

- CCC Activity 4 from Making Connections

## Introduction

- In this passage Jesus deals with a recurring problem among his followers which threatened to destroy the little community which he was forming. As he deals with the problem, Jesus highlights a characteristic which is to be fundamental in his community and which is also vital if his community is to make any impact on society at large.

### Verses 17-19

- Jesus' death puts into context, makes possible, frees us to live in the way he then calls his disciples to live!

### Verses 20-24

- The problem. Very simply, the problem was **naked ambition**.
  - by this time the disciples as a group were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah › the anointed one of God who was to bring salvation to Israel
  - but despite the fact that Jesus had already told them more than once that his being the Messiah meant rejection and death › leading to resurrection
  - they resolutely clung to the popular idea that the Messiah was to be a great earthly king who would establish a great empire with Israel at its heart
- Now if Jesus was to be a great earthly king it was perfectly reasonable to think that his closest friends and followers would be at the heart of his imperial administration
  - it was also reasonable to think that, like all other earthly kings, Jesus would need chief ministers › those closest to him who, in picture language, would sit on his right and left hand.

### Verses 20-21

- In verses 20-21 we find James and John the sons of Zebedee bringing their mother to Jesus to ask, on their behalf, for the chief place in his kingdom
  - there are a number of theories as to why James and John were supported by their mother in this request...
    - one is that she was Jesus' mother's sister and that by getting her help James and John would be reminding Jesus of his obligations to his family
    - another theory is that their mother had some leverage with Jesus because she was one of the women who was supporting Jesus and his disciples financially
    - the fact that James and John left their father in the boat 'with hired men' (Mark 1:20) suggests that they were from a more well-to-do family who could have supported Jesus financially
- All this is speculation!!
  - the important point is the way **James, John and their mother saw their link with Jesus and his community in terms of an opportunity to 'get on in the world'**.

### Verses 22-23

- In verses 22-23 Jesus responds to their request in two ways.
  - in verse 22 he says that they don't really understand what they are asking for. They think that to be on his right and left will be a place of great prestige and power while in fact to be nearest him will mean being like him in his suffering.
  - in verse 23 he reminds them of his subjection to God his heavenly Father. The suggestion being that if they shared his humility before God, they would not be making their request.

### Verse 24

- In verse 24 we learn about the reaction of the other disciples when they found out what James and John had been up to:
  - **they were very cross!**
- People being cross with each other is hardly conducive to community building!
  - in fact, James' and John's request destroyed any sense of unity that the company of disciples might have had

- their action was a statement that the interests of a particular family group or a couple of individuals were more important than the interests of the group as a whole
- there was no suggestion that the disciples as a whole should have discussed who was to have the chief places in the kingdom
- rather two individuals grasped at the chief place before anyone else could get in before them
- But in doing this they were seeing Jesus as a way to power, position and authority
  - they tried to **use Jesus to their own ends**
  - the others were very cross when they realised what was happening, probably because they wished that they had jumped at the chance first.

### Verses 25-28

- Jesus teaches his followers about the meaning of true discipleship
  - he reminds his disciples that greatness in the world is measured in terms of the ability/authority to have the greatest possible number of people obeying one's orders
  - to have power over as many people as possible is what those who want to be considered the great ones of this world strive for
  - driven by the desire for recognition, they scheme and manipulate others in order to achieve their ambition
  - in this process people are used › and often abused › by the ambitious to achieve their ends
- **'Not so with you,' Jesus says to his disciples**
  - the way to greatness for those who follow Jesus is the way of servanthood › slavery even (verse 27)
  - slaves were at the bottom of the social order, their whole lives spent serving others without any right to any recognition or reward
- Jesus himself gives us the supreme example of what it means to serve because he came to give his life as a **'ransom for many'** (verse 28)
- The idea of 'ransom' comes from either the practice of warfare or the freeing of slaves in Jesus' day
  - if someone was captured in a battle, they could be released on payment of a ransom
  - in the case of slaves they could be freed if a ransom was paid to the local god(s)
  - in effect while the slave was sold to the god(s) he/she became free with regard to any earthly master
- What Jesus did was to give up his life on the cross so that those who are in bondage to sin and death could go free
  - but in its context here the **focus** is **not** on the wonder of Jesus' self-sacrifice for us **but** on the fact that he was motivated by the desire to do good to those who were in great need
  - Jesus did not see people as a means to an end
  - rather he sees them in terms of needs which he must strive to meet
- He is continually looking for the opportunity to raise others up and not himself
  - in order to do this he continually put others' needs before his own › in his case to the point of death.

### Conclusion

- This teaching was addressed to the central core of the community which Jesus was in the process of establishing on earth
  - they were to be the leaders of the church and as such were to set the tone for its life
  - theirs was to be a servant leadership
  - their goal was not the satisfaction of their own ego but the good of those in need around them
  - if the led see such qualities in their leaders then generally they will be replicated in the community so that the church as a whole becomes a servant church
  - *a community of people existing to serve each other and those in need outside*

- The servant church which is the true church of Jesus seeks out the needy in order to serve

### Experience

- the freedom that comes from being saved, from knowing that we've nothing to prove, that someone else has paid the price; the gratitude that comes from salvation, we'll do anything to honour please and please him!

### Example

- *just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (v.28)*

### Effect

- its effective! winsome, lovely, attractive