

Giving His Life As A Ransom For Many

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's Gospel reading is from the Gospel according to Mark, chapters 9 and 10.

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 had argued about who was the greatest.

Sitting down, Jesus called the twelve and said, Anyone who wants to be the first must be the very last and servant of all. They were on their way up to Jerusalem with 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 the teachers of the law.

[1 : 30] 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.

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. 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 hand and the other at your left in glory. 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?

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 my 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 very indignant with James and John.

[2 : 40] Jesus called them together and said, You know that those who were regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lorded 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 of all.

For even the son of man did not come to be served, come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. 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 Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging.

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.

[3 : 45] 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.

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. This is the gospel of the Lord. Good morning, Christ Church. As we are drawing closer to Easter, we only have a few weeks left in the gospel of Mark.

And what we're going to talk about today is of, it's a vital subject of great importance with far-reaching implications in every sphere of our lives, our homes, our churches, our workplaces, our society as a whole.

And if as individual people and as a collective community, we can embrace the essence of this text and by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God begin to live it out together, many, many people would come to see the light and the life and the love of Jesus Christ in us to such a degree that they'd be compelled to consider why our lives are so radically different than everyone else's.

[5 : 20] Why we are a counterculture, an alternative society, a city within the city, defying the prevailing social norms and values of our time.

I want to remind you before we get into the text of the larger context in the Gospel of Mark, if you're paying attention to the literary structure, Mark has written this Gospel as a three-act play.

And we looked at Act 1 where Jesus is in Galilee and He's demonstrating His authority and His power in the first eight chapters of this Gospel. And then you come to Act 2, which is Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, and He's taking His disciples on this journey in order to teach them about His cross and to re-educate them about the kingdom of God in light of the cross.

And then in Act 3, we come to Jerusalem, the final days leading up to Jesus' cross, and that's the last chapters, chapters 11 through 16.

But here we are in this middle portion, Act 2 of this Gospel, chapters 8, 9, and 10, where Jesus gives us these three prophecies of His passion, these three predictions of His coming cross.

[6 : 40] And Jesus solemnly repeats these prophecies about His cross three times so that His disciples can know that what's going to happen to Him is not going to take Him by surprise.

And in fact, this third prediction is the most elaborate and most detailed. It says in verse 33, it says, we're going to Jerusalem. The Son of Man is going to be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law, that is, the Jewish authorities.

And they will condemn Him to death and they'll hand Him over to the Gentile authorities who will mock Him, spit on Him, flog Him, and kill Him. And in three days later, He will rise.

Now, you would think with such a prophecy that the disciples would be in a state of reflection and a prayer. And yet, this prophecy is followed by this request, this incredible request by James and John for positions of privilege and power.

And then we have Jesus' brilliant response, which is capped off by verse 45, which is really the key verse in our entire gospel. And so that's where I'd like to focus our attention as we begin there in verse 45.

[7 : 53] And my whole message today is this, that Jesus came to serve and to create a counterculture of servants. That Jesus came to serve and create a counterculture of servants.

And I want to talk first about how Jesus came to serve. He says that in verse 45. He says, For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.

And the choice of that word that the Son of Man has come is a strong giveaway that Jesus existed before He was born. That He's come into the world. And why has He come into the world?

Well, a major part of our identity formation is to get clear on who we are not. And to be able to say who we are not.

And I'm not this, so I'm not going to do this, that, or the other. And Jesus knows who He's not. Jesus has not come to be served. And that assumes that He has every right to expect to be honored and served, but He's not come to seek that.

[9 : 01] To be served is the default mode of the human heart. There's a part of us and every single one of us that says, I'm here to be served. Serve me.

Give to me. My will be done. I'll be the superior. You be my inferior. I'll be the center. You be the circumference. The reason Jesus came is because the only way this world could be put right again is for there to be a new human being with a new kind of heart that's operating in a new kind of way.

And this is why the New Testament calls Jesus the new Adam. And tells us why it's so important to get out of the old Adam and to live your life here under the new Adam.

Because Jesus, the new Adam, He's not infected. by this disease that says, serve me. My rights. My privileges. My power.

My status. I want to be the greatest. I want to be the first. What's so incredibly attractive about Jesus is that He's radically free of these things. Jesus comes and He says, even though I have a right to be served and to be honored and to enjoy all the privileges of the Son of God, I've not come to exercise my rights and my privileges.

[10 : 18] In fact, what I've come to do is surrender them. I've come to lay them down in a cause greater than myself and my rights. So Jesus knows who He's not.

I've not come to be served, but Jesus also knows who He is. He's very, He's quite clear on His identity and His mission. And He says, in verse 45, He says, the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

He has no doubt about what He's come to do. He says, I've come to serve, to be a diakoneo, which is where we get the word deacon or the diaconate. It just means a servant.

It literally means a table waiter. And a table waiter is someone who comes to meet your needs and clean up your mess. And Jesus says, that's what I've come to do. I've come to serve.

All of His acts of mercy, all of His acts of healing, His acts of teaching are to be seen in light of this one great purpose. I've come to serve. And what is Jesus' greatest act of service?

[11 : 24] He defines it. He says, I've come to give my life as a ransom for many. Jesus' death is not incidental to His identity and His mission, but it's quite central.

The death of Jesus is not an accident. It's not a tragic waste of life at the end of a great career. Unlike most deaths that we read about in biographies and headlines, Jesus went to His death willingly and quite deliberately.

He says in John chapter 10, verse 17, the reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. Jesus' greatest act of service is giving over His life to God the Father in His death on the cross.

And why was it necessary for Him to do so? Well, Jesus tells us not only that He will die, but He tells us why He will do so. And He says, it's because we need to be ransomed.

[12 : 37] We, all of us, every single one of us need to be ransomed. Right? the plight of humanity is that we are held in captivity. And if you go back to the earliest part of the Gospel, Mark chapter 2, these friends, they bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus and they lay Him down before Jesus.

And what does Jesus say to this man? He says, Son, your greatest problem is a material problem. It's a physical problem. No, He says, Son, your sins are forgiven. And then He goes on and deals with His material and physical problem.

He heals His infirmity and His paralysis. But He says, Sons, your sins are forgiven. The very next chapter in Mark chapter 3, Jesus describes His mission and what does He say?

He says, No one can enter the strong man's house without first tying him up. Then He can plunder the strong man's house. And when Jesus says that, He's painting for us a picture of a kidnapping.

And this strong man who's kidnapped us and tied us up and put us in the basement of His house in this kind of hostage situation.

[13 : 52] And what Jesus is saying to us is that you are held captive internally by sin, which leads to death. And you're held captive externally by these dark powers of evil.

And that's kind of a question for us this morning. Do we believe this diagnosis, Jesus' diagnosis of the human condition, that we are in a spiritual and a moral bondage from which we cannot extricate ourselves?

We're prisoners in need of a ransom. And Jesus not only talks about the plight from which we need to be ransomed, but He also talks about the price with which we need to be ransomed.

He leaves us in no doubt about the price. He says, we need such a huge sacrificial payment that would not only match the value of our personhood, but it would also procure our freedom.

And Jesus says, the only price, the only payment that will work in this situation is me, myself. It's only if I give my life, only if I die, only if I shed my blood that you could possibly hope to be ransomed.

[15 : 08] And this is what sets Jesus apart really from the founders of all the other religions because each of them came, if you study them, each of them came to live. Each of them came to set an example.

They came to give their teachings, but Jesus says, I came to die. I came to give not just teachings, I came to give my life. And how does Jesus say he's going to carry out this ransom?

Well, he says, I'm going to do it for the many. And that word for means instead of or in place of the many. I'm going to be a substitutionary sacrifice for the many.

Now, when I think about all of my favorite films about kidnapping and hostage situations and ransoming, am I the only one that likes these films?

I think of Air Force One with Harrison Ford as the president of the United States and his aircraft, his plane is taken captive by terrorists. Or there's this great movie called Taken where Liam Neeson is this ex-CIA operative and his daughter has been snatched away by human traffickers.

[16 : 22] Or a more recent film, Captain Phillips, where Tom Hanks is the captain and his ship and his whole crew has been overtaken by these pirates. And, you know, in every single one of these films, how are the prisoners set free?

How do those hostages end up making it home safe if they make it home safe at all? Well, in every single film, many, many people have to die. I mean, Liam Neeson's like killing a lot of people.

Many people are shedding their blood. But this is what makes the drama of Jesus so very different because he says instead of the many people dying for the ransom of one, he says it's going to be the one for the many.

One person will die to ransom the many. And I love, if you'll just turn with me back to verse 32. I love this verse.

It says, they were on their way up to Jerusalem with Jesus leading the way and the disciples were astonished while those who followed were afraid. And where exactly is Jesus leading them?

[17 : 33] Here is almighty God himself come in the flesh. He stepped out of eternity and into time and he's striding ahead with purpose to Jerusalem.

He's on a determined march to his cross to voluntarily give his life to be a ransom for those who are in captivity. One substituted in the place of the many.

Out ahead leading everybody to the cross. And Jesus says here in this exchange with James and John, he asks them this question in verse 38.

He says, can you drink the cup that I drink? Can you drink the cup that I drink? And in Hebrew scriptures, the cup is representative of the just judgment of God upon human evil.

The cup is the wrath and the condemnation of God on sin. And when Jesus says, can you drink the cup that I'm going to drink? He's saying, I'm going to make the payment. I'm going to pay the price by drinking that cup.

[18 : 37] He says, I'll be condemned so you don't have to be. I'll take on the wrath of God, the judgment of God on human evil upon myself so that you can be free from this condemnation.

He says, that's the payment. That's the ransom that you could never pay but that I'll pay on your behalf for your freedom. So friends, do you know that this is why Jesus came?

He came to serve you in this way. Do you know that He served you in this way? Without faith in His ransom for you, you're still enslaved.

You're still a prisoner. Without putting your trust in Jesus who gave His life for you, you're still in bondage and in captivity to sin and death and to evil.

And so I want to ask you today, what in the world is keeping you from giving yourself to this one who came to give Himself for you and came to serve you.

[19 : 45] Jesus came to serve. But it's not just that He came to serve. Jesus came to serve and to create a counterculture of servants.

This is the end game of His service. Jesus came to create a counterculture of servants. What Jesus accomplished on His cross was utterly unique.

Only His life as the Son of God could be the ransom for us. And so this prophecy is very much about Himself, but it's also a prophecy that becomes a pattern for us.

It's the mold into which our lives are to be formed. And perhaps you notice in this text and perhaps when you look around at the church in North America, have you ever noticed that the life of Jesus' disciples doesn't always reflect the life of Jesus Himself?

Has anyone noticed this? Do you know anything about the church today? That the life of Jesus' disciples does not always reflect the life of Jesus Himself. And when you look at verse 35, it says, Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him and they said, Teacher, we want you to do whatever we ask.

- [21 : 00] Very often we address Jesus as our teacher, but we've not yet assimilated into our lives the major focus of His teaching. And this story makes abundantly clear that the sons of Zebedee and the Son of Man are in this irreconcilable contradiction with one another.
- The sons of Zebedee are seeking after power and glory and thrones. Right? And the Son of Man is seeking after humility and service and the cross.
- And we too are faced with this choice between these two radically different alternative value systems and lifestyles. And we've got to decide what kind of people we're going to be.
- And to what degree are we willing to adjust our lives to the pattern and the practices of Jesus. And we've got to make three key choices. And the first choice is we've got to choose between self-seeking and self-sacrifice.
- If we're going to be disciples of Jesus we've got to choose between self-seeking and self-sacrifice. They say to Jesus we want you to do for us whatever we ask. Now what kind of prayer is that?
- [22 : 17] We want you to do whatever we ask. That is a terrible prayer. It is actually the exact opposite of true prayer. True prayer says Lord your name be hallowed.
- Your kingdom come. Your will be done. Not my will but your will be done. But James and John are somehow determined to bend God's will to their own will.
- We want you to do for us whatever it is that we ask. But Jesus being full of grace he works with his self-seeking disciples and he says to them in verse 36 what do you want me to do for you?
- And they replied let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory. They think when the kingdom of God comes our Messiah is going to rout the Romans and he's going to set up a new administration in the royal palace and at that moment like there always is in these moments in history there's going to be a scramble for the best seats.
- And you're probably aware that the Caesars in that time they set their victorious generals on either side of their royal throne. And so they're thinking to themselves well we need to kind of get on this.
- [23 : 26] We need to compete. We need to get at the front of the line. We need to make advance reservations so that we can rule there with Jesus. And Jesus says to them in verse 38 you don't know what you're asking.
- And that must be how he responds to so many of my prayers. Jonathan you have no clue what you're asking. Yours is the way of self-seeking but mine is the way of self-sacrifice.
- Jesus emptied himself of all of his heavenly glory to take on human flesh and throughout his life he humbled himself he never sought his own glory. In fact for the sake of God and for the welfare of other people he chose the self-sacrifice of his cross from the very beginning.
- And he's saying to us you my disciples must choose between self-seeking for your own glory and your own honor and self-sacrifice for the glory of God and the honor of other people.
- That's just a basic choice you've got to make. A choice between self-seeking and self-sacrifice. But the second choice that we've got to make is a choice we've got to choose between power and service.
- [24 : 40] The church as a whole and Christians as individuals need to choose between power and service. They say in verse 37 let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.
- Basically they're saying Jesus forget Peter. Forget about Peter. We know you've made him the number one. We know that he's our lead disciple but forget about him.

We want to rule on thrones next to you. We want the top places in your cabinet. We want to be your prime minister and your chief of staff. Give us these seats of authority so that we can enjoy all the connections and all the status and all the influence and all the power with you Jesus.

And it says in verse 41 that when the ten heard about this they became indignant with James and John. This includes Peter. They're all full of fury because they've been outsmarted. They're full of fear because they've been beaten to the punch.

All of them every single one of Jesus' twelve disciples are hungry for power because the lust for power is so intoxicating.

[25 : 52] And we see this everywhere in our public life don't we? We see it in our professions. We see it in our politics. Somehow this lust for power even enters into our places of worship.

And Jesus says I'm calling you my disciples to a different way. He says in verse 42 Jesus called them together you know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Now we have to say that the exercise of good authority the good exercise of authority is something that God intends for us and we see that in Genesis 1 and 2 where God puts Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and he tells them to rule over it.

He tells them to exercise their authority over it by caring for it and cultivating and that's a good thing. That's what human beings are for. But we see very quickly in Genesis chapter 3 that Adam and Eve begin to misuse their authority and begin to control and domineer over one another and by Genesis 4 that authority is not just being misused it's being abused and the descendants of Adam and Eve are dehumanizing and killing each other they're coercing and overpowering each other and this is what Jesus has in mind.

He's thinking about how all of this has gotten baked into the systems and the structures of power in the Roman Empire this empire that's organized hierarchically with different levels of power and privilege from Caesar and the Senate at the top down to the peasants and the slaves at the bottom and Jesus looks at all that and he says not so with you.

[27 : 34] In fact Jesus will take those slaves at the very bottom and he turns that kingdom upside down and he says in verse 43 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 of all.

Do you want to be great? Do you want to be first? Jesus says. He says I came not to grab hold of power I came to give power away.

I came not to wield power over people like Caesar but I came to show you the power of relinquishing your power to serve other people. And Jesus is saying do you want to be great?

Do you want to be first among my disciples? Then try on these labels for size. Be a diakonos and a doulos. We already saw that the word diakonos means be a table waiter who is there to meet the needs of other people and clean up their messes.

But then what is a doulos? A doulos is a slave. Is that how any of you identify yourself as a slave?

[28 : 47] In our late modern western culture of self-expressive individualism we're all searching for these identity markers so that we can say who we uniquely are in this me culture so that I can tell you the truth about myself.

Right? But how many of us define ourselves as a slave of Jesus Christ? Listen to Romans chapter 1 verse 1.

This is the greatest letter in the New Testament and it opens with these words. He says Paul a slave a doulos of Christ Jesus called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.

How does Paul identify himself? What does he say is the first and the most important thing that you need to know about him? He's a slave and that's what a Christian is.

This transcends all other identity markers that you willingly surrendered yourself to the lordship of Jesus Christ and if you don't identify yourself as a slave of Jesus you need to ask yourself am I really even a Christian?

[30 : 04] Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 he says for what we preach is not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.

So if we measure greatness by how much of a slave you are well how great are we? How great are we?

The third choice we have to make is not just a choice between self seeking and self sacrifice and a choice between power and service but we also need to choose between security and suffering.

We need to choose between security and suffering and Jesus says to James and John he says in verse 38 you don't know what you're asking can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I'm baptized with and they say we can and again they didn't know what Jesus was talking about they thought that Jesus cup was the wine that they'd be drinking at the messianic banquet in the kingdom of God and they thought that Jesus' baptism were like those luxurious pre-banquet baths that King Herod was known to enjoy before a good feast and they're excited about all of this they're excited about the security and the comfort that they're going to enjoy when Jesus becomes king and Jesus says to them in verse 39 you will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with he's saying James and John you will have your own little cups not of wine but of suffering and you will have your own smaller baptisms not these luxuriant baths but little baptisms of persecution salvation and what's amazing to me and what gives me such hope is that

God changes these men in such a radical way these disciples who are self-seeking and power hungry and security focused they become so transformed by the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ that they actually begin to identify themselves as slaves of Jesus and James James will go on to serve Jesus to the point where he loses his head at the orders of King Herod Antipas which we read about in Acts chapter 12 and John will go on to serve Jesus to the point where he's exiled in the isle of Patmos under the reign of emperor Domitian which we read about in Revelation chapter 1 and for these men their voluntary loss of security and their willing embrace of suffering became for them a joyful participation in the very sufferings of their servant king Jesus and they counted it great joy to be considered worthy to suffer with Jesus and so friends you might not suffer beheading you might not suffer exile but if you're going to be a disciple you are called to be conformed to the image of the suffering servant

[33 : 18] Jesus and you've got to make that choice now how does this apply we're out of time and I hope the Holy Spirit has been applying this to you as I've been preaching but I do want to make a few specific points of application and the first thing is I want you to think about your body your body because as Jesus came to serve and create this counterculture of servants he wants us to be thinking differently about ourselves the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6 you are not your own you were bought at a price therefore honor God with your bodies a Christian is a purchased person which means that you're no longer free to do with your body and your time and your energy whatever you want to do you've been saved to serve and the first place we begin to do that is just with our body second thing I want you to think about is the church when we gather together on Sundays when you gather midweek in our homes as we go are we praying

Lord who do you want me to serve and how do you want me to serve them how can I pray for them encourage them listen to them carry their burdens how do you want me to serve them how can I show up today with this attitude that says at your service I've not come here today to be served but to serve and if you don't have a way to do that I encourage you to find a ministry team get involved in a community group find other people ask God to put people on your heart and begin to serve them the third thing I want us to think about is our homes and our workplaces as you think about your spouse or your roommates or your parents whomever you live with and you think about your boss and the people you manage and your clients it's so easy for us to say you know I'll serve you if and to the degree that you serve me and really that's the way of the world isn't it I'll serve you if and to the degree that you serve me but the way of Christ is to say you know I'm going to serve you and I'm going to lay myself down in sacrificial self-giving for you regardless of whether you serve me or not because that's the way

Jesus served me the fourth thing I want to say as I close is I'd like to apply this to our politics it's clear that the church in North America has been following the way of our Caesars and if you are someone who's known more for your politics than you are for your religion it's very likely that you've turned your politics into your religion and if you're new at Christ I just want to say we are part of the exhausted majority this congregation is center left center right but whatever it doesn't matter we're just weary of polarization we're weary of partisanship and we love that sign in 2020 that said any functioning adult we just want that bumper sticker we want that sign and I'm tempted to say that we are called as a church to charitable sober minded moderation in these things in these political things but what I want to say beyond that today is that we are actually called not to advocate for this version or that version of the United States this red version or this blue version of America but what we're called to do as a church is to bear witness to a different kingdom altogether the church is called to be a sign and an instrument and a foretaste of this subversive cross shaped upside down kingdom of God in which the greatest people among us and the first people among us are the people who act like servants and like slaves and to the degree that the church is living that out we might have some hope to be salt in the earth and light to the world so Jesus has called us right he's come to serve us and he's calling us to be a counterculture of servants and may he give us the grace and the power to do that very thing in the name of the Father

Son and Holy Spirit Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen