

“A Foolish Request”

Matthew 20:20-28

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How many of you have seen Spiderman 3? (Hmmm, looks like more of you need young sons.) In this movie, Spiderman’s nemesis is the sandman, but what’s interesting is that Spiderman’s alter-ego, his secret identity, also has a nemesis, Eddie Brock. At one point, after Peter has exposed Brock’s faked photo of Spiderman, and ruined Brock’s career, we find young Brock entering a church and kneeling to say a prayer that went something like this:

God, I know it’s been a while, but I come before you as a broken man, a man who has been humbled... humiliated. And God I have just one request: I want you to kill Peter Parker.

What? Not quite the request you were expecting? But stop and think about our own lives...our own requests. Maybe you’ve been the ultimate saint your whole life, and never made a foolish request, but I think most of us have made our fair share of wrong or even foolish requests.

“God, I need a million dollars, wait, make it 10 million, then I can serve You without having to worry about the financial demands of this world.”

“God, I really want this promotion, please, please, please have the boss choose me.”

“Dear God, please help the Cavaliers win tonight.”

So, what’s so foolish about these kinds of requests? Well, the request for millions is wrong on many counts. The Lord tells us we cannot serve both God and money. If God were to grant that request, it would be likely that we would actually become quite comfortable with our life here, and may not even stop to think anymore about the one who provides for us, like we do when we are relying on Him day by day. He also tells us He will provide for us so we shouldn’t be “*worrying*” about the financial demands of this world – we should be trusting God to sustain us.

What about the promotion...or the Cavaliers – certainly it’s not wrong to pray for that...is it? Well, in both cases we are ignoring the fact that if we get the promotion, someone else doesn’t. If we get the win, someone else doesn’t. If we get the promotion, the power and money that go with it could corrupt us. It may demand a change in our priorities that would be harmful to our family, and to our own spiritual health. Maybe God knows better than we do that we really aren’t cut out for that new position.

Of course, making foolish requests of God is nothing new. Our text from Matthew 20 shows us that. **Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. “What is it you want?” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”**

We all know that mothers, and fathers for that matter, have high aspirations for their children, but to ask the Lord Jesus to put her sons at the two highest positions of authority next to Jesus Himself, is a little presumptuous, don’t you think? Isn’t it enough that He already chose them to be among the inner 12.

“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” “We can,” they answered. What cup is He talking about? Jesus is talking

about the cup of suffering and sorrow that He would drink to the dregs on our behalf. He was talking about the beating, the flogging, and the crucifixion yet to come. Perhaps, had they realized that this was what He meant, they might not have been so eager to affirm their ability to drink the cup.

Of course, Jesus knew even then that they would indeed suffer for the faith. In fact, all but one of Jesus' inner circle of 12 disciples would be martyred – killed because they were followers of Jesus.

Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

Just where are these places – at the right and at the left of Jesus when He comes into His kingdom? Well, when did Jesus enter His Kingdom – perhaps when he cried out, “It is finished.” Many bible scholars point to the moment of His death on the cross as the time when He came into His kingdom.

And who were on His right and left? Two thieves, drinking the same cup of suffering upon the cross that Jesus was – one that would repent and be saved, and the other that hurled insults at the Son of God as He was dying on the cross for the sins of the world.

When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 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.”

To be great in the kingdom of heaven, we must be servant of all. Our foolish requests go out of our hearts, and out of our mouths to the very ears of God and so often they are all about what we want and what we think we need. Maybe someone else needs that promotion more than we do. Maybe another team has had a tough year, and could really use a win to boost their spirits. Maybe we don't need 10 million, or even 1 million. Maybe we just need our daily bread.

Yes I'm sure most of us have made foolish requests of God at times in our lives. But don't worry, God still loves us. He didn't cast out the sons of Zebedee, they remained among the 12 disciples who would later be called the apostles. They went on to proclaim the good news of the forgiveness of sins that they themselves had received at the feet of Jesus. In fact, the one apostle, who although he certainly suffered for the Gospel, was blessed to live to a ripe old age and, as far as we know, to die a natural death was John...the disciple whom Jesus loved...the brother of James...the son of Zebedee.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we continue through our Lenten journey, let us never forget that though it is right to examine ourselves, recognize and confess our sins, it is not the absence of our foolishness and our sins that win God's love, it is God's love that wins the absence of our sins, and even our foolish, selfish requests. To God be the Glory. In Jesus name, Amen.