

Scripture; Mark 10:35-45

1

Theme: Are Ye Able?

apr. 2, 67

Text: Mark 10:39a.... "And they said to him, 'We are able.' "

Proposition: Christians are able to live the Christian life for its own sake, and not because they expect preferred treatment now or in the hereafter.

Date written: March 2, 1956

Dates and Places preached: Grace Church, Cheyenne, Wyo., March 4, 5 to
8:15 & 11:00 a.m.:

Sheridan, Wyo., Aug 17, 58, 11 a.m.
Blanca & Alamosa, Colo., April 2, 1967.

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Introduction:

1. Son: "Dad, what was your greatest ambition when you were a kid
Dad: "To wear long pants. And I've had my wish. If there is anybody who wears his pants longer than I do, I'd like to see him."
(Public Speakers Treasure Chest, No. 609). As a boy, the word "long" meant something to this Dad in relation to pants: the length they hung on his leg. As a man the word "long" referred to the length of time he wore them.

2. In our Scripture a misunderstanding by James and John of the nature of the word "kingdom," as used by Jesus, caused them to be taught a lesson which changed the goal in life, and which has changed enough lives so that mankind's whole history has been affected.

a. They thought of "kingdom" as a state in which Jesus would rule in pomp, power and richness, exercising absolute authority, giving preferred treatment to those who pleased him. They were trying to prepare him to put them in preferred spots there.

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b. Jesus quickly taught them that his kingdom, or the Kingdom of God, was not so ruled, nor achieved by being favorites of the ruler.

c. He showed them that unambitious service of others, as far as ambition for personal advancement is concerned, was the key to his kingdom, and that such a life would probably mean inconvenience and suffering for them.

d. Then he asked them "Are ye able?" Their reply came back strong and clear, "We are able."

3. We want here to explore the meaning of the Scripture teaching for both the disciples who first heard it and for ourselves.

I. Personal ambition is a natural human characteristic.

1. In our Scripture James and John displayed personal selfish ambition, and used "tricky" methods to try to achieve their end (v. 35-36).

2. Many a person's chief ambition in his work is to "make his pile" of money as quickly as possible so that he and his family

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can enjoy comfort and security at an early stage of life. Often this drive for financial success causes us to adopt methods which, at the best, take little thought of the welfare of the customer, the client or the other person involved. At the worst, they involve methods which might include theft, dealing in narcotics and liquors, murder, or other sordid activities, simply because "there's good money in it." Excuses are presented that "people are going to get those things anyway, so I might as well profit by their desires;" or "it's a legitimate business, so what's wrong with it;" and much other similar rationalization.

3. Personal ambition is often directed toward position and influence, rather than toward money-getting. The man who puts political office ahead of personal fortune may be doing so because of the power and influence he will wield in office, though all can hope that he does so from a motive to serve others. Position and influence is often coveted even within the church; as, for instance, when a person becomes hurt and angry because he isn't elected to or retained in a certain post (steward, trustee, committeeman,

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teacher, etc). Sometimes a person within a church or organization won't give or work unless the group votes to proceed as he thinks best: sort of like the child who "won't play unless you play my way."

4. Personal ambition can find its goal to be the serving of others but we shall defer consideration of that goal now till a little later.

II. Work, struggle, and disappointment are usually encountered by the ambitious, whatever the ambition.

1. In the case of James and John, of our Scripture, Jesus warned them that this was true (v.38). "Cup is a common Scriptural symbol for both happy and bitter experiences. Baptism is a symbol for suffering of an overwhelming character." (Abingdon Bible Commentary, p. 1013b). We know that in the case of James the Christian way was a bitter cup and dangerous baptism, for Acts 12: 1-2 tells us: "Herod the king laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with

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the sword;". Tradition is uncertain of how John died, but we are sure he lived in times when to be a Christian was dangerous.

2. Jesus taught James and John, too, that to be part of a successful, powerful, movement is little satisfaction: v. 42.

3. The fortune-seeker in business usually must start on a small salary, or, if on his own, begin business on a very small scale. He must deny himself and his family many things while they are getting started. Often he will see the well-established competitor get the sale or job when he thought he had it, or another get a promotion that he thinks should have been his. A period of time, seemingly endless, often must pass before success seems to come in the door, monetary worries ease, and disappointments cease.

III. Once the goal is reached one usually finds it unsatisfying and worthless.

1. By the time of success, often, the ambitions one has become so accustomed to competition, struggle, grasping, that he can not cease such activities even though he would.

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2. Or the successful business man or seeker of position finds that his success makes him the target of job-seeking people or money-seeking opportunities who care for him only because of what he has and not because of what he is.

3. Or he finds that the ease, comfort and security don't bring family harmony, security or happiness. Strife, sickness and other tragedy frequently come at just the period of success, and the successful one sees that he is, like any poor and less successful person, but a human being.

IV. He who makes service of others and of God his driving ambition finds life's greatest satisfactions.

1. James and John, of the Scripture, were taught this (v.43-44).
2. As the example of this fact, Jesus referred to himself (v.45).
3. Illustrations could be taken from many parts of modern life to show that it still is true that an ambition to serve others and God is the most satisfactory way of life.

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a. Albert Schweitzer, outstanding European concert organist, distinguished theologian, successful in each of these fields to the extreme degree, studied medicine and then went among backward African peoples to practice his medical skill, and became the classic modern, living example of putting personal success secondary to an effort to serve others. Yet, because of his sacrificial service, in his old age he is enjoying an undesired world-wide fame, instead of fame limited to music lovers and theologians.

b. Those 40 of our church members who last Sunday pledged more than 1/3 of the amount subscribed for our Building Fund, then went out to solicit from other church members and friends for additional help, illustrate this idea. Most of them did not like the idea of soliciting funds at all, hedging away from it as a sort of "begging," feeling a little sheepish at doing it. Many of those who worked as canvassers gave up family-get-togethers, afternoon and evening social or leisure-time activities, to participate in what seemed to be an unpleasant task. Yet, at the end of the day a smiling and happy 40 people were surprisedly realizing how

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pleasant a task had been theirs. Faithful and sacrificial service of church, and through it of God, proved a most satisfactory experience. Sunday School teachers, commission and committee members, WSCS and Men's Club folks, choir singers, and others who put God and Church first usually find this true, though some can't put selfish ambition and desires aside sufficiently to experience such satisfaction.

Conclusion:

1. Personal and selfish ambition is a human characteristic which when followed far brings an unhappy ending.
2. Christ gave to his disciples, and gives to us, a challenge to make as our driving ambition the service of God and of others.
3. He does not promise that such ambition of service will safeguard from pain, disappointment and danger, but suggest it may well lead to such bitter experiences.
4. But he did teach and demonstrate that eventually, sooner or later, the greatest of all satisfaction is to him who puts God and

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others first.

5. Christ is asking us, as he asked James and John, "are ye able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

6. As James and John said to Him, "We are able," so Christians today are able to live the christian life for its own sake, not because they expect preferred treatment now or in the hereafter, but because they find the greatest satisfactions in the doing of christian service.

"Are ye able?" Still the Master
Whispers down eternity,
And heroic spirits answer
Now, as then in Galilee.
"Lord, we are able." Our Spirits are Thine;
Remold them, make us, Like Thee divine,
Thy guiding radiance Above us shall be
A beacon to God, To love and loyalty.

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