

The title for today's message is: **The Three Poison Pills of Position, Prestige, and Power**

Jesus said: **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."**

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Allow me to set the stage for our text. Its now five days before Jesus' crucifixion. Four days before His betrayal, and trial. One day before the clearing of the temple.

And a few hours before the Triumphal Entry. If the Disciples are going to start appropriating Jesus' teachings in their life, it ought to be now.

But that's not what happens is it. No just moments before the most crucial events in their life, their bickering.

What a bad-tempered quarrelsome lot. Yet we need to learn from this not-so-flattering moment in the life of the disciples.

It all has to do with the three poison pills of; position, prestige, and power. Something James and John, wanted all of.

As you read the Gospels you come across numerous occasions when the disciples misunderstand Jesus' teachings. It happens quite often.

And here in Mark chapter 10, is a unique situation, something a little different than their usual blunders.

Within their own ranks they are jockeying for position. Remember now Its the last week of Jesus' life here on earth.

It must be early in the morning, as they are approaching the city of Jericho.

And they have yet to make that hard climb up the treacherous path to Jerusalem.

Now, the disciples know, that whatever messianic plans Jesus has, there certainly about to be put into effect.

With this in mind James and John, two brothers born to a man named Zebedee, sense their opportunity to claim top leadership positions.

Perhaps, they thought that Jesus is partial to Peter, so they must act now, in order to gain Jesus' affections.

Perhaps they felt they were better leaders, and Jesus would come around to their view, that is, if their able to argue their case.

Whatever the reason for their actions, they wanted to be on the right and left of Jesus in His glory. High positions of power.

They secretly take Jesus aside and ask, **“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”** And he said to them, **“What do you want me to do for you?”** And they said to him, **“Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”**

What James and John are asking for, is nothing less than the power to command the army of Israel, that they thought Jesus would form.

Even Rabbis, and Scholars at the time taught that the messiah, when He comes, would be the new David, the King of Israel.

They believed He would rule with a mighty sword, and vanquish all of Israel's enemies. Sadly, the disciples were under the same impression.

Now Its important to remember that most of the disciples misunderstandings about Jesus, stem from this very impression.

So even though Peter recognized that Jesus was the Christ, the messiah, he didn't mean a suffering messiah who dies upon a cross.

No! He meant an earthly messiah, who with sword in hand, would conquer the Romans. An army that James and John were trying to gain position in.

But doesn't it seem strange, and even a little childish, the way they go about it. They demand for Jesus to say yes, to a question they haven't even asked yet?

We want you to do whatever we ask, they said. But Jesus makes no such promise.

I think they knew in their hearts, that the answer would be no. Yet they wanted to affect the outcome.

This reveals their selfish motive, a motive were all guilty of. Look, the road to power, is paved upon the backs of conquered men.

Its a history, which now must change, and will change. Calling His disciples together Jesus tells 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.**

In other words, there is always someone a peg above you. And there are higher officials over them, and on up the chain of command it goes.

Not so with you, Jesus says. The kingdom of God will have no hierarchy. Why? Because God is love.

God's love doesn't conquer, but it serves. Now listen carefully to this quote, and then I'll tell you who said it:

"Alexander, Caesar, and Hannibal conquered the world but had no friends....Jesus founded His empire upon love, and at this hour millions would die for Him.

He has won the hearts of men, a task a conqueror cannot do." Now, the person who said this, was none other than, Napoleon. That's right!

The very man history records as having one of the largest egos, knew what dangerous ground he stood on.

So, if you want the devotion, and allegiance of men? Don't fight to be leader of all; fight for the least position of all, and be a servant.

Secondly, James and John wanted prestige. They wanted the recognition, and the honor, that the position deserves.

**"Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."** is the request. They want a piece of the action, so to speak.

They assumed, but incorrectly that there would be glory, and honor bestowed on them when they rode in military victory over the Romans.

How, you might ask, did they really think that little Israel, could actually conquer the Roman Empire?

One need only be reminded of Moses, and Egypt, Samson and the

Yes, there are plenty of examples in the scriptures of God's people overcoming impossible odds.

Looking at James and John He said, **“You do not know what you are asking... 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.”**

Again, James and John thought the positions on Jesus' right, and left, were earthly positions of power.

But, they were not. So what exactly was Jesus saying, when He said these positions are for those whom it has been prepared..

Perhaps He means Moses, and Elijah who stood with Him on the mount of Transfiguration. Its just not clear.

Look, once again James and John have misunderstood, what lies ahead of them.

Yes, James and John wanted position, and they wanted prestige as well. Now finally, they wanted power.

Notice that the other ten disciples became all worked up, when they heard what James, and John were up to.

It was a power play, a strategic maneuver, and the other disciples resented it.

Ask yourself, why are we like this? Why do we pursue positions of power, when there is so much more reward, in reaching out to others?

Perhaps you have heard the story about the three trees? The trees were talking in the forest one day about their dreams for the future.

The first tree said, it would like to be made into a cradle, so that it might go on living as a support for the fragile life of a tiny new baby.

The second tree, wanted to be made into a big ship, so that it might go on living, carrying important cargo and influential people to exotic new lands.

The third tree, longed to stay right where it was, existing only as a tree, but growing ever taller, and pointing ever higher, to remind everyone that there is a God in heaven who loves them.

Those were their dreams: One wanted to be a cradle, one wanted to be a mighty ship, and one wanted to be a tall tree, pointing people toward God.

But then one day the woodcutters came and chopped down the three trees...and destroyed their dreams.

The first tree was not made into a cradle, but into a simple feeding trough, a manger for animals.

But the manger was sold to a family in Bethlehem, and on the night Jesus was born, that simple feed box, became the cradle for the Christ Child.

The second tree was built into a boat, but not the kind it had dreamed of, not a mighty ocean-going vessel--but a tiny inexpensive fishing boat.

A man named Simon Peter bought the boat, and on one warm afternoon when the crowds pressed in.

Jesus Himself climbed aboard that small fishing boat, so that He might preach the good news to the multitudes. Now, the third tree also was deprived of its dream.

It wanted to remain standing tall, and pointing toward God. Instead, it was cut down, and shaped into a horrible instrument of torture, a cross.

But it was on that very cross, that Jesus was crucified, transforming a symbol of cruelty into a powerful reminder of God's eternal love for all people.

The three trees were humbled, but in the plan of God, they were exalted. That my friends, is the way it works.

Look, when we, in humility, give ourselves to God, He can do great things through us, and for us. Greater than we can ever imagine.

Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.