

The Serving Son
Mark 10:35-45

Amen. We get to sing to our God, Father, Spirit, and Son, and focus here on Mark's gospel again where we are honing in on the Son and His ministry. Jesus upon this earth as we return to Mark chapter 10, and we've noted as we've gone through Mark, the purpose or the whole point of the gospel is giving us the message. The book that Mark wrote is to give us the beginning of the good news of Jesus the Messiah; the good news which is concerning and wrapped up on and hinged upon Jesus the Christ, the Anointed One, who came to this earth, and as we've gone through this, we've seen Mark display this over and over again.

And if we think about the gospel, and we think about the good news beyond just what we have in Mark, but looking at the whole of the New Testament, we find so many important aspects of how the gospel is necessary, important, foundational for us as believers. I mean, we just think of different Scriptures that come to mind that Paul said, the gospels of first importance in 1 Corinthians 15, and Romans 1:10, he called it "...the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." In Romans 10, he talks about how it is exactly our salvation. The gospel saves us and justifies us. It makes us right with God. We see that the gospel causes us to be born again. It is the gift of God. It's our peace with God that we can be reconciled and no longer enemies with Him. It is the wisdom of God, this message of good news, and it's the word of truth by which we heard expressed faith and were born again; and we know this from Scripture. We know how all of this works together as we have the privilege of studying the whole of Scripture, all of the New Testament and seeing it come together and how it just comes to us in this blessing, this wave of blessing, that we have received in the good news of Jesus Christ.

The interesting thing, though, to think about is that thus far in Mark's gospel when we think about how he's been portraying Jesus and showing Jesus to us as the reader, we see a lot of factual information, a lot of historical accounts of who Jesus was and what He said and the different miracles He did, and we learn about Christ and His compassion and His mercy, His love, His grace that He offers and how He interacts with people. And recently, as we think back to the end of chapter 8 and on in to where we are in chapter

10, we've seen things get a little more detailed as Jesus has actually predicted and prophesied His own death. He's spoken of this mission of why He came, that He needs to go to Jerusalem. He needs to get arrested and suffer and die on the cross and then be buried and after three days rise again. We're learning more about Jesus, not only is He qualified to be the Messiah in everything He does, He's perfect and matches exactly what the Old Testament anticipated in regard to a Messiah to come and be the King of kings and rule God's kingdom on earth, but He has this mission to go die, to go die in Jerusalem.

And what we really haven't answered is why? Why this mission? Why death? Why suffering? Why does this have to be the next thing? Why does this have to be on God's agenda? Why is this His plan? All we've seen so far is Jesus who is clearly qualified to be the Messiah talking about going to suffer, and we as a reader have to ask that question, why? Why can't He just go to the throne? Why can't He just kick out the Romans. Why can't He just assume authority and rule over the earth at this time. Our passage today is a monumental passage in the gospel and in really the whole of Scripture, and that helps us understand why it is that Jesus must go to Jerusalem in order to suffer and die. So, join me in looking at Mark 10:35-45, "And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him 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.'"

A wonderful text that's before us, as we see it culminating in a wonderful verse in verse 45. And like we've seen so often in the gospel in the account of Christ and His life, He's able to go into any kind of situation. You name it. Hostility from Jewish leaders or confused disciples or arrogant people and He's able to twist it, turn it, and use it for a great interaction and exchange where there can be good teaching that comes out of it. And so, we're thankful for this. We're thankful that Jesus doesn't just blow them off when James and John these brothers come up. He doesn't decide I'm not going to talk about this. This is ridiculous. You still don't get it. I don't have time for this. But that's not our Savior.

As we see, this wonderful passage gets kicked off by a very selfish request in verses 35-37; "And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.'" That's a wonderful tone, sounds like. To begin this, notice who we're dealing with here. It's "...James and John, the sons of Zebedee..." and we've seen them before so far in Mark's gospel. They have been mentioned at various other places and normally in conjunction with Peter as well. So, normally, you have Peter, James, and John, the three of them there, the inner three of the twelve. There was an inner three that had special privileges at times, to go with Jesus into a house as He raised a young girl from dead back to life, or to go up with Jesus onto the mountain and to see Him in His glory as He transfigured before them, and Moses and Elijah appear and the booming voice of God the Father affirming everything that was taking place and who Jesus in fact is. So, these two brothers here not just two of the twelve but two of even the inner three in the way that they've been engaging with Christ in this ministry.

Additionally, we see in other gospels that they're given the nickname "...the Sons of Thunder..." And that might be appropriate because of how kind of bold they are with certain things including our very scene in front of us. The nickname might fit them well because of their boldness in this passage when they say, "...we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." It sounds like a completely entitled and selfish demand. That's what it is. It's a selfish request. It's hard to say it's a request. It's more of a demand as they're getting into this - seems like they needed to work on their social manners. I'm not sure how they were raised. I'm not sure what they were told to say when they were asking for something, but you can't help but get past the fact that they knew who they were talking to at this point. In the ministry of

Christ, the disciples had actually had the affirmation, and they all knew, after Peter confessed back in Mark 8:29, You are the Christ “You are the Christ...” to Jesus, and Jesus affirmed that. The disciples knew Jesus was the Messiah. There’s no question of that anymore. There was no more of this being in the boat and watching Jesus calm the storms and saying, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” They knew it now. They knew He was in fact the Messiah. That was clear, and yet with that in mind, it just amazes me that James and John come up with this kind of tone. This is still the tone they have approaching the King of kings, the Messiah.

But how does Jesus respond? Like I said, rather than blowing them off, He says, “What do you want me to do for you?” He plays along with it. He allows it to go as He often does, and as we see, for the purpose of what comes in our text, an opportunity to teach, no doubt, but also to reveal what’s in their hearts, to allow for them to speak more, and out of that overflow of the heart, their mouths speaking what their true desires are. So, Jesus asks them what they want. They say, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” Again, still a terrible tone, sounding really just shocking and selfish. They sound like children who are determined to be first in line or to sit in the front seat of the car no matter where they’re driving, to be first to open their presents on Christmas. That’s how these brothers are coming across right now; grant us to be first above everybody else even these ten other guys behind us. “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”

While it is distasteful and insensitive in the way it seems like it comes across, we have to acknowledge they get a couple things right. Well, let’s try and give them a little credit here, if we can give them any credit at all. First, we see they continue to affirm that Jesus is in fact the Messiah. They wouldn’t be asking such a grand request unless they actually believed the person they were talking to was who He said He was, the Messiah. So, they actually have that right. They continue to show that faith that Jesus is the Messiah, and to be fair, Jesus has shown them His glory, and so, they are expecting this glory to come, and they are expecting the kingdom to come. In fact, in Matthew’s parallel passage, they actually say not just “...in your glory...,” they say Matthew 20:21, “...in your kingdom...” So, this idea of Jesus the Messiah being the King over God’s kingdom on earth - this is their expectation. So, they’re certain not just that Jesus is the Messiah, but they’re also certain that the kingdom will come, God’s rule will be established on

this earth, and His will as it is done in heaven will be done additionally on earth. So, they have those things right, but on the other hand, they got a lot wrong, and it's unfortunate. They're clearly misunderstanding Jesus' words.

Just think of how diligent Jesus has been to try and explain to them what's taking place. Yes, He's done the signs to show He's the Messiah, but what has He said to His disciples? Has He said that He will go to Jerusalem, and He will simply rise up and go to the temple, and everyone will fall before Him, and He will become King, and then they will drive out the Romans? He has not said anything of the sort. Instead, as we know, three times on three different occasions just recently, He's said the opposite, that His approach to Jerusalem will actually lead to suffering, death, for Him and thereafter resurrection. How are they forgetting this? I mean, if we're just looking at the two verses right before our text, verses 33-34 (this is where we left off Jesus saying), He's going to die, and here they come to talk about the seating chart in the kingdom. It's amazing. They're completely missing it. They're dull of understanding. They want the right and the left hand because, not just to be close to Jesus, but these are really the seats of greatest honor. As often times in antiquity, the idea of being at the right hand of the king is someone that would be important, like the son of the king or the heir to the throne or the chief advisor of some sort, and so, this is what they're asking. They know what they're asking. They're asking to be second and third most important if they can, on the right and left hand of Jesus in the kingdom.

Pretty clear, and all this is a selfish request as this text kicks off for us, but Jesus continues to show and exude patience, and He seizes the opportunity to teach and use this for good. That's where we see in verses 38-49 the suffering required - the suffering required; "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?'" He has to address them, and at this point He's straightforward with them; He plays along and says, "What do you want me to do for you?" And He knows what they're going to say. They say they want the best seats in the house when it comes to the kingdom, and so now, He says I have to tell you guys you really don't understand what you're asking. You really don't know what you're talking about at this point. You basically missed it.

They don't understand the difficulty of trying to attain to the level that they're expecting. They don't understand the difficulty of sitting at the right and the left of Jesus in the kingdom, of really ascending to such a prominent place in the kingdom, and the reality was, given their current frame of mind, they weren't even close. They weren't going to come close to having their request granted. Why is that? It's because their paradigm was just simply the paradigm of the world. Their way of thinking of who is prominent and who is the best and who is the greatest and who is the leader was completely wrong, and as Jesus has to do, as He has done at other times, He has to turn the paradigm upside down, upside down, and He does this by speaking of the concept of suffering once more; "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" Two metaphors - He throws out these two metaphors of a cup, drinking from a cup, and then being baptized, and so, we kind of go, okay, this is a little unclear. What exactly is being said here? This is where we use the opportunity to dig into the Old Testament and to understand how, maybe, these metaphors might have been used at other places in Scripture, and what we find is that they have been. They have been used and both metaphors, the cup and the baptism, are metaphors that have been used for suffering, suffering, not good things but bad things.

The cup actually has been symbolized as God's judgment and wrath in the Old Testament. There are many places in the prophets where you can see this, but just to give a couple for us, looking here at Psalms 75:7-8, we read "but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another. For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs." God executing His judgment described as a cup of wine getting poured out on the nations; this is what Israel expected as the nations rebelled, and they chose not to embrace Yahweh or Israel for that matter. God would then judge them, and they viewed it in this way, this cup that's getting poured out upon them, the cup of the wrath of God, punishment upon the nations.

As we see further along in the Old Testament that punishment wasn't just for the nations, it was actually even for Israel. In Isaiah 51:17, we read, "Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering." Even Jerusalem, even Israel, the people of God

failing to obey and live in accordance with His Law and standards. And instead of getting blessings, they get cursed, cursed to the point that God pours out His judgment and wrath upon them. In fact, if we just were to look ahead in Mark, if we jump to the end, we go to that night before Jesus gets arrested and then goes to the cross in the morning. In Mark 14, we see Jesus praying in the garden, and we're aware of this when He says, (Mark 14:36), "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Jesus using the same metaphor again. What is about to happen to Him very shortly is this cup of His wrath, the cup of really the wrath and the punishment of almighty God upon mankind. And Jesus, that is what He is going to have to drink. He is going to have to have to bear this punishment and wrath. That's what's going to lead to Him saying on the cross; (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34) "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" God turning on His back on the Son, pouring out His wrath on Jesus.

And then we see this other metaphor of baptism, not just the cup, but baptism, and it too is a parallel or synonymous metaphor for suffering. We continue to see in the context of suffering, looking again in the Old Testament, we see this word can be used at times just to talk about cleansing or washing. So, it can be used in other ways, but often times, it can definitely be used in terms of threatened lives where you are flooded or swept away to one's death. It's not a good thing. It's concerning. For instance, just in the Psalms particularly, we see it often, and one Messianic Psalm that tends to speak of Christ a lot is Psalms 69:1. It reads, "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me." And it's there that actually in some Greek translations of the Old Testament, you have the word baptizó (βαπτίζω). That's the Greek word for baptize that's used there, and again in verses 14-15; "Deliver me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters. Let not the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me."

So, when Jesus is saying this cup that He will drink and the baptism with which He will be baptized, He's both referring to the suffering that awaits Him (what He's already predicted three times), what He must go through when He enters Jerusalem, the suffering and death. Jesus also mentions this in Luke 12:50 He says, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great

is my distress until it is accomplished!” It was distressing moments just as it was in the garden when He was praying asking God to let the cup pass. In the same way, this baptism that awaited Him, the baptism into judgment and suffering, was a distressing thought, and this is what is being described here. And Jesus asks James and John, are you able to do this; “Are you able to drink [this] cup...” this cup of suffering are you able “...to be baptized with [this] baptism...” ...suffering unto death.

In our text, we see “And they said to him, ‘We are able.’” ...quickly claimed their willingness to follow Jesus’ steps. However, I think we can say, it’s very safe to say, they don’t know what they’re talking about. They don’t understand. They don’t realize the extent to which Jesus is using these metaphors and what they are actually indicating. They think, yeah, You show us the necessary steps. You show us the hoops we have to jump through. We’ll do it. We just want to be in that prominent spot with you. And Jesus says, I don’t think you get it. You don’t understand. They think, yes, we are able; we do understand. Jesus knows the outcome and the destiny for all of His followers and the twelve that are there to follow Him. And He goes on and says to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized...” It’s not a question anymore; it’s a promise. It’s a guarantee. This is what is in store for you guys. You do have suffering on the horizon in the same way that Jesus will in fact suffer. So, they too can look forward to this. As we’ve seen before, following Jesus requires, mandates suffering and persecution, and that He is promising to James and John. Suffering is no option. It is the reality for following Christ. Not just James and John that would get this exposure and have this promise, I mean, this is for all the disciples, and then it’s for all the church. It’s for you and me as Peter says in 1 Peter 4:12-13, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings...” This is the whole church, “...share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”

Jesus eventually gets back to their initial request and demand. He says, “...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.” Jesus has done everything perfect in His ministry, perfectly in accordance with God’s will. He came to do exactly what God His Father had Him to do, and in the same way here, Jesus states

that it is the Father to determine who sits where in the kingdom. He is the One who prepared that. He is the One that has set that up. But take a guess - if the Son of Man who is the King of kings would go through the ultimate suffering and sacrifice, what do you think it's going to take to sit at His right and His left? It would be no cake-walk that's for sure. It will take suffering. It's going to take this sacrifice. It's the point of what Jesus is getting at here. They don't know what they're asking. They're not ready to give of themselves to that extent, but they would become ready, and they would give of themselves.

The focus again comes to the shock that people are in for when they realize that the first will be last and the greatest will in fact be a servant and "...slave of all." And that's exactly what Jesus gets into, not just with James and John, but with all of His disciples at the end of our passage here, verses 41-45, this is where we find the Son's ransom - the Son's ransom. After this short exchange with James and John, we read, "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.'" Now we realize that the ten are getting wind of this. They're hearing of this conversation. They might have been within earshot, just a little way away, or they heard it immediately when James and John came back. We don't really know, but when they heard of it, they got mad. They're angry.

And you might think, yeah, it makes sense. I might be angry too, like, man, how insensitive. You guys, really, after He just told us He's going to die for the third time, you're going to start talking about that? You're going to start talking where you can sit and making Him guarantee that for you? But the reality is the ten probably weren't in that frame of mind either. They were probably struggling a little bit, not quite understanding everything still, and frankly, they were probably mad because they wanted those spots. They were probably mad because James and John beat them to the punch. They said, aw, I wanted to ask Jesus that. I wanted to secure that location. They were probably mad just because of James and John jumping to it and them dragging and not getting to it.

Jesus calls them to Him, and He has to speak to all of them. He knows they're mad. He knows what they're thinking, and He brings them in for this teaching; "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them." He invites them all to hear this teaching because, looking around, this is the general truth, and this is the paradigm as I mentioned earlier. This is the frame of mind, this is the way James and John are thinking. This is the way the twelve, all of them, are thinking. They're so used to this way of reasoning; this is how society functions. If you're looking for one that actually has the power, that has the promise, that has the authority, they're going to be the superior one. You'll know it because of how many subordinates they have, how many people are underneath them and how exalted they are, and how they're able to snap their fingers and they get exactly what they want in no time. That's how society functions. That's obviously who the great people are; those are the superior ones. This is the style of leadership not just that they're exalted and they have people underneath them, but even the way they rule. They rule in a kind of tyrannical dictatorship. They are oppressing those underneath them if they want to because they can, and they're able to. They lord it over people. They rule with this heavy hand, and Jesus says you observed this. And no doubt, right away, they're thinking, well, that's for sure. You know the Romans, that's what the Roman's do. And then they put the Herodian family in ruling over us in Israel, and that's all we're getting, the Herodians and how they rule lording it over us. We don't feel cared for at all, of course not.

And this is where Jesus says that's the paradigm, now flip it; "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." The worldly paradigm of leadership would not be the paradigm of greatness for Jesus' followers. I mean, He really goes in the opposite direction with this. He could've said something different. He could've said you know how the worldly leaders rule. You know what they do. I just want you to ease up a little bit, be nicer. You don't have to be unnecessarily mean, just pull back a little bit, but that's not what Jesus says. He says let me go as far in the opposite direction as possible. You know them as the ones that are at the very top, and they have subordinates underneath them. They're the ones on top of everyone else. But instead, I tell you, you want to be great? You want to be prominent? You want to be the leader? You'll be underneath everyone

else. You'll be below. You'll be beneath everyone else. It's not - be a nice leader, it's be a servant, that occupation, if you can even call it that, that position in society that is unwanted. No one desires that. You got into that because you hit financially hard times, and so you became a servant because you had no other option, you're in debt or you're just a slave and you're property, a "...slave of all." Jesus could not be any more opposite than what the disciples were expecting. The world of the disciples believed that those of prominence were those that had everyone underneath them as a subordinate, and God changes it drastically. They'll be beneath everyone else.

This is the case for you and me as well. We start right here with the people around us, brothers and sisters in Christ. We're free in Christ, and we ought to use that freedom to serve one another. That ought to be evident. That ought to be known. And the body of Christ - it is not those that are high up and have the power and authority and people underneath them. It's those that serve. Those are the ones that are truly great as Jesus describes this, and in order to serve in a way that honors God, we have to examine the example of our own Savior; "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." This wonderful verse - notice that He continues to identify Himself as the Messiah. Let's just be very clear. He still calls Himself the Son of Man. He's not saying that's not a thing anymore. He's not saying times have changed, and that was the plan, and now it's not a plan. He still is the Messiah. He still is the King of kings, and there's no question about that.

God is so serious and consistent with His definition of greatness that the King of kings came as a servant. This isn't something that Jesus tells His disciples to do. He will model it Himself the One who is the rightful heir to the earth and everything that is in it. He owns it all. He's already superior. He doesn't need to prove it. It's been done. He's the Creator. He came instead of receiving what was rightfully His in terms of glory and adoration and praise and worship, He came instead to give. His service permeated all that He did in His earthly ministry. Think of all the service we've seen already, how He interacts with people, the outcast leper, the ill women. It doesn't matter - however these people were viewed by society - Jesus did not care. He served, He placed Himself underneath them, but here we find the pinnacle and apex of His service, the sacrifice of His own life. Why? We finally get the reason, not just the statement that it will happen, but now the

reason. Why is it that the Son of Man is giving His life? Why is it that He must die? He gives "...his life as a ransom for many" as payment for many.

Jesus's death was no failure or natural end that every human must embrace. His death was a payment to God. That's what this word ransom is, it's payment, and often times, it's used in reference to payment for slaves, to free them, or prisoners in bondage. Sometimes the word's even used in terms of an offering or a sacrifice to make the gods happy for some time, as pagans understood it. And so, in Jesus' death, there's no lack of purpose. It is loaded with intentionality, that it would be a payment to God, a ransom for the purpose of freeing us from our slavery, slavery and bondage to sin, blinded by Satan, the veil he put over us, walking according to the course of this world, stuck in our sin - but Jesus' life offered as a payment to free us from all of that.

We can stop trying to do the impossible. We can stop trying to work our way to God. We can stop trying to be the rich, young ruler and make ourselves as presentable as possible to God. We can be done with that. Instead, we can just trust simply in Jesus' death as payment that God has accepted for our sins. We no longer fear the inevitable punishment and judgment of God's wrath. Instead, the payment has been given in Jesus' death as Isaiah says in Isaiah 53:10-11, "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities." We finally have the significance. As readers of Mark gospel, we finally understand, and Jesus makes it so clear.

He's not just telling them to be a servant because that's a good thing to do. He's telling them you must be a servant because that is exactly what the King of kings is doing, and in being the ultimate servant and sacrifice, He's granting you life and salvation. He's paying the payment that you could never pay. So, when we serve now, it's not just out of obligation because, aw, I guess that's what God told us to do, but now when we serve, we recognize that every act of service, every time we have that mentality and engage in this, it is a beautiful representation of the salvation that we've received. It's a wonderful picture of the very fact that someone else gave up

their life, served to the extreme, to the max, and it brought eternal life to us. So, now our service represents that it's a picture of the gospel. It's a picture of what Jesus has done. It's a proclamation of good news that the world needs. Every time we serve, we model our Savior who served us, laid down His life to save us. Clearly, this had an impact on John 1. John who is in this episode and later writes in 1 John 3:16, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." This is the beautiful significance of Jesus' mission, purposeful, intentional, to be a ransom, a payment for you and me, for the sinful humanity and the rebellion against God.