

It is vital that we look at the verses right before our text here in Mark 10. We read that for the third time, Jesus tells His disciples that He will be handed over to the Gentiles; they will mock Him, spit on Him, flog Him, and kill Him, and after three days He will rise. And then we see James and John coming up to Jesus asking: “*Grant us to sit, one at Your right hand, and one at Your left in Your glory.*”

They don't get it. They do not know what they are asking. Jesus flat out says this to them. And the other disciples, all ten of them, don't get it either. Because they are angry with James and John. They want the same thing – the seats of honor, with all the prestige, importance, and greatness that go with these seats.

Oh, do they ever have a lot to learn! They have two-dimensional thinking, and that's it. They have length and breadth, but no depth. They think with their eyes, but not with their ears. They hear what Jesus says about being handed over to be crucified, but their eyes paint a different picture for them. They see Jesus ruling on a throne of glory here on earth. After defeating His enemies, He will establish His glorious reign. And His chosen disciples will reign with Him. Two of these sitting on the seats of honor, one on His right hand and one on His left. This is what their eyes tell them. But it's not what they hear from Jesus with their ears.

What He says, and has been saying, is that, yes, He will reign on a glorious throne, but that throne is not as His disciples picture it, for Jesus' throne is His cross; His cross on Golgotha's bloody hill. And this throne is glorious because the work of God that gives Him the most glory is in giving His life in exchange for others.

All of God's works are glorious. “*The heavens declare the glory of God,*” Scripture says, “*The whole earth is full of His glory.*” God's works of creation, and preserving what He has created, do bring Him glory, for these works are impressive and very great. But God's work of salvation, saving sinners like you and me by His sufferings, death, and resurrection – none of His works compare to these.

And so, when Jesus is mocked, spit on, whipped, and nailed to a cross, that crown of thorns pressing cruelly into His head, all this is His greatest glory. And what this means, my friends, is that those two criminals crucified with Him, one on His right hand and the other on His left, these two robbers are in the very seats that James and John, and the others, want so very much. Oh, if they only knew what they were asking!

“*We can drink the cup that You drink,*” they tell Jesus, “*We can be baptized with the baptism You are baptized with.*” In Gethsemane Jesus pleads with His Father, if it be His will, to take the cup away from Him. It's not simply the cup of crucifixion. The Romans crucified many thousands of victims in the First Century. The cup Jesus is given to drink is the cup of God's wrath. His wrath on sin, our sin, yours and mine. We deserve a seat in hell for our sin. And that's the cup Jesus drinks. He takes that seat for us, in our place. Jesus suffers hell on the cross. The penalty for sin, He pays.

His baptism is a baptism of blood. His cup is the cup of wrath. And in that cup is shame, disgrace, and rejection. Who would want that cup? Who would want His baptism? Not James and John, if they knew what they were asking. But they have two-dimensional thinking. They need to hear what Jesus is saying. And they need to look, not just in front of them, but up. They need to look up and see, with their ears, that Jesus will be uplifted on a cross. And there is nothing that brings God more glory than this cup that He drinks for sinners; this baptism of blood that He undergoes for us all.

As the saying goes, “Be careful what you wish for, what you ask for, you may get it.” James and John would drink from Jesus’ cup. They would be baptized with the baptism He is baptized with. And so would the ten with them. As His chosen disciples, and apostles, they would suffer much for proclaiming the Gospel of salvation. They would face shame, disgrace, and rejection. And James would be the first apostle to undergo a baptism of blood; the first of the Twelve to be martyred for Jesus’ sake.

You, too, my friend – a disciple of Jesus, a Christian – will drink of Jesus’ cup. You, too, will suffer because you are a Christian. The devil will see to it. But don’t let him tempt you to think with your eyes. What you see is only temporary, the sufferings you endure for Christ. Think with your ears. Hear, over and over, Jesus’ promise to you, and I mean to all of you.

His promise is attached forever to your baptism. And yes, your baptism is a baptism of blood: Jesus’ blood, for you are baptized in His blood. His blood is the payment for your salvation. He who took your seat in hell, gives you His seat in heaven. And no one can take that seat from you, because that promise is in your baptism, and your baptism is forever.

He who drank the cup of God’s wrath for you, gives you the cup that is filled with grace. The cup of Holy Communion which, when you drink it, are given every blessing Jesus purchased for you by His bloody crucifixion. And I mean every blessing: forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Your place with Jesus is not on His right or on His left. Your place is beneath His cross. If you have been living with two-dimensional faith, look up and see the wounds in your Lord. He is wounded for you. He is dying there for you. There is no part of your life that His blood does not cover. There is no sin you have done that is left unforgiven. It’s all forgiven, all your sins. It is done. Jesus’ death seals it. Your baptism in His blood makes it yours forever.

And the cup of His Sacrament He places to your lips as a pledge and promise that you, dear sinner, yes you are forgiven, because everything that He did – all of His glorious work of salvation – He did it for you. Amen.