

## SERMON FOR THE SUNDAY JUDICA

(Cape Town - 29 March 2009)

**Text:** <sup>35</sup> Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." <sup>36</sup> "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. <sup>37</sup> They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." <sup>38</sup> "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" <sup>39</sup> "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, <sup>40</sup> 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." <sup>41</sup> When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. <sup>42</sup> Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:35-45)

In the last three weeks I have been rushing around so much, that I sometimes forget that we are still in the middle of the Lenten Season. In fact, we are nearing the end already. In less than two weeks we will be celebrating Good Friday, the day Jesus was crucified on the cross.

As we reflect on the Passion of Jesus we are reminded that his fate and our fates are very closely intertwined. This means on the one hand, that we will one day share in his wonderful glory. Just as God raised Jesus from the death on Easter morning, he will also raise us, his followers, from the death at the end of time. For me this was a comforting thought as I buried my father this last week. As we lowered his coffin into the grave, and as the family shed some tears, we also knew: One day we will see him again! And it will happen because we *all* share in the glory of God in and through our Lord Jesus Christ.

That Jesus' fate is intertwined with ours, however, also means that sometimes - on the way to eternal glory - we share in his pain and suffering. And when this happens it is not a coincidence or a freak accident, but part of the path on which God leads us and on which he shapes us to become more like his Son and less like this world.

In a first part, I would therefore like to reflect with you on the path that Jesus was led by God, and then we will reflect on what that means for us.

I am not sure what you personally visualise when you reflect on the journey of Jesus here on earth. But I can tell you that from the day that Jesus was baptised, his journey led him straight to the cross of Calvary. As you know, it wasn't an easy journey. Jesus refers to it here in our sermon text as the "bitter cup" that he had to drink and the

“baptism” he had to be baptised with.

We know from the Gospel stories that the devil made every effort to divert Jesus from this path to the cross. In the desert he tempted him with glory and power. **“I will give you all the splendour of this world”**, he said, **“if you just keel down and worship me!”** But Jesus had his eyes fixed on the cross. He knew that personal glory and power would never lead to the salvation of mankind. What we, you and I, need before God - and I realised it again at the grave of my dad - is not a dazzling show of God’s power or glory, but simply the *forgiveness of sins*. What we *really* need is for somebody to take the penalty of our sins upon himself.

This path of “Jesus paying for our sins” was already clearly marked out when these two disciples, James and John, approached Jesus with their request. They wanted to sit on his right and his left when he enters his glory. Their request shows: They were seeking glory, while Jesus was consciously and purposefully walking the way of the cross.

In the last verse of our sermon text, Jesus reminds them: **“The Son of Man did not come to be served (he did not come to be glorified), but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”** (v.45).

This path, as we indicated, Jesus walked consciously and purposefully. His death was not an unfortunate accident, but the goal and the purpose of his life. When God was ready to strike this world for its sins, Jesus stood there, and on the cross he paid the penalty for our sins.

It was this act of servanthood-love that brought us salvation. And when we were baptised, Jesus drew us into his fellowship. He made us part of his family and heirs of salvation. And he gave us the promise: This world will no longer rule over your lives. From now on you belong to me!

The question posed by our sermon text is: What does it mean that we belong to Jesus? Or, how does it show that we are now “in fellowship” with him?

The answer is: People that are in fellowship with Jesus experience a “reversal of values”.

It just doesn’t work that a person in fellowship with Jesus pursues his own glory. This is what Jesus was trying to communicate to James and John. His values, the values of the one in whose fellowship we are drawn, are totally different to those of this world.

We all know, in this world nothing is as important as the self-realisation of the individual. Everybody is concerned about getting his or her slice of the cake. Everybody tries to make it to the top and tries to obtain more influence and more power than others.

This we see all spheres of society. Politicians are jockeying and lining up for position of power. Many jump from one party to the next, depending on what position they can secure for themselves. But we see this even in the Kindergarten. Children dominate each other. Each one wants to rule and each one seeks personal recognition.

A well-known philosopher has noted that the “will to power” is the driving force of history. In other words, what makes us “tick” is this inner craving for power and domination. We see it Zimbabwe, in South Africa, and all over the world.

And sadly Jesus sees these values still deeply ingrained in the life of his two disciples, James and John, and the rest of the disciples who are envious of the two. They all want power. They all want glory. And Jesus says to them: **“You don’t know what you are asking”**. In other words, you don’t understand what living in fellowship with me means. You don’t understand the basic principles of God’s Kingdom.

Jesus says to his disciples: **“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. (But) [not so with you]”**. In other words, that is how world-people live, but not people in fellowship with Jesus. People in fellowship with Jesus experience a reversal of values.

Notably, Jesus does not “command” his disciples to change their values. It is not something you can simply change *by will*. It is the “result” of living in fellowship with Jesus. In the fellowship of Jesus, things like more power or recognition takes the back-seat. In this world, power is measured in the ability to give commands to others. In God’s kingdom, power is measured in the ability to serve.

That is why Jesus says: **“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”** That is the example that Jesus himself left us: He became our servant. And that is what happens to those who are drawn into his fellowship. They become servants who seek the well-being of others.

We are talking about sharing in Jesus’ fate. The last point I would like to make is: In individual cases sharing in Jesus’ fate may also mean that we literally walk the path of suffering, as Jesus did.

When Jesus asked his two disciples, James and John, whether they could drink the cup he drinks or be baptised with the baptism he is being baptised with, they answered: “Yes, we can”. And Jesus affirmed: **“You will drink the cup I drink and be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with.”** And this happened. Both James and John suffered a martyr’s death. The apostle Paul is another disciple who endured endless suffering and often reflected on it. And not once does he bemoan his fate. Not once does he resist the suffering he had to endure.

On the contrary, in everything that happened to Paul, he sees Christ at work. He does not wish suffering upon himself. Nor do we. But when it happens, based on his faith, Paul could write: ***“We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us”*** (Rom.5:3-5).

In conclusion: We share in the fate of Jesus. Our destination is eternal glory. But that road that leads there is often one of suffering. But it is not needless suffering. It is a suffering through which God shapes us to be different. It is a suffering through which God challenges our worldly values, and promotes those values that shaped the life of Jesus.

In fellowship with Jesus we learn: Great is not the one who commands. Great is the one who serves. But the one who serves will be glorified by God - not because he serves, but because his servanthood character testifies to his faith in Jesus Christ, who gave his life as ransom for many. Amen