

Mark 10:35-45

RIGHT PATTERNS OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

Introduction: When people are placed in positions of leadership in the church, either as ordained ministers or as lay-leaders in their local parish, it is very important that everyone understands that Christian leadership is to be different from that expected in other spheres.

This is the matter that Jesus spoke about when two of his disciples wanted to be given special seats when they went to glory, Mark 10:37. Note that this outrageous request followed immediately after Jesus had informed them that he would soon to be delivered to his enemies; verse 43, 'they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.' They clearly didn't understand this; instead they were thinking about themselves. Neither did the other disciples understand because in verse 41 it says they were very upset at James and John for trying to get the jump on them.

Jesus said, 'you don't know what you are asking. How could they? It was only after the resurrection and Pentecost that things began to fall into place. Nevertheless it does show how little had penetrated in the more than two years of being with Jesus.

Notice how Jesus deals with them; he patiently and rather kindly leads them from where they were to a true understanding of what leadership in the kingdom of God is to look like.

Firstly he asks them whether they can go through what he, as the true model of Christian leadership, is going to go through. With all the brashness of youth they said, verse, 39, 'we are able.'

Mark 10:35-45

But when Jesus referred to the baptism and the cup he was about to drink, he was referring to his death. The idea of drinking a cup was a common image of God's judgement in the Old Testament. His death was to be a judgement, not on *his* sins, for he had none, but on *ours*. So bitter was that cup that shortly after this conversation, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he said, 'Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not my will but yours be done.'

That was the cup James and John said they could drink. If only they knew. Jesus then said, verse 39, you *will* drink of that cup and be baptized with my baptism, but not in the way you think. Jesus was referring to a lifetime of service and suffering in Christian leadership which they, as his apostles, were to experience.

Silly as their trumped up idea of glory was, it did give Jesus the opportunity to explain to them what the right pattern of leadership is to look like; verse 42-44:

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and the first among you must be the slave of all; for even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Mark 10:35-45

Notice the contrast between worldly and godly leadership. In the world, it's all about power and status. Those on top all too often use their position to dominate those beneath them. In the world, reward, recognition and respect are seen as important. Sometimes, even in the church we see these worldly patterns of leadership.

This is contrasted to the new way of leadership; humble, sacrificial service. True greatness, according to Jesus, is found in serving, and those who want to be on top should be the slaves of all. Since every member of Christ's kingdom is a forgiven sinner, whose salvation was bought for them by Christ's death on the cross, there can be no place for self-seeking, jostling for position, and the pursuit of glory.

Do you remember Jesus at the last supper? He took off his coat and a bowl of water and washed his disciples' feet. Then he said, John 13:12-14, 'Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me your Lord and Teacher, and you are right for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.'

In Christian service, what is important is the *function* not the *status* of the one who is serving. Jesus himself is the model to follow. His service was sacrificial, costly and motivated by love.

The application of this teaching is pretty clear. Firstly, whatever we do for the Lord, it can never repay what Jesus did for us and continues to do. Therefore gratitude and humility are to be in our hearts.

Mark 10:35-45

Secondly, it should always be centred on the welfare of others. So if we serve in our local parish, we do not do it to bring credit on ourselves but to contribute to the ministry of the parish, be it helping the needy, being on the roster for this or that, or sharing in the teaching or other public activities on a Sunday. Our focus should be on helping people understand what God is like and how he can help them, not on what we are like.

It is enough that our heavenly Father sees and is pleased and, as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, 'that people might see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.'