

Lord Jesus Christ, who by precept and example taught us that the greatest of all is the servant of all, and that the humble shall be exalted: Make us content to take the lowest place; and if it shall please You to call us higher, we ask that You would preserve within us a simple and lowly spirit; to Your great glory. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 122)

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to [Jesus] and said to Him, "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." 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." And 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."

In Christ Jesus, the Lord of lords who came among us also as the Servant of servants, dear fellow redeemed:

I have always wanted to use our text, especially verse 43 as the text of a new pastor's ordination sermon. And to use the King James Version, where Jesus says: "whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister." It would be a fun play-on-words. Often people will call the Pastor, the Minister. But the word "minister" primarily means servant. The Pastor is called by God to serve His people.

But in truth all Christians whether in the pastoral office or not are called by God to serve neighbor. If understood correctly we are all "ministers" according to our text. But what also comes out in our text is that we have been elevated by the work of the Lord of lords, by God's grace we are also lords. Let us then consider our text with this truth in mind: **In Christ, We Are Lords of All, Subject to None AND Servants of All Subject to Everyone.**

I

This is a truth that was brought back to light through the Lutheran Reformation, which God performed in His Church through

the work of His servant, Dr. Martin Luther. He made this point in an early published pamphlet entitled "On Christian Freedom":

A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one. Although these statements appear contradictory, yet, when they are found to agree together, they will do excellently for my purpose. They are both the statements of Paul himself, who says, "Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself a servant unto all" (I Cor. ix. 19), and "Owe no man anything but to love one another" (Rom. xiii. 8). Now love is by its own nature dutiful and obedient to the beloved object. Thus even Christ, though Lord of all things, was yet made of a woman; made under the law; at once free and a servant; at once in the form of God and in the form of a servant.

James and John were among the inner circle of Jesus. They along with Peter ascended the Mount of Transfiguration, they were brought in to the room where Jairus' daughter would be raised from the dead. They would soon be selected to join Jesus deeper in the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. In addition Jesus had just told them that His Apostles would sit as lords in seats of judgment over the twelve tribes of Israel. Is it any wonder that they would assume that perhaps they were to be selected for even greater honor in heaven? They asked Jesus: "Grant us to sit, one at Your right hand and one at Your left, in your glory."

Now they must have had some reservations about making this request, because in Matthew's account we are told that it was actually communicated directly to Jesus through their mother. But they were bold enough to consider such a request. Again this assumption can come naturally to those who know and believe they are heirs of the eternal kingdom, co-heirs with the Son of God, or as Peter would speak of Christians in his first letter: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God."

This all came at a dear price: the holy precious blood of God's Son for all sinners. Those who trust in Him as the only Savior are granted this exalted position before the Father in heaven. When the Spirit created this faith in us whether through the waters of our baptism or through hearing the regenerative Word of Christ, it was as dramatic a transition for us as it was for that lost son going from being denied to eat even the slop served to pigs to the royally dressed son for whom the fattened calf was slaughtered in celebration of his return.

My fellow heirs with Christ Jesus, we are made lords of all things for the sake of His supreme sacrifice made for us. Through

faith in Him our exalted seats await us in the courts of heaven. All our sins have been forgiven and we are dressed in the regal robes of Christ's righteousness forever. No one can snatch us from the safe position at the right hand of the Lord of lords bedecked with crowns of glory.

II

And yet while we possess these prestigious positions we are also given by the same Lord humble hearts, which do not allow us to use our positions as lords to lord it over others. Yes, we will in the weakness of our sinful flesh conduct ourselves with pride and arrogance at times, just as James and John did in our text. We too will need to hear the same instruction over again as our Lord here provides.

But notice how our Lord does not unmercifully rebuke them. The other ten disciples did not take it so well, but our Lord used it as a time for patient instruction. In their ignorance, Jesus asks them: "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" To which they immediately answer with all confidence: "We are able." Jesus then goes on to instruct: "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."

From what cup would Jesus drink? It was the cup that He in great anguish asked to be removed from Him the night before His crucifixion. But it was the Father's will that His beloved Son drink to the most bitter dregs. It was filled with the eternal hateful wrath of the Father toward all sin: your sin, my sin, the sin of the whole world. How would His believers drink of this cup, since He drank it all up for us to the point of declaring: "It is finished."? It is for us the cup of hatred from the unbelieving world for Him that He should dare come and claim to be the Savior of the whole world of sinners. As much as we love the name "Savior" the world hates it, because it means they are not good enough, they too need to be saved.

So we also share in His baptism into death. We must die with Him and be buried with Him in our baptisms. The Lord of lords, the Lord of Life, the one who breathed into the human race the very breath of life, lay immovably breathless for three days and for what purpose? He gave His life as a ransom for us, the entire human race. Although the Lord of lords, He did not come to be served but to serve, willingly expending His life for us.

The lesson was taught to James and John, and the other indignant ten disciples, to you and me. We have been made lords subject to none, but also in that royal freedom we have been set free to serve.

We are honoring one of our fellow lords today who has served among us for many years. Sharon King, knowing and trusting in her Lord Jesus, lived as one who was set free from sin, death and hell and yet willingly and faithfully obeyed the call of her Lord to serve us and our many children for a period of about four decades. She too was made to drink from the cup of hateful wrath against her Lord at times when parents despised the application of forgiveness shown to the children of others. She would be branded as lenient and unfair. She too experienced what it means to be baptized into Jesus' death when in her own daily repentance and contrition she needed to drown her own sinful flesh in the waters of her infant baptism. But she arose daily with Christ to serve afresh in newness of life.

The world considers lordship much differently than it is considered in the kingdom of heaven. Learn well to use your royal positions correctly my fellow lords. You have been called to the freedom as lord of all so that you might serve. Again Peter writes in his first letter: "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor." Seek those opportunities right where you live, my fellow free lords, where God has placed you to render the service God has set you free to render.

Our positions in the kingdom of heaven have been prepared for us by the grace of God before the creation of the world. Our eternal inheritance secured by the ransom price of Jesus' precious blood awaits us as we live here drinking from His cup and being baptized with His baptism. Amen.