

Asking For Trouble

Mark 10:32-45 April 8, 2026

What's the biggest gift you ever asked for? Think back to letters to Santa or your wedding registry. Sometimes the request betrays an ugly selfishness. Like when a boy told Santa, saying he'd be more than willing to trade his sister for a north pole elf just as soon as the stork dropped her off.¹

Sometimes it's just the *size* of the ask that raises eyebrows. Last year, Elon Musk asked to have his 2018 Tesla pay package reinstated after a judge said he couldn't have it. It took a while, but he finally won what the company offered him: \$139 billion dollars.²

In our text, James and John bring a big request to Jesus. But not only do they not realize what it would *cost* for them to get what they want, they also have not *considered* that their motivations are not at all in line with the example *or* the guidance Jesus has given them.

A Christian does not lift themselves up at the expense of others - like the boy trading his sister for an elf. And so, in yet another cringe-inducing interchange, Jesus tries *once again* to explain that greatness in His Kingdom is found in service, in humility, and in following our Savior's example.

We want to examine this text *not* as though we'd never make a similar mistake. After all, we ask the Lord for a *lot* of things. And we're not immune from the flaws we see in the apostles. And so, we don't want to read this text to laugh at their blunder, but to learn how to evaluate ourselves.

Mark 10:32a - ³² They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. The disciples were astonished, but those who followed him were afraid.

Morale is a little low. The group has been traveling from Galilee in the north on the southern road leading to Jerusalem. All along the way, the Lord has been challenging and correcting the disciples' assumptions and understandings. He's been blowing their minds with truths that totally upend their spiritual perspective. At times, He has had to rebuke them outright. In fact, He recently became *indignant* at them for their behavior.

But they followed. We have to commend their faithfulness. *Many* had turned back from following the Lord. The rich young ruler *would not* follow as a disciple. But they followed. And they weren't lagging behind the Lord. Rabbis usually walked in front of their students.³

But Mark also wants us to understand that while the disciples were wrestling with confusion, the Lord Jesus was *fixed* on His mission. As one commentator put it, He's "anxious to get on with it."⁴ "It" being the cross, our deliverance. He was *not* afraid. He was adamant.

¹ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/brief-history-sending-letter-santa-180957441/>

² <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/musk-wins-appeal-restores-2018-212635609.html>

³ James Brooks *The New American Commentary, Volume 23: Mark*

⁴ R.T. France *The Gospel Of Mark*

Mark 10:32b-34 - Taking the Twelve aside again, he began to tell them the things that would happen to him. ³³ "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death. Then they will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴ and they will mock him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him, and he will rise after three days."

This is the third time in Mark that Jesus predicted what would happen. Each time He adds additional detail or clarity. Here He spells it all the way out. And now, they're closing in. They're on the ascent to Jerusalem. The disciples feel the pressure, they're aware of danger, but Luke explains that they understood *none* of these things.⁵

We cannot understand spiritual truths without the indwelling Holy Spirit.⁶ As we're growing in our knowledge of the Word, we also must grow in our relationship with God the Holy Spirit. I'm not criticizing the 12 for that because they had not yet received the indwelling Holy Spirit.⁷ But their missteps in this phase of discipleship highlight for us how necessary relationship with the Holy Spirit is. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit is our Counselor Who will teach us all things and remind us of everything Christ has told us.⁸ He does this and much more, and so let's never neglect Him.

Mark 10:35 - ³⁵ James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached him and said, "Teacher, we want you to do whatever we ask you."

Wow. Has anyone ever asked you something that made you spit out your drink? They know from the start that what they're asking is a little beyond the pale. That's why they want Him to agree before telling Him what they want.

On top of giving in to selfishness here, James and John fail to treat Jesus as a real Person. I mean, He's just said, "Guys, I'm about to be murdered. In a short time, I'm going to be tortured and brutalized and treated with more contempt than any of us can imagine."

"Ok. Anyway, we have some things we'd like You to give us." But I have to admit I've treated Jesus this way in my prayer life. More butler than Commander. Rattling off want after want after want without pausing to thank Him or give Him praise or wait for Him to speak to my heart.

Now listen: God *wants* us to cast our cares on Him. He *wants* us to bring Him our petitions and requests. But that's not *all* prayer is about, not by a long shot. And though all of us have wants in life - *and the Lord wants to hear about them* - discipleship means adjusting our thinking and remind ourselves that what matters more is what *God* wants for our lives.

Mark 10:36 - ³⁶ "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked them.

⁵ Luke 18:34

⁶ John 16:13, 1 Corinthians 2:14

⁷ John 20:22

⁸ John 14:26

The Lord is so patient. Yes, there were times where He had to sharply rebuke His people, but over and over we see His grace, we see His patience, we see His tenderness in how He dealt with people who were dealing badly with Him. Those who *should've* known better and done better. But as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows what we are made of, remembering that we are dust.⁹

Not only is this patience, it's also kindness. He gives them one more chance to abort this ill-conceived mission. The Lord often asks questions like this to give us a chance to think through our choices, our attitudes, our designs. "Where are you, Adam?" "Why are you angry, Cain?" "Where are you going, Hagar?" "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Mark 10:37 - They answered him, "Allow us to sit at your right and at your left in your glory."

It's a *big* ask. They want to be the top, crown princes in the Kingdom.¹⁰ Kudos for swinging for the fence, guys, but it's the same problem the 12 had been wrestling with this whole trip: *Who is the greatest?* How can I get in front of someone else? They want to *sit*, not *serve*.

Robert Utley points out that every time Christ predicted His death in Mark, the disciples start worrying about who will take His place as the big boss.¹¹

When we ask the Lord for things, we must first evaluate the motives behind the ask. Now, this is hard, because in our fallen humanity, sometimes we don't even know our own hearts.¹² But a *different* James - the half-brother of Christ - explains in his epistle:

James 4:3 - ³ You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Rather than praying and asking *that* way, the Lord encouraged us to pray that *God's will* be done on earth and in our lives. What is *His* plan, *His* design, *His* program for the life He's given us today?

Mark 10:38-39a - ³⁸ Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink or to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" ³⁹ "We are able," they told him.

In the Old Testament, being given a cup to drink referred to what God has in store for someone.¹³ Jesus uses drinking a cup and being baptized as a metaphor for suffering and death.

⁹ Psalm 103:13-14

¹⁰ David Garland *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*

¹¹ Robert Utley *The Gospel According To Peter: Mark And I & II Peter*

¹² Jeremiah 17:9

¹³ Morna Hooker *The Gospel According To Saint Mark*

He is gently trying to help them understand that Kingdom greatness costs something. Suffering. Service. Surrender. *Dying* to self, not exalting ourselves.

They glibly say, "Sure. We can do it." They're just saying what they think He wants to hear. They *have not* faced the cost. They *will* abandon Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Throughout this section we're seeing how quick our human hearts are to rely on ourselves and over-inflate our spirituality. The rich young ruler did it, Peter did it, James and John are doing it. We tend to do it, too if we're not careful. "We are able." And yet they weren't willing to wash feet.

Mark 10:39b-40 - Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink, and you will be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with. ⁴⁰ But to sit at my right or left is not mine to give; instead, it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

Great irony here. They say, "Of course we're able to do whatever to get this thing we're asking for," and now Jesus says, "Ok, well, you *are* going to pay the price. You're going to be *submerged* in suffering and death for the sake of the Gospel,¹⁴ but you're *not* going to get the position."

Not that they wouldn't rule and reign with the Lord - I mean, James and John have their names written on the foundations of the wall of New Jerusalem! But their ask was so high, it wasn't even Christ's to give! *Who* will receive this honor? No idea. That's God's business.

But, as we walk with God, as we cooperate with *His* plan, we will endure suffering. The New Testament talks a *lot* about suffering to us *because* it's going to be part of the Christian experience. Part of discipleship, part of honoring God, is suffering. That doesn't mean we go looking for it, but let's be honest about what we're agreeing to and not think it strange when it happens or lash out against God when it does.

Mark 10:41 - ⁴¹ When the ten disciples heard this, they began to be indignant with James and John.

They're not mad because James and John were being rude to *Jesus*, but because they asked first.¹⁵ This is a rare time where Peter had been frozen out of the Three Amigos. Usually it was Peter, James, and John. Not this time. If I was Andrew, I would've been mad at James and John but also thinking, "Yeah, Pete, see how it feels?" But when our hearts are in a pattern of selfishness, you bet we're going to get mad at other people.

Mark 10:42-45 - ⁴² Jesus called them over and said to them, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave

¹⁴ Garland

¹⁵ Brooks

to 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."

Remember how the unit starts: Jesus is *leading the way* to Jerusalem with purpose and urgency. Though His disciples are following, *spiritually* they have fallen behind. So now He has to pause, put *His* plan on hold, and perform 12 heart surgeries.

The Lord is so gracious. So kind. So faithful. He stops and says, "Ok guys, come here." And *once again* tells them what He's *already* told them. He already taught this lesson in Capernaum. He taught it by example every day. This is not a *new* revelation. It's just one they wouldn't yet submit to.

But again He explains that the way of the cross is through grace, service, humility, and meekness. Christian lives and Christian activity *should not look like* the world. It should not be organized like the world. He says, "*Here's* what those in the world do. *But it is not so among you.*"

And to drive the point home one more time, Jesus says, "Look at *Me*. I came to serve. While you're worried about how high of a position you think you're owed in the Kingdom, I'm making sure you can be *bought out of hell!*"

Now, aside from the practical teaching, there's also an important theological teaching here. Jesus is identifying Himself as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.¹⁶ He was struck for *our* rebellion. Crushed for *our* iniquities. He bore *our* sicknesses and carried *our* pains. He did not shrink from any of it. From foot washing to foot piercing. That's our Lord and Savior. *That's* the Master we follow.

And now He not only calls us to follow after Him, He explains that the way of the cross is the way to spiritual greatness in His Kingdom. Selflessness. Service. And not *only* doing acts of service, but being willing to be *treated* as inferior to those around us.¹⁷ So, if I say to the Lord, "Well, I'm willing to push a broom, but if I'm not *thanked* for it, then I'm going to quit," ok, *that's* like the rich young ruler. That's a refusal to follow as a disciple.

You see, discipleship is not internship. Why does a person intern? To get a foot in the door, to get experience, to get leveled up. If you intern, you double your odds of getting a job *and* that job will pay more.¹⁸ But discipleship isn't about my greatness. It's encapsulated by what John the Baptist so famously said: "He must increase, I must decrease."

So, as we walk through these passages, we want to recognize those things that kept dogging the disciples tend to dog us today. And we want to once again answer the call to *discipleship*. To not only do what God asks, but to think how He thinks. Which will transform our hearts and the things we ask for and how we relate to others *only* for the better! Because we will be in proper position, following our leader, not falling behind, not motivated by selfishness, but service to the King.

¹⁶ Craig Keener *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Second Edition)*

¹⁷ Keener

¹⁸ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brandonbusteed/2026/03/24/13-stats-everyone-needs-to-know-about-internships/>