



According To My Will

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Mark 10:35-45

Somewhere back in the recesses of our beings, we struggle with the whole idea of surrendering our will to God's. Well, maybe not so far back in the recesses, perhaps we should say it is a constant battle to surrender, even when we state our desire to do so. Rather than surrender, we desperately want to be in control of our lives and surroundings. From infancy we begin attempting to force our will upon our parents and caretakers. We struggle against authority figures in our lives. We want to live by our own rules and enforce them on others. We want to live according to our own desires without reservation.

In such a context, how can we even think to use the words Lord or Master in reference to God? How can we call Christ Lord, when we struggle even to begin the process of submission to God's will?

The disciples struggled with the issue of submission. They were not always aware of the conflict between their own desires and God's. After all, they had lived most of their lives, all of their formative years without Jesus' influence on their priorities, concerns, and decisions. We can't really blame them for reverting time and again to alternative standards of conduct and acceptable priorities. It was all they had known for so long. Jesus' teaching was still new and had yet transformed their daily practice of living.

James and John had been listening to Jesus and hearing his discussions on the coming reign of God. It seemed the inauguration of the Messianic Reign through Jesus was imminent. They had certainly had some talks about it at home, including what it would mean to them personally as two of the Twelve. Can you imagine the possibilities?

Here they were, two brothers from a fisherman's family. They were nothing special in the eyes of the community. Smelly, sweaty, rough, they lived a hard-working existence until Jesus came along. He had given them the chance to become disciples to a rabbi! That was definitely a step up in life for two fishermen. Even if Jesus led a mendicant ministry, he was a teacher with crowds yearning to follow him and hang onto his words.

If Jesus now were to usher in the Messianic Reign all awaited, what was to become of the Twelve? They would obviously rise to the top in the political arena of Israel, ministers of the long-expected Messiah, King of Israel! They would really become something then! Just think of the power and wealth they stood to gain! It would mean the shift from fisherman to disciples to cabinet ministers of Messiah! Wow!

Doubtless, those thoughts had been plaguing them for some time. Ever since Peter had spoken aloud to voice their expectation that Jesus was truly the Messiah, they had toyed with the concepts of the wealth and power they might enjoy by simply riding his coattails into glory. As Jesus talked about the encroaching day of the inauguration of the Messianic reign, those thoughts rose ever stronger to the surface. It was time to take up the questions plaguing them and voice them once and for all.

James and John weren't the only ones with the same concerns and dreams. They were just the first ones to voice their desires before Jesus. The moment had come, and here came the question, if they could just figure out how to phrase it properly. They wanted to know what was in store for them. They wanted Jesus to know their desire for high positions in the Messianic Reign.

“Lord, tell us ‘Yes!’”

Jesus answered them, “Tell me what it is you want.”

“When you come in glory to inaugurate your Messianic Reign, we want to be next in command!”

The other disciples were livid with James and John. Perhaps it wasn't so much that they had the audacity to make such a request. Perhaps it was more that they had not done so first. They all wanted the same thing, after all. James and John simply made the request first. They wanted power. They wanted wealth. They wanted authority. They wanted real status and position over others. They wanted others to obey their desires, whims, and direction. They could taste power and authority in the air around Jesus. They wanted that for themselves. What they failed to grasp was how Jesus used and managed authority and power. They did not yet accept its link with his character of grace.

Jesus told the brothers, “You don't understand the cost; neither do you know what you are really asking. Besides, it is not mine to give.”

They thought of power and influence. They yearned for control over others, just as they had seen in all political structures around them. For Jesus, the coming Messianic Reign was of a wholly other character. It had nothing to do with power over others. It ignored concerns for force and power. By setting aside those concerns, one could be freed to act and live by wholly other criteria and purposes.

The world gains power through force, conquest, and violence. We see that in our political arenas. Parties and candidates attack one another, seeking leverage and influence over the electoral process. Individuals, corporations, and groups of people vie with one another to press their own interests ahead of all else. We see blatant displays of desires to promote our will, desire, and interests at the expense of all others. It is our struggle to rise to the top.

It is not just about partisan politics, though. We see the very same issues in the hiring, promotion, and firing practices of our businesses. We see it alive and well in office politics, family politics, and church politics, as well. It is present everywhere that politics, the drive for wielding power over others, rears its head.

We want to call the shots. We want to determine how decisions are made and what the priorities for our actions should be. We want to see that our own needs and desires are met, even when that means we ignore the needs and desires of others. James and John wanted more power and authority than the other Twelve. In asking for privilege, they put themselves first, giving little thought to the rest. It was selfish. It was misguided. It was anti-Christian, working counter to the very purposes of the Messianic Reign under which they wanted position!

Jesus brought this to their attention. He called the Twelve together to set the record straight. Serving God is not about power and control over others. It is not about calling the shots and determining how others must act. It is not about meeting our own needs. It is about seeing to the needs of others.

Jesus says, “You all desire position and greatness in the Messianic Reign. That requires the willingness to serve others. Greatness is not bending others to one's will. It is bending our will in submission to the needs of those around us.”

As long as I live according to my will, I deny Christ Jesus as Lord, for I have yet to learn the greatness of true submission. Even Jesus, when praying, said, “Not my will, but Thine be done.” Can I call him Lord and live by any lesser standard of greatness?

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