Are you drinking the cup of Christ?

Asked with a question often heard from pulpits, *“If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”* Would you feel safe where Christians are persecuted because you would never be suspected of being one? As the world competes with God for what you value most, who wins? You pick the winner with ever decision you make about your time, attention, and treasure.

The demands of discipleship are ultimately a call to complete surrender as servant and slave to others and to God. As servant, you choose willingly to sacrifice as Christ did for you. As slave, you know that you have no choice, for God demands such service of all disciples--not to earn anything from Him, but because His love compels us and His Spirit leads us.

He will not promise where you will sit in heaven, but by faith, you will be in God’s presence. For He has drunk the cup of sorrow empty for you, removing all sin that separates you from God. He has been baptized in blood for you, so that in your baptism of water, you

are dead to the power of sin. Because he fulfilled his word to rise on the third day, we who are baptized into His name and drink the cup of salvation, will also rise. Until that day, we seek not to be served, but to serve. Amen.