

The Journey to the Cross, Part 3

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[0 : 00] We're looking at the second half of Mark's gospel, seeing Jesus' journey to the cross. And today, as Jesus continues to teach his disciples, we see the very different values, the upside down values, so it seems, but the right side up values of God's kingdom.

So Mark chapter 9, beginning at verse 30. Let's hear God's word together. They left that place and passed through Galilee.

Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, the Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.

They will kill him and after three days he will rise. But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, what were you arguing about on the road? But they kept quiet because on the way they'd argued about who was the greatest.

[1 : 08] Sitting down, Jesus called the twelve and said, if anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the servant of all. He took a little child and had him stand among them.

Taking him in his arms, he said to them, whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me does not welcome me, but the one who sent me.

Teacher said, John, we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop because he was not one of us. Do not stop him, Jesus said.

No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me. For whoever is not against us is for us.

I tell you the truth. Anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.

[2 : 09] Amen. So we're going to think today about different values and a different way of life. Many of us here today, either right now or have in our past, we've lived abroad.

You know what it is to live in a different culture. You know that struggle sometimes when different values and different cultures collide.

I had a friend in Glasgow, an older Chinese gentleman by the name of Mr. Shang. He moved to Glasgow in the 1980s.

So the first time there was Chinese New Year and they were living in the south side of Glasgow. His mum, his wife rather, took a pile of lucky money and burned it on the street.

And was then surprised 20 minutes later when the police came along asking what on earth she was up to. Old values, new place, values and cultures collide sometimes.

[3 : 10] And what we're going to see in the Bible today is that Jesus continues to teach about his kingdom. And the fact that in his kingdom, he turns the world's values upside down.

Different ways of thinking about greatness, of glory, of inclusion. And what we see here is that the disciples, they're struggling, they're misunderstanding.

And that can be true for us as well. We can struggle to understand how we are to live for Jesus. So we're going to explore that today. Another image that might be helpful for us to think about is that of life in a colony.

We know we've maybe read stories or we've had the experience of people leaving the old world to go to a new world. And then when they live in that new place, they continue to represent and to live by old world values.

So they retain language and culture and practices while everyone else around them looks very different. And one of the things that we're called to be as a Christian church is we're called to be a Christian colony, as it were.

[4 : 20] We're called to follow Jesus and his values. While we're surrounded by people who might think that the values of Jesus seem completely upside down to them, completely confusing and bewildering.

But what Jesus is going to say to us is that these values, as we see them lived out in Jesus, they're the path to true glory. And they're actually crucial to our mission as a church because it's about us living like Jesus in the world.

So it's a colony that's to be positive. And that's not always been the case. It's a colony that's to be welcoming where we are to love and to serve like Jesus.

So let's begin to think about our passage. Let's think, first of all, about the kingdom of the cross.

Now, in verse 30, we're told that Jesus and his disciples left that place and passed through Galilee.

So where Jesus has been is he's been up the mountain where he has shone with the glory of God.

[5 : 27] So he's been in the place of glory. But he also came down from the mountain. When we saw this, he entered into a situation of pain and suffering and he brought rescue and release.

But now he's moving on from there to find a quiet place. And we're told why. In verse 31, he didn't want anyone to know where they were because he was teaching his disciples.

So the focus of part two of Mark's gospel, 9 to 16, a lot of the time is Jesus teaching his disciples what it looks like for him to be the Christ, the chosen one of God.

Jesus wants to take time to teach about both his identity and his mission as they are on the way to the cross. And so he says to them, verse 31, the son of man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.

They will kill him. And after three days, he will rise. Who is Jesus? He is the son of man. So this is the Jesus favorite way of talking about himself. I am the son of man.

[6 : 37] Now, this is not Jesus saying, I am just like you. I am also human. This is Jesus taking a title that's found in the Old Testament in the book of Daniel and chapter 7.

God in Daniel chapter 7, the ancient of days is there in the throne room of heaven. And the son of man comes and receives authority and glory and power and the right of worship and eternal rule.

And so when Jesus says, I am the son of man, this is a bold statement of his identity. So he says that I'm the son of man, but then he reveals to them his mission.

Why did he come? And he gives them the second prediction of his death there in verse 31. And in particular, he focuses on this reality.

The son of man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. And here Jesus is quite deliberately saying to his disciples, it is part of God's purpose that I be handed over to suffer and die.

[7 : 46] He is revealing to the disciples that God's hand is behind this. This is carrying out God's plan for his own son.

And we find this in the Old Testament, perhaps Isaiah chapter 53, familiar words, but really helpful for reminding us of this.

So here's a prophecy about the suffering servant of God. Isaiah 53 verse 6, for example, says this. We all like sheep have gone astray.

Each of us has turned to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. So we have sinned, but God is going to send his servant and the punishment for that sin will fall on him.

Verse 10. It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. And though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days.

[8 : 50] It's the Lord's will that his servant suffer, that he become a guilt offering to deal with the sin of his people.

And so the disciples are hearing these two very different messages. They're hearing once again Jesus saying, I'm the king of glory. But they're also hearing, I've come to suffer and die.

And there's confusion. We're told that in verse 32. They didn't understand what he meant. How can these two realities fit together? They have been with Jesus.

They have been witnessing the greatest life ever lived. They've heard him teach with authority.

They've seen his power over nature. They've seen his power over sickness and disease and even raising people from the dead.

And now they're being told his life will be ended, poured out in sacrificial love. They have three of them, James and Peter, John.

[9 : 51] They've witnessed him as the king of all glory. And he's saying to them, I have come to humble myself, to suffer and die. And they're struggling to understand how these two things come

together.

Perhaps we have that question also. Why did Jesus, this Jesus, the son of God, the son of man, why did he die?

And what we discover in the Bible is that it reveals to us the heart of the Christian message. We talk about the gospel, the good news. But in a sense, that good news message in the Bible begins with bad news.

Now, we discover from the beginning of the Bible that we were made to know and enjoy God. And we were made for a two-way love. We were made to love God. And we were made to love other people.

But very quickly into that story, sin came. And one of the things that sin does in our lives is it turns us inwards. So instead of delighting to love God and love others, we choose first and foremost to love ourselves.

[11:00] So we shut God out. We are unkind to others. We lack that love. And so we find ourselves failing to do what God has called us to do.

And the Bible says that our failure, our sin, deserves the judgment of God. And so there is in the gospel a bad news, a failure to be and to do what God has called us to do.

But then we discover the good news in Jesus. We find Jesus comes, and the Bible says he comes as a substitute. When you look at the life of Jesus, what do you discover?

You discover someone who lived a life of perfect love and obedience towards his Father God and towards others. Perfect love that you and I can never do by ourselves.

And then we also discover his love in that he willingly goes to the cross to be a sacrifice for us, to atone for our sin, to wash us clean, to give us forgiveness if we would trust in him.

[12:04] He shows us love. And by faith in him, we receive the love of God in our lives. We receive the power of God in order, once again, to begin to truly love God and to love other people the way we were made.

At this stage in the story, the disciples are struggling to understand. They haven't seen the cross. They haven't seen the resurrection. Jesus is teaching that essential to his coming is his suffering and his dying.

Many people today, I guess, admire Jesus' teacher. They love the golden rule. Treat people the way that you would like to be treated. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Happy with that. But here's a part that we also need. Here is Jesus teaching that at the center of the Christian faith, at the center of his life, at the center of our message, is the cross.

There is no Christianity without the cross. And we're being introduced to one of the core values of the kingdom of God, that of humility, that of self-giving love.

[13:24] And Jesus is going to call his disciples to that. He calls his church to that. But first of all, we need to have received that for ourselves from Jesus.

If we are to love in the name of Jesus, we need to have received the love of Jesus for ourselves. And so he begins to teach them about the connection between the kingdom and the cross.

And they're struggling to understand. And then he sort of draws out some of the implications. And he shows to them that his kingdom is a kingdom of service.

Again, there's clear misunderstanding. Verse 33 and 34. And Jesus asks them, what are you arguing about? And they're really embarrassed to say because they've been arguing about who was the greatest.

Just like us, they lived in a culture where your rank and sense of privilege and status was really important. They lived in a time where you could be divided by wealth.

[14:27] Or you could be divided by gender. You could be divided by social or religious status or purity. And so that was the message that they had received.

And so they expected Jesus' kingdom would follow those normal patterns. To be a follower of Jesus is to climb the ladder of success and greatness. And so Jesus is going to teach them.

And he's going to teach them that life in his kingdom is very different. He sits down. The posture of the teacher. Verse 35. He called the 12 and said, if anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the servant of all.

If you want to aspire to greatness, aspire to be great at serving. Is what Jesus says to them. He's already said in chapter 8 and verse 34 that to come after Jesus means living a life of self-denial.

It means taking up one's cross. If you want to be great, be great at denying yourself. Paul the apostle, he talks about outdoing one another. In what?

[15 : 35] Outdo one another in love. Outdo one another in good deeds. Value others above yourself. Do we see how this is very different to the message the disciples have received?

Maybe it's very different to the message that we receive about greatness and about glory. And to try and help them to understand, Jesus gives them a lesson illustration.

Verse 36. He calls in a little child. Takes the child in his arms. And he says, whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.

He's giving them two lessons. I think he's saying, welcome a child for Jesus' sake. Don't be so concerned about a rank and status that you ignore those who are weak.

You ignore those who have low value. Children in Jesus' day considered to have very low value until they reached adulthood. Welcome a child in Jesus' name.

[16 : 41] But also, as those who are sent by Jesus on the mission of Jesus, they are to regard themselves as children for Jesus' sake.

To remember that even as they go about their mission, as they go about their ministry, as they go about living for Jesus, they're not to be pursuing their own glory, but rather they want to point to the glory of Jesus.

One of the things that becomes clear when Jesus teaches is he wants to form a counter-cultural community. Where greatness doesn't come by pursuing personal glory.

Where greatness doesn't come by stepping on others in order to get ahead. Where we don't achieve greatness by force. Rather, we follow the way of Jesus where greatness comes by going low.

By giving recognition and value to others. Maybe especially to those that the world wouldn't tend to pay much attention to. I find this a profoundly attractive community compared to the competition and the hostility that we can find in so many places.

[17 : 55] The church and the church on mission is therefore to seek to promote the good of others. That we are to have concern and value placed on everyone who comes into this place.

Who comes into our communities of faith. It's like when James, Jesus' half-brother, he wrote a letter. In chapter 2 of that letter, he forbids favoritism.

Suppose two different people come into your meeting and one's a really rich guy and one's a really poor guy. Don't say to the rich guy, have the seat of honor. Say to the poor guy, here, sit at my feet. We see everyone as made in the image of God with value and dignity. We follow the example of Jesus. You read the gospels. What do you discover?

Oh, we've seen Jesus welcomes children. We see Jesus showing dignity and respect to women when they were regarded as less than in his day.

[18 : 55] We see him extending the touch, the healing touch to lepers who are isolated in their community. We see him welcoming in the outcasts.

He lives by a very different but by a very attractive set of values. And, you know, when the church of Jesus gets this right, it also makes a big difference.

It also looks wonderful. I love reading about the church in the early centuries in the Roman Empire as they looked to live out the values of this colony while surrounded by the Roman Empire.

A couple of things that they did. It was common practice in the Roman Empire. If you were looking for a male heir and you had a baby girl, if you didn't want the girl, then you could just throw her out, leave her on the street to die.

What did the Christians do? They adopted those babies into Christian families to say that God cares for everyone. When plague broke out in towns and cities and people were, you know, everyone was just, every man for himself, running to get out of town.

[20 : 03] You know, knocking people into the gutter to get past. What did the Christians do in many cases? They stayed and they loved and they served and they contracted the plague themselves as they cared for others.

So that even the Roman emperors were recognizing, hang on a minute, there's this group of people called Christians. They love our people better than we do. And it was in part as they served and as they loved and as they welcomed that the church grew.

Because the church looked beautiful, because the church looked like Jesus. It's what we discovered in the gospel. Jesus comes how? He comes as our humble servant. Jesus is the one who goes low for his people. He is the one who is abandoned so that we can be welcomed as children. And it's that love and it's that example that will turn our lives and our world the right side up.

So it's a kingdom of service. It's also a kingdom of inclusion as we discover in verses 38 to 41. I guess we all recognize the temptation to hold on to power.

[21 : 20] To exclude rather than to include to be concerned with self-interest. We see it in politics sometimes. We see it in the workplace. We can identify it in our communities.

That so often there can be a division into. There's us. We're the people with power. And then there's them. And we need to keep them out and make sure that we can hold on. It seems like it might have been the same temptation for the disciples.

Look at verse 38. Here's John. Teacher said, John, we saw a man driving out demons in your name. And we told him to stop because he was not one of us.

Now last week when we were here, we discovered something about the disciples of Jesus. The disciples had been given authority by Jesus to be able to drive out evil spirits in his name.

But there's this one particular occasion where they are unable to. And chapter 9, verse 28, they asked the question, why couldn't we drive out this demon? And Jesus says, this kind can come out only by prayer.

[22 : 29] So demons are driven out by prayer. Prayerful dependence on God, on the power of Jesus. Now they're rebuking someone who is clearly, therefore, dependent on prayer.

Who is clearly working in the power of Jesus. Who is concerned for the glory of Jesus. But they're thinking, hang on, he's not one of the 12.

Therefore, let's try and stop him. And what does Jesus say? Verse 39. Don't stop him. No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me.

For whoever is not against us is for us. We're in the same kingdom. We're in the same team.

Therefore, don't stop him.

Rather, be glad that you're seeing the kingdom come. That you're seeing God's work. Verse 41. He says, I tell you the truth.

[23 : 29] Anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward. Jesus is saying this.

God may use a person to do a big thing. To drive out a demon. God may use a person to do a small thing for him. To give a cup of water to a fellow person.

God remembers. God sees. God rewards both. What matters is, do I belong to Jesus?

Am I doing whatever I can to serve the church of Jesus and to show love for others? Are my opportunities big or small? Are my gifts big or small?

That doesn't matter. Do I belong to Jesus? Am I doing what I can to serve him? The disciples are being reminded that the church is bigger than they think.

[24 : 28] They need to have a wider view of God's kingdom. They need to have a more inclusive view of who is a disciple of Jesus. They need to learn to celebrate rather than complain when they see God work in another person.

And so one of the things that we're going to do this evening as we take time to pray is we're going to give thanks to God for what he's doing locally, nationally, and globally.

Some of the stories I've heard about this week, some of the things that we'll pray about, we'll give thanks for up in the northwest of Scotland, the new church that's been redeveloped in Poole U and the great opportunities for community witness up there in the northwest.

We'll give thanks that Chalmers Church here in Edinburgh is looking to plant a new church in Collington. They've got 37 people ready to go for that. We'll give thanks for the church plant under Jonathan de Groot in Christ Church over in Glasgow.

And we'll give thanks that at the last Christian Union Missions Week, there were seven people that gave their lives to Jesus. God is doing things.

[25 : 43] And it's really important that we learn to celebrate, to recognize that where God is at work, where God's building his kingdom, that that's part of our work and we should be really glad.

I think it's also important for us when we see that Jesus values even a cup of water given. It's important for us as a church to have that culture where we're thankful, where we're thankful when

people do small things and big things.

So here in Becloot, it's a chance for me to just stop for a moment and to say thank you. For example, to everyone who helped with the work party yesterday.

Lots of light bulbs getting changed, drains being unblocked, furniture being moved around, things being painted. Important stuff, small stuff, but important stuff. So thank you to everyone who helped with that.

Give me a chance to sort of think about everyone through the week who volunteers faithfully. We had deacons court on a Monday. We had a women's book group on a Tuesday led by Sarah and Vicki.

[26 : 49] We have community groups with leaders who open their homes every week. We have Richmond court coffee morning. We have a toddler group. We had the youth group on a Friday.

So many people involved in serving. It's important for us as a church to say thank you for that. To think about how many people are involved on a Sunday to make worship possible.

Probably at least 50. From opening up, from welcoming, Sunday school, catering, AV, musicians. There's a lot of people serving small ways and big ways.

It's important for us to remember that Jesus values that. That there is reward in that. And there is a reminder too that in our divided world, Jesus offers a different message.

Here is Jesus, the perfect son of God. And he enters into the world, the Bible tells us, to make his enemies into his friends. He crosses that divide in order to create a new community, a new family where he is the head.

[27 : 58] And that family is open to anyone who will trust in Jesus as Lord. Anyone who will turn from sin, who will trust in him as Savior, has a place in that family.

And again, that's very different sometimes to what we find in our own countries and communities. What we see is that Jesus values are very different.

But Jesus values will turn the world the right side up. I'm just about to close. Let me share a story from when Vicky was a student in Aberdeen.

And she had a year abroad in France. And she came back home by Eurostar and then by the train up to Glasgow.

So if you can imagine somebody who's got all their worldly possessions all in various bags of different sizes. So she got to the Eurostar station and was struggling to get all of her stuff down the escalator.

[29 : 02] Well, along came a well-dressed man and helped her. It wasn't me, by the way. I feel like I needed to say that. A well-dressed man came, carried her bags, stowed the bags, and then went off to drive the train.

He was Mr. Eurostar train driver taking his idea of serving his passengers very, very seriously. We think about Jesus.

Jesus didn't grasp onto power and glory and stay in heaven where he could have remained.

Instead, he came down. He humbled himself, becoming one of us to serve us, to love us, to die for us.

I wonder today is the cross of Jesus at the core of who we are, at the core of our lives. Have we seen how the values of Jesus are different and more attractive than anything else?

That it's better for human well-being when we live the way that we are made to live, when we live following the example, the rule of Jesus.

[30 : 19] He is our perfect example. He is our perfect Savior. He shows us what humble service looks like. He shows us what it looks like to welcome others in. He teaches us to celebrate God's work in the lives of others.