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*Loaded Questions:
What Do You Want Me to Do for You?*
Mark 10: 32-41; 46-52

Like our students, there are so many things I love about our Mexico mission. One of those things is watching Craig Monson at work. Not only does his team feed us so well that I gained five pounds in Mexico, he is always looking for amazing ways to make us more comfortable. For instance, there is no running water at our camp site. The “shower rooms” are open air walls. You dip a bucket of cold water, hang it on a hook and let it drip on you. But Craig devised a shower system that pumps heated water into both shower rooms so that the kids can have hot showers. I thought I had seen it all...

Until I came home one afternoon and found this *[picture]* next to my tent: an executive washroom... complete with privacy screening, heated water supply, portable electric pump, shower head and, yes, even a bath mat so that I wouldn't have to stand on dirt! It was so cool and so creative. It was the talk of the camp; I loved it!

But let me ask this question: What if I had said to Craig, “One of the conditions of my going to Mexico is that you build for me a private, personal shower stall right next to my tent.” How would that sit with you? Audacious? Well... then you are going to love the audacity of James and John in this morning's story.

For several weeks we have been talking about the spiritual power of asking simple questions. We're not done yet. But beginning today, we are looking at some of Jesus' *Loaded Questions*. These are the hard ones—questions with an edge to them; questions that force the listener to grapple with deeper things. This will be tougher. Are you ready?

Next Sunday will be our annual *Run for Burma*. Our missionaries in Thailand, the Eubanks, lead a ministry in which they hike into Burma to care for the tribes who are being savaged by their own government's military. It is important and dangerous work. Now, just imagine if next Sunday, we were sitting here in worship, watching a video from Dave Eubank and he said, “By the way, I want you to warn you—I am heading back into the jungle tomorrow, and I know that I am going to be betrayed by my friends, arrested, tortured and killed.” Do you think we would find that upsetting?

That is exactly what Jesus says. As a matter of fact, this is the third time in three chapters that He has done so. Jesus wants to make it very clear to his disciples what awaits Him in Jerusalem: betrayal, arrest, humiliation, torture and death. And, by the way, resurrection. He mentions that three times, too. Now, if you were a disciple and heard Jesus make this awful prediction, how would you feel? Anxious? Frightened? This would be devastating news, wouldn't it?

Want to hear how devastating it was? Next verse: "Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.'" Wait a second... What? Jesus just told them that He is about to suffer torture and death... and the very next words out of his key leaders are, "We want you to do whatever we ask!" "Guys, I want you to know that I only have a few days before I am to be brutally murdered." "Well, Jesus, in that case while you're still around, we want you to do us a big favor!" Unbelievable!

The Greek suggests that they know exactly what they are going to ask of Jesus... but they feel embarrassed about it. So they decide to leverage their relationship with Jesus; to get him to sign a blank check before they have to tell Him what they want. James and John know this is callous and self-centered, but they want what they want, so they just bulldoze their way right through. Imagine how hurtful this must have been!

But Jesus responds with grace and with the *Loaded Question* of the morning: "What do you want me to do for you?" "Okay, you want a favor from me; what is it?" Now, if you thought their timing was insensitive, just wait until you hear their request! "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." "Okay, Jesus, you're going to suffer and die... blah, blah, blah, blah... whatever. But we know that, in the end, you are going to be in charge. You are God's Messiah; He's going to put you on a throne. And when that happens, promise us this: how about you put the Zebedee boys in the positions of greatest honor—one of us on your right hand... one of us on your left? It would sure make our mama proud!" Breathtaking!

A woman I will call Sally recently went to California to be with her mom who has only a few months left to live. While there, the doorbell rang and three of her mother's church "friends" came to visit. As they talked, one of the visitors pointed to the table and said, "We'd like to have those centerpieces back." Sally had no idea what they meant and later asked her mom for an explanation. Oh," she said, "they made those centerpieces for me. They were saying that after I die, they want them back." Wow!

When our staff was discussing this passage, Rachel White said, "It's like your mom tells you that she has just been diagnosed with terminal cancer and you respond, 'Well, can I have the house?'"

Isn't that awful? It is a huge offense against Jesus. But not only against Jesus... who else? Let me give you a hint. There were three men in Jesus' inner circle: James, John and... Peter! Recently, Jesus had bragged on Peter and promoted him to head honcho disciple. James and John did the math. "Let's see, when Jesus gets into power, He will have two positions of honor: one on His right hand and one on His left hand. One plus one equals two... and there are three of us. Hmm... If we don't act now, it may be too late. Pete's a good guy, but blood is thicker than water..."

That was their plan. Cut Peter and the rest of the disciples out of the action with a pre-emptive strike! Grab the positions of power while they have the chance. "What do you want me to do for you," Jesus asks James and John. "Give us fame and power," they reply. Wow! Not their finest hour. Mark is so irritated with this incident that he's not done making his point. Let's look at the next story. *[Read verses 46-52.]*

As Jesus continued His last march toward Jerusalem, they passed through the city of Jericho. A blind man name Bartimaeus had heard about this miracle-worker and was determined to get his moment with Jesus. As Jesus and his posse waded through the crowds, Bartimaeus, who was sitting by the road begging, began to scream at the top of his lungs: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" It was embarrassing! Everyone around tried to "shush" him, but Bartimaeus would not be shushed. Jesus heard him and told the crowd to bring the man. Bartimaeus jumped to his feet and was led to Jesus. Then Jesus asks him a question. Did you see it? The exact same question. "What do you want me to do for you?"

"I want to see," he replied. 'Go,' said Jesus, 'your faith has healed you.' Immediately, he received his sight and followed Jesus along the way." What a contrast! Jesus asks His closest friends what they want from Him. They want fame and power. Jesus asks a blind beggar what he wants; he wants his healing. James and John want to be with Jesus in glory, because they want to be spiritual hotshots. Bartimaeus screams to be with Jesus because he's a broken nobody. James and John want what Jesus could do for them. Bartimaeus wants Jesus.

So here is the loaded question that is going to stick us right in the craw: Do you want Jesus, or do you just want the perks that Jesus offers? We often try to "sell" Jesus on the basis of all the good stuff He can do for us. "If you follow Jesus, look what's behind door number 1: forgiveness, healing blessing, prosperity. He'll take away your sins, give you a bigger house and take you to heaven when you die. This is what you'll get if you sign up for Jesus right now." It's like throwing spiritual chum in the water to the unsuspecting fish. And of course, it is true that Jesus brings blessings. It is wonderfully true that in Christ, we find healing and forgiveness and peace and eternal life. Bart did get his eyesight. Praise the Lord!

But the question "What do you want me to do for you?" is an enormously loaded question for each of us... especially for churchy, Christian folk. Do we want Jesus

because loving and being loved by Jesus is the very best thing in the world, or do we want Jesus mostly because of all the cool stuff He doles out to us?

Do you find my question odd? Then think of it this way. Who is the person you love most? For me, it is Cyndi. I enjoy my wife; I want to be with her. And not because of all the stuff she does for me, although she does a lot of stuff for me. I want to be with Cyndi because I love her and being in her presence is my supreme earthly pleasure.

And if you are a Christian, there was probably a time when that described your relationship with the Lord. You discovered that knowing Jesus, being with Jesus, spending time with Jesus, loving Jesus was its own supreme reward. The stuff that He did for you was only a wonderful side benefit.

But like James and John, it is easy for love to dull... easy to take Jesus for granted. After years of faith, it's easy to think of Jesus in terms of what He can do for us: make me rich, make me powerful, make me healthy, make me well, make me blessed. Someone, somewhere, once observed, "Most people love Jesus the way the farmer loves the cow: for the milk and the cheese."

Pastor John Piper asks this hard question of us in his book, *God is the Gospel*:

The critical question for our generation—and for every generation— is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?

The grim fact is that in this moment, James and John became users. They were just using Jesus. They wanted Him for the fame and power that He could bestow upon them. They weren't interested in Him for the delight of having a relationship with Him. They weren't interested in His call to servanthood and sacrifice. They certainly weren't excited about joining Him on His road to suffering and death. They wanted fame, power and glory. That was their answer to His question. That's what they wanted Jesus to do for them.

You know, this passage makes me angrier than any other story about the disciples. Really angry. When the disciples can't heal a man's demon-possessed son because they lack the faith, I am sympathetic. I lack faith. When the disciples fall asleep in Gethsemane, I am sympathetic. I get tired and bored. Even when Peter denies Jesus, I am sympathetic. I get gutless, too. But this insensitive, self-centered incident really disgusts me. And up until Friday night, I couldn't figure out why. Why does this story, of all the stories, make me so mad?

And then a horrible thought struck me: maybe it's because this one cuts closer to the bone than ever I realized. Maybe I hate this story because I realize how I

want to use my relationship with Jesus for my own fame or power or glory or whatever. Maybe it's why I had to stop looking at Sunday morning worship attendance numbers because it's like a heady morphine drip to me. Maybe it's why my morning prayers can sometimes seem like duty. Because, like James and John, I am more interested in the list of things Jesus can do for me than I am interested in being with Jesus. And when I see that in myself, I hate it. And it shames me. It makes me feel like a user, too.

So, how about you? What do you want Jesus to do for you? One way to test this is to ask why you come to church: "I come because the buildings are cool, the music is great, the kids' programs are awesome, Upward Basketball is incredible, the food is tasty, the fellowship is warm, the sermon entertains me, the worship inspires me." I hope those things are true, mostly, but think about it. Shouldn't our first response be, "I come to meet Jesus. I come because Jesus is here and I want to be with Him and worship Him."?

In this shameful moment, James and John were users. I hate this story because too often, I am a user, too. How about you? There are people seated here this morning who are only interested in Jesus for the payout they receive—only interested in Jesus' forgiveness, Jesus' blessing, Jesus' eternal life, Jesus' perks—but who have little interest in Jesus. You don't love Him, really. You don't serve Him, you don't give to Him, you don't follow Him. You just use Him.

Fame? Power? Glory? Blessing? Healing? Prosperity? "What do you want me to do for you?" I think Jesus longs to hear from us, "I want you."

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. Can you share a time when you were so focused on what you wanted, that you wounded and offended those close to you?
 2. Do you find this passage of scripture audacious? Why or why not?
 3. Jesus asked the same question of Bartimaeus in chapter 11. Contrast their responses.
 4. Grapple with this question: Do you want most what Jesus can do for you... or do you want Jesus most? Period.