



# **THE NEW SHOFAR**

**Disciples are to be slaves and not just servants**

**Isaiah 53:10-11 - Mark 10:35-45**

## **Trinity 29**

*Disciples need to share in Jesus' cup if they truly seek eternal life in Christ*

Jesus and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem and they are well aware that it will be the City in which the Master will be crucified. This is the context within which James and John outline their truly audacious request to Jesus. What they are after are “thrones” in heaven the other side of the grave. Remembering this narrative comes at the end of the third passion prediction by Jesus, their question has a sense of – *well if we are going to have to endure all of this difficult and painful stuff, we want to be guaranteed a good reward at the end of our suffering.* Ministering as disciples, for them at least, seems to be more about themselves than the mission God has in mind.

They are reflecting the traditional Jewish understanding of the End current at the time. Before *the End* there would be a time of great suffering when *the Beast* would wage war against the saints and prevail over them. It would be a time of martyrdom. Only then would The End come. This is the *cup* of which Jesus is speaking, the *baptism* he says they must embrace wholeheartedly. This *cup* is a cup of shame, about as far from *glory* as it was possible to go.

The great St Chrysostom said it well...*you speak of honours, but I am discoursing of wrestling and toil; for this is not a time of rewards, but of blood, of battles and dangers.* James and John want seats on Jesus right and his left at the time of his glory. There is a note of irony introduced here as this will be the scene on Golgotha. The Messiah is crucified between two fellow criminals.

### ***Mark's note on the sacraments***

Mark's own Church would have heard a sacramental message in these images of the *cup* and *baptism*. They drank *the cup which Jesus drank* each time they celebrated the Eucharist. In so doing they are proclaiming his death until he returns. In their going down into the water at their baptism, they are also participating in the death of Christ, going down into the grave with him and dying to earthly ways of living. This was how his fellow Christians interpreted the reply of Jesus to the two disciples. It is through this sharing in the sacramental life of the faith community they are entwined with the saving works of Jesus. *Glory* is about sharing in the *glory* that is rightly something belonging to God and God alone. It is something Christ shares with those who have patiently and faithfully persevered in sharing his own pathway to the Father.

***There is a life beyond the grave, but such life is a gift***

Jesus does not tell James and John there are no places of *glory* to be found either side of his heavenly throne. What he does affirm is how there is no simple calculation that will enable them to determine who will and who will not inherit these places, who will or will not be there in heaven.

**Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -**

**[anathoth.hough@gmail.com](mailto:anathoth.hough@gmail.com) - [www.houghgod.com](http://www.houghgod.com)**

## *Not so among you...*

When Jesus addresses the grumbling of the other disciples over the self-aggrandizing questions posed by James and John, he does so by speaking of greatness. The key to his argument is in the phrase *not so among you*. The narrative here reflects the theology of the Book of Daniel where the kings of the four Gentile world empires express their power through cruel and oppressive means. But for Daniel, these rulers only appear to be in charge. The real truth is that they are permitted to exercise their kingly authority because God allows them to rule. Behind them are greater powers – angels and demons – and over all of these stands Almighty God, the most powerful of all. Thus, earthly power, no matter how brutal, crushing, evil and absolute it may appear to be, is only transitory and can never fully contain the human spirit, for that belongs to God. That is why the Maccabees can declare *let us not fear him who thinks he is killing us!* In Christ, there is always more to life than there appears to be at any particular moment in time.

## *Disciples are to be servants above everything else*

When Jesus speaks of being *servants* of all, the notion he has in mind is more that of being a *slave*. That is the troubling challenge to his disciples. Disciples were generally freedmen while a slave is in that position because of powers beyond their personal control. No one volunteers to be a slave! This is a purely Christian understanding for which there are few parallels in Ancient Near Eastern literature. Free people feared the possibility of being forced into slavery and the loss of status that comes with it. This is the path to glory offered to the disciples. Glory comes through their degradation. That is the mystery they are to ponder. A key part of the answer to the mystery is to be found in the degradation undertaken by Jesus as he took upon himself the sins of the world.

This is highlighted by the important little word *for...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*. The cross is his *glory*. How that works is another mystery but what it means for the disciple is that the way to be exalted is to become the slave of all – in the same manner Jesus chose to become a slave for all. How?

While a part of the answer is that disciples are to follow the example of Jesus, there is much more to what Jesus is saying. Using Daniel (7) again, we can see how it is the way of the living and particularly the way of the dying of the *people of the holy one* that turns *many* to a life of righteous living. It is this perseverance in faithful Gospel living that leads to *glory*. It is the way the disciple lives, suffers, endures and dies that speaks most eloquently to the world – particularly to their persecutors – of the great God who is the true ruler of the nations of the world. There is our glory.

Mark also picks up language from **Isaiah's** Suffering Servant in **53:12**... *For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them*. The saviour presented in the Gospel of Mark is not the glorious judge spoken of in Daniel, the ruler who rewards the saints according to their deserts. Here he is to be the sacrificial lamb who makes many righteous by giving his life as a ransom for many. The cross for Mark is the means of paying a ransom, the payment of a *price* that the *many* are unable to pay themselves. Jesus sells himself into slavery so that his brothers and sisters may be freed from bondage. Therein is glory to be found.

In quoting Isaiah, Mark is making it clear how the service of others is correlated with the service of God. The one who suffers for others is illuminating them, opening up to them the true meaning of life and the only true way of human living that will lead to peace here in this life and eternal joy in the life beyond the grave. Somehow believers need to deal with this demand of slavery.

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -  
[anathoth.hough@gmail.com](mailto:anathoth.hough@gmail.com) - [www.houghongod.com](http://www.houghongod.com)