

Jesus, his people and service

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[0:00] Mark, from your seated position, do you think you could say a prayer so that we'll be able to hear God's word just now? Right, boys and girls. We've got some boys and girls here. Would you just indicate if you're a boy or a girl and you're here?

So I can look in the right place. Okay, welcome. Nobody up there, but all down here. No, nobody hiding. Oh. Hello, Eden Rose.

Hello. How many people have gone back to school this week? Oh, you've sort of gone back to school, haven't you? How many people still haven't gone back to school? Anybody?

No. Okay. Well, boys and girls, I'm going to ask for your help at certain points in the talk this morning. I haven't designed it all for you. It's really for the grown-ups, but I'm going to come and ask your help from time to time.

So if you can follow along, that would be great. But I know your mums and dads might have got something else for you to do as well. So be guided by them. What we're going to talk about is what is the church.

[1:08] Last time I said, is it the building? And you said, what did the boys and girls say? Is this building the church? What was the answer? It's the people.

Well done. I think you'll give him a round of applause. Yeah. It's the people. And we looked at what we meant by the church and we said it's people.

It's a community of sinners who've repented, who have faith in the gospel, who are baptized, who have new life by the Holy Spirit and form a new community.

And then we were looking last time at what's its importance because the world around us doesn't think the church is important. But Jesus does think the church is important. And it's his body.

And he cares for it as we care for our own bodies. And it's his bride. And he loves the church as a husband loves his wife. And he, this is amazing, isn't it, that he should love us and see us as his bride and share with us in union.

[2:14] And we looked at the description of the church and I tried to pick out two things that sort of said church. And the two things I picked out were, one, love. And that's actually quite, in the passage we read, 1 Corinthians 13, it's quite an awkward subject because he described all the things that they weren't.

And he says love is not rude and they were rude. He says love is patient but they were impatient. Love doesn't boast itself up but they did boast themselves up and so on.

So that was one thing was love and then the other thing was sweet order. Because there is a way that the church fits together and there is an order and it's characterized by submitting.

Submitting to one another, falling into place and there's a sweetness to it rather than oppressiveness to it. And my question is, is that, that's what church is? And we're church and are we being that?

Is that us in practice, in reality, week by week? And I really want to ask that question because I think the Lord is asking that question of us.

[3:26] And I'm tending to the view that as we go forward in future ministry, the Lord says, well first of all I want to ask you a question about you. Before I send somebody to you or raise up somebody, I want to ask you about you.

Where are you as regards being church? And that's an important question. So I want to now move on to this important subject of service.

Jesus and service and his people. And I put in there mature church because I want us as a sort of sideline to think about maturity.

Maturity, we need to grow as Christian people. That's what I mean by maturity. Maturity means an all-round growth.

You know, not just being very clever or being very active or indeed being very emotional, but being all the things that we should be. So that's why I bung the word maturity in there and it'll pop up from time to time.

[4:31] And time to time I'll forget to use it. But what I thought we would do this morning is just look at that very simple passage. So please turn to Mark chapter 10.

Marcus 10. And verse 35 to 45. And here Jesus sort of lays down this foundational principle of service.

And I guess you could say that you can't build a church unless this foundational principle is in place. So here we go. Let me just read it.

Mark 10, 35. Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. Teacher, they said, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.

And what do you want me to do for you? He asked. They replied, let us, let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory. And Jesus said, you don't know what you're asking.

[5:42] Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? We can, they answered. And Jesus said to them, you will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I'm 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. I think in the other version it says that the father has prepared.

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. And Jesus called them together and said, you know that those who are regarded as rulers of the nations of the Gentiles lord it over them.

And their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you.

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant.

[6:58] And whoever wants to be first will be slave of all. 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. So that's the passage we're going to look at. I've got four points. I'm afraid they're not very zappy. Anyway, number one. A prayer of faith and flesh. Number two.

The precondition of death of self. Number three. A contrast with the Gentile lords. And number four. The principle of other centered service.

I think you could hardly imagine more clunky headings than those. They are the best I could do.

See if your kids remember them afterwards.

[8:01] Anyway, so. Let's just try and say them again. Ah. Prayer of faith and flesh. Precondition of death of self.

Contrast with the Gentile lords. Principle of other centered service. So let's do this. So boys and girls you can help with this for a minute.

Teacher, we want. Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. So James and John said, we'd like you to do for us whatever we ask.

I don't know whether they went up to Jesus while he was having his coffee. Tapped him on the shoulder. Said, do for us whatever you want us. What we want you to do. And Jesus said, what's that then?

And he said, let one of us sit at your right hand. And at the other in your left. In your glory. Glory. So he's imagining Jesus in glory. And saying, can we sit next to you?

[8:58] One on one side and one on the other. And that glory will sort of, you know, we'll be there in glory with you like that. So, can you help us with this, boys and girls?

I think that's a prayer of faith. Because. Anybody like to help out with that? Why do you think, I think, there's faith in that prayer? I almost thought that was a hand, but it just was a stretch.

Why do you think there's faith? So, they say, let us sit at your right hand and left hand when you get to your glory. Is there any faith in that? Yeah.

It's your kingdom. When you become king. No? I'm on my own on this? Grown ups then. Why is there faith in that prayer? Yeah.

Okay. Thank you. They have faith in Jesus. And they think that they're going to be brought with him. Yep. And the bit I was thinking was that they, yeah, Steve.

[10:17] Exactly. Yeah. They're convinced that Christ will have glory. So, there's faith in that, isn't it? They see Jesus. They say, you're headed for glory. We believe that. We trust you on that.

And we'd like to be there with you. So, there's faith in that. They believe Jesus would have glory. But I think there's also flesh. Now, boys and girls and everybody else, when I say flesh, flesh this, I mean what we're like without God.

And that's really just another way of saying self. Self. I think there's a lot of self in this prayer. Why do you think of the self there? Any thoughts about self?

Because they just wanted themselves to be sitting there?

Yeah. I think that's good. Can we give a little round of applause for them? They're asking for themselves, weren't they? They wanted something for themselves. They weren't saying, can these other guys come?

[11:27] They said, we want to get there first, right and left. We're in there first. Bag those places before anybody else gets there. And they just, they wanted, they said to Jesus, do, we want you to do whatever we ask.

They're treating Jesus like a magic genie, aren't they? You know, you do what we want. We're going to ask you for something. You do what we want. Give us whatever we ask.

And I don't think that's right, is it? We ask the Lord things, but we say, if it is your will. We don't say, I demand. I've got there first. You give it to me. They wanted glory for themselves.

So it's a prayer of faith and flesh. It's mixed up. Jesus does answer prayer.

But sometimes he doesn't. And in the book that James wrote, or the letter of James, he talks about this. He says, you have not because you ask not. Okay, so one thing is, did you actually ask at all?

[12:31] And this is one of the things I want us as a church to be very clear. Before we make any future decisions and things that we have prayed, that we have asked.

And I want us to be clear that we have together asked the Lord. So we can say, that week we did ask. And then he goes on to say, but when you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives.

That you may spend what you have, what you get on your pleasures. That's what James said. And so I want us to ask that question of ourselves. Are we asking with the right motives? Are our hearts in the right place as we pray?

And let me just give a very crude caricature. And it's almost cruel to put it this way. But let me just say it. We've been looking for a future pastor.

Have we been thinking, he's going to do all the work. He's going to sort everything out. We'll just be the recipients of it. He can do it all. I think that would be a very crude and cruel thing to impute to us en masse.

[13:46] But I just want to ask our motives. Are we saying, we want him to do all the work and we'll do, yeah, this but no more. Or we won't even do anything.

Just ask that question. What about our motives? So number one was a prayer of faith and flesh.

Yeah, what are our priorities? What are our motives?

Number two, the precondition of death of self. So what Jesus says next, and I'm going to ask for some help with this one, boys and girls as well. He said, can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?

So here's a cup on the screen and there's water. Now, in my understanding, and a lot of people would not necessarily see it the same way as me, when it says baptism, it means just a lot of water. And it could be a lot of water underneath that you go down into or a lot of water on the top that splashes over you like a tsunami or a tidal wave. And I think that's actually the picture that Jesus

has of this baptism.

[14:55] And boys and girls, do you have any idea what he means? What is this cup that he's going to drink? And what is this baptism that he's going to be baptized with?

Any ideas, boys and girls? No, I think I'm on a loser here. Let's go for the adults then.

The cup. He was going to drink a cup. And it doesn't sound like a particularly nice thing to do. Any ideas, grown-ups, what cup he's talking about? Ray?

Cup of God's wrath. Yes, in the Bible, God makes the corrupt nations drink a cup.

It's a cup of wrath. And I think that's the cup that Jesus is thinking about. And this baptism, what's going to come over him and sweep over him and almost drown him? Any suggestions?

[15:53] I think boys and girls had their opportunity. Going, going. Gone, okay. Grown-ups, what's going to sweep over him and almost drown him?

It's not a difficult question. His death. Yeah, his death. He's talking about the nasty cup of wrath and suffering and the tidal wave of baptism, God's wrath and anger.

So he's talking about his, any boys and girls like to do this one? I've already mentioned it. D something, something, T something. Well done.

His death. So he's saying, are you going to be prepared to go through that too? His death on the cross. And he says to his disciples, are you up for that?

Now I think we have to make a distinction and say Jesus' death was a redeeming death. He paid the price for us sinners. He bought our sins so that we would not have to.

[16:59] And he's not saying to his disciples, you're going to have to die a redeeming death and pay for other people's sins. But he is saying there is death. Are you prepared to die?

And they say yes. So I'm picking up on this. Will you answer my prayer? And Jesus says, are you first? Let me ask you a question. Are you prepared to die?

And they say yes. Jesus says you don't quite know what you're talking about. But actually Jesus does say this in other contexts as well. Are you prepared to die?

If anyone would come after me, he must take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. And whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it.

Are you prepared to die? I suppose that could mean literally being a martyr. But I think it fair to say that Jesus does not expect that of, he does not providentially put that in the place for many Christians.

[18:17] And certainly many Christians here in Europe. It's pretty unlikely that we would be martyred. But Jesus still says, the way you live the Christian life, are you prepared to die?

Are you prepared to say that old person is finished, the death of self? Are you prepared to die? And keep on making that a principle of life.

There's a word mortification, which means killing. Putting to death. And the Christian life is a life of daily mortification.

Putting to death. Well, sin. Putting to death sins. And I'm here saying putting to death self. So self is me, I.

The world revolves around me. Put that to death. My problems are the main thing. Well, actually, other people have problems too. My issues are the center of the world.

[19:24] Well, actually, other people have issues too, if you think about it. My well-being is the paramount thing. No, it isn't. My comfort, I insist on.

No, you can't. My rights, put to death. My dignity, put to death.

Getting my own way, put to death. My rights to decent employment, put to death.

My rights to having a spouse who meets my needs, put to death. My right to a decent standard of living, put to death.

My right to ease and comfort, put to death. My right to my hobbies, put to death. My right to always feel good about myself.

[20:22] God won't always make us feel good about ourselves, will he? If we really follow him. Sometimes he'll show us the depth and foulness of our sin.

The right to always feel good about myself, put to death. Are you prepared to die? Are you prepared to die? And Jesus makes this a precondition of answering prayer, doesn't he?

I'll give you my answer, but first I'll ask you, are you prepared to die? Yes. Death to self is a precondition of answering prayer.

It is not an extra special merit. Let me try and explain that. He says, okay, you're prepared to die. However, sitting at my left and my right is not part of this deal.

That's what he says, isn't it? Yes, you will die, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. That's another department.

[21:42] Dying to self does not guarantee that particular answer to prayer. It's just the starting point. Death to self does not put anyone above anyone else.

We can't say, look how much I've died to self. Surely I deserve more answers to prayer than the person next to me. Look at all that I've sacrificed for you, Lord.

And Jesus says, well, not that impressed actually. Because dying to self is not the mark of a superb achievement.

It's just the starting point. Just the starting point. And I say, is this standard for us? Is this, are we mortifying self every day?

Is there a time in the day or at least in the week when we look back and say, Lord, just examine my heart.

[22:42] Just look at what's been propelling me. Making me say the things I've said and do the things I've done. React the way I've reacted. Just please look inside.

And where self was there. Show me how to kill it. And let me die to that. It's called repentance. That's one of the other ways of putting it.

But it's standard. It's normal. It isn't an extra thing that sometimes we do every few years or something like that.

Or only how we begin the Christian life. Let me just go back. Yeah, okay. And I ask, are we going forwards with this?

Are we learning more about our sin and how to kill it? Or are we actually going backwards? And have we forgotten? And self has grown and taken over?

[23:38] Well, it's a question, isn't it? So number three. A contrast with the Gentile lords. And he goes on to say.

He calls that the other ten are indignant because they didn't think about it first. And Jesus calls them together and says, You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.

Their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Not so with you. It isn't that the other disciples are humble and not interested in self-glory.

They're just annoyed they didn't think of it first. And Jesus tells them about the Gentile lords. So these are the lords in the nations. You know, the lords of Iraq and Iran and Persia and Greece and Rome.

And how they do things. You know, how the rest of the world does things. There's great lords. And as you sit there, you're thinking, Well, at least this bit doesn't apply to us.

[24:42] Because we live in a democracy. We don't have great lords lording it over us. We don't have an emperor. We don't have a dictator. We don't do things that way. We have equality and democracy.

And at least this bit doesn't apply to us. But boys and girls, you can help with this bit. If I could just call on you for a moment. So here's a question. A lord is somebody who does what he's told, doesn't have to do what he's told.

What's that? Which one of those? A lord. Does what he's told or doesn't have to do what he's told? Doesn't have to do what he's told.

Can we give a round of applause for that? Okay. And a lord is somebody who has to keep the rules or makes up their own rules. Makes up their own rules.

Okay. And you get a round of applause for that. So I think Gentile lordship is alive and well. Gentile thinking says, Deep down, nobody tells me what to do.

[25:55] That's the way the Gentile lords think. Gentile thinking says, I make up my own rules. Gentile thinking says, No one limits my freedom. Gentile thinking says, No one challenges me. Gentile thinking says, Submitting to one another? Yeah.

Dream on. Dream on. And the problem is when that thinking gets into Christians. And he says, That's not the way Christians think.

That's not the way Christians think. The contrast with the Gentile lords. And the fourth thing. A principle of other-centered service.

Not so with you. The person who's going to be great and first among you. Whoever wants to be great, not so with you, whoever wants to be great among you, says Jesus, must be your servant.

[27:10] Who wants to be great among you. First among you. Must be slave of all. So I'll just stop on the you. So this is something worked out in relationship with other people.

Among you. Your servant. Your slave. It is a community thing. Jesus assumes that this will be working in a community.

That's why he says you. It's worked out within a community. And there is a type of thinking that I want to sort of target here, which says, I live the Christian life on my own between me and the Lord. And that's as far as it goes. To envisage living the Christian life as a lone, solo enterprise is simply disobedience.

I'm putting it quite strongly, but I think this is right. To envisage living the Christian life as a lone, solo enterprise is simply disobedience.

[28:25] Don't expect the Lord to bless you if that's the way you see the Christian life. To see the church as them, which I'm not that bothered with and not impressed with, to which I have no obligation, no commitment, is insolence to the Lord Jesus.

To see the church as them, they do their thing, I do my thing, is insolence to the Lord Jesus. Not so with you.

Whoever is great and first among you must be your servant. Whoever wants to be first must be your slave or the slave of all.

And I say, which of those statements is the most surprising? The one where he links servant with slave.

Servant is diakonos, so we have deacons, so that's okay. Slave is doulos, slave. We don't have slaves in the church. Shall we appoint some slaves for us?

[29:38] But you see, Jesus rather shockingly says, he equates them, and he says, this principle involves you being a diakonos, like a table waiter, a servant.

But it also involves you being a slave. Of all. That's shocking, isn't it? You'd imagine him saying, you know, be a slave, you know, give or take the, you know, to a certain extent, but he doesn't.

He just says, slave of all. And I think this ought to shock us slightly and make it, give us pause to think. And you say, surely that's not really what Jesus meant.

Well, I know Jesus says things in a shocking way to make us think, so let him make us think about this. And I know there's other parts of scripture which say we're sons and not slaves, and this is all dignity and a non-drivenness and a freedom about the way we operate, but here he says slaves.

And, you know, we're saying, really? Surely, Lord, you don't expect me to be a slave, do you? That is so demeaning.

[30:52] And Jesus says, well, I said it, didn't I? And, surely I can insist on making some reservations. I mean, a slave is just a total thing, isn't it?

24-7, total thing. And Jesus says, no, I use the word slave. And you say, surely I can insist on making some reservations, you know, Lord, you can have this much of my life in your service, but not this bit.

And Jesus says, no, I never said that. I will serve so far, I'll give you this much, but not this much.

And Jesus says, please read what I wrote, or listen to what I said.

If you want to be great, if you want to be first, you need to be slave, of all. And you say, this is going to cost me. This is going to cost me, and actually, it's going to cost me everything.

There won't be a single bit of my life in which I can say, Lord, you're not having that. There won't be a single bit of my life in which I say, I reserve the right to, and Jesus says, no, you don't.

[32:10] This will cost me everything. I hasten to say, when everything is offered to Jesus, he often gives a lot of it back. He often gives a lot of it back.

But first, we've got to offer it all to him. We don't hold it back from him. We give it all to him, and then he gives us some back. And it's a slave of all.

And I'm sure nobody's thinking this, but so let me make it a caricature. Lord, I'd serve you if I had a decent church to serve you in. Lord, I'd serve you if there were, you know, a few more graduates in the church.

Lord, Lord, I'd serve you if there were a few more people who weren't so middle class or whatever like that, you know. And Jesus says, no, slave of all, you don't choose who you serve. If they're my people, you serve them.

And we're saying, Lord, surely I don't have to do that. And Jesus says, well, actually, you do. The principle of other-centered service.

[33:21] The Gentile lordship, not so with you. The one who is great and first must be your servant. So the first question then, really, is, are you willing to offer yourself totally and unreservedly in his service?

basic question. Question that the Lord asked you when you became a Christian and you said, yes, then, if you became a Christian.

I offer my whole life to you, hands off, nothing held back. That's how you start the Christian life. You don't start the Christian life saying, I will serve you, Lord, as long as such and such.

And Jesus says, well, blow that. I'm going to send you as a missionary to Afghanistan and your main problem will be finding drinking water. You know, or avoiding death.

I, when I was, I did a Zoom Bible study with some of the dear folk in Sri Lanka a couple of months ago and there was one guy, his son must be 20 or 30 years of age and there was a husband and wife team there who were working in a, I think, perhaps, Save the Children NGO in Sri Lanka and I said, what are you doing next week?

[34:48] And they said, we're going to Afghanistan. I think, was it, or was it Iraq? But they were going somewhere dangerous and I thought, you know, you're in your mid-50s and you're prepared to upend everything and go off and serve the Lord goodness knows where and they were.

And let's just be real about this. You know, the Lord could say that and we'd have no right to say, oh, that's out of order. You can't do that. So are you willing to offer yourself totally in his service?

And let's be real about this. Unless you've said yes to that, you haven't started the Christian life. Unless you've said yes to that, you haven't started the Christian life.

And then he says, whoever wants to be great will be your servant. Whoever wants to be first, he uses sort of number one.

Whoever wants to be number one must be the slave of all. Must be, is the translation, I think in the original it said will be. So here's my second question. Do you want to grow as a Christian?

[36:07] Do you want to grow and increase and in Jesus' words, become great so that people will say, so and so was a wonderful Christian.

Wish I could be like him or her. Do you want to become mature?

Do you want to become mature? Do you want to become useful? Do you want to walk on with the Lord? Do you want to become more like Jesus Christ?

Do you want to change? Do you want to grow up into Christ? And he says, if this is the case, here's the secret of it. Death to self, selfless, unreserved commitment to his service.

Do you want to grow? That's the way to grow. Do you want to become great? That's the way to become great. So I'm calling us, well I'm calling us, I think scripture is calling us here.

[37:24] Let's just look at this, shall we? Let's rededicate ourselves to serve him unreservedly. And he links this with unreserved service to his people.

Links the two together. We've looked at, number one, a prayer of faith and flesh.

Do for us whatever we want. Jesus' answer, you're prepared to die. Won't answer, that's his answer. First, are you prepared to die? Thirdly, we looked at a contrast with the Gentile lords who

says, nobody tells me what to do.

Not so with you. And then fourthly, the principle of other-centered service. The greatness is in being a slave.

And why is that so important or where does it all come from? Because that's exactly how our Savior lived. That's exactly how his Spirit moves within us.

[38:35] If there is any fellowship in the Spirit, any comfort from his love, have this mind in you, which was in Christ Jesus. Let this mind be in you.

Let this be the way you think about every situation. Let this be the mindset you bring to every moment, every challenge, every opportunity.

Let this mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus. Jesus laid aside being served. He laid aside his glory.

He laid aside the comfort of heaven, the standard of living. He laid aside his rights to be worshipped by angels. He laid aside his right to a trouble-free life.

He laid aside everything for us. He embraced the totality of death.

[39:32] Everything that death was, he experienced. And he did it as a ransom. He laid down his life as a ransom for many. It was redeeming love.

How grateful we should be. That's what he did for us. And have mercy upon our hard hearts and our slow minds that don't grasp that.

Jesus, Lord of all, became Jesus, servant of all. Came to serve us wicked servants. And I say this is a matter of amazing beauty and wonderful grace beyond the power of tongue to tell.

And it also impacts us as the most searching probing of our own hearts and lives. Let's pray.

Lord, help us to hear your word and apply it in our lives and apply it as a church amen.

[40:51] Amen.