

# The way of the cross

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Date: 23 March 2025

Preacher: Daniel Chapallaz

[0:00] Raving mic being on? Steve? Have you got the raving mic turned up? Because it should be down.! Okay, cool. Well, let's see how we go, shall we? So where were we? Chapter 8, verse 29.

Mark showing us in the middle of the gospel, Jesus, he's the Messiah, he's the one chosen and anointed by God, which fits with everything he said in the first eight chapters. He's shown us Jesus and his miraculous works in the world.

You've just got there in the beginning of chapter 8, how he feeds the 4,000, how he heals a blind man. And now we're told he is the Messiah. He is surely this chosen one, the one Israel have looked forward to coming.

And then, go to the end of the book, chapter 15. It's not quite the last chapter, but more or less. Chapter 15, verse 39.

We read this, and when the centurion who stood in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said, surely this man was the Son of God.

[1:20] So, at the beginning, Jesus, he's the Messiah, the Son of God. In the middle, Peter, one of his followers and a Jewish person says, he's the Messiah, he's the one we've been looking forward to.

And at the end of the book, this Roman Gentile centurion says, surely he's the Son of God. So, Mark helps his readers to see Jesus' identity as we go through the Gospel of Mark.

But what we're particularly interested in this evening is Jesus' journey to the cross. And I want to show you how this comes front and center in Mark's Gospel.

I say front, center. So, there's three cross statements in Mark's Gospel. And it's worth us reading them. So, first of all, Mark 8, verse 31.

Mark 8, verse 31. He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law.

[2:40] And that he must be killed and after three days rise again. So, that's the first cross statement. Jesus saying, this is what I have come to do.

I'm the Son of Man, that sort of Daniel 7 figure, if you're familiar with that chapter, the one who's going to sit at God's right hand and receive all glory and honor and blessing.

But I'm going to come. I'm going to die. That's why I'm here. That's the mission I'm on. And it's a refrain which goes through the middle of Mark's Gospel.

So, the second cross statement, chapter 9, verse 31 again. He was teaching his disciples and he said to them, the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men.

They will kill him and after three days he will rise. And then the third cross statement. It's a shame it's not Mark 10, 31.

[3:46] That would be nice, wouldn't it? But Mark 10, actually from verse 33. Jesus says, we are going up to Jerusalem, he said, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the 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 again.

Those are the three cross statements, three refrains, the refrain that runs through the center of Mark's Gospel. This is what Jesus has come to do.

And after each occasion, if you read on after Mark 8, 31 and after Mark 9, 31, you would read at least one of the disciples not reacting well to what Jesus says.

But that gives an opportunity for Jesus to teach them about what discipleship, about what following the one who is heading to the cross looks like.

[4:56] And it looks like taking up your own cross. And we're going to see a little bit more about how Jesus shows that to his disciples as we read this passage.

So it would be great to read from verse 32 to 52. The NIV splits it into three different portions. I wonder if we could have three different people reading it.

So someone to read verse 32 to 34. Someone put their hand up. We'll get a microphone to you in a moment. Or Sema. We'll read that one.

And then we'll pass it to the next person to read 35 to 45. Shikondi. And then someone to read 46 to 52. Mercy, isn't it?

Yeah, great. So front row, basically. Thank you. So it's Mark 10, 32.

[6:01] To 34. To 34. We are going up to Jerusalem, he said. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law.

Oh, am I reading the wrong thing? Oh, right. Sorry. They were on the way up to Jerusalem, Jesus leading the way.

And the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. 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 delivered over 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, spit on him, flog him, and kill him.

Three days later, he will rise. Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him.

[7:14] Teacher, they said, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. What do you want me to do for you? He asked. They replied, let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.

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? 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. When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

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. Not so with you.

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave before. 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.

[8:25] Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples together with a large crowd were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus, which means son of Tiamus, was sitting by the roadside beginning.

When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, son of David, have mercy on me.

Jesus stopped and said, call him. So they called to 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.

What do you want me to do for you? Jesus asked him. The blind man said, Rabbi, I want to see.

Go, said Jesus, your faith has healed you. Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Thank you. Before we look at that, let's sing this song, which is a really helpful song to sing as we come to a passage where Jesus talks about being a servant.

[9:34] We're going to sing of the Lord Jesus who is, are you looking for your guitar? Can we just say a prayer?

Heavenly Father, we see in this passage, the Lord Jesus, who is God, our servant king, who calls us now to follow him and so help us now as we learn to follow him.

Teach us much. Now we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. If you were to take a walk from here down to the seafront, get to the pier and take a right-hand turn, and you walk along a little bit more,

you'll see the big towering I-360, but down near it you'd also see this, this house, which looks peculiar.

It's upside down. It's not the way it's meant to be. It's not like the houses or homes of whatever kind we live in.

It's upside down. It's wrong. And if you go inside, you can experience what life could be like if you were upside down. It's a topsy-turvy way of experiencing life.

[11:05] Well, this evening as we travel with Jesus on the way to the cross, I want us to see that we're traveling with someone who turns life upside down.

His ways are radical and revolutionary, because his ways are not as the world's ways, not even as our own ways.

And yet to many, his ways may seem a little bit small, perhaps pathetic. And yet this is God's way. And he teaches us here God's way of greatness.

As we have already seen in that just little introduction to Mark's gospel, the first part of Mark, chapters 1 to 8, Mark is establishing for his readers that Jesus is the Messiah.

He's the Christ. That's because Israel had expectations of a Messiah that were big and impressive. They were expecting the rule of a great leader, one who would overthrow the Romans and bring about independence so that Israel can live free and liberated lives.

[12:25] And as he does so, there'll be great celebrations. And in the early part of Mark's gospel, we can see how this might feel like it's the case.

As Jesus is healing the sick, as he's casting out demons, as he walks on the water, as he feeds thousands of people, that the buzz, the hype of the Messiah being here was building.

But then as we saw, Jesus turns these expectations round. And he says, Me, the Messiah, I am on the way to die.

I'm on the way to bleed and suffer at the hands of cruel men. And as Jesus says that for the third time, I want us to see firstly that I don't think his disciples quite get it.

Because what they want is to grab after greatness. That's our first point, grabbing after greatness. Verse 35, Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him.

[13:39] Teacher, they said, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. What do you want me to do for you? He asked.

They want Jesus, who they have seen is all powerful. They've seen his power at work. They want him to do whatever they ask him to do.

James and John, they'd seen his glory in chapter 9 on the Mount of Transfiguration. They'd seen that Jesus is the glorious Son of God.

And so, of course, they can ask him for anything. Just like some sort of genie in the bottle. And what do they ask him for?

Verse 37, they replied, let one of us sit at your right hand and the other at your left in your glory. What they ask is all about glory.

[14:39] Not the glory of the Son of God, but their own glory. Their own reputation. We want the biggest seats in heaven, Jesus.

We want to be next to you. We want to gaze people as they gaze on your kingly glory. We want them to also notice us and think, well, aren't they something special?

Haven't they arrived at good and important places? They want to grab the greatest pieces of the pie.

And they want to sneak in before the other disciples get there. They want to grab after greatness. And this sort of feels like this is how the world works.

On a big scale, Donald Trump, since he became president, has made claims to wanting to grab various pieces of land. Have you noticed?

[15:44] He's wanted to rename the Gulf of Mexico the Gulf of America. He's wanted to grab after Greenland, make it their own.

He's wanted to have Canada as their 50, is it 52nd state? 51st state, thank you. And Gaza, he wants to turn in some sort of holiday resort.

He wants to grab land in order to gain a name for himself, in order to leave his legacy on the world. And it's what the war in Russia and Ukraine are about.

It's about lands. It's what Israel and Palestine is about. It's about lands. But we see this sort of grabbing after greatness on lower levels too.

Perhaps at work, people chasing after the big jobs, the promotions, the big money. On social media, people chasing after the followers, the likes, the views.

[16:56] At church, chasing after the biggest number of people we can get. grabbing more and more of the bigger piece of the pie that we can of life.

And in an individual level, perhaps at church, perhaps we want that popularity, perhaps we want to be the people that others gravitate towards more naturally.

Perhaps we want to be seen on the most rotors, doing the most things. Perhaps we want to rise up in church leadership somehow. And speaking to myself, perhaps we want to preach the most and best sermons.

So it's not just James and John here that have this attitude at life. It's not just them that have this greatness-grabbing attitude. Actually, it's probably all of us in one way or another.

we want that desire to be seen, to be celebrated, to be thanked, to be held in high esteem for all we are and have done.

[18:11] But Jesus sets them straight. He's not interested in the norms of life. He comes with his topsy-turvy, upside-down house way of doing things.

And so, secondly, we see the way we're going, the way Jesus says we're going. Verse 32, they were on their way up to Jerusalem with Jesus leading the way and the disciples were astonished. Well, those who followed were afraid. Again, he took the twelve aside and he told them what was going to happen to him. We are going up to Jerusalem, he said.

Difference between this cross-statement as opposed to the other ones in chapters eight and nine is that Jesus says here, we are going together.

We are going together to Jerusalem. We are on this journey to the cross together. The way we're going, James and John, it is not about greatness as you see it.

[19:24] No, this is the route to glory, that we're going to Jerusalem and I'm going to die on a cross. It's heading for suffering.

And in the suffering it is the way of service, which is the way of Jesus. And look how Jesus begins to correct them in verse 38.

You don't know what you're asking, Jesus said. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?

As he talks about drinking and baptism, it's not perhaps how we think about it. It's not drinking a nice little drink and being dunked under a bit of water.

It's far more than that. Jesus is showing, beginning to help his disciples to see that the route to glory involves the cup and the baptism.

[20:29] But what is the cup and the baptism? Well, the cup is an experience. Have you ever thought about drinking something like an experience?

I do with coffee. If you were to come around to our home and ask for a coffee, I would whiz up some coffee beans in a coffee grinder and I would put it in a V60 coffee maker, a little filter thing, and I would boil the kettle and I would leave the kettle for a few minutes because you mustn't put boiling water over coffee.

And then I'd pour the water on carefully in a circular motion, all so that I'm serious, all so that I can get a good experience of a coffee.

It's the most important thing I do in the morning. It's not. But if it's done wrong, I notice. And it feels like a not so good experience.

Perhaps you can think of drinks you've had which you just want to spit out. Not a good experience. Well, this cup that Jesus talks about is an experience, one that he's going to consume.

[21:49] And yet, just to look at it, would repel you and I. The cup in scripture can refer to blessings, like in Psalm 23, my cup overflows with blessing.

But more often than not, it's about something else. And I think we thought about this a little bit in some of the revelation stuff, so I don't want to repeat too much. But let me show you what the cup in

scripture is often about and what Jesus is referring to here.

So Isaiah 51, verse 17, first of all. Isaiah 51, verse 17. We read, Awake!

Awake! Rise up, Jerusalem! You who have drunk from the hand of the Lord, the cup of his wrath. you who have drained it to his dregs, the goblet that makes people stagger.

The cup there is God's wrath. If you want to make sure that that's not just one random mention of the cup of God's wrath, well, Jeremiah 25 may help us.

[23:22] Jeremiah 25, verse 15. This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me, take from my hand this cup filled with wrath, filled with the wine of my wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them. The cup of God's wrath.

cup. And that's what I think Jesus is referring to here as he talks about the cup with his disciples.

But just one more mention, one more mention of it in Mark's gospel, in fact.

Mark 14, verse 35. Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, may the hour pass from him.

Abba Father, he said, everything is possible from you. Take this cup, this cup of God's wrath that he was going to face, and yet not what I will, but what you will.

[24:50] Jesus' journey to the cross is one that will lead him to drinking this cup of God's wrath in full for his people.

can you drink the cup? I drink, he says to his disciples.

And then the baptism. There's a few places in Scripture where we hear of suffering, being described a bit like a deluge of water.

So in Psalm 69, 1-2, we could read that. Psalm 69, 1-2. Nearly there.

We read, Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters.

[26:16] The flood engulfs me, suffering like a deluge of water, like flood waters. And then Isaiah 43, 2, also speaks of the waters.

Jesus, sorry, the Lord speaks about when you pass through the waters.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. the waters, the rivers, whatever they might be, the suffering, the judgments.

And then, of course, there's a really big illustration in Scripture with the flood waters of God's judgment covering the whole earth in the book of Genesis with Noah and the flood.

Jesus uses baptism here, the language of baptism to describe going through the waters of suffering and God's judgment at the cross.

[27:37] Perhaps we can, although we understand a bit as we look back on our own baptisms being dunked under the water, that would be a terrible place to have stayed, wouldn't it?

But wonderfully, the picture isn't just staying under water, it's rising out of the water. We go through those waters with Jesus, we're united with him in what he's done, in going through the baptism waters himself, but we rise back up out of the grave.

And so as Jesus asks James and John this, as he says, can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with that baptism I am baptized with?

They say boldly, we can. Of course we can, Jesus. But can you really face the awful terror of God for your sins and live?

Can you really stand under the floodwaters of God's judgment for your sin? Jesus says, I am going to face that.

[28:48] I am going to go through that for you. And this is where we're going. This is what I'm going to do. And yet, Jesus in verse 39 does say, you will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with.

And not that they're going to go and atone for people's sins themselves, but in following Jesus, in taking up their cross, as Jesus calls them to, they will suffer.

as they walk, as they walk daily with Jesus, as they take up their cross day by day, they're called daily to take up the cross which involves suffering.

Be prepared to suffer on a day by day basis, as you humbly follow me, he is saying. when we looked at Acts 14, I think very early on in the year, we saw in that chapter how Peter, sorry, Paul and Barnabas were being targeted with people who wanted to stone them and throw them out of the city of Iconium.

so that led them out, that forced them out and so they went to Lystra and there was a misunderstanding of who Paul and Barnabas was, were they gods?

[30:26] And then when they found out they weren't, there was another threat to them for stoning them, they wanted them dead and then as they made their way back through the churches after a little while, they said to them, we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

That's because we're following the Lord Jesus who has himself gone through awful suffering in order to save us, in order to atone for our sins.

This all may sound very weak and foolish to the world around us, but this is our saviour, this is God's plan of salvation for the world and thirdly, this is the way of greatness, this is the way of greatness.

In all this we see the way of greatness and it's not as the world thinks, it's topsy-turvy to the world's sort of ways.

things. So verse 42, Jesus called them together and he said, you know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them and their high officials exercise authority over them.

[31:50] Not so with ye. authority. In other words, the rulers, the leaders of the world around us, they love their authority.

Perhaps they're very good at it, command respect for people, but perhaps they love it so much that they abuse their authority. When Becky and I were staying in Plymouth a month or so ago, we're staying with a family with some young children and I was reminded of the game of snakes and ladders, treated to many, many games.

I was reminded of how simple the game is. You roll the dice, you move the numbers it tells you to, you go up some ladders, you go down snakes, and you try and get to 100.

Very simple, but also very frustrating. You think you're doing well and then suddenly a big snake appears and you go down. imagine life like a game of snakes and ladders.

Everyone is trying to get to the top of life. These rulers of the Gentiles that Jesus talks about, they love to climb the ladders. James and John, they want to sit on the thrones of glory.

[33:10] But perhaps in the process, they watch others slip down the snakes and struggle. Whereas in God's kingdom, Jesus is going to, is showing his disciples here, the leadership looks different.

The leadership looks like going down the snakes. And keep going down until you get to the bottom in order to be seen as anything like great.

Because verse 43, Jesus says, so not so with you, instead whoever wants to become great among you must be your servants.

And whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. Jesus says the way of greatness is this. If you want to be great, you've got to be a servant.

If you want to be first, you've got to be a slave. That sounds like a rather topsy-turvy way of doing things to me.

[34:18] You've got to lay down your life for the other. You've got to prefer each other's needs to your own, for it is Christ you're serving. This is our God, the servant king.

And he calls us now to follow him, because look at verse 45, for even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life for many, as a ransom for many.

He gives his life for us. He, the son of man, that Daniel 7 figure who will have all eternal glory and worship and honor. and yet he doesn't come to this world to lord his power and glory over us.

Rather, he, the eternal God, lays down his life for us. He chooses the path of a servant. He prefers others' needs.

We get a glimpse of this in John's gospel, in that famous scene as Jesus is sitting around the table with his disciples when suddenly he gets up and he wraps a towel around him and he bends down and washes his disciples' feet.

[35:40] That's not the job of the host of a meal, not the job of a guest, not even the job of a top servant, but the job of the lowest slave. And Jesus is prepared to do that for us.

Because in Jesus' kingdom, if you want to be great, you've got to be a servant. If you want to be first, you've got to be a slave. He's come here in order to go to the cross, to be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law, who 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.

This is his route to glory. And he does that according to verse 45 in order to save us. He serves us in order to give his life as a ransom for many.

In order to ransom us, in order to pay that price for our sin, in order to buy our salvation for us, so that we don't have to spend a penny towards it, because we can't.

He comes and he's willing to face the wrath and judgment of God upon our sin in full of the cross for us. Not so that we might sit on the two best thrones of his glory, but just that we might share in eternal life.

[37:14] That's the path he's going on. That's where he says we are journeying towards us as we go to Jerusalem. And he gives us a little bit of an insight into how this looks in this very next scene in this chapter.

Like with James and John who come to Jesus with a request, this blind man that we see in the verses following comes to him with a request.

Verse 47, when he heard Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. But it's different from the James and John request.

It's please have mercy on me. It's not do for me whatever I ask. It's saying mercy, saying I don't deserve anything good from you.

Maybe you won't answer my request, but please have mercy. And like with James and John, he then asks them that same question, verse 51, what do you want me to do for you?

[38:27] That same question that he asks in verse 36, what do you want me to do for you? But unlike with James and John, the blind man says, don't worry about me being great particularly, I just want to see.

And I think it's a bit of an illustration of where the disciples are at right now. They are blind. They don't quite see Jesus' topsy-turvy way of doing things.

They will see it, but they don't see it yet. They are like this man, blind and in need of his mercy. mercy. And Jesus, even as he does this, is showing, I'm willing to serve the most, one of the outcasts, the unwelcome nuisance.

I'm willing to serve the lowest. And so Jesus has mercy on him. Jesus is servant-heartedly going to have mercy on many more people as he goes to Jerusalem and gives his life as a ransom for many. And he has had mercy on us even this evening. This is our God, the servant king, who calls us now to follow him.

[39:52] And where we have got this attitude of being a servant wrong, we need to pray like this blind man, Lord, have mercy on me. At times we do have those illusions of grandeur that James and John have and we need to remember our need for mercy.

We need to remember that we were once blind and wretched sinners, but praise God for his mercy. But we can also be encouraged this evening for how we are serving.

I know there are many servant-hearted people here at Calvary Church. And so be encouraged that Jesus sees it when you spend your Saturday afternoon cooking for a meal for 50 people.

Know that Jesus sees it when you give up an evening of the week to serve the gospel. Know that Jesus sees it when you make extra food to put in the church freezer in order to serve someone in the future who's in need.

Know that Jesus sees it when you spend time praying earnestly for a brother or sister in Christ.

Know that Jesus sees it when you give lifts to people to church.

[41:07] Know that Jesus sees it when you sacrificially give money towards his kingdom purposes. Know that Jesus sees it when you send a text or phone call to a brother or sister, perhaps we haven't seen for a while.

Know that Jesus sees all these different ways and more of us serving him. And so be encouraged as you serve, though it may feel costly, though it may look weak, though the world may say you should actually be looking out for just you.

Number one, Jesus' way is topsy-turvy and he says I've come not to be served, but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many.

Can we respond to this? Firstly in prayer. Firstly in quiet prayer, responding to God. God's God's God's God's