

AM Mark 10:32-52 What are our exam questions?

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- [0 : 0 0] This morning is from Mark's Gospel, chapter 10, verses 32 to 52. Mark 10, 32 to 52.
- It begins with the section entitled, Jesus foretells his death a third time. And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem.
- And Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed. And those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was going to happen to him.
- Saying, see, we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes. And they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.
- And they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.
- [1 : 1 1] And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you. And he said to them, What do you want me to do for you?
- And they said to him, Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory. Jesus said to them, You do not know what you are asking.
- Are you able to drink the cup that I drink? Or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? And they said to him, We are able.
- And Jesus said to them, The cup that I drink you will drink. And with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized. But to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.
- And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them, But it shall not be so among you.
- [2 : 2 9] But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.
- And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples, and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside.
- And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me.
- And Jesus stopped. And he said, Call him. And they called the blind man, saying to him, Take heart, get up, he's calling you.
- And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, What do you want me to do for you?

[3 : 44] And the blind man said to him, Rabbi, let me recover my sight. And Jesus said to him, Go your way. Your faith has made you well.

And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way. May God add a blessing to his word.

I've yet to meet anyone who actually likes exams of any sort.

At school, they kind of hang over you, waiting for those results to drop through the door or appear on your phone. Driving tests as well may be a seemingly insuperable hurdle till you pass, eventually.

And you may be really anxious till your MOT certificate is issued. Not to mention hospital or, dare I say it, dental examinations assaulting your person.

[4 : 57] Or even more, the examination that a prospective bride or groom is subjected to by the Mibby in-laws to be.

The examinations are very unsettling. But there's a deeply disquieting verse of scripture in support of examinations.

And that's in 2 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 5. 2 Corinthians 13 verse 5 where Paul looks the people of the church in Corinth and the people of the church in Dumfries for that matter in the eye and tells them, 2 Corinthians 13 verse 5, examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

Test yourselves. Or do you not realise this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test.

Left to our own fallen devices, self-examination or self-assessment has the potential to be a very flawed process. A lifetime in medicine has taught me that most people who think they have a lump where there shouldn't be one are completely normal.

[6 : 23] There's a smaller but significant number of folk who have radical abnormalities but are in denial and they declare, I'm fine, I'm absolutely fine when clearly they are not.

And some folk may truly be unaware of a problem till a passing medic in the aisle at Tesco or at a gathering of friends says, see that shakiness? Do you realise you've got early Parkinson's?

And so on. Of course, in spiritual terms, we're talking here about a lack of assurance for some, a failure to confront personal sin in others and for others, again, ignorance of God's laws to the way of Christ is pointed out.

But Paul still tells us, examine yourselves. Now, would you and I have unrealistically high marks in this self-examination and so deceive ourselves?

How do we set about examining ourselves? Who sets the examination questions? Thank God, in his grace and in the person of his beloved son, he has posed many questions in his word which we would well do to answer.

[7 : 38] The Lord Jesus, in fact, has asked 306 questions in the Gospels and one in the book of Acts. So some of the questions in our examination paper go like this.

Who do you say I am? Who touched me? Will you give me a drink?

Do you want to be healed? Where are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?

Do you want to go away as well? Has no one condemned you? Do you believe in the Son of Man?

Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?

[8 : 45] The question asked of Saul of Tarsus and us, and you may wish to put your own name here, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

So in these and many other questions, as Paul David Tripp, the American pastor and counselor, has said, God gives us the ultimate tool of self-assessment, the mirror of his word.

Today I'd like us to look at a question Jesus asked twice in the passage we read from Mark's Gospel and ask it a third time of ourselves.

The question is asked of James and John in verse 36 of Mark 10 and it's also asked of Bartimaeus in verse 51. Exactly the same question. What do you want me to do for you?

Yes, just what? Let's look first at Mark 10 and get some context to the question. You see, Jesus has just told the disciples for the third time that he's going to be killed and that in an awful and ignominious way.

[9 : 59] The first time Jesus told the disciples this was in Mark 8. He had led the twelve to the north of the country to Caesarea Philippi, teaching them on the way.

And Caesarea Philippi was a very special place steeped in history, the history of religion. There were sites there recognised for their Baal worship and abominable sacrifices in previous years.

It was also where the Greek god Pan had allegedly been born in a cave. So much so the town was called Panias after Pan and that got corrupted to Banias which is its current name.

Now it was just next to where the Jordan River rose from a spring in the rocks and there we have the Jordan so integral to Israel's monotheistic history.

But Caesarea Philippi also contained an amazing huge marble temple on the hillside which had been erected for the worship of Caesar, the emperor.

[11 : 06] And this had been embellished by Philip, a more local acolyte, hence Caesarea Philippi. It's as if Jesus was saying here are all these religions and here I am.

What is your choice? Remember that on the way there Jesus had taught the disciples about poor spiritual vision in the example of the blind man whose vision was partly restored at the master's touch.

I see men like trees walking he said but then with another touch vision was 20-20 clarity. The disciples were not the finished article.

Their spiritual vision was like trees walking and at Caesarea Philippi are all the religions you could ever wish for. Then Jesus asked another two questions.

Who do men say that I the son of man am? John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah are among the wrong answers. But who do you say I am?

[12 : 11] Jesus asked looking at the disciples and impelled by God's spirit Simon Peter responds you are the Christ.

What a moment for Jesus because after all the healing and serving and teaching of the previous two years someone had articulated this greatest truth with clarity.

But Jesus then for the first time told them that he would suffer many things, be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes and be killed and after three days rise again.

Well the disciples just could not get their heads around that. Not at all. Messiah in their minds was to restore Israel spiritually economically, militarily, politically and the Romans vanquished and got rid of from the land.

And here we see a pattern established. Jesus declares his impending death and resurrection with the defeat of Satan that that entails and in an instant Peter takes Jesus aside and he puts his arm around him and he tries to dissuade the Lord from that very road of suffering and sacrifice.

[13 : 26] get behind me Satan says Jesus recognizing that the evil one will do all in his power to undermine salvation in all its fullness.

For that salvation implies the devil's own defeat and humiliation. Didn't it say in Luke 4 that after Jesus' temptation by the devil in the wilderness when by God's own word he had refuted and beaten the devil's snares that when the devil had ended every temptation he departed from him until an opportune time.

And in Peter's seeming concern for Jesus' welfare and his own for that matter the devil was back undermining, lying, scheming. The second time Jesus teaches his death and resurrection is in Mark 9 and the disciples still didn't get it.

They did not understand, they were afraid to ask him and immediately after the same pattern Satan tries to undermine again by stirring up argument among the disciples as to which of them was the greatest.

And Jesus' response teaches servanthood and the innocence and uncomplicated acceptance of a child.

[14 : 50] Demonstrating true greatness. forgiveness. So now in today's passage Jesus has in Mark 10 taught for the third time about his being delivered to the satanic authorities and has taught about his condemnation, the mocking, the spitting, the flogging and the killing.

But in his next sentence, Jesus says, after three days the Son of Man will rise. The same pattern. What would be Satan's response this time?

But notice verse 32 there. It says, And they were on the road. What road was that? Well this was the road, the pilgrim road to Jerusalem and it was a road that caused both astonishment, it says, and fear.

You see, Jesus never stopped being about his father's business. And he was like all pious Jews, fulfilling God's commands through Moses, that three times a year all the adult male Jews were to worship God in person, bearing a gift, assembling at the place of God's choosing, Jerusalem, at the temple.

and those occasions were the occasions of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Passover, the Feast of Days, Pentecost, and the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles in the Autumn.

[16 : 24] In fact, religious Jews today, this day, 1st October, are right in the middle of the week of their celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Now, in John's Gospel, we learn that Jesus had been at a place called Ephraim at this point in time. The exact locus of that is not certain.

But it was thought by some people at least to be a way to the north of Jerusalem towards Samaria and it was from there that he started this journey.

But there was a designated pilgrim route which went over towards the Jordan, down the Jordan River, to Jericho and then ascending to Jerusalem. The Jews had been doing this for centuries.

So that was the road. But Jesus and those following him knew that the authorities wanted to arrest and kill Jesus. Yet, like Isaiah foretold, now that his time had come, Jesus set his face like a flint towards Jerusalem.

[17 : 38] And so he led the way, verse 32. Jesus was walking ahead of them, seemingly alone in that position of leadership. The disciples were amazed.

But why he's walking into the lion's den? And the people following, they weren't just amazed, they were terrified. terrified. But then with patience and courage, which then and in subsequent days proved unparalleled in history, Jesus taught these fractious, argumentative, uncomprehending disciples just what was going to happen.

Those self-same disciples who when it came to the bit, and despite all their protestations of love and support, all forsook him and fled.

But right here, the devil could not let this further teaching of truth remain unchallenged. And so his attempt to undermine and subvert and divert the truth was to prompt the sons of thunder, Bo and Erges, James and John, and the other gospels say under the influence of their mother, to respond to Jesus teaching of his death by asking a pride-filled question.

The difference between Matthew's account in chapter 20 of Matthew, where the mother of Zebedee's children is named as the instigator of the question, and Mark's account, usually explained by Peter, whose gospel account Mark's gospel largely is, telling it orts and all, while Matthew maybe didn't want to land James and John in it, as we might say.

[19 : 24] But you could maybe see what was going on in James and John's heads, if you look back to Matthew 19, where Jesus had been teaching the disciples that they would reign with him on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Ah, yes, but they wanted the best thrones, those closest to Jesus, the place, the position, the pride. Now, as a parent and grandparent, I instantly know something as a foot if one of the boys or the grandchildren says as their opening gambit, I want you to promise to do exactly what I ask, before they've actually articulated what it is that they want.

And trust me, that is not a good plan. Likewise, here the Lord Jesus is not taken in by this opener, but instead he asks our question for today, what do you want me to do for you?

Now, James and John obviously had thought through their request before asking, and they'd been spurred on by their mother, but had they no shame to ask this in front of the other disciples at a time like this before the echoes of Jesus' teaching regarding his own torture and death had stopped ringing in their ears?

You and I might, with some justification, feel the sense of outrage the other disciples expressed. Frankly, they were seething, sons of thunder again, jumping in, shouting the odds, without necessarily connecting their brains with their mouths.

[21 : 12] But, before our self-righteous criticism goes further, are we the same? In our self-examination, when Jesus asks us, what do you want me to do for you?

Who is on the throne of our hearts? Exodus 20, commandment number one, is our triune God enthroned in our hearts?

Or is it ourselves, just like the sons of thunder? Is it the love of Christ constraining us in our requests? Or, is it self, self, self?

Ah, and this is self-examination. We haven't got to the other nine commandments yet, and we're stuck at the first question. In his grace and goodness and love, the Lord Jesus is so gentle with these two, James and John, as he affirms their good intentions to follow him because they truly believe that Jesus is going to reign in glory.

You wonder though if they still were attached to the military political picture of Messiah. But Jesus makes it clear that those positions at Jesus' side in glory are not his to allocate and request, but are for those for whom they have been prepared.

[22 : 40] And we then have that beautiful sermon from Jesus about servanthood. Beautiful sermon. Our tendency, isn't it, is to elevate those in the ministry or in office of one sort or another in the church to positions of honour and eminence.

But Jesus says, not so. Whoever would be great among you must be your deacon. That's the word in Greek, diaconis. A deacon is a servant.

And any honour that comes only in as far as that servanthood mimics the one who became servant to all, the Lord Jesus.

And Jesus goes on, whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. Slave, mark you. Doulos, bond servant, the one who does the dirty jobs, the one who washes the dirty feet, the one who makes sure others eat before they themselves have a morsel, the one who is so cloaked in humility, there's no lower to go.

Let this same mindset be in you as in Christ Jesus, Philippians chapter 2. So, Jesus says, even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for the many.

[24 : 05] how do I, in answering my Lord, in my honest self-examination, match up to his standards?

When we do exams, we're always looking for extra time, aren't we? And I imagine the disciples and ourselves might need some extra time to answer this examination paper.

By the time verse 46 comes along, they've reached Jericho. Old Jericho, of course, was destroyed by Joshua. But a mile away, New Jericho, or Jericho Newtown, had been built and had been enlarged in Roman times, and by all accounts, it was a beautiful place full of palm trees and gardens and springs with a fabulous climate and much loved by the Roman and Jewish gentry.

But just like most beautiful cities in our own country, and beautiful towns, there's always a poor underbelly. The have-nots as well as the haves.

And of course we know from the Gospels that Jesus had a real heart for the poor, the sick, the downtrodden, the oppressed, the minorities, the women and the children.

[25 : 25] And he reserved his most scathing criticism and condemnation for those who did the oppressing of these vulnerable groups with dishonest trading or rules of religiosity.

But in this last wee section of Mark 10, we have Jesus reaching Jericho and turning west. And starting to leave Jericho to begin that climb to Jerusalem, to injustice, to humiliation, to torture, and agony, and death.

He knew all this was coming. And you could have forgiven him if, as we might put it, his mind was elsewhere. And he was surrounded by quite a crowd, not just his disciples, but a great crowd it says there.

Now, I know my hearing is not what it used to be. When I'm in a crowd, especially if there's a low ceiling, I cannot make out things that the person in front of me is saying.

I just hear snippets of everybody's conversation. Likewise, trying to hear what someone is saying at the other side of the room, it's not possible. But in the midst of all the hubbub of this crowd, Jesus heard the cry of the needy.

[26 : 48] Let us never forget that. Never forget that. This poor man cried, God heard, and saved him from all his distresses.

It doesn't matter if you are one in the midst of a million, you cry, God hears. Now, Bartimaeus was not one of the gentry.

I'm certain he would have offended our sensitivities. He was without doubt dirty. He was without doubt smelly. He was without doubt noisy, even a nuisance.

poor. And he was without doubt poor. He was a beggar, and he was a blind beggar. He had not very much going for him, despite the opulence down the street in New Jericho's mansions and gardens.

But he did have a few things, did Bartimaeus. He had a cloak, which was most likely his sole possession, his sole worldly possession.

[27 : 50] he also had a loud voice. He had persistence. He had an acute sense of need. And blind as he was, he had a clear sight of who Jesus of Nazareth was, and what he was capable of doing.

Of course, he wouldn't have known it was Jesus who was passing unless someone had told him. He was blind after all. But what a ministry of whoever told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.

When he heard it was Jesus, he created a right strumash, shouting and bawling, creating a rumpus. But notice what he was shouting, Son of David, that is Messiah, Son of David, have mercy on me.

And he cried it again and again and again. If he'd been in white sands, he'd been arrested for breach of the peace. People told him in no uncertain terms to keep his mouth shut.

But that just made him worse. When was the last time that you or I got that excited at the prospect of meeting with Jesus?

[29 : 06] And what we were shouting for was mercy. Jesus stopped, it says. Did you for an instant think he wouldn't?

Call him, he said. And when Bartimaeus was told, take heart, he's calling you, he threw aside his one earthly possession, his cloak, in case it got in the way. He came to Jesus with energy.

He sprang up and either honed in on his voice or would he have been led into Jesus near our presence. But can you believe the question Jesus asked, what do you want me to do for you?

Excuse me, he's blind, Jesus. Why are you asking such an obvious thing? Trust me, that is not such a strange question to ask.

After 45 years in the health service, what people may want is not necessarily what you think they want. Someone with heart failure may be more concerned about the rash on their face.

[30 : 16] The person with terminal illness may just want to talk. The master physician's opening question would have been mine too. What can I do for you?

So do not assume when you find yourself in the presence of Jesus of Nazareth. He wants to hear what you want. what is your heart's desire?

You see, Bartimaeus had nothing except a cloak which he quickly cast aside. He knew he had no value in anyone else's eyes or even his own eyes.

He was so poor he had nothing. You know in Greek there are two words for poor. One is the word which means nothing to spare, subsistence living. You can put bread on the table but there's nothing to spare, no frills.

The other word means destitute. You've got nothing at all. No food, no clothes, no self respect, nothing. That is the word which Jesus uses in Matthew 5 verse 3 when he says, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[31 : 26] That is where Bartimaeus was. He knew his poverty and his need. And he knew the all sufficiency of the son of David.

That son whom he lovingly called Rabboni. It's not Rabbi. In the Greek text it says Rabboni. Rabboni is only used twice in the New Testament.

This is one place. The other was when Mary recognized Jesus after the resurrection. And so there's a connotation not just of teacher but my teacher.

Rabboni let me recover my sight. Did you think for an instant that Jesus might have said no too dirty too smelly too noisy too poor too much of a nuisance.

No this is Jesus this is Rabboni my master the friend of publicans and sinners. Jesus on the way to the cross still with time for the poor and the lost.

[32 : 32] And let's not fail to notice that it was Bartimaeus' faith which had made him well but also that what he then did having immediately recovered his sight was to follow Jesus on the way that same amazing frightening road that ultimately led to the cross.

But what different answers to the same question? what do you want me to do for you? Easy question in a way there are nine monosyllables there.

Not hard to understand but one answer from the disciples highlights two hearts of pride and the other answer from Bartimaeus highlights the eternally rich heart of faith of the impoverished sinner who comes to Christ and his emptiness to be filled.

So what answers are we going to put down on our self examination paper? What do we really want Jesus to do for us? Who is it really on the throne of our hearts?

Oh for a closer walk with God a calm and heavenly frame a light to shine upon the road that leads me to the Lamb the dearest idol I have known.

[33 : 54] Whatever that idol be help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee. Are we in the faith as 2 Corinthians 13 and 5 queries?

Is Jesus Christ in us? Are we in him? The New Testament speaks scores of times of this in relationship.

What exactly does that mean? Well Nicky Gumbel the pioneer of the Alpha course illustrates it this way. He said take a Bible in one hand to represent the Lord Jesus and take a piece of paper with your name on it to represent you.

Put that in the Bible. You are in Christ. Christ. Where Christ goes you go and where you go Christ goes.

there is therefore now no condemnation says Paul in Romans 8 to those who are in Christ Jesus.

[35 : 08] For the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and to death. Is that you? Is that me?

me? If you have any doubts today whether that means you ask him now into your heart. Seek him because you will find him and knock because he will open the door.

let me leave you with an amazing promise from the Lord Jesus himself. Back in John's Gospel chapter 5 verse 24 you know when it says in scripture truly truly I say to you or verily verily I say unto you as the authorised version puts it.

What it says in the Greek original is Amen Amen I am telling you this. So here as we close is our Saviour in John 5 24 saying Amen Amen I say to you whoever whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

He and she does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life to life.

[36 : 33] Test yourselves have you passed from death to life. Amen Let's bow our heads in prayer.