

**Great Servants of a Great God, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 20061022**  
**Hebrews 5:1-10 and Mark 10:35-45**  
**Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 22 October, 2006**

James and John the sons of Zebedee, the “sons of thunder,” just didn’t get it. Jesus had just told them and the other disciples that he was going to be tried, tortured, and crucified. This was deep-feeling and tragic stuff. Some of the disciples were probably shocked by what Jesus said. They might have responded by saying, “He’s going to be arrested, humiliated.”

“He’s our leader. They can’t do that to him.”

“What are we going to do without him?”

Not James and John, though. Their response was, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”<sup>1</sup> That is not far different from some prayer requests I’ve heard. Some preach Christ as the great magician, saying, “Call upon him, and he will grant your every prayer.”

“If you truly love Jesus, he will bless you with wealth and riches.”

The sons of Thunder were pretty cheeky. “We want you to for us *whatever* we ask of you.” Jesus was up to their request. He responded, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Here it comes. The sons of Thunder ask Jesus, who had just told them about his impending torture and death, to let them sit on either side of him in his glory. It is as though they had been with him all these years, and they just did not get it. They did not understand what Jesus was all about.

Are you and I the same way as James and John, the sons of thunder? We can go to church all of our lives and still not understand what Jesus is all about. He is not a genie from a bottle. He won’t make us rich in wealth or power, or even security in things of this world. We cannot follow him for glory.

Jesus asked the sons of thunder if they were able to drink the cup that he would drink, and he didn’t mean one of those little communion cups of grape juice. He meant the cup of death. They glibly answered that they were ready. I don’t think so. I think they were being naive.

Are we too quick to say “yes” to Jesus? Are we ready to follow Jesus for the glory, but not willing to drink the cup? The cup of derision from our friends when we argue for rights for welfare recipients? ... or when we tell the little league and soccer coaches that we will not allow our children to practice or play games on Sunday morning? ... or when we remind a friend that God loves all people, including those she just made a joke about?

Following Jesus takes courage. We better be sure we know what we are opening ourselves up for before we say we’ll follow him. Are you sure you want to follow this Jesus and worship the God he revealed to us? This is not the invincible God who throws thunderbolts on people God disagrees with. Jesus revealed to us a God who suffers with the people. This is a God who hears the cries of the poor and defends the orphans and immigrants. This is a God who surely sorrows when Shiites and Sunnis and Christians and Jews act in hatred towards one another. This is a God who comes as a vulnerable baby born among the homeless and associates with the outcasts and invites us to hope like children.

When we follow this Jesus, we will be aware of our own vulnerability. But ironically, it is then, that we may find our strength. We will be shaped and molded into tools that God will use to spread God’s realm.

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<sup>1</sup>Mark 10:35

I get weary. There is so much to do. And there is so much resistance to change. It is easy to give up. Have you had times when you felt like giving up? Those are our times of vulnerability when we just might find strength coming from God.

Max Lucado wrote a book entitled, *On the Anvil*.<sup>2</sup> In his introduction, he talks about different tools in the blacksmith's shop.

Some are on the junk pile: outdated, broken, rusty, and dull. They are full of cobwebs and useless to their master, oblivious to their calling. There are tools on the anvil: melted down, molten hot, moldable, changeable. They lie on the anvil, being shaped by their master, accepting their calling. These tools are strong, made of "living steel!" Living steel, considered by many to be the finest steel developed by European sword makers, can only be produced by using the finest charcoal, hammer, anvil, fire and sweat. Most steels have a random crystalline structure. In Living steel, the crystalline structure becomes highly aligned, focusing its natural energy along the edge and towards the point. Under the hammer blows the steel becomes exceedingly dense. The hammer blows break the microscopic crystals as they form and forces them into a tighter more highly aligned pattern. The grain boundaries become so small that it becomes difficult to distinguish one crystal from another even with a microscope. Modern metallurgy refers to this as super micro crystalline grain. In essence the entire blade becomes a single crystal of steel. When steel shatters the break occurs along the grain boundaries between the crystals. Smaller crystals in a more highly aligned pattern reduce the grain boundaries, making it more difficult for a break to occur.

– Angel Sword Forge, Wimberly Texas

We as Christians have to be willing to drink the cup and to be baptized with the baptism of Jesus. We must be willing to go through the fire to become the Living steel that God is going to be able to use. We are placed under the Master's hammer and on his anvil. We are heated, hammered, and plunged into cold water over and over again.

God is building Living steel out of us, and God will use us for God's glory if we are willing to follow Jesus and drink his cup.

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<sup>2</sup>Max Lucado, *On the Anvil* © 1983, Tyndale House Publishers