

## The Pitfalls of Pride

Mark 10: 35-45

Man by his very nature has a tendency toward pride and self-promotion. The attributes associated with pride are revealed at a very early age. Children don't have to be taught to be selfish; this characteristic is within their nature. Left unchecked our pride and selfish desires continue to manifest themselves as we mature, often in unhealthy ways. Many of the problems within the world today, and the majority of conflicts from the past, resulted from pride and the desire to possess power, prominence, and prestige.

While those who follow Christ have the benefit of the Spirit to aid in the struggle against such fleshly ambitions, even believers struggle with pride and self-promotion. The greatest battle we have is the continual struggle to suppress the flesh. Pride takes on many forms, and can be revealed in many ways, but it often presents unwanted consequences.

Our text today reveals an encounter between Jesus and His disciples. These men have now walked with the Lord for some three years. During that time He had continually modeled humility and service to others, but even these men struggled with pride and the desire to obtain a place of prominence. Jesus will address the issue of pride and reveal what is expected of those who are committed to serving Him. Surely we all can relate to this passage in some way or another.

As we examine the [aspirations](#) revealed in the text, I want to consider: [The Pitfalls of Pride](#).

**I. A Selfish Ambition** (35-40) – First we discover the selfish ambitions of James and John. It seems apparent these men have pondered and even discussed their ambitions among themselves, and feel the time is right to approach Jesus. Consider:

**A. Their Desire** (35-37) – [And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.](#) <sup>[36]</sup> [And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?](#) <sup>[37]</sup> [They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.](#) As Jesus and the disciples journeyed toward Jerusalem, with Jesus knowing His crucifixion was quickly approaching, James and John came to the Lord with a particular request. They boldly requested to be seated beside the Lord when He assumed His throne in glory. These men knew that the one on the right would be regarded as the second in rank, and the one on the left would be considered third in rank within the kingdom. They were seeking a place of prominence and power within the coming kingdom.

- Clearly this was a bold request. What would motivate these men to ask such a thing? What caused them to believe they deserved such a place of prominence? Matthew reveals that their mother had also requested this position for her sons, [Matthew 20:20-21](#). She was actually Mary's sister, and the aunt of Jesus. James and John would have been His first cousins. Likely they assumed their family relationship with Jesus had earned them a position above the other disciples. Scripture reveals these men, along with Peter, seemed to enjoy a closer relationship with Jesus.
- This request is especially troubling due to the timing involved. Jesus had just spoken of His coming betrayal, arrest, suffering, and death. These men seem unmoved by the horror that awaited Jesus, and it appears they desired to secure their position before it was too late. (Have we not encountered such selfishness too? We have heard of those who want to divide up a deceased loved one's possessions before the funeral arrangements have even been made. Pride has no conscience, seeking only its own promotion and well-being.)

**B. The Discussion** (38-39a) – *But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?* <sup>[39a]</sup> *And they said unto him, We can.* Jesus asked a serious question in response to their request. Were these men able to drink from the same cup He would and endure the same baptism? He was not referring to the suffering of the cross, knowing He alone could endure that for them; but Jesus wanted to consider the gravity of their request. Were they willing to endure the shame and reproach of the cross following the resurrection? Would they be willing to suffer and even die for their faith? While they had yet to comprehend all they would eventually face, they readily agreed they could endure such difficulty. No doubt this was their pride speaking.

**C. The Disclosure** (39b-40) – *And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized:* <sup>[40]</sup> *But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.* Jesus affirmed they would have to drink a cup of suffering and persecution for their faith. In fact, each of the disciples, with the exception of John, would be martyred for their faith. An attempt to kill John would be carried out without success, and he would be banished to the Isle of Patmos. These men would suffer faithfully for Christ, but the positions James and John desired would not be rewarded due to sinful pride and selfish ambition. Those seats would be filled according to the sovereign will of God.

- Pride is evident among humanity due to the curse of sin. It is something we all have to deal with, and it even rears its ugly head within the ranks of Christianity. Many who faithfully serve the Lord get caught up in sinful pride and selfish ambition. We need hearts of humility to serve Christ!

The Lord promotes those whom He chooses. We must be content to serve at His leisure, allowing Him to elevate our status, rather than seeking a place of prominence on our own!

**II. A Submissive Position (41-44)** – Jesus used the request of James and John as a teaching moment for all the disciples, revealing the submissive posture needed to serve Him. Notice:

**A. The Resentment (41)** – *And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.* Clearly the other disciples were not pleased with such an arrogant request. They were literally “*grieved and resentful*” toward them. Now, we can understand such emotion. Likely we too would have felt the same way, but we must understand that such a reaction is not pleasing to the Lord either. In fact, the reaction of the other ten was motivated by the same pride that James’ and John’s request was. “Who do they think they are? What makes them think they deserve such a position more than we do? We have served the Lord just like they have!” Do you see the presence of pride in such an attitude? Pride takes many forms, and we must guard against each one.

**B. The Reflection (42)** – *But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.* Jesus reminded them of the oppression they endured by the Romans. Such authority was exercised by power and force instead of being earned through love and humility. These men had to guard against possessing the same attitudes and motivation the Gentiles held among the world. They were expected to behave differently, honoring and revealing Christ in every aspect of life.

**C. The Requirements (43-44)** – *But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:* <sup>[44]</sup> *And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.* This was not the first time Jesus had had this conversation with the disciples. While they were in Capernaum they disputed who would be the greatest, [Mark 9:33-37](#). There Jesus declared the pathway to greatness in the kingdom came through service to others. Again He reaffirmed this truth to them. Those considered great in the kingdom must be a minister, [V.43](#). Like the previous discussion, this word is translated “deacon” in other passages. These men must be willing to be a servant to others if they desired recognition in the kingdom. If they wanted a chief position, they must be a servant of all, [V.44](#). Quite literally Jesus declared they must be a slave. The word servant means “*a slave, one in a position of permanent servitude to another.*” James and John desired a place of prominence, and Jesus revealed this would come only through committed service to others. In God’s economy, the way up is down. One must assume a position of humility and service to gain position in the kingdom.

**III. A Selfless Motivation (45)** – For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Following their discussion in regard to prominence, Jesus revealed the position He had assumed. He is the Son of God, and yet He was willing to give of Himself for the good of others. His example was to be the standard these men should aspire to attain. Jesus spoke of:

**A. His Service** – I am continually amazed studying Scripture by the humility and servitude of Jesus. He was God robed in flesh, sovereign of the universe, and yet He came not to be served, but to serve others. We find Him showing compassion for countless people and multitudes, touching those who stood in need of healing, providing for the needs of the less fortunate, and even humbling Himself as He assumed the position of a slave while washing the disciples' feet. Jesus truly modeled serving others, and expected the disciples to follow His example.

- We will never become all the Lord desires and expects of us apart from service. We are not called to promote our agendas or seek others to serve us. We are called to humble ourselves in service to mankind. We are never more like our Lord than when we show His great love through acts of service to others. Service is not a burden; it is a great joy!

**B. His Sacrifice** – Jesus declared that He had come to give His life a ransom for many. Jesus knew He came to give His life on the cross to redeem us from our sin. He took our place, bearing our sin while enduring the righteous judgment of God for sin. He suffered like no other, bearing the humiliation of the cross, and tasted death so we could be forgiven of sin and given eternal life. Such a sacrifice ought to motivate an attitude of submissive service to the Lord and others!

- Jesus endured the horrors of Calvary for you and me. He takes pleasure in those who come to Him by faith unto salvation, and follow His example in service within the kingdom. He is worthy of our commitment and praise. I want to be found faithful when the Lord calls for me, enduring until the very end. I have found great joy in serving the Lord and His church. It isn't always easy, but His grace is always sufficient.

**Conclusion:** Surely this passage has challenged our hearts. I am certain we all battle pride and the lusts of the flesh at times. Left unchecked, pride has devastating effects on our lives. Seek the Lord for the strength necessary to commit to humble service for Him. If you are unsaved, respond to His gracious offer of salvation. He already paid the ransom. Come to Him in faith and repentance.