

TWO BROTHERS' REQUEST

Matthew 20:20-28

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: James and John, their mother, and Jesus

Key-location: Road from Galilee to Jerusalem

Key-repetitions:

- Greatness/importance: the mother wanted important positions in Jesus' Kingdom for her two sons (Mat 20:21); the other ten disciples were indignant because the brothers sought special positions (Mat 20:24); Jesus said that rulers lord it over others (Mat 20:25); in Jesus' Kingdom, the great must be a servant and the first must be a slave (Mat 20:26-27); be like Jesus who didn't come to be served but to serve (Mat 20:28).

Key-attitudes:

- James and John's selfishness when they asked for privileged positions in Jesus' Kingdom.
- Other ten disciples' anger toward James and John, when they asked for special privileges.
- Jesus' seriousness when he taught his disciples.

Initial-situation:

Jesus was leading a caravan along the road from Ephraim to Bethany, along the border between Samaria and Galilee. Jesus was headed to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, and Jesus knew he would be judged and crucified.

Initial-problem:

The mother of the brothers James and John came to Jesus, kneeled down, and asked Jesus, "Will you do me a favor?"

Final-situation:

Jesus challenged his disciples to be like him. He didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

BIBLE STORY

The brothers James and John were members of the twelve disciples. Their mother came to Jesus with her two sons, kneeled down, and asked, "Will you do me a favor?"

Jesus asked, "What do you want?"

The mother replied, "Grant that one of my two sons may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

Jesus told the mother, "You don't know what you're asking." Then Jesus asked her two sons, "Can you drink the cup I'm going to drink?"

James and John answered, "Oh, yes we can."

Jesus told them, "Yes, you'll drink from my cup; however, I'm not the one who decides who sits at my right or left. That's up to my Father."

The other ten disciples heard about this, and they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called the twelve together and said, "You know, the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; their high officials exercise authority over them. It's not that way with you. Instead, the person who wants to become great among you, must be your servant; whoever wants to be first, must become your slave. Be like me, the Son of Man. I didn't come to be served, but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many."

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story? | 5. How did the characters face their problems? |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems? |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story? | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face? | 8. What does the story tell about God? |

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What petition did the mother of James and John make to Jesus?
2. How did Jesus answer the petition of James and John's mother?
3. How did the other ten disciples react when they discovered that James and John requested privileged positions in Jesus' Kingdom?
4. How did Jesus compare the greatness of those who govern on earth with greatness within the Kingdom of God?
5. How does greed and jealousy create conflict today?
6. How can we avoid jealousy when someone gets something or a position that we desired for ourselves?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **People who constantly hear God's word, may still misunderstand it.** Jesus predicted his death and resurrection three times (Mat 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). But the disciples still didn't understand him. They continued their power struggle to be great in an earthly kingdom (Mat 20:20-28).
2. **People may seek to manipulate God when they participate in acts of worship.** The mother of James and John went to Jesus, kneeling in worship. But her real motive was to manipulate Jesus into giving her what she wanted (Mat 20:20).

3. **People are free to ask God for anything they desire; but God will decide whether to give or deny the request.** Jesus didn't ridicule James and John for requesting privileged positions in his Kingdom, but he denied their request (Mat 20:20-28; Mk 10:35-45).
4. **People often don't understand the request they make to Jesus.** James and John didn't understand what they were asking for when they requested for one to be on Jesus' right side, and the other on his left (Mk 10:37-38). When Jesus was crucified, those positions were occupied by two thieves (Mk 15:27).
5. **Within the followers of Jesus, carnal ambition to become great generates conflicts; however, spiritual ambition to serve others generates peaceful well-being.** The carnal ambition of James and John provoked the other ten disciples to anger (Mat 20:24), while Jesus' spiritual ambition to serve (Mat 20:25-28) resulted in peaceful well-being.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Role-playing Drama:

Invite two volunteers to role play a part of two disciples having a private conversation. Have them react to the news that the brothers James and John requested privileged positions in Jesus' Kingdom.