

## **The Feast of St. James the Elder, A<sup>x</sup>D 2010**

### **Mark 10:35-45**

*In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

1 There is a comfortable religion, but it's not Christianity, not the belief in Him who died on the cross. There is a word from pulpits that calls you to an easier life, a life filled with more temporary blessings from God, but it is not the Word of God. There is a voice that beckons you not to take up your cross, not to die with Jesus, not to endure suffering, but it is not the voice of Christ. There is a religion that allows you to love your life, to remain in your sins. The Gentiles love such a religion. Not so with you; you have red paraments.

2 There is a religion of glory, a religion of seeking a higher position, of being esteemed by your peers. This is what James and John sought when they came to Jesus. We're going to ask you a question, Lord, and we want you to say "yes." "'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.'" That's how St. Mark records this petition of James and his little brother John, the sons of Zebedee, the Boanerges, sons of thunder. Perhaps Mark is generous to his fellow apostles in excluding the detail that St. Matthew records. It was their mother, Salome, Mrs. Zebedee, who came to Jesus with this request. Through their mother, they asked, "'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' 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?' 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, 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.'"

3 So the other ten were indignant. Not that they were too pious to ask Jesus for such an honor, but they were indignant that James and John got the jump on them. Jesus' rebuke is for the lot of them. "When the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 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. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'" The Gentiles are concerned with positions of esteem and respect. Not so with you.

4 The disciples would change. These men would cease to care about which of them was the greatest, which was Jesus' favorite, which was to receive the greatest glory. Eventually they would care less about how much they were loved by others than how much others loved their Lord. Such was the case with St. James the elder, the brother of John, among the first apostles called by Jesus. Today is not James' birthday. The paraments are not red because it was his favorite color or because he was filled with the Holy Spirit. The paraments are red because James' neck was no match for Herod's sword. Not the first Christian to be martyred, James was nevertheless the first of the Apostles to be given martyrdom. But he was not the last. All the rest, with the only exception being James' brother John, were martyred, murdered for preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus. The pagans can be concerned with saving their lives. Not so with you.

5 What happened? What changed in these men? Their Lord died. The One they rightly revered as God, as the Son of God in human flesh, as the long-awaited Messiah, entered into His glory by dying on the cross. If Jesus came to die, to take the sins of the world, of every person on Himself and die as the curse for sin, everything is different. If Jesus paid for their sins, even their sins of bickering about greatness and clambering for glory, the lives of the apostles are changed. If their sins are forgiven, if they are free in Jesus, then suffering and martyrdom are no big deal. In fact, if Jesus died, then being

joined into His suffering, given the privilege of enduring suffering or persecution, is counted as a blessing.

6 We prayed, “Your servant and apostle James was the first among the Twelve to suffer martyrdom for the name of Jesus Christ. Pour out upon the leaders of Your Church that spirit of self-denying service that they may forsake all false and passing allurements and follow Christ alone.” Dear Jesus, make our pastors like James. And you will sing in a moment, “O Lord, for James we praise You, Who fell to Herod’s sword; He drank the cup of suff’ring And thus fulfilled Your word. Lord, curb our vain impatience For glory and for fame, Equip us for such suff’rings As glorify Your name.” Dear Jesus, make us martyrs like James. Followers of other gods can be worried about suffering and death. Not so with you; yours is the God who defeated death by suffering and dying on the cross.

7 There is a life where the gate is wide and the way is easy. That road leads to destruction, to hell. Not so with you. You are called to a narrow way, with a narrow gate, the only way to salvation. That Way is Jesus. And His way is the cross. The only way through the gate is to be with Jesus, to have faith in Him for forgiveness. The Christian life is a cruciform life, shaped by the Crucified. You are not promised glory, not on this side of the return of Jesus. Honor is for the Gentiles; not so with you. You are called to be the servant, the slave, to all. You are given a cross to bear. And the only reason you can bear it is because Jesus bore His.

8 So your body is breaking down; so the doctors are running out of ideas. So your children are rebellious, your boss a jerk, your life not as exciting as you hoped. So Herod’s men are brandishing their swords. So the mobs have bound you and tied you to the stake atop the pile of wood. So the police have orders to arrest anyone praying or preaching in the name of Jesus. So your neighbors had their house burned for being Christians. So the kids in school make fun of you for not participating in activities that consume your Sunday mornings. So your buddies think you’re a Christian hypocrite when you won’t join them at the strip clubs. So you lose friends for refusing to participate in their gossiping and complaining sessions. So the world hates you. So what? Jesus died and rose. The blood of the martyrs is an example of faithfulness, of steadfastness in the face of persecution, of endurance in the midst of suffering.

9 You eat the Body of the Crucified Lord. What can man do to you? You drink the Blood that was shed to forgive your sins. Who cares if you have to endure suffering? Jesus died and rose for you. Who or what can separate you from His love for you? The death and resurrection of Jesus changes everything. Your suffering may seem intense, but it is not as intense as His. He knows what your suffering is like. And He promises deliverance when He returns. And for now, He gives you endurance through His Body and His Blood. These are stronger than your flesh. Let the world fear death, flee persecution, and seek honor. Not so with you; you have life beyond the grave, life that endures forever.

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*

Pastor Jeff Hemmer