

Mark 10:40

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.

Analysis

But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared (τὸ δὲ καθίσαι ἐκ δεξιῶν μου ἡ ἐξ εὐωνύμων οὐκ ἔστιν ἔμὸν δοῦναι, ἀλλ’ οἵς ἡτοίμασται, to de kathisai ek dexiōn mou ē ex euōnymōn ouk estin emon dounai, all' hois hētoimastai). Jesus affirms divine sovereignty in kingdom appointments—positions of honor aren't dispensed through human favoritism, nepotism, or presumption, but according to the Father's eternal purposes.

The phrase "not mine to give" has sparked theological discussion. Does this limit Jesus' authority? Reformed theology understands this as Jesus speaking in His mediatorial office as incarnate Son—kingdom positions aren't arbitrary gifts Jesus dispenses based on personal preference, but divinely determined according to the Father's will. Matthew's parallel (20:23) adds "but for them for whom it is prepared of my Father," clarifying the Father's sovereign role.

The verb ἡτοίμασται (hētoimastai, "has been prepared") uses the perfect tense, indicating completed action with ongoing results—God has already determined kingdom positions according to His eternal counsel. This doesn't eliminate human responsibility but emphasizes that greatness in God's kingdom isn't achieved through self-promotion but through faithful service according to divine calling.

Historical Context

This response would have shocked James and John. In ancient patronage systems, powerful individuals dispensed positions to loyal followers, family members, or highest bidders. Jesus rejects this worldly model entirely—God's kingdom operates on radically different principles. Positions aren't negotiated, earned through political maneuvering, or granted through family connections, but prepared by God for those who faithfully serve. This teaching challenged not only the disciples' personal ambition but the entire cultural framework of honor, status, and social advancement.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' statement that positions are 'prepared' by God rather than earned through ambition reshape your understanding of kingdom service?
2. What does this teaching reveal about God's sovereignty in spiritual gifts, callings, and responsibilities within the church?
3. How do you respond when others receive positions, recognition, or opportunities you desired—with envy or trust in God's sovereign purposes?

Interlinear Text

τὸ	δὲ	καθίσαι	ἐξ	δεξιῶν	μου	καὶ	ἐξ	εὐωνύμων
G3588	But	to sit	on	right hand	my	and	on	left hand
G1161	G2523	G1537	G1188	G3450	G2532	G1537	G2176	
μου	οὐκ	ἔστιν	ἐμὸν	δοῦναι	ἀλλ'		οῖς	
my	not	is	mine	to give	but	it shall be given to them for whom		
G3450	G3756	G2076	G1699	G1325	G235		G3739	
ἵτοιμασται								
it is prepared								
G2090								

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 20:23 (Parallel theme): And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.

Matthew 25:34 (Parallel theme): Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

Hebrews 11:16 (Parallel theme): But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

John 17:2 (Parallel theme): As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

John 17:24 (Parallel theme): Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.