

It is to the glory of God that we serve and we all serve as equals before God in this respect. The service we enter is one of dying and rising. James's mother, in this version of the third prediction of the passion, is still living in a world where service to a king or queen is all about inequality and gaining reward, moving up through the ranks, acquiring land and wealth. It's all about competition rather than co-operation, stealing a march on one's fellow, I'm alright Jack, the rest of you can, in effect, go to hell. That's an exaggeration no doubt in the case of James and John but where this sort of thinking eventually ends up, the trickledown theory seen for what it really is. There's a trickledown theory also going on in Paul's letters to the Corinthians, but it works in quite a different way. It begins with an admission of our radical inequality before God:

*"we are only the earthenware jars that hold the treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us."*

We are all equal in this radical inequality before God and equal too in its radical overcoming in Christ. The importance of Paul is that he has come to understand that Christ relives in him his own pattern of death and resurrection. Every day, every event, becomes a matter of dying and rising, dying to self so that Christ might rise within him. Superficially this may seem to be an invitation to suffering as a way to gain, praising victimhood as a way to God, relishing the status of a doormat Christian, willingly open to the abuse of others. But Paul is no more a doormat than was Christ. He suffers precisely because, like Christ and in Christ, he stands in opposition to this way of thinking, to this abuse of others for one's own personal gain or the gain of one race or nation against another. And he dies to himself so that Christ might live not only in himself but in others:

*"we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus too may be seen in our body."*

This is the witness that Jesus invites James and John to embrace – the cup that he gives them:

*"but as for seats at the right hand and my left, these are not mine to grant."*

They are in the gift of God and we don't know how that will actually play out in each of our lives. So at one stroke Jesus cuts away any hope of self-aggrandisement through faith. No, we serve as the Spirit leads. Full stop.

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