

Not to Be Served, But to Serve

Jesus was the greatest leader who ever lived. Today's text helps us understand why.

Mark 10:32-45

³² And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³ saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

³⁵ 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." ³⁶ And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" ³⁷ And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." ³⁸ 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?" ³⁹ 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, ⁴⁰ 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." ⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. ⁴² 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. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ 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 is Jesus' third prediction of His death and resurrection as recorded in Mark's gospel. We should be amazed by three things:

1. Jesus' extraordinary courage and compassion (10:32-34)

If we dread even going to the dentist, think how much Jesus must have dreaded the pain, humiliation, and spiritual agony of the cross; yet we observe in v. 32 that He "was walking ahead of them!" This loving determination seems to be a fulfillment of Isaiah 50:7: "...therefore I have set my face like a flint..." The extra details of His suffering given in this third prediction make His love and faithfulness all the more extraordinary. He will be delivered over to Gentiles (the Romans) who will humiliate and abuse Him before they torture and kill Him. Witnessing Jesus' remarkable courage, we are told by Mark that His disciples were "amazed" and that the others who followed were "afraid." Jesus' loving leadership truly astounds us.

2. Our own wicked selfishness (10:35-41)

The behavior of Jesus' disciples is breathtakingly atrocious, but when we look at the actions of James and John, we must admit that we are merely looking into a mirror and observing ourselves. Which of us thinks we are any better? In the midst of Jesus' deep grief and dread, they think only of themselves, wanting desperately to get ahead of the other disciples. Notice:

A. We manipulate for high position (36,37)

Jesus has just explained how He will suffer for them. They say, "...we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

B. We vastly underestimate our weaknesses and wickedness (38-40)

Jesus has just asked if they are able to "drink the cup that I drink," which is the cup of God's wrath, as described vividly by the prophet Jeremiah (see Jer. 25:15,16) They say "We are able."

C. We don't care if our selfish ambitions divide the family (41)

The other ten disciples were "indignant"—not because James and John were insensitive to Jesus, but because they beat them to the punch!

3. He calls us to be like Him (10:42-45)

Rather than rejecting His disciples because they were numbskulls, He patiently and lovingly calls them to His way of leadership.

A. He teaches us (42-44)

He tells them that there are two basic types of leadership: the way of the Gentiles, and the way of Jesus. They had been acting like Gentiles, who seek nothing but their own advancement. But the way of Jesus is the way of the servant and the slave.

B. He shows us (45)

In this remarkable verse of Scripture, Jesus summarizes His greatness. The One Who is none other than the Messiah, the Son of Man, has humbled Himself to be our servant. (See Philippians 2:1-11). Moreover, His service to us is the greatest act ever performed on behalf of fellow human beings: He gave His life as a "ransom" for us. In Exodus 21:28-30 we read that "ransom" frees us from our debt; in Lev. 25:47-49 we see that the "redemption price/ransom" frees us from slavery.

As a result of being ransomed by the Son of Man, we, His followers, now take up His style of leadership for our own. Two better examples could not be given than the two disciples in this very text: James was the first apostle to sacrifice his life for the gospel (Acts 12:2), and John suffered much tribulation on behalf of his brothers and for the sake of the gospel (Rev. 1:9) and then taught us why this was essential to the Christian life (see I John 3:16).

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the sufferings awaiting Jesus in Jerusalem. Why was He seemingly so eager to undergo this great trial?
2. What is at the root of our trying to manipulate circumstances so that we can be number one? Why is this behavior so destructive?
3. What are some ways in which we today, as disciples of Christ, are overly confident in our own moral and spiritual abilities? How does this get us into trouble? How can we avoid this pitfall?

4. How do you see the pride and ambition of leaders causing strife and division among others?
5. Describe “servant leadership.” Share an experience in which you observed this kind of leadership. What difference did it make?
6. What are the present benefits we enjoy because Christ has ransomed us? What are the future benefits?

Going Deeper

1. How do you need to alter your current leadership style in order to imitate Jesus’ servant leadership style?