

Jesus Teaches To Serve and To Give Our Lives
Mark 10:32-52
Key Verse: 10:45

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

This passage concludes the second semester of Jesus’ teaching to his disciples. It began when Jesus predicted his suffering, death and resurrection at Caesarea Philippi. It ends as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, still teaching his disciples that he would suffer, die and rise again. This had been the theme of Jesus’ teaching in this semester. Jesus concluded by teaching them to serve and to give. This is the way to true greatness in the sight of Jesus. This is the essence of Jesus’ discipleship training. Some of us need to learn this lesson for the first time. Others need to be reminded of it. We can all make progress in becoming like Jesus. Let’s listen to Jesus’ words and make new decisions to live like Jesus.

I. Jesus again predicts his death (32-34)

Look at verse 32a. “They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid.” Jesus knew well what awaited him in Jerusalem. It was suffering and death. Yet he pressed forward with resolution. The disciples were astonished at Jesus. It was because Jesus had firmly decided to give his life to obey the will of God. Jesus does not lead from behind. Jesus goes on ahead into the crucible of suffering, setting an example. Jesus is our hero and leader. Hebrews 12:2 says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” When we look to Jesus, we see victory over the world and joy in the midst of pain. We find the encouragement to press forward in mission.

Look at verses 32b-34. “Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ‘We are going up to Jerusalem,’ he said, ‘and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.’” This is the third time Jesus has mentioned these things to all of his disciples (Mk 8:31-32; 9:31-32). Each time he has added detail. Here, he mentions Jerusalem for the first time. He predicts the events in order: the betrayal, the condemnation, being handed over to Roman soldiers, being mocked, spit on, flogged and killed. Then he would rise again. How could Jesus know in such detail what was going to happen to him? Obviously, God revealed his will to Jesus step by step on the way to Jerusalem. As the picture became clearer, Jesus must have cried out in prayer, depending on God (Heb 5:7-8). Jesus shared God’s will with his disciples though they didn’t seem to accept it. Sometimes it is hard to accept God’s will because it is so contrary to human desires. But God does not change his will; we must learn to accept it through prayer. Then we can keep in step with God. Later, Peter told the Jewish leaders, “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge” (Ac 2:23a). Peter accepted God’s will for Jesus and God’s plan of salvation. God did this because he loves mankind and decided to save us from our sins. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

There is a strange phenomenon in chapters 8-10 of Mark’s gospel. Each time Jesus predicts his suffering, death and resurrection, the disciples react strangely. At the first prediction, Peter began to rebuke Jesus. At the second prediction, all the disciples were afraid and could not speak to Jesus. At the third prediction, James and John make a mad dash for power. Planting gospel faith is a spiritual battle. It requires a challenging spirit, persistence and perseverance through conflict, for the gospel dislodges the power of sin and death in people and in society. Nevertheless, the truth of God’s love in the gospel is a mighty spiritual force that presses forward steadily, unstoppable, until it finally conquers the world. Therefore, we must preach the gospel faithfully, especially through one-to-one Bible study, until it spreads to all American young people.

II. Jesus teaches the way of suffering, service and giving life (35-45)

First, Jesus encourages James and John to share his sufferings (35-41). The disciples knew that Jesus was serious. Something big was going to happen in Jerusalem, though they did not quite understand what. To James and John, timing was important. Perhaps the words, “Carpe Diem!” “Seize the Day!” entered their minds. They came forward and said, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” They were like little children trying to induce Jesus

to give what they wanted even if it was not the right thing. They were actually pretty sneaky. But Jesus loved them and asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” James and John felt that Jesus understood them. So they opened their hearts and said: “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory” (37). They wanted to share power with Jesus as numbers one and two, pushing Peter aside.

The desire to grab power to rule over others may be hidden in the heart of each person. Those who seem humble, kind and gentle when they have no power can suddenly change when power is given. President Abraham Lincoln said, “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.” Obviously, President Lincoln had experienced a few surprises after entrusting men with power. There was a head waiter. One day he served a very influential leader in the community. This man asked for an extra portion of butter. The waiter said, “No.” Then the man stood to his feet and said, “Do you know who I am?” He proceeded to explain which boards and councils he was on and the measure of power he held in the city. Then the head waiter replied, “Do you know who I am? I am in charge of the butter in this restaurant.” Sinful man always tries to gain and exercise power, even deceitfully. Many postmoderns understand this. So they are cynical. They distrust power structures and avoid politics.

James and John's bold power play was shocking. But Jesus did not rebuke them. Jesus understood them deeply and addressed their real spiritual problem. Look at verse 38. “‘You don't know what you are asking,’ Jesus said. ‘Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?’” Jesus pointed out their spiritual ignorance. They thought of Jesus' glory in terms of worldly glory. They imagined that Jesus would exercise power as a king over the world. They were asking to be prime ministers in his earthly kingdom. However, Jesus' glory is much greater than this. Jesus' glory is the glory of the Son of God. In his glory, Jesus sits at the right hand of God Almighty. Jesus rules all creation. Legions of angels attend him, ready to obey his slightest command. Peoples of every tribe, tongue and nation kneel at his feet, throwing crowns before him, worshiping him as God. No one in heaven dares ask to be at Jesus' side in glory. In God's history, many suffered much to fulfill the will of God, such as David. But David did not ask for a position at Jesus' right hand. David humbly called Jesus his Lord in submission and worship (Mk 12:36). The one who seriously tried to get such a position was Satan. We know what happened to him (Isa 14:13-15). James and John had no idea what was really involved in their request. Jesus understood them and said, “You don't know what you are asking.”

However, Jesus did not stop there. He asked if they could drink his cup or share his baptism. Here “cup” means “cup of suffering,” and “baptism,” means “baptism into death” (Lk 12:50; Mk 14:36). Jesus channeled their request in a positive direction. Jesus was a good shepherd for them. But they must realize that sufferings precede glory. No suffering, no glory! No cross, no crown!

Look at verses 39-40. “‘We can,’ they answered. Jesus said to them, ‘You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.’” James and John still did not know what they were talking about. Yet Jesus accepted their answer as their willing offer to participate in his suffering. Yet Jesus made no promise about the positions they asked for. Jesus helped them realize that God is the sovereign Ruler of his kingdom. Not even Jesus can decide who sits at his right or left. Only God the Father can do so. The disciples needed to accept God's sovereignty and trust God for their future honor and glory. In accepting God's sovereignty they could find true freedom from their nagging ambition. This discussion began with them trying to get glory from Jesus without suffering. It ends with Jesus promising them suffering without guaranteeing the positions they asked for.

Second, Jesus teaches his disciples to serve and to give (41-45). When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had done, they were indignant. They probably decided to give them cold stares and the silent treatment. None of them said, “Sure, I support James and John to be top leaders.”

Look at verse 42. “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.’” The disciples knew well about Roman rule. It was based on brute force; the oppressed had to comply or die. In spite of their own experience of suffering, the disciples were exhibiting the same lust for power in their words and deeds. It is a repeated irony in history that oppressed people throw off their yoke only to become oppressors themselves. Even God's chosen people Israel, who had tasted the misery of bondage in Egypt became oppressors (1Ki 9:21). Jesus came to break this vicious cycle.

Jesus taught his disciples that they must be different. Look at verses 43-44. “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to become first must be slave of all.” Jesus turned hierarchical thinking upside down. The greatest one is not on the top looking down, exercising authority by force. The greatest one is on the bottom, looking up and serving all others. How can sinful men who want to exalt themselves at every opportunity become servants of others? We can learn from Jesus. Look at verse 45. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus is the eternal God. Jesus is the Creator God. John 1:3 says, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” Yet when Jesus came into this world, he was born in a manger. He lived a poor life. He became a friend and servant to all kinds of people. He took time to listen to a man with leprosy who cried for help; and Jesus healed him. Jesus visited a forlorn Samaritan woman, and risked being misunderstood to help her find living water for her soul. Most of all, Jesus served his disciples by living with them daily, bearing their selfishness, pride, fear, doubt and all their sins. Jesus served them in the hope that they would each be changed into servants of God and history makers in God’s world salvation work. Finally, Jesus gave his life on the cross as a ransom for their sins and for all sinners.

We must learn the mind of Jesus. Philippians 2:5-8 tells us: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

God alone can make a person great in his kingdom. God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. Therefore, to be great in God, we must die to our sinful passion and pride and learn the humbleness, servanthship and obedience of Jesus. These days many have been moved by the life of Mother Theresa. She was a simple Albanian nun who received Jesus’ call to serve the poorest of the poor in India. She began her ministry by picking up dying people in the streets, whom no one else was concerned about, and caring for them with God’s love. At that time, she was all alone. No one saw what she was doing except God. She was willing to do anything for Jesus, becoming all things to all people, because she loved and followed Jesus. So God blessed her ministry and she became great in God. Now Missionary Jimmy Lee is serving Indian people by raising disciples of Jesus among students. He is a great man in the sight of God. In Chicago UBF, Missionary Elijah Park has become a most useful servant of God. He is always ready to do anything that needs to be done, such as giving rides, planting flowers, and fixing broken things. He carefully listens to many powerful servants of God and follows God’s leading with prayer. He serves his fellowship members with great humility. So God is blessing his ministry. This week there was an Oakton Bible club meeting on campus for the first time in many years led by Mary Miranda. Kristin St. Lawrence has had enough trouble in her family struggles. Yet she has faithfully served and loved Helen, especially through Bible study together. Grace Yang has been learning of Jesus’ servanthship through internship training. She is no longer interested in shopping, except when it serves the work of God. Now she loves God’s sheep and sheds tears for them in her prayers. But she had a question, “How long should I do this?” Through this passage she accepted, “until I give my life.” May God bless each of us to be truly great by following Jesus who served and gave his life. Especially let’s love one person with the mind of Jesus through Bible study.

III. Jesus heals a blind man by faith (46-52)

As a conclusion to this section, Mark inserts Jesus’ healing of blind Bartimaeus. As he was sitting by the roadside begging, he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. He began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many people began to rebuke him, “Be quiet! Shut up! Jesus is too busy for you.” But the more he was rebuked, the more he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” He only cried out for mercy with a deep sense of need before the Messiah. He cried out as a matter of life and death. Look at verse 49. “Jesus stopped and said, ‘Call him.’ So they called the blind man, ‘Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.’” Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. When Jesus invited him, he came forward with bold faith.

Look at verse 51a. “‘What do you want me to do for you?’ Jesus asked him.” Jesus’ question was the same one he had asked James and John. Jesus gave the man a chance to say explicitly what he wanted from Jesus. Jesus knows what we need before we ask, but it pleases Jesus to help us ask for the right thing. Jesus is not a miracle machine. Jesus is a personal God who wants to have a relationship with us. Jesus wants us to grow in our understanding of who he is and who we are so that we may pray intelligently and grow as his children. James and John had asked for positions at Jesus’ right and left. Their request came from their selfish ambition. It was also not what they really needed from Jesus.

Look at verse 51b. “The blind man said, ‘Rabbi, I want to see.’” The blind man’s request was exactly what he should ask for. What he really needed was to see. Jesus said, “Go, your faith has healed you.” And immediately the man received his sight and followed Jesus. This was a lesson to James and John and the other disciples as well. They may have thought they needed many things. But they really needed only one thing. They needed insight to the meaning of Jesus’ cross and resurrection. This was the love of God which would satisfy their souls and give them everlasting life. They should cry out to accept the gospel in their hearts. They should cry out to be changed in their inner beings from proud and selfish into humble and sacrificial. This is what Jesus wanted for them and what they really needed.

This gives us clear spiritual direction as well. We sinful human beings have a nagging desire to exalt ourselves and be served by others. But Jesus wants us to deeply understand the gospel of his suffering, death and resurrection. This restores the love of God in our hearts and the image of God as humble and obedient servants. We should not pray based on our sinful desires, but based on Jesus’ will and purpose for us. We should pray to deeply understand the meaning of the gospel. We should pray to grow in Jesus’ humbleness, obedience and servanthship. Jesus is ready to have mercy on us. Jesus is ready to change us into his servants. May God make us a servant people and a servant nation for his world salvation purpose.