



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

**Sermon for Lent 5**

March 21, 2021

## Boneheads for Jesus

### Mark 10:32–45

<sup>32</sup> And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, <sup>33</sup> saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. <sup>34</sup> And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

<sup>35</sup> And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” <sup>36</sup> And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” <sup>37</sup> And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” <sup>38</sup> Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” <sup>39</sup> And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, <sup>40</sup> but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” <sup>41</sup> And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. <sup>42</sup> And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Peter was the easy one. You never had to look very far or dig very deep to find Peter messing up – saying things he shouldn’t, being both bold and timid at all the wrong moments. I mean, it was Peter who bragged about dying with Jesus and then denied even knowing Him when asked by a little girl. It was Peter who whacked off a guy’s ear in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was Peter whom the Lord looked in the eye one day and called him Satan. Yes, Peter was the easy one.

And then there was Judas! Stole money from the community funds and sold his Savior for the price of a slave. And Thomas. We all know about Thomas, right? Refused



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to believe that Jesus had risen until he saw Him with his own eyes. Or Philip, who couldn't believe a little boy's lunch would be enough for 5,000 people. And all the disciples complained to Jesus about the women bringing their babies to Him, and Jesus had to rebuke them: "Let the little ones come to me and do not forbid them! For faith such as theirs is required for entry into the kingdom." Or how about the time they griped about the Syrophenician woman who was asking for help with her demon-possessed daughter? "Send her away, Lord; she won't shut up!"

But then there were these two – James and John. Brothers they were, sons of Zebedee. Jesus nick-named them The Sons of Thunder. They were among the first followers He ever called. Partners with Peter and Andrew in the fishing business, Jesus called all four of them the same day – that day He gave them the miraculous catch of fish, the day they left everything behind and followed Him.

Peter, James, and John were the inner circle of Apostles. And yet, they were far from perfect men. Peter's failings we've mentioned already, but what of James' and John's? Well, there was that time in Samaria when they asked Jesus if He wanted them to call down fire from heaven to destroy a village. Boneheads. And then there was the time recorded in our text.

"Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." Well, that's a fine howdy-do! Sure, we'd all like Jesus to do whatever we asked of Him! But maybe they thought their request so noble that Jesus couldn't possibly refuse. "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Jesus replied, "You don't have any idea what you're asking." And they didn't. Not a clue. So Jesus asked them, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" He was referring to His cup of suffering and the baptism of blood awaiting Him in Jerusalem. James and John had no idea. But they would find out. Jesus said, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." They would indeed taste of His suffering, whether they liked it or not. James was the first of the apostles to be martyred and John was banished to the Isle of Patmos, destined to witness the death of his friends one by one, beginning with his brother. The cup would be bitter to the very dregs.

Having heard these two ask this question of Jesus, the other disciples were peeved, to say the least. Indignant, our text calls them. Boneheads. Jesus had to call them all together and explain to them again that their behavior was not to imitate that of the worldly folk around them. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant," He said,



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“and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.” Who among them had any right to lord it over the others? None – except Jesus. He certainly had the right, being the very Son of God. But, as He said, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Myriad followers of Jesus have gotten this wrong ever since. The church, during the era of The Crusades, took a sword in its hand and thought to force conversion on the heathen by threat of death. Popes and bishops over the centuries have claimed secular power as well as churchly authority. Many a pastor has lorded it over his congregation and abused the power and authority of his office – just because he could. Boneheads for Jesus are boneheads just the same! When I think of some of things I’ve done and said over the years – even this past year! – my soul aches and cries out for mercy. God forgive me and grant me wisdom.

But pastors aren’t the only ones who’ve exercised undue power in the life of the church. Many a layman has given his pastor and fellow congregants grief over his or her overreach of authority. And it doesn’t matter if we claim a godly purpose in it. Jesus had the Godliest purpose of anyone and still doesn’t rule His Church that way. The church ought to be governed by grace, beloved – the grace we all need, the grace we all receive freely from our Savior, who gave His life to earn it for us.

Apostles, church fathers, pastors, and lay leaders are all easy targets. We’re sinful human beings, who, by nature do sinful things. But do you think that you are exempt from accusation? Have you never thought of yourself more highly than another? People in leadership are not the only ones who sit in judgment. Even a beggar judges the cup in another beggar’s hands. You don’t have to have a lot to think you’re better than someone else and you can never have so much that you’re not jealous of your neighbor.

Jesus had it all and He gave it all up to come here and suffer and die for people who pretty much couldn’t care less, for He knew that if He didn’t we’d all go to hell. I can only imagine what He felt sitting there far removed from His heavenly glory hearing filthy sinners talk about other peoples’ muck. And these two – James and John – having the audacity to ask for places of glory . . . The effrontery! The arrogance! The stupidity! Boneheads!

And yet, when He looked at them, it was not with an expression of disgust, frustration, or contempt, for He loved them. He loved them from the bottom of His soul. It was for them that He came, for them that He suffered, for them that He died. There was nothing He wouldn’t do for them – even when they were being so foolish, even when they were so aggravating, even when they were driving nails into His body and hurling insults at Him – He loved them. And He loves you. He loves you as He loved them. And He



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wants you in His kingdom as He wanted them. He suffered for you and died for you. There's nothing He wouldn't do to have you, His beloved child, with Him forever.

This is the attitude we're to have toward one another, beloved, because it's the attitude of Jesus toward us. None of us deserves it; we only have it by His grace. But we do have it by His grace. Let's not keep it to ourselves. Let's be gracious toward one another.

John seemed to get this. Of the twenty-three appeals in the New Testament for us to love one another, nearly half of them come from John. There are four in the gospels – all from John's Gospel. And there are six in John's letters. You see? Even a bonehead can come to his senses by God's grace. And if God can do that for John, maybe He can do it for me. In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen