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Ambitious Leaders, Barbimaeus (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this piece, Steve Gregg discusses Jesus' teachings in Mark chapter 10, specifically focusing on the concept of suffering and how it relates to ambition in leadership. He notes that Jesus frequently spoke of the difficulty in entering the kingdom of God and the inevitability of persecution for believers. Gregg also highlights the importance of spiritual authority over political leadership in the church and the dangers of adopting a mentality based on Gentile systems of authority. Ultimately, he emphasizes the need for humility and a willingness to suffer in order to truly follow Jesus' example of leadership.

Transcript

We are turning to Mark chapter 10 today. If the Bible you're looking at happens to have subtitles over various paragraphs, you can see by glancing through the early part of chapter 10 of Mark that this is the material we covered in our last session, although we covered it in Matthew. We were using Matthew's parallel to talk about Jesus blessing the little children and his meeting with the rich young ruler and his statements to the disciples about rich men entering the kingdom of God.

And although we were using Matthew, we can see all those same stories here in Mark chapter 10 bringing us up to verse 30. And that means we pick it up at verse 32 and we want to go to the end of the chapter. Now, the material we'll be looking at, at least some parts of it, has parallels.

The parallels are found sometimes only in Mark, sometimes only in Luke, and in some cases in both. We'll let you know as we go through them. In verse 32 it says, This little segment has a parallel in, let's see, I believe it's in Matthew 20, verses 17 through 19, and also in Luke chapter 18, verses 31 through 33.

Now, Jesus, it says he takes them aside and tells them this in the context of their being amazed and afraid. That's what verse 32 says. In fact, verse 32 is a strange sounding verse.

It just says Jesus was on the road. Apparently Jesus was walking a little further ahead on the road and they were kind of maybe talking among themselves or maybe just in a

contemplative mood. Maybe it was a silent time that they were lagging behind, perhaps because of their confusion or fear or depression or whatever.

They were not in a talkative mood with Jesus and they let him move on ahead on the road and they just kind of followed it some little distance. Now, what we're not told about is why they were amazed or why they were afraid. Certainly not simply by the fact that Jesus was walking ahead on the road, which is all that verse 32 tells us.

However, the fact that this story, this little segment, follows the story of the rich young ruler in all three of the Gospels that record it, perhaps is to let us know that it's what had immediately previously transpired. That is, Jesus' conversation with them about the rich young ruler. Maybe that's what they were amazed about because we are told that in verse 26, when Jesus had said, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

Verse 26 says they were astonished beyond measure. So it may be that's what they were amazed about. Still, Jesus had finished talking about the situation.

They were now moving down the road and yet they had not quite recovered from their astonishment and their amazement. And some of that was mixed with fear. Now, if you'll recall the things that had just happened, not only had Jesus indicated it's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, but he had said some things specifically about these disciples, about their destiny and about their calling.

Now, his statement that for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God was difficult. In fact, without God, impossible. That would be probably what amazed them.

It would not scare them because they weren't rich anymore. They had forsaken all to follow him just as he had asked the rich young ruler to do. And the rich young ruler had not done so, but the disciples had, as Peter points out in verse 28.

Therefore, I don't think they were afraid of not being able to enter the kingdom because they were rich. In fact, they were not rich, but they were amazed, as we know, by the suggestion that rich men would have a difficult time since it was thought generally by the Jews that being rich was a sign of God's blessing. It was a sign that God really was on your side.

And that such people who had what were usually interpreted as evident tokens of God's blessing were the ones who were the least advantaged in terms of ability to get into the kingdom of God, must have just kind of thrown their whole thinking for a loop. And they were astonished and perhaps still amazed by that in verse 32. The fear, I'm not sure what the fear arose from.

He had said to them in the previous section that they would have persecution. Look at verse 30. Well, that's part of a longer sentence that begins in verse 29.

Jesus answered and said, Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my sake and the gospels, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers, sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecution and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last and the last first. Now, this statement, many who are first will be last and last first.

Jesus made this on other occasions. It's sort of a truism that Jesus said in various circumstances. Many times or it seems to me like most of the time when Jesus used this expression, he was talking about the difference between Jews and Gentiles.

The Jews had been first in opportunity, but they would be the last in salvation, whereas the Gentiles had been last in opportunity, but would be the first to respond to the gospel. And there are times, for instance, in the parable of the workers in the field or in the vineyard, which is in Matthew chapter 20, that Jesus says this statement in a connection of Gentiles coming in and participating in the kingdom prior to any Jews or a serious number of Jews ever doing so. Meaning that those who have had the most opportunities in the past will have the least, as it were, in terms of the kingdom.

Now, in this context, it does not look to be anything about Jews and Gentiles, but about rich and poor. The rich men who are esteemed by all to be first in privilege and first in status and perhaps even first in the blessing of God will in fact be the last. And they're the ones who have the hardest time, whereas the poor who people have considered to be the last or the bottom of the bottom rung of the ladder, as it were, they will be first with reference to the kingdom of God.

Now, having mentioned persecutions in verse 30, and by the way, only Mark mentions that the parallel accounts in Matthew and Luke don't mention persecutions, but Mark does. And no doubt the throwing in of that persecutions was what made them afraid in verse 32. They were amazed and afraid.

And although it doesn't say so in so many words that they were silent, I have the feeling they were quiet. They were walking along quietly behind, pensively reflecting on what Jesus had just said with a mixture of amazement and fear. And Jesus took them aside and you would think that he would take them aside to say something comforting since they were afraid.

But what he had to say, at least the first part of what he had to say, would not be very comforting. Now, the reason he had to tell them this and the reason he didn't say something comforting is because they were in for something more fearful yet than what he had just said. He had to prepare them for that.

Not only had he said they would have persecutions, but they were even then on their way to Jerusalem where he was going to be betrayed, taken from them. They would be

left without him. They'd be scattered.

He himself would be arrested and put to death. Now, that wasn't exactly good news to them. And one might think Jesus a bit insensitive to bring it up at such a time as this where they were already experiencing discomfort and fear.

But what he had to tell them is it's essentially like he's saying, if you're afraid already, listen, you've got to brace yourself. There's worse things ahead. But the last thing he said to them in verse 34 is that he would rise again on the third day, which means that he would have the last laugh.

What he's trying to tell them is, yes, you'll have persecutions and you think you've got it bad. Look what I've got to do. I've got to be crucified.

I've got to be mocked and scourged. I've got to be mistreated. And that is coming up pretty soon.

We're on our way there now to Jerusalem to have this happen to me. But I will have the final victory. I will have the last laugh, as it were.

I'll rise again on the third day. Now, in the book of Revelation, when Jesus is dictating a letter through John to a persecuted church in Smyrna. In Revelation, chapter two.

He says to them in verse 10, do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison. That's not very comforting that you may be tested and you will have tribulation 10 days.

Likewise, that's not very comforting. He's writing to a church that's already in tribulation and so forth. And he doesn't he basically says it's not going to let up anytime soon.

You've got more of this to come. But then he says, be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life. If you if you're faithful to death, if they kill you, you'll be rewarded ultimately with life.

Just as Jesus was put to death, but he was crowned with resurrection life on the third day. And so the message of Christianity is not one that alleviates all fears instantly and says, listen, everything's going to be OK. It's not a Pollyanna kind of optimistic approach to things as well.

Listen, just keep the faith and everything's going to get better. The fact is, even if you do keep the faith, things may get a lot worse than they are now. In fact, in many cases, they can be expected.

But in the final analysis, things will be OK. So if the disciples were afraid of persecutions, Jesus is saying, well, I'm going to be persecuted and killed, but I'm going to rise from the dead. Which is, you know, when you introduce the final part of the picture that you rise

from the dead, that is supposed to be comforting.

Jesus said in First Thessalonians, chapter four, after he said, well, the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, the voice of the archangel. The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain should be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air.

And thus shall we ever be with the Lord. He said, therefore, comfort one another with these words. That's First Thessalonians four, sixteen through eighteen.

So it is to be comforting to the Christian. Not that they're going to have an easy life, but that they will rise from the dead when Jesus comes back. That's what we're to comfort one another with.

And Jesus is essentially taking the same approach. He's not saying, hey, life's going to get easier. I'll protect you from persecution.

You're not going to suffer. What he's saying is you are going to suffer, but I'm going to suffer, too. In fact, I'm going to suffer first, but I'll also be vindicated first by resurrection and by implication.

Later teachings indicate they will, too, rise from the dead. Now, this is actually the third time that Jesus gave them this information. The first hint he ever gave them that he was going to die was at Caesarea Philippi.

We studied that story in Matthew 16. He took the disciples aside, asked who do men say that I am, that he got answers. He said, who do you say I am? Peter answered.

Jesus commended him that he'd gotten the right answer. And then he began to tell them that he was going to die. In fact, this very information that we find in Mark 10, 33, Jesus had said almost verbatim the same thing to me.

Back in Matthew 16. And that's when Peter reacted negatively and said, no, Lord, this isn't going to happen to you. And Jesus redeemed Peter and said, get behind me, Satan.

And then said, if anyone wants to come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me. The idea that Jesus was going to a cross did not meet with a welcome reception by the disciples when they first heard it at Caesarea Philippi. But Jesus said, well, if you're going to follow me, you're going to have to take a cross, too.

Then he said the same thing a second time. To Peter, James and John, as they were coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration. This was about eight days after Caesarea Philippi event.

And as he was coming down the mountain, that's in Matthew 17 in parallels. He gave the same information to them. And now this is the third time.

So three times he has told them that he's going to be put to death by the Jews in Jerusalem and that he's going to rise again the third day. But the interesting thing is that the disciples didn't hear him or didn't understand him. They did hear him because they recorded this later.

They obviously must have remembered that he said it. But in we are given a clue as to why this, why, why his actual resurrection took them by surprise back in Matthew 17. Well, I guess it has to be in the parallel rather than in Matthew 17.

Yes. In Mark nine. This is as he was coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration.

It says in Mark nine, nine. Now, as they came down from the mountain, he commanded them that they should tell no one the things that they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. And verse 10 says, so they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant.

They heard him, but they didn't understand him. They didn't understand what he meant by rising from the dead. Now, to us, it seems so obvious what rising from the dead means.

Why wasn't it obvious to them? Maybe because they weren't dispensational literalists. Maybe because they were accustomed to the fact that rising from the dead was a figure that was used symbolically in the Old Testament. For instance, in Ezekiel 37 of the restoration of the Jews from Babylon, there was a vision that Ezekiel saw where he saw dead bodies rise from the dead.

And the interpretation was that God was going to rise the nation from the dead, as it were, from Babylon and restore it again in their own land. And there are a few other places, not many in the Old Testament, that speak of dead people rising in a context where it may not, in fact, be talking about the literal resurrection of the dead. The prophets use that kind of language in a non-literal way sometimes.

And therefore, the disciples probably wondered if Jesus was talking in a non-literal way. After all, people rising from the dead wasn't a very common phenomenon in the literal meaning of the word. Though the disciples had already seen Jesus raise some people from the dead, they just didn't think of that as the first meaning, the first interpretation of Jesus' words, and they weren't clear what he meant.

So even when he did die, they didn't expect him to rise from the dead. It surprised them when he did, and in fact, they didn't even believe the reports. Some of them didn't even believe their eyes when he rose from the dead.

Which is surprising to us when we see how several times Jesus had warned them of these exact events, told them exactly what was going to happen. They missed the point. Now, verse 35.

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him, saying, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. Sounds like a typical Christian. Jesus, I want you to do whatever I ask.

Aren't you my errand boy? I'm your boss. I give the orders. You do what I say.

No. And he said to them, What do you want me to do for you? They said to him, Grant us that we may sit, one on your right hand and the other on your left, in your glory. But Jesus said to them, You do not know what you ask.

Can you drink the cup that I drink and be baptized with the baptism that I'm baptized with? And they said to him, We can. And Jesus said to them, You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I'm baptized with, you will be baptized. But to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but is for those for whom it is prepared.

And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to himself and said to him, You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you.

But whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever of you desires to be first shall be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. Now, this story is recorded only here and in Matthew chapter 20, beginning at verse 20.

Mark, excuse me, Luke does not appear to have this story, but Matthew and Mark both record it. It's a little different, though, in Matthew. In Matthew 20 and verse 20, where the story begins there, we are told that it was the mother of James and John that came to Jesus.

And some have felt there's a contradiction here. You know, whenever there's a slight difference in the way a story is told between two Gospels, there's always people always looking for problems. We'll say, well, there's a contradiction there.

Here it says James and John came to him. Matthew says Salome came to him. But if you look carefully at Matthew, it says that the mother of James and John came with her son.

That's what it says in Matthew 20. So both accounts tell us that the two boys came to Jesus. Only Matthew tells us that they brought their mother along.

And what we have recorded as they're speaking to him, particularly in verse 37, grant us that we may sit one on your right hand and one on the other in your glory. Matthew represents that as Salome speaking on their behalf. Grant that my two sons may sit on your right hand and your left in your kingdom.

Kingdom and glory being alternates in the two versions. In your kingdom, she said, or in your glory, it has here. This is another one of those cases.

And I pointed out others before where the Bible speaks of somebody doing something when, in fact, someone else did it on their behalf. It says James and John made this request. And if you just read Mark's version, you get the impression they said it with their own mouth.

They actually made the request through their mother. Their mother came and made the request for them. But this is not much different.

Then when Matthew tells us the centurion came to Jesus and asked Jesus to heal his servant, whereas Luke's version tells us that it was actually the elders of the Jews that came to Jesus on behalf of this guy and made the request. A typical thing to happen in the Bible and also in other literature for that which is done by an agent or by a representative of another person is said to be done by the person who sent the agent or who sent the representative to do it for them. No big deal.

There's no contradiction here. But Salome, the mother of James and John, was a player in this picture. And Mark doesn't give us that fact.

Now, why was Salome brought in here? Well, I think I pointed out before to you that there is evidence in the scripture that Salome was Jesus' mother's sister. We don't have time to look at the scripture. You have to look at three different scriptures to get that.

One in Matthew, one in Mark, and one in the Gospel of John. And it's in scriptures that talk about the women at the foot of the cross. And if you compare the different lists, you'll find that Salome is spoken of, at least the best way to understand the verse in John, is that she was the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother.

And she was also Zebedee's wife and the mother of Zebedee's children. And James and John were Zebedee's sons. Therefore, Salome was their mother.

Salome was Mary's sister. Mary was Jesus' mother. Therefore, Salome was Jesus' aunt.

And James and John were his first cousins. Or aunt, if you prefer. And so we have a relative of Jesus, you know, his mother's sister, comes beseeching him.

Now, you know, the Roman Catholics who advocate praying through Mary to Jesus often say, well, Jesus would never turn down a request from his mother. That's why it's good for us to have her on our side and to go talk to Mary about it. And then she can go talk to Jesus.

He'll never turn her down on this. As if our selfish prayers will be honored so long as we get Mary on our side about it. I mean, like if we ask, the only reason our prayers would

never would not be honored otherwise is that they're not according to the will of God.

If we pray according to the will of God, our prayers will be answered in any case. But if we don't pray according to the will of God, our prayers won't be answered unless, of course, we get Mary on our side. The assumption is that if Mary helps us pray for something that's not the will of God, God will do it anyway, even though it's not his will.

I mean, I've never heard a Catholic say it that way, but that seems to be the implication. If you're praying for something that's the will of God, why would you need somebody like Mary to go and talk about it? Why would Jesus be indisposed to grant it if it's already something according to his will? The only reason you would need someone like Mary or anyone else to intervene with Jesus is if you're asking Jesus something that he's not disposed to do, that's something that's not his will. And then to suggest that he'll do what isn't his will just because his mother asked is, to my mind, a strange way of looking at God and prayer and so forth.

Actually, we know in the Bible that Mary was denied her request on at least once or two occasions in the Gospels. One time in particular, when Mary and the brothers came to take Jesus into their custody because they misunderstood what he was doing, Jesus wouldn't even grant them an audience, even though they were requesting one. Mary was requesting an audience, but Jesus wouldn't give her one.

She wasn't doing the will of his Father, and therefore she had no more bargaining power with him than anyone else did. I think James and John were making that mistake, too. If what they were asking for was already in Jesus' heart to give, they wouldn't need to get an advocate.

They suspected maybe that without an advocate, he wouldn't grant this, which means it wouldn't perhaps not be his will already, but he would not turn down his mother's sister. Same mistake that people make when they think he won't turn his mother down. Jesus doesn't obey anybody except his Father, and he doesn't give any special weight or authority to anybody who's not doing his Father's will.

He doesn't even acknowledge them to be his mothers or brethren or whatever. So anyway, the disciples hadn't worked this out or understood this, but they sent their mother and came with her and made this request. Now, the request they made seemed particularly inappropriate in view of what he had just told them.

He had just told them he was going to die. He had just told them he was going to be arrested, ridiculed, mocked, condemned to death, delivered to the Gentiles, scourged, spit upon, and killed. That just went right over their heads.

They were still thinking in terms of him coming into Jerusalem, taking command, and setting up his throne, and having a cabinet, and having a right-hand man and a left-hand

man, guys who had the two highest positions under him in the cabinet, and they were asking for those positions. And when he said to them, you don't know what you're asking for, he's saying, you essentially haven't caught my message here. The idea here is not glory.

The idea here is not power. I'm talking about dying here. And, of course, he closes this whole interaction with them in verse 45, saying, I didn't come to be served, but to serve and to give my life.

He tells them again he's going to die. To give my life for ransom for many. So, they're missing it.

They still think that being connected to Jesus is their path to glory. It ain't earthly glory. Of course, it is the path to glory in the resurrection, but it's not the path to glory on earth.

But they're still hoping that it is, and they haven't really grasped what the kingdom's all about. So, he says, you don't know what you're asking for. And he asks them a question in language that is non-literal, and they don't quite understand what that means either.

He says, can you drink the cup that I drink and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? In Matthew's version, the latter part of that, be baptized with the baptism that I'm baptized with, is not found in the Alexandrian text, but it is in the text of the Receptive. If we were reading, in other words, Matthew 20 instead of Mark 10, if we were reading the same story there, we would find in our New King James Version this line, but we would not find it if we were reading in the NIV or the New American Standard or something like that, because it's not in the Alexandrian text of Matthew's version. But it is found in the Alexandrian and text of the Receptive of this passage.

So, we know the statement's authentic, even though there's some question about its authenticity in Matthew. Now, drinking the cup and being baptized, obviously he uses figuratively. He wasn't talking about an actual cup he was going to drink or being re-baptized.

He was talking about participating in suffering. To drink the cup is something that comes up as a metaphor for his suffering a little later when he was in Gethsemane. And he prayed three times to his father that this cup might pass from him, meaning that he, if possible, that he would not even have to drink the cup.

And there's no question what cup he had in mind. It was the cup of suffering that lay immediately before him. And when he was arrested, later that same evening, and Peter sought to interfere with those that were arresting him, Jesus said, Peter, don't do that.

The cup that my father has given me, shall I not drink it? So, we see this cup imagery first here in Mark 10, but then it comes up again in the Garden of Gethsemane, and it's

made a very clear reference to the suffering of Christ. Now, as far as to be baptized with the baptism that I'm baptized with, there isn't really a place where Jesus has previously used this imagery of his suffering, at least not clearly so. There is a statement, if I can find it quickly, and I'm not sure that I can.

Let me see here. I don't know if I'll be able to find it. There's a statement in Luke, and actually I think we covered it not very long ago, but I'm not sure how quickly I can find it, if at all.

Jesus said, I have a baptism to be baptized with. Is it 1250? Luke 1250? Let me have a look here. That could be.

That's it. There it is. Thanks.

Yeah, Luke 1249 and 50. He came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled. But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished.

Now, this is almost certainly a reference to his sufferings, though that was not made clear at this point. The fire that he came to send on the earth is questionable. We don't know exactly what he's referring to.

If he's talking about the fire of the Holy Spirit, if he's talking about the fire of judgment, both could be true. But the baptism that he was to be baptized with, and he was distressed until it was accomplished, that's almost certainly been his suffering, his death. So there has been a reference to his death in this way, but very obscure.

One that certainly the disciples probably didn't understand. And now he repeats that imagery. Can you be baptized with this baptism that I have to be baptized with? Now, baptism means dip or immerse or immersion.

And therefore, to say, I'm going to be baptized means I'm going to be immersed. I'm going to be overwhelmed, flooded over with something. And we speak of baptism in water and we speak of baptism in the Holy Spirit.

These are familiar terms with us, and when we use those terms, we understand it to mean immersed in water or immersed or overwhelmed with the Holy Spirit. But if he's talking about a baptism in sufferings, he means he's going to be overwhelmed with suffering, immersed in it. Suffering is going to totally come upon him like a tidal wave.

And he says, are you willing and able to have that happen to you? And they, of course, didn't quite catch his meaning again in verse 39, and they said, we can't. And Jesus said to them, well, you will indeed drink the cup that I drink and be baptized with the baptism I'm baptized with. But on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but it's for those for whom it is prepared.

Matthew's version says by my father, prepared by my father. So in other words, it's the father's decision, not Jesus. They were coming to the wrong guy with this request.

He didn't say that they couldn't have the positions. He just said, I can't, I'm not in a position to give out those positions. It's my father who has prepared the positions of authority and positions of prestige or privilege in his kingdom.

And that's not mine to give, so you'll have to just wait and see. Or you can talk to my father about it, see what he has to say about it. But it's interesting, he predicted that James and John would be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with and drink the cup.

James actually ended up being the first of the disciples to be a martyr. In Acts chapter 12, Herod Agrippa I, in order to please the Jews, arrested James and had him beheaded. He also shortly thereafter arrested Peter and probably was planning to behead him too, except an angel delivered Peter from prison and he escaped.

But James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee, was the earliest martyr among the apostles. Of course, Stephen, who was not an apostle, was an earlier martyr than James. But of the 12 apostles, James was the first to drink the cup of martyrdom.

John, however, it's not clear at all whether he ever died a martyr. In fact, the prevailing tradition about John is that he never died a martyr. He is the only apostle who didn't.

The traditions that have come to us from the early centuries of the church have indicated that all the apostles died as martyrs except John. One tradition says that John was condemned to be dipped in boiling oil. And it's not known whether this happened or not because he later was banished to the island of Patmos.

Some believe that he actually was dipped in boiling oil, but it didn't hurt him. He was supernaturally preserved, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were preserved in the fiery furnace. And thus frustrating his intended killers, they figured an easier way to get rid of him was to banish him to an island, a prison colony.

And so he went to Patmos and there saw the visions that are recorded in the book of Revelation. That's one tradition. There is another tradition, and I believe it comes from Irenaeus, though I'm not sure of this.

I forget, to tell you the truth. That says that John suffered martyrdom about the same time his brother James did. There is at least one church father that said that when James was put to death by Herod, John was also put to death shortly thereafter.

But it's a lone tradition that stands against greater tradition. Certainly the consensus of most church fathers was that John would be very old, even after spending time on Patmos. He was later released, went back to Ephesus, and died an old man of natural

causes.

In Ephesus. And that he's the only disciple who did die of natural causes. It's possible that the one voice from the second century that says that John died a martyr was basing it on this statement of Jesus.

Since Jesus had said to James and John that they would drink the cup, it didn't seem to fit the prediction for John to live out a natural lifetime and not die a martyr. However, drinking the cup doesn't necessarily have to mean martyrdom. It can just mean suffering for the will of God in general.

Death was part of Jesus' suffering. Martyrdom was part of James' suffering. But even though John may not have died as a martyr, that's not to say he didn't drink the cup of suffering for Christ.

He was beaten with Peter, along with Peter in Acts chapter 4 and chapter 5. They were both beaten. And of course we don't have all the details of their ministries, but I'm sure that he experienced as much persecution as the rest did and probably suffered a great deal of pain and suffering for his testimony. So I don't know that it would be necessary to insist that James and John both suffered martyrdom and death at the hands of the wicked, as Jesus did, in order to say that they did drink of the cup and they did receive the baptism that he received of suffering.

Anyway, we have to leave that unsettled because what we have is conflicting traditions in the Church, but the dominant tradition that is found in most of the writings of the Church Fathers is that John lived to be an old man, died of natural causes in Ephesus at around 100 years old. Okay, well, Jesus did say they would experience suffering, as he also would experience suffering, but that was not going to guarantee them a position in his right and left hand, probably because they weren't the only ones who were going to experience such suffering. All the apostles were going to experience suffering and almost all of them, except for John, were going to be martyrs.

Therefore, just the fact that John and James were going to drink this cup didn't guarantee them the seats of privilege because there would be a lot of people going to drink that cup. And some were going to drink it just as painfully as James and John did. So Jesus said, I'm sorry, my father is going to have to make those decisions.

However, Jesus' answer does seem to indicate that there is a position. There are two positions in his right and left hand in his kingdom, which it says in verse 40, his father has prepared. These positions, he says, are for whom those positions have been prepared, and Matthew's version says, prepared by my father.

Now, Jesus, in acknowledging that there are such positions of honor in the kingdom and in glory, does not necessarily mean to affirm their thinking about it. I mean, they're

thinking of a political kingdom and physical thrones and things like that. We know from later scripture in the New Testament that Jesus' throne is not a physical throne.

His throne is at the right hand of God in heaven. Many people like James and John, many modern Christians who feel that the kingdom should be a physical kingdom on earth, really believe that Jesus is going to have a physical throne in Jerusalem someday and there's going to be thrones at the right and the left and someone's going to sit there. I've heard a lot of speculation as to who might be there.

A lot of people think Paul would certainly be one of the guys who has to sit there. Maybe Peter, since Jesus gave him such privileges. There's no way of knowing.

And frankly, I do not hold to the view that there are physical thrones, either that Jesus sits on a physical throne or that the disciples or leaders in the kingdom sit on physical thrones. Just prior to this, although Mark doesn't record it, but Matthew does in his parallel. Jesus, when Peter said, we've forsaken all that we have.

What shall we get out of this? Jesus said to Peter, and this is, as I say, in Matthew's parallel, because it's not found in Mark. He said in Matthew 19, 28, I say to you that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, all of you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the tribes of Israel. Now, twelve thrones doesn't single out two, one at his right hand, one at his left, that are above the other.

All the apostles reign in the kingdom, as it were, as authorities with Christ. And as I pointed out when we were talking about that, it's not clear whether he means in the resurrection, which would mean after Jesus comes back, or whether the regeneration actually means the church age, when people are regenerated, when people are born again. And so, I think that in favor of the second suggestion is something Paul said in Titus chapter three.

Titus chapter three and verse five says, not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. Now, this is something we've already had. We've been saved by the washing of regeneration.

So, arguably, the regeneration has come. We have been regenerated. We've been born again.

And that may be what he was referring to, that in the church age, once they have been regenerated, once the Holy Spirit had come and they've been washed and regenerated, the disciples, the twelve, would have a position of authority over the church in general. But that would be a figurative way of talking about thrones rather than a literal way. Not much we can say with certainty about this.

I incline toward that view I just mentioned, but it's not really all that important. What Jesus is saying is there are, in fact, positions of special honor that God the Father has prepared for a certain person. He has not revealed who they are.

Even Jesus didn't know who was going to be in those positions. When he was on earth, he didn't know. He might know now.

And to suggest that there's only two of them is to buy too much into what the apostles James and John were thinking. Jesus does admit there are positions of honor, but he doesn't say there's only two seats available, which James and John were hoping to get. There might be thousands of seats in that position.

Anyone who suffers with him, anyone who drinks his cup and is baptized with the baptism he was baptized with could easily qualify for a position of equal honor. It's hard to say. It's not important for us to know.

What Jesus is saying is that they were asking him for something that was in the Father's discretion, not his, and that they have to be prepared to suffer even if they don't get the loftiest seats of honor. Now, as soon as the other ten heard what James and John had asked for, they were upset. And understandably so.

These guys had gone behind the backs of their friends. James and John snuck up with their mother to Jesus to try to push themselves in ahead of the other guys. I mean, the other guys no doubt felt that they would like to have those seats of honor as much as James and John.

And they were all under the same wrong assumptions that there's only two people who could possibly have the highest positions because they were thinking of a government. They were thinking of a political system. And they were thinking of a king and his cabinet or his courtiers.

And there's only, you know, a king sitting on a throne only has one right hand and one left hand. And therefore there's only two positions available. So they saw these guys as trying to crowd the others out and in a devious and sneaky manner by going to Jesus with their mother and so forth.

And the other disciples were apparently not present when James and John did this because it says they found out about that or they heard about it. And it didn't please them at all. Now, James and John probably had as much reason to think they would be in those two positions although Peter conceivably may have felt like he had a higher claim.

Peter and James and John were certainly the inner circle. They're usually called the inner circle. Maybe we should call them the inner triangle because there are three of them.

But they were the ones that did have the closest relationship and the most privileges

among the apostles. And if anyone was to have seats of honor in the kingdom they probably would have reason to believe that it would be them. Peter, who is one of these three might have been the one who objected most to these two guys going behind his back and trying to muscle their way into a position that he thought he belonged in.

It's hard to say. Remember, Peter is the one who had asked previously Lord, we have forsaken all. What will we get out of this deal? And Peter was a bit ambitious himself in all likelihood.

Anyway, when Jesus saw that there was this big rivalry going on and everyone wanted to be the first. Everyone wanted to be the top guy. He decided to take the disciples aside and he said to them, Lord, I want you to give me your attitude about things.

And he said in verse 42, it says Jesus called them to himself and said to them, you know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lorded over them and their great ones exercise authority over them. But yet it shall not be so among you. But whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant and whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all or even the son of man did not come to be served, but shall be your servant.

Now he's telling them right here that they've got the whole concept of the kingdom and of greatness and of leadership and of privilege turned upside down. Their model of glory, their model of honor and authority and leadership, he says, is they're basing it on the model of the Gentiles. He says, that's what the Gentile rulers do.

They lorded over people. They exercise authority over people. It shall not be done that way among you.

Now, it was natural enough for the disciples to think like everybody else about this. I mean, obviously, even Christians haven't in many cases gotten this work out, even though they have this teaching from Jesus already. It's still misunderstood, in my opinion, by many Christians, this idea that the leadership in the church is not to exercise authority over people.

That's what Jesus said. The Gentiles who are in leadership, it's not to exercise spiritual authority, but it is not exercised over people. And this is the kind of the paradox that is even hard for us to grasp today.

And so we can forgive the disciples who had never heard this teaching before this point. We can forgive them for not knowing it instinctively when we've been told, and we still have a hard time grasping it. When a person is an elder in the church, that doesn't mean that he now has a privileged position.

He has made it to the top of the totem pole. He has been promoted to the highest position of leadership in the church. And therefore, people need to do what he says.

He's paid his dues. He's got the position. He is a member of the board.

And probably the way most churches are organized, the board of elders is often the same as the board of directors. And therefore, a lot of times the authority picture of the elders resembles that of a board of trustees or board of directors of a corporation, the way the rulers of the Gentiles do things. Churches still, the old methods and mentality of the Gentiles and thinking about authority and leadership and so forth.

Now, just having said that, I need to clarify, I'm not against eldership. I believe eldership is the model that the early church followed. And I think it's a good model.

Those who are the leaders are called elders. But the problem is that it sounds to me like what Jesus taught, and I think what Paul taught in his epistles on this subject, differs from the way that we naturally think even about church elders today. Being like the board of directors of corporations, they exercise authority over people.

Whereas the word elder in the New Testament means an older man. And in all likelihood, the older Christians were the ones who were the most mature. And the way Christianity was taught by Jesus and by the apostles, more maturity would be marked in greater humility, greater servanthood, less inclination to tell other people what they should do rather than these markers.

If you meet somebody who's still itching for power, someone who's still offended when people don't do it their way, people who still think that they should be able to give the orders and other people should follow them, you're looking at a person who's still thinking like a Gentile and has not come far in the sanctification of his thinking. He may be a Christian. I'm not saying he's not a Christian, but he's not mature and he's not experienced because this is how Jesus taught it.

And also the church, the early church fathers seem to indicate this in some of the ways that they write that the elders were not so much politicians in the church. They didn't wield political authority and exercise authority over the church. They were the ones who were there to serve.

They were men who were mature enough and old enough probably to be humble, to not be pushy and arrogant and not to be saying, I'm not going to do this. But rather they were there to serve, to serve as leaders. Paul lists ruling as one of the gifts of the spirit along with teaching and helps and giving and exhortation and quite a few gifts that Paul lists in 1 Corinthians.