

## The Chasm Between Gainers and Givers

*The Gospel of Mark Part 2*

*Mark 10:35-45*

Two weeks ago, while on lunch break inside the Convention Center in New Orleans, I heard the strange sounds of engines roaring; sounds that were growing louder by the second. I looked to see if an alien aircraft had crashed into the Convention Center because the Martins on board had grown tired of listening to sermons from Baptist Preachers. I didn't spot one. But I did spot two individuals playing a game at the next table over on their phones that I had never heard of. They called it Name That Combustion Engine. The object of was to name the automobile by the sound of the combustion engine. They went back and forth for 30 minutes, ruining my fellowship time with my bowl of jambalaya. One would play the sound of an engine and the other would respond in a matter of seconds: "that's an 8-liter Ford Mustang with Eco boost." Then sounds of the next engine would roar and the other guy would respond in a matter of seconds: "that's a 12-liter Dodge Charger with a Hemi engine." I became convinced they flew to the wrong city for the wrong conference. My ears were ringing so bad that I was thankful to go back into a business meeting. I may not be suitable to be the next contestant on Name That Combustion Engine, but I do know a little about what makes a combustion engine combust. You take fuel and air and compress them inside the cylinders. When the spark plugs fires, then — *boom*— it's combustion time. Then, off you go in your Ford Taurus.

Friend, I want to tell you this morning, that combustion may indeed move your automobile forward. But what combustion won't do is move the Gospel forward, especially when combustion happens among the people of God. And in Mark 10:35-45, combustion happens, and it threatens to keep the disciples in park. It came in the form of a question from 2 spark plugs: James and John, the sons of Zebedee. "Teacher," they asked Jesus, "let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in glory." It was a question about what they could gain. As a result, it produced an equal and opposite reaction in the other ten. It produced indignation. But it also produced something else: the greatest explanation from Jesus about how the Kingdom of God advances this world has ever seen: "the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many."

Dear Friends, I want to suggest to you today that there is a great chasm that exists between gainers and givers. You can see that great chasm in every aspect of life if you look hard enough. You see it in marriages. You see it in friendships. You see it businesses. You see it among clergy. You see it among church leaders. And you see it among the people of God who gather each Sunday faithfully to hear the Word of God and strive to put it into practice. The world might say it takes both the gainer and the giver to create combustion and drive things forward. But I want to tell you today unashamedly that Jesus says the exact opposite. The Kingdom of God advances through giving. And the willingness to be a servant is the fuel that creates the combustion. *So, I want to show you from Mark 10:35-45 the chasm that exists between gainers and givers by pointing out the differences between the two.* Here's why you need to listen: if you get this fundamental principle of the Christian right, it will produce spiritual fruit in every single area of your life. But if you get it wrong, you will miss what Jesus desires from you, like James and John, the Sons of Zebedee, *almost* did. Let's read together.

<sup>35</sup> Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." <sup>36</sup> "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. <sup>37</sup> They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." <sup>38</sup> "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" <sup>39</sup> "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, <sup>40</sup> but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." <sup>41</sup> When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. <sup>42</sup> Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> 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."

### 1. Different Attitudes (35, 45)

- **Chuck Swindoll on Attitude:** "The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, the education, the money, than circumstances, than failure, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company... a church... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past... we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it. And so, it is with you... we are in charge of our Attitudes."
- **Attitudes of Gainers and Givers:** The gainer's attitude is *I need you to do this for me, Jesus!* On the other hand, the giver's attitude is *What do you want from me, Jesus?*
- **Attitude Contrast in this Passage:** (1) Mark sets up the contrast in two phrases, one at the beginning and one at the end: "sons of Zebedee" (35) and "Son of Man" (45). (2) Zebedee was high society in Galilee, as were his sons James and John. He owned a fishing company in Capernaum and was extremely wealthy. We know this from biblical material in the Gospels and from extra-biblical material. There is a column to the ancient synagogue in Capernaum with an inscription that reads: "Alphaeus, son of Zebedee, son of John made this column. Their mother, Salome, also funded Jesus' ministry. So, James and John ask the question in v35 because they thought they had earned the right to more than the others. You've gained from us Jesus, now we want to gain from you by doing whatever we ask. (2) Therefore, it's no coincidence Jesus uses the phrase Son of Man in v45. It's used 69 times in the NT and denotes the idea of Jesus being *necessarily* human. He had to be to die on a cross. That was his greatest act of faithfulness and service. The contrast between the two is therefore obvious and intentional.

- **App:** Your quiet conversations with Jesus can reveal something to you about your attitude in your relationship with Jesus. Is it dominated by “I want you to do for me whatever I ask?” Or “what do you want from me, Jesus?” They are two completely different attitudes.

## 2. That Produce Different Motives (37, 43)

- **The Elderly Man and the Magic Lamp:** (1) An elderly man found a magic lamp on the beach. So, he picked it up and the genie appeared. “Because you have freed me,” the genie said, “I will grant you one wish.” (2) To which the elderly man responded: “My brother and I had a fight 30 years ago and he hasn’t spoken to me since. I wish he would finally forgive me. (3) To which the genie responds: “I’ll grant you that wish. Most would have asked for wealth, a longer life, or fame. But you only wanted the love of your brother. Is it because you are old and dying? (3) “No way,” said the old man. “But my brother is, and he’s worth about 60 million.
- **Motives of Gainers and Givers:** The gainer’s motives are: what do I have to gain? What’s in it for me? How can I benefit? On the other hand, the giver’s motives are: What’s in it for you, Jesus? How can I give? How can I serve? How can the Gospel go forward?
- **The Contrast of Motives in this Passage:** (1) In v37, the brothers ask a question that reveals their motives: let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in glory. The image is one of a king and his court. This one though is the triumphant court of Jesus after all is said in done. The right side of the king is a privileged position. The name Benjamin means “son of my right hand.” It’s the place where Solomon sat Bathsheba, his mother, at his coronation. Equally, the left side (contrary to what some think) is also a privileged position. It’s where Solomon’s general, Abner, sat at his coronation. As a result, their request reveals their motive: the only reason we’ve followed you is because we want to gain something. We want to gain glory and honor. (2) On the other hand, in v43, Jesus says “whoever wants to become great (that’s a motive) must be your servant. Slaves were taken against their will and forced to serve. But servants chose to serve God and neighbor voluntarily. And that’s the essence of not only how God defines greatness, but how the Kingdom of God advances.
- **App:** Motives of the heart can also say something to us about whether we fall into the category of gainers and givers. Am I doing this because I have something to gain from it? Or am I doing this because I want to give. I want to serve. And I want to see this go forward.

## 3. That Produce Different Confidences (38-39)

- **Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader:** (1) I used to watch a show on television called Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader. I used to call it the What Happens When You Put Your Confidence in the Flesh Show. (2) Because in every episode, there was always some adult with a big smile on their face because they expected to win. They wouldn’t have agreed to be on the show if they didn’t. (3) And then the game began, and the smile turned into a frown because they didn’t know the answer, but the fifth grader did: (a) What general led the US troops during the Vietnam War? Adult: no answer. 5<sup>th</sup> grader: Gen. William Westmoreland. (b) What is the plural form of the word “deer?” Adult: Deers? 5<sup>th</sup> Grader: Nope. Deer.
- **The Confidences of Gainers and Givers:** The gainer’s confidence is in the flesh. It says: “I believe I can.” The giver’s confidence is in the Spirit: “I can’t do that in my own strength, Lord. But I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”
- **The Confidences Contrast in this Passage:** (1) Are illustrated clearly in v38-39. “Can you drink from my cup or be baptized with my baptism,” Jesus asked them. “We can,” James and John answer. (2) “Cup” and “Baptism” are metaphors in both verses. And what James and John think these metaphors mean and what Jesus knows they mean are different. (3) “Cup” is a metaphor for what God has in store for an individual. John and James think their “cup” to fame and glory. It will, but not in the way they think. To “baptize” is to immerse. It’s not used here the way we speak of baptism. It’s used here to say: “do you think you can immerse yourself in what God has in store for you.” To which they respond, “we can.” (4) Jesus knows his cup is suffering and he will immerse himself in it. They don’t know that, but they will soon find out, in Jesus’ life and in their lives after the resurrection and ascension. James, in fact, is the first martyr in the Book of Acts. (5) They put their confidence in the flesh, and it caused them to have an improper view of themselves and God’s cup.
- **App:** When we want to gain, we put our confidence in the flesh and have an improper view of ourselves and God’s cup for us. On the other hand, when we give our lives willingly as Jesus did, we sing “whatever my lot/cup is, it is well with my soul.” “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

## 4. That Produce Different Results (41-42)

- **Mom and Dad’s Chore List:** (1) My mom and dad had a chalk board on our refrigerator with the chores my brother, sister and I had to do after school. (2) But if one of us didn’t do our chores, none of us got to do anything for the rest of the day we wanted to do. (3) I’ll assure you that if two of us did them and one didn’t, we didn’t look upon the one who didn’t with any amount of favor, only contempt.
- **Results Produced from Gainers and Givers:** In life, and especially within the Body of Christ, gainers will inevitably produce indignation because what they desire comes at the expense of the rest of the body. On the other hand, givers produce the very of essence of the character of Christ because he modeled it. And the Kingdom of God advances because of it.
- **The Results Contrast in this Passage:** (1) Is straightforward and in v41-44. (2) When the ten heard James and John’s request, they were “indignant.” It’s a word that denotes their intense anger and their selfishly ambitious request. One brought on because James/John put themselves above the others. That’s ultimately the result that “gainers” produce. (2) But Jesus responds to the conflict in a way that’s interesting: You are not going to Lord over people like the Gentiles. It’s a statement that implies authority and responsibility over others, just not in the way they thought. They were going to do this by serving/giving of themselves, including their very lives...just like Jesus.
- **App:** The central verse in the Gospel of Mark must be the center of our lives if we want to continue to see the Kingdom advance through our efforts. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.”