

SUMMER 3 - Mark, the Man - What is it You want Me to Do for You?

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[0 : 00] God our Father we thank you that in your mercy you speak so clearly to us the words of gospel truth concerning your son.

We pray today that as we come to these words in Mark's gospel that you may feed our minds and reform our lives so that we may be faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ wherever that may lead us and at whatever cost.

We pray this for his sake and glory. Amen. Well you may remember the TV program I Dream of Jeannie.

Make a wish or whatever you say will come true. I often ponder at those jokes that say you know a genie turns up and they say you've got three wishes. Well my first wish would be to change it to say I've got a million wishes but anyway what would you like a genie to do for you?

What wish would you make? Well at the very northern tip of the promised land of Israel in the foothills of Mount Hermon on what is today the border of Lebanon, Syria and Israel Peter the chief of the followers of Jesus said in answer to the question we saw at the end of last week you are the Messiah.

[1 : 25] That declaration of faith was the culmination of a number of miracles that Jesus had performed as we saw over the last two Wednesday nights in the first half of Mark's gospel.

But now comes the issue what sort of Messiah? Because in a sense the first half of the gospel has built up to that climactic confession you are the Messiah.

Now the question is what sort of Messiah? And one question that's asked a couple of times in the chapters we're looking at tonight by Jesus is what would you like me to do for you?

What would you have me do for you? Now it's almost as though here is this person the Messiah who's performed all these miracles as though he's been answering people's wishes like a genie does.

What wish would you like to come true? And no doubt for many people if they'd answered Jesus' question what would you have me do for you they would say overthrow the Romans let's get rid of them let's purify the land so that it belongs to the Jews the people of God.

[2 : 39] For others it may well be matters of self-glorification give me the right hand in heaven give me the left hand in the kingdom of heaven that's certainly what James and John wanted as we'll see later for a blind man it was to receive his sight but what we find unexpectedly and even scandalously shockingly in these chapters culminating in what we'll see next week is that what Jesus has come to do for us is to die that's the sort of Messiah that he is immediately after the high point of Peter's confession that we ended last week on in chapter 8 verse 30 we read that Jesus began to teach his disciples there presumably in the very north of the land near Caesarea Philippi

Jesus taught his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering that's not what you would expect of a Messiah that he would be rejected by the elders the chief priests and the scribes a triumvirate of opponents that's not what you'd expect of a Jewish Messiah that he'd be killed and after three days rise again they're shocking words you see what this Messiah does is die and you don't expect that of a Messiah and what happens to this Messiah is rejection and you wouldn't expect that of the Jewish Messiah long foretold in the Old Testament and especially when the rejection comes not at pagan hands but at the hands of Jews well Peter of course is scandalised by this teaching of Jesus Peter who's just said you're the Messiah and then Jesus as though for Peter's eyes seems to sort of slap him in the face and say well I'm going to be killed and I'm going to be rejected well Peter rebukes him he tells him off the one who's just said you're the Messiah he

then rebukes and Jesus in reply says get behind me Satan

Jesus is not saying Peter you're possessed by Satan he's not saying Peter you're satanic but what Peter was rebuking Jesus about was the fact that he was going to die Messiahs don't die would be the expectation they'd ride a crest of victorious wave to defeat their enemies and bring peace and all those sorts of things but they don't die and that's what Peter rebuked Jesus for and Jesus when he says get behind me Satan when he speaks those words to Peter he's not really accusing Peter of being satanic but what Peter had said to him in effect was you don't have to die if you're the Messiah and that's the temptation that Jesus faces that somehow he may regain heavenly glory all the authority of the dominions of the world without dying that's the temptation temptation it's the temptation of the devil in the wilderness as we read it in Matthew and Luke and it's the temptation here that Jesus somehow would or could avoid the cross and go back to God the Father in heavenly glory and that's why Jesus says get behind me Satan because as we've seen already in Mark's gospel there is a spiritual contest going on between Jesus and the devil and we see Jesus defeating the devil by casting out demons and so on at different times but the devil's big temptation is somehow to prevent Jesus from dying on the cross because the devil knows that's where our salvation will be won and that's why

Jesus says get behind me Satan when Peter rebukes Jesus for suggesting that he need not die indeed Jesus' words of teaching in verse 31 were that the son of man must be killed and after three days rise it's not an option it's the divine necessity he must die there is no other way if there were another way no doubt Jesus would have taken that other way and God would have taken that other way in order to save us but there was no other way for as the theology of the later part of the New Testament explains to us perhaps more clearly than the Gospels in a sense the perfect life needed to die for our sins as substitution for us there was no other way and no wonder Paul said at the beginning of 1 Corinthians that the cross was a stumbling block for Jews because they don't expect their Messiah to die to die well from the beginning of Mark's Gospel

Satan is the tempter of Jesus his aim is to make Jesus bypass the cross and here yet again Jesus resists as he does all the time which leads him to the cross and death now after that rebuke of Peter to Jesus and Jesus then in a sense rebuking Peter in return Jesus goes on having predicted his death and resurrection to describe something of the nature of discipleship following Jesus in the rest of chapter 8 verse 34 through to 38 or really chapter 9 verse 1 if anyone to become my followers let them deny themselves take up their cross and follow me now we trivialise those words people say from time to time oh we all have our own cross to bear might be a sick relative might be a gammy leg that's not what

[9 : 00] Jesus has in mind these are much severer words Jesus says if you want to follow me take up your cross and that means only one thing willingness to die we must not trivialise that expression and think that somehow the cross that we bear is just some little misfortune in life some inconvenience not at all it means being prepared to die because a crucified messiah is followed by crucified people people who are willing like him to die to give up their life how different that is those words of Jesus are from what is so common in modern Christianity that somehow Jesus might have said if you want to follow me the path is self fulfilment no he says it's self denial not self fulfilment very big difference and very big difference in churches that preach self fulfilment compared to those who preach self denial very big difference in the Christians who are self denying rather than seeking self fulfilment ultimate fulfilment comes for those who take up their cross deny themselves and follow

Jesus for those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will save it almost paradoxical not what you might expect but Jesus is saying if you are prepared to take up your cross if you're willing to die for me if you're willing to lose your life for my sake and for the gospel's sake then ultimately you will save it but if you want to cling to your life here on earth now by all means do so but you will lose it and you'll lose it for eternity for what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life see sometimes we think that the value of the whole world might be worth more than a life Jesus says no gain the whole world you lose your life and that's not a good thing to do indeed what can they give in return for their life the implied answer is nothing those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation of them the son of man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with the holy angels and then beginning of chapter 9 truly I tell you that is a solemn word he wants his disciples to pay particular attention to this truly I tell you there are some standing here

who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power now they're words that have troubled many people over the last 2,000 years because people think that they're somehow referring to the return of Jesus which he's actually talked about at the end of chapter 8 but there's actually some unexpectedness about this word this idea because where do we see the kingdom come with power but at the death and resurrection of

Jesus that's what he's referring to he's saying in fact that the kingdom comes not with some great triumphant wave of defeat of enemies but death on a cross that's been the issue of this paragraph Peter's saying you're not going to die Jesus having said he would die the kingdom coming in power is the power of the death of Jesus not where you'd expect to see it yes there's power in the resurrection but actually in the end the power is in the death of Christ that's the power to defeat death the power to defeat the devil the power to defeat sin the power to give us eternal life comes in death on a cross and it's true that Jesus says there are some standing here who will not taste death he was right now if we think somehow this is referring to the return of Jesus then of course Jesus is wrong because none of those people are still alive and of course if Jesus is wrong here then how can we believe any of his words because he might be wrong in other places as well but actually theologically what

Jesus says works consistently with this gospel and the rest of the New Testament the kingdom of God comes in power on that good Friday in darkness and in death well Caesarea of Philippi in the foothills of Mount Hermon the very northern part of the promised land and I don't have a map this week but last week it was the very northern most part that Jesus would have gone to that's where he was at the end of chapter 8 around that area of Caesarea Philippi six days later he goes up a mountain and is transfigured maybe it is the same mountain we can't be certain about that there's various traditions but we're not told enough but it could well be way up in those foothills of Mount Hermon that Jesus went up a mountain at the beginning of chapter 9 and there alongside Moses and Elijah two of the great heroes of the Old Testament Jesus is transfigured glowing white in front of some of the disciples Moses and Elijah tend to stand for the

Old Testament as a whole often the Old Testament is described as the law and the prophets technically it's the law the prophets and the writings but in shorthand often the Jews of Jesus day would say the law and the prophets meaning all the Old Testament just like we might say the gospels and epistles meaning all of the New Testament but actually strictly speaking it's gospels epistles and you might say some of Revelation is not epistle and you might certainly say the Acts of the Apostles is not epistle but it's a shorthand for the Old Testament so here we have two people representing the whole of the Old Testament but maybe Moses and Elijah the greatest heroes in a sense and certainly Elijah didn't die ascended to heaven on chariots of fire if you remember from the books of Kings Moses whose own burial place was slightly unknown on the plains of Nebo overlooking the Dead Sea and there was some tradition by time of Jesus day that maybe Moses actually had been somehow brought back to life or had not actually died although the Old Testament's clear that he did so here we got people who who stand alongside Jesus the heroes of the Old Testament and then a voice comes from heaven in verse 7 of chapter 9 this is my son the beloved listen to him and suddenly when they looked around they saw no one with them anymore but only Jesus

[15 : 50] Moses and Elijah presumably no longer visible there a voice from heaven had begun the gospel now a voice from heaven commences the second half of the gospel as Jesus heads to the cross a voice that says this is my son listen to him over and above anyone else or anything else listen to him more important we might say than the Old Testament summarised by Moses and Elijah not that the Old Testament is tossed out in these words but the priority is given to Jesus because he's not just another prophet as Peter had confessed at the end of chapter 8 a few days earlier he's more significant than that the Messiah and God's beloved son a relationship with God that is unique of all people earlier on people had said

Jesus had asked who do people say that I am Moses Elijah another prophet a prophet like Moses John the Baptist come back to life you see the transfiguration puts that into perspective like Peter's confession had in a sense Jesus is over and above each one of those people only Jesus remains indeed as the next paragraph goes on to say Elijah has already come now the reason for this little paragraph of Jesus teaching is that the Old Testament ends at least in our version with the book of Malachi with the prediction that Elijah would return as I said Elijah hadn't died in the Old Testament and therefore there's this growing expectation that he would come back and Malachi the prophet

predicts that he will return as the forerunner of the Messiah and Jesus is saying in verses 9 through to 13 of chapter 9 of Mark's gospel that Elijah is indeed coming he says in verse 12 to restore all things but

Elijah has come verse 13 referring presumably to John the Baptist a link that's made clearer in other parts of the New Testament John the Baptist was the forerunner not necessarily Elijah the person the real person again but John the Baptist fulfilled the role expected of the prophet Malachi saying that someone or Elijah would return well back down to the rest of the disciples down the mountain Jesus casts out another evil spirit in the section that follows verses 14 through to verse 29 again as we've seen in the last two weeks taking the initiative with evil spirits whereas with healing of sick people they come to him and he responds with compassion but with evil spirits Jesus takes the initiative because fundamentally his is a conquest of Satan a conquest concluded on the cross the evil spirit attempts to kill Jesus is the one who brings life it's actually a bit of a dispute going on down the mountain we haven't got time to deal with all the details of course of each of these paragraphs in order to get through four chapters but the disciples were unable while Jesus was up with just three of the disciples on the mountain to deal with this evil spirit and Jesus says as an explanation if you like they want

Jesus to act they ask him if you're able to do anything have pity and help us Jesus said if you are able all things can be done to the one who believes the father of the child responds I believe help my unbelief Jesus casts out the spirit before the crowd arrives right where he is trying to do it before it's too much of a public sort of event and then the disciples privately ask him why couldn't we cast it out and literally they're asking why were we not empowered to cast it out the word power is actually part of their question and Jesus replies this kind can only come out or is only empowered to come out through prayer Jesus is directing people's attention to where real power lies and asking for real power presumably the disciples have somehow got it wrong Jesus anyway has cast out the evil spirit well now we come to prediction number two we began tonight with prediction number one chapter eight verse thirty one of Jesus death and resurrection now in chapter nine verse 30 onwards

Jesus for the second time predicts his death and resurrection at this stage he's heading south so if you imagine Jesus way in the north of the land he's now heading south back into Galilee to the area where he'd spent much of the beginning of Mark's gospel his adult ministry round about Capernaum because that's where they get to in verse thirty three notice that in verse thirty it says he did not want anyone to know it maybe he travelled at night but certainly Jesus was travelling if you like secretly with his disciples heading south because his destination in a sense is not Galilee it's just that he's got to get through Galilee to get to Jerusalem and he doesn't want to be caught up in Galilee especially with the high level of opposition and public clamour that we've seen especially last week that had developed in that area as well as the opposition of Herod Antipas the ruler of the area of Galilee Jesus was teaching his disciples verse thirty one and said to them the son of man is to be betrayed into human hands and they will kill him and three days after being killed he will rise again this time the additional feature is betrayal he hadn't mentioned that he would be betrayed before now he mentions that he will be betrayed into human hands who will then kill him and yet still the disciples are not only confused but afraid so verse thirty two they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him well no doubt since Peter had been so roundly rebuked by Jesus back in chapter eight when he said you're not going to die and Peter said

[22 : 11] Jesus said get behind me Satan I can imagine they'd be they wouldn't want to dare to say anything just in case they got that sort of response from Jesus again now how do they respond now to this teaching though about Jesus death the first time Peter dismissed it and Jesus went on to teach about losing your life for my sake now what happens is that the disciples argue amongst themselves who amongst them is the greatest verse thirty four they were silent for on the way they'd argued with one another who was the greatest and their silence is because Jesus asked them what were you arguing about who is the greatest now when they get to Capernaum Jesus calls them together and he says to them whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all well this teaching not dissimilar to what we saw in chapter eight after the first prediction lose your life in order to save it save your life you'll lose it now Jesus says first should be last the last should be first that is it's a reversal that we don't quite expect and you see what he's doing is unpacking bit by bit why the

Messiah must die because you don't expect a Messiah to die so this great reversal a Messiah who's going to die is being explained bit by bit lose your life save it save your life lose it it's okay then for a Messiah to die first should be last last should be first who of course is the first not James or John but Jesus he's going to die to be the last to be the servant of all he doesn't explain why yet but he's describing this reversal this overturning or upturning of values in a sense well Jesus now heads further south having taught the disciples here we'll skip over to the beginning of chapter 10 and we're told at the beginning that he left that place presumably up in Galilee he went to the region of Judea that's the southern area of Israel Jerusalem was its capital at the time of Jesus and beyond the Jordan now Jesus quite possibly here has travelled down the Jordan Valley maybe into Judea not to Jerusalem in Mark's gospel although if we synchronise Mark and John for example possibly Jesus has actually gone to Jerusalem for the feast of tabernacles September October-ish and now he's gone back across the Jordan out of Judea before finally entering Jerusalem for the feast of Passover when the gospels do fit together it's just that deliberately it seems Mark, Matthew, Luke leave out Jesus going to Jerusalem as an adult other than to die they're not distorting history let me say they're just selecting the material John has Jesus go to Jerusalem on a few occasions as an adult for the various feasts tabernacles in John 7 feast of dedication in John 10 before the last feast of Passover when he dies so here we are probably about six months before Jesus' death he's come through Judea but he's crossed over the Jordan out of Judea out of the area of Pontius Pilate the Roman rule into what's called Perea the area where John the Baptist would have been imprisoned and possibly around by the Jordan where John the Baptist was in fact baptising and the Pharisees come to Jesus across the Jordan or beyond the Jordan it says to test him verse 2 of chapter 10 so there's now quite an active pursuit of Jesus in opposition to him clearly it's known where he's gone clearly there are more than disciples with him or crowds who've seen him and reported his progress and so the Pharisees have come presumably from Jerusalem to him beyond the Jordan so that shows a level of energy in pursuit of Jesus by his opponents we shouldn't be surprised at that because we've seen the build-up of opposition over the previous eight chapters or nine chapters or so and all the way really from the end of chapter one and certainly the beginning of chapter two it's the area where John the Baptist would have lost his head so it's got an element of danger in its recent history and the Pharisees come to test and they say is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife the issue of divorce is always a thorny issue modern times as well as Jesus day as well as Old Testament day the Pharisees presumably are referring back to Deuteronomy 24 they said in verse say in verse 4 here Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her now what's actually happened it's very intriguing to unpack further which we haven't got time to do the relationship of the Pharisees to Old Testament law and Jesus to Old Testament law I said last week that Jesus rebukes the Pharisees on matters of oral law not Old Testament law but what we actually find here and in a few other places is that the Pharisees actually sit loose with Old Testament law Jesus doesn't the Old Testament law in Deuteronomy was not giving a man free for all to divorce his wife and just sort of sign a certificate and off she goes rather this was actually a law to protect the wife and to limit divorce but what's happened in [27 : 51] Jesus' day is that the Pharisees have changed the whole character of that law and put men on a more highly exalted place to have freedom to just send away their wives just sign a piece of paper and off they go so that's part of the dispute that's going on and intriguingly the Pharisees who are so legalistic actually have lost the spirit of the law of Deuteronomy 24 about divorce well Jesus addresses them back not to Deuteronomy 24 but to Genesis chapter 2 and he says in verse 5 onwards because of your hardness of heart Moses wrote this commandment for you but from the beginning of creation God made them male and female words traditionally also applied to Moses in that he was regarded as the author of the book of Genesis as well as Deuteronomy for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh so they're no longer two but one flesh therefore what

God has joined together let no one separate he's quoting of course from Genesis chapter 2 well Jesus is going back to the real principle that marriage is the ideal and there are concessions for divorce here in Matthew in 1 Corinthians 7 that limit divorce in certain circumstances but of course marriage is the ideal and what Jesus is doing here is not in effect answering the question of the Pharisees but showing them that they've misapplied it and misunderstood because they've got a lower view of marriage than Genesis 2 has and Jesus is showing that in a sense in their face in his

answer in these words now in the house again privately so often Jesus says something publicly but then later on back in the house privately his disciples ask him about it and that happens in verse 10 and Jesus replies whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her and if she divorces her husband and marries another she commits adultery and it's left at that now this is not the time or place to talk about the nature of divorce and remarriage after divorce it's clearly a thorny issue it's a highly sensitive pastoral issue as well as I say we've got to take all of the New Testament scriptures as well as the old in balance divorce but Jesus explanation here is in the context of the Pharisees who have an easy divorce I think the biblical view is that divorce ought not to be easy but I'll refrain from saying more in the next little paragraph Jesus uses children as an example of entering the kingdom of God something he did in chapter 9 in the bit that we sort of skipped over that was then in a private house this is now in a more public situation in chapter 10 verses 13 to 16 he says let the little children come to me don't stop them for it's to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it now we must be careful there not to jump to a conclusion about what it means to receive it as a little child but what Jesus is clearly showing though is an inversion of expectation the Pharisees those who are very clever about the Old Testament compared to a little child who may know nothing yet about the Old Testament or very little and Jesus is saying these are the ones for whom the kingdom is it's again this sort of reversal of expectation and he's certainly challenging the Jewish leaders because this is done now publicly and it's in the context of this conversation about the Pharisees that's just happened although it seems that Jesus has then gone home with disciples or gone to a house privately talked to them about the issue of divorce but now people are bringing little children to him so now it's back back to the public so to speak well in verse 17 of chapter 10 Jesus sets out on the journey again don't miss these little travel indicators because from the top of Caesarea Philippi at the end of chapter 8 Jesus in a sense is turning to head to Jerusalem it's clearer in one sense in Luke's gospel and in fact takes many more chapters there than it does in Mark but what's happening is that

Jesus is moving south he's gone from the north at Caesarea Philippi at the end of 8 down to Capernaum in Galilee down through Judea and out to Perea that's where he is now and now we're told that he's setting out on a journey presumably heading towards Jerusalem ultimately to die a rich man comes to him as he's setting out runs up to him in fact suggesting some urgency about the matter he says good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life Jesus dismisses being called good and addresses him to the commandments not murder not commit adultery not steal not bear false witness not defraud honour your father and mother the what are they fifth to the ninth of the commandments Jesus the man says then to Jesus I've kept all these since my youth he may well be speaking sincerely here Jesus doesn't condemn him for boasting he doesn't say no you're lying or anything like that but rather he just looks at him he loves him we're told here in

[33 : 16] Mark's gospel and he says you lack one thing go sell what you own and give the money to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven then come follow me now that's an odd thing to add having quoted five of the ten commandments because there's no command in the old testament to sell all your possessions give the money to the poor and follow Jesus or anyone else for that matter so why does Jesus add this well some people from Holy Trinity might have heard me preach on the corresponding passage in Luke late last year but quite simply it seems Jesus is exposing this man's idolatry his first God is his wealth and by Jesus by saying to this man sell your possessions give the money to the poor is actually in effect for this particular man addressing the first two commandments probably and maybe the last not coveting as well this is a man whose wealth was his God and Jesus is showing here by this very radical statement to this man the nature of discipleship he's earlier said give up your life and you'll gain it now he's saying to this man give up all your possessions now

I don't think we ought to apply this to say that each one of us has got to give away everything what we've got and give all the money to the poor but for this man that's what he had to do and of course the test of any idol is can you give it away if you can give away something it's not your idol and this man couldn't because when he heard this he was shocked and he went away grieving that he had many possessions not just because he's wealthy but because he couldn't quite face giving them away it's a test for any idol can you give it away if you can it's not your idol because our idols are what we cling to most of all and for this man it was money and not God and Jesus responds by saying in those famous words how hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of

God the disciples are perplexed Jesus then adds the illustration that's in a sense quite absurd it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who's rich to enter the kingdom of God now over the years people have tried to explain this away and say there must have been a gate in Jerusalem's walls that was called the camel gate or something or the needle gate rather and and camels had to stoop to get in well that's nonsense it's clear from the disciples response that it was an impossibility you can't get a camel through the eye of a needle and as I've said when I preached on this

Lucan passage equivalent late last year I can barely get a thread of cotton through the eye of a needle it takes me ages well try getting a camel through you can't do it and the question then is well who can be saved and Jesus answer in verse 27 is for mortals it's impossible but not for God for God all things are possible Jesus is teaching about not only the nature of discipleship but the absolute grace of God that anyone is saved at all and Peter says we have left everything and followed you of course Jesus called Peter in chapter 1 and others a bit later in this gospel and they've done what what he wanted they've actually done both things they've left all their possessions and they follow Jesus and Jesus replies truly I tell you there's no one who's left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the good news the gospel that is who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age houses brothers sisters mothers children fields with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life many who will be first will be last and the last will be first you see Jesus is unpacking a little bit here in the light of this rich man what he said in chapter eight whoever gains the whole world will lose their life but whoever loses his life for the gospel's sake will gain it that's what he's saying again it's his radical discipleship complete inversion change from what we might expect and that leads then into the third prediction now Jesus is on the road going up to

Jerusalem verse 32 he's been in Perea beyond the Jordan he's crossed into Jericho the city on the Jordan the city of palms in a little oasis and then if you've been there you know that you do literally go up to Jerusalem in England they always say I'm going up to London well you don't go up to London it's just as flat as or level as anywhere else in England but it's their expression but in Israel literally you go up because Jericho's 400 feet below sea level Jerusalem's 2500 feet above sea level and we're only 30 kilometers difference it's a steep climb and Jesus is going up to Jerusalem and he's walking ahead and he took the 12 aside that presumably there's quite a crowd remember he's going at Passover time so there's a whole crowd of pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem for the feast but Jesus takes just the 12 aside because these predictions of his death have only ever been to the disciples and he began to tell them what was to happen to him saying see we're going up to Jerusalem and the son of man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes now they're named and they will condemn him to death they'll hand him over to the

Gentiles now they're named they will mock him spit upon him flog him kill him and after three days he will rise again the third of three predictions chapter 8 9 10 this one a little bit more detail than the previous two unpacking about the nature of the death of Jesus well how do the disciples respond this time firstly Peter rejected it said and Jesus had to say get behind me Satan secondly the disciples talked about well who's the greatest well now James and John two of his key disciples are talking about who might have the prime seat in heaven and they actually ask Jesus for it in verse 37 if you look down they said to Jesus who's just asked them what is it you want me to do for you grant us to sit one at your right hand one at your left in your glory isn't it extraordinary they haven't grasped the nature of following Jesus and they haven't grasped the nature of Jesus and that's happened each time he's predicted his death the death that's so shocking for a Messiah that is the reversal of all the expected values Jesus said lose your life in order to save it don't hang on to it you'll lose it and then he said the first are going to be last and the last shall be first and now here we find James and John who want the glorious seats of heaven because they failed to grasp the nature of Jesus and his Messiahship and Jesus replies you don't know what you're asking and then he goes on with some enigmatic sorts of words are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with and then they said we're able probably fairly sort of boldly not quite understanding what they're answering I suspect and Jesus says the cup that I drink you will drink and that with the baptism with which I'm baptized you will be baptized but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant for it is for those for whom it has been prepared well presumably in all of that the cup that I drink is an Old Testament allusion to the cup of

[40 : 44] God's wrath or punishment as they're in Jeremiah for example probably the baptism has got a similar sort of idea here and and it's certainly an allusion to death they said we're able they're

not quite sure what he means Jesus words in reply saying yes you will be probably predicts their own martyrdom doesn't mean their death achieves what Jesus death does but it seems to be that he's a it's a prediction perhaps of martyrdom of these two disciples and you see again then Jesus goes on to talk about servanthood verse 42 you know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them and their great ones are tyrants over them well here James and John have been wanting the best seats and Jesus is implying you're acting like the Gentiles it is not so among you for whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all for the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many we've had consistently in chapters 8 9 and 10 this radical self-denial to follow Jesus the first shall be last lose your life be a servant in order to be great Jesus models that because each of those discussions has followed his expect his prediction of death that you don't expect Jesus models servanthood putting yourself last and losing your life and now finally we're told why why will Jesus die and verse 45 says the son of man came not to be served but to serve and that is because the and is explanatory to give his life a ransom for many simple words profound words to give his life a ransom for many that is

Jesus death accomplishes something great it's not just Jesus dying because he wants to be lowly or humble it's Jesus dying to bring about the power of the kingdom to liberate ransom deliver free release many now the tapes being changed at this point money political freedom release of prisoners in some countries something's got to be done in order to free those who are caught up in the plane Jesus dies as the ransom he's the price paid for our liberation for our freedom freedom not from this earth so much not from freedom from political oppression or slavery but freedom from our sin we can't get rid of it our own it's Jesus death that is the ransom and he says there for many the implication of that word is for many and any whoever would follow him Jesus death accomplishes that release that redemption that freedom you see therefore this death is not defeat this is why the Messiah must die to conquer sin and its source and evil and death and the devil see this is a death that serves the world and serves God's purpose and this is the death that accomplishes because this language of verse 45 echoes the prediction of the death of the suffering servant in

Isaiah 52 and 53 in the Old Testament prophets this is the price the death the perfect death that will bring atonement it's a substitution he will die so that many will live and intriguingly as we follow the rest of the story though many people seek to kill Jesus and take his life he in the end is in control and he gives his life here is the greatest the Messiah stooping low to give his life and if that's got to be his way it's also the way of his followers not that our death will ever be substitutionary or redemptive but giving up our life for the sake of him is what we're called to do well Jesus is now on the way up presumably he's come to Jericho a blind man calls out verse 46 we're up to now in chapter 10 he acknowledges who Jesus is the son of David his name is Bartimaeus he's probably well known at the end of it all his sight is given him Jesus says to him in verse 51 what do you want me to do for you same question he asked

James and John he wants his sight he's given his sight and notice that he then follows Jesus here is a model disciple he leaves his home he follows Jesus on the way and now finally in chapter 11 he arrives in Jerusalem and the crowds coming for Passover acclaim him in the story that's very well known he gets on a donkey not a horse here is the king there's kingly imagery all the way through Mark it's accumulating at this point son of David he's just been acclaimed by blind Bartimaeus that's a kingly term David was the great king the Messiah would be a son of David Bartimaeus though blind physically could see spiritually and that's the significance and now Jesus fulfills all sorts of Old Testament imagery not least in Zechariah the prophet by riding on a donkey into Jerusalem as the people acclaim him the crowds acclaim him he comes over the Mount of Olives again as the Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would come from the Mount of Olives in the east but despite this triumphant arrival the Romans are not immediately overthrown in fact the tension rises all is not well he goes into Jerusalem to the temple and then leaves on that first day and the next day he curses a fig tree such an odd thing to curse a fig tree for not having fruit in spring that's Passover time when you expect figs not in spring but in summer so why curse a poor old fig tree when it hasn't got fruit out of season but in the Old Testament

Jeremiah 8 for example Isaiah is a fig tree by use of metaphor and image Jesus of course is cursing Israel here it's an acted parable if you like a statement of doom and judgment on Israel because the Messiah is coming and they claim acclaim him with words Hosanna meaning save but his work and

his curse of the fig tree and the things that follow are acts of judgment for salvation and judgment are the different sides of the same coin you don't have one without the other he comes to save at the same time to judge and we see those two running parallel here he then goes on to cleanse out the temple in verses 15 to 19 of chapter 11 again in some ways fleshing out what he's just done by cursing the fig tree here he is cursing in a sense the temple and we know historically that it's only just in the year or two before Jesus that the money changes tables had been set up in the temple courts by Caiaphas the high priest at the time of Jesus one of the puppet high priests in effect appointed by Rome not descended from Zadok before that the money changes tables it seems were actually well outside the temple area maybe even on the Mount of Olives but Caiaphas has exposed his own corruption and so Jesus overturns them as we know so well in a fit of anger but not caprice a righteous anger because

[48 : 58] Jesus then quotes again from the Old Testament my house shall be called a house of prayer my house notice the implication of what Jesus is saying not my father's house not God's house my house and then when evening came he goes back out of the city the fig trees then withered and Jesus then talks about this mountain being taken up and thrown into the sea if you do not doubt in your heart but believe what you say will come to pass maybe he's referring down to what you can see just outside Bethlehem and can see from the Mount of Olives a man-made mountain so to speak called the Herodian today built by King Herod the Great as a palace to which he could flee and be safe maybe he's referring to this man-made mountain say if you've got faith you can by faith overturn mountains maybe that's part of the imagery here what follows then is a series of traps and tests by the various leaders and very briefly we'll just see some of them in verse 27 it's the chief priests the scribes and the elders that evil triumvirate again who've been in this gospel a number of times with increasing opposition to

Jesus now the three of them together representing in effect the ruling Jewish body the Sanhedrin and they ask Jesus a question he replies with a question they say by what authority are you doing these things who gave you this authority Jesus says I'll ask you one question answer me and I'll tell you by what authority I do these things did the baptism of John come from heaven or was it of human origin Jesus forces it back in their face they realize they're sort of in a what we would today call a catch-22 situation he calls their bluff he goes on in the beginning of chapter 12 to tell a parable of the wicked tenants as it's called and in telling that parable makes it clear that they are opponents of his opponents of the son of God opponents also of the prophets of God that they're going to kill him and that they are the ones who reject the stone of Psalm 118 which is quoted in verses 10 and 11 it's the rejection theme again and it's precisely the people that he predicted in those predictions of chapters 8 9 and 10 in verse 13 to 17 now it's some Pharisees and Herodians an unusual combination we saw the first week not your normal bedfellows but they still are in league together they're still part of the ruling Jewish group in a way and they now come to trap Jesus we're told that explicitly in verse 13 and their trapping of Jesus is on the question of paying taxes again Jesus throws it back in their face he evades their trap cleverly and brilliantly but he also shows their deceitfulness and their evil by doing so and they're amazed at him at the end of that segment and then the next group verse 18 the Sadducees another group of leaders a fairly wealthy aristocratic group who had much more power than their numbers really entitled them to and they came with a question of resurrection again it's a trap they quote from Deuteronomy 25 about the fact that if a man dies then his brother was under some responsibility to take his widowed sister-in-law to be his own wife and to care for her it was a sort of primitive social securities measure a very good measure they come up with a ludicrous example where one by one seven brothers died I think you'd become a bit suspicious by that stage and whose wife whose husband in the resurrection life what they're trying to do is say isn't resurrection a ludicrous idea how will it work and Jesus of course throws it back at them he says you don't actually know the scriptures and ironically it was the Sadducees who claimed above all the leaders of the Jewish groups that they were the most faithful to the scriptures because they refused the oral laws of the Pharisees and so on and Jesus says you haven't got your scriptures right and he says God is the God of the living not the dead in verse 27 and then comes a genuine question from one of the scribes not trying to trap Jesus now most probably but something that's really a genuine question which is the greatest commandment and Jesus gives to love God love your neighbor quoting Deuteronomy 6 Leviticus 19 putting the two together holding the two together as at least in Anglican liturgy we know so well this is a person who's not far from the kingdom of God he's in he's put in

real contrast to those previous three groups that have come to him deceitfully and evilly trying to baffle him and trap him Jesus then throws back a riddle the issue of kingship again verse 35 Jesus was teaching in the temple and he says how can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David because

David says in Psalm 110 the Lord that is God said to my Lord sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your feet David calls him Lord but how can his Lord be his son logically it doesn't follow Jesus gives no answer he leaves it hanging the answer is him and his forthcoming death and resurrection he's the Lord and that will be evident when he rises from the dead he is David's Lord but he's David's son descended from David a thousand years before he goes on then to finish chapter 12 to reject the arrogance of the scribes something we would well expect because we've seen those themes all the time today first shall be last lose your life don't cling on to it all that sort of stuff their arrogance and pride wanting to be first they're the ones who'll be last and then by contrast the widow and her little offering the last indeed shall be first well Jesus in these chapters not only overturns the temple tables he overturns all their expectations he overturns the values of our world doesn't he he overturns human pride and self-seeking glory the kingdom of God its value is the last shall be first and lose your life in order to gain it and Jesus demonstrates that by dying but not just a demonstration of value a death that accomplishes something a death that is a ransom for many so what do you want to do for you was Jesus question to James and John and to blind by the mayas what do you want me to do for you nice miracle a bit of sight right hand of heaven or do you want me to die as a ransom for many because that's what he's come to do a question that arises out of tonight the question is chapter 11 verse 24 how do we interpret this the question the the verse says so I tell you whatever you ask for in prayer believe that you have received it and it will be yours we have to understand it a bit in its context of cursing the fig tree and then saying to this mountain be taken up thrown into the sea if you do not doubt in your heart but believe what you say will come to pass it will all be done for you and then the following verse about whenever you stand praying forgive if you have anything against anyone so that your father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses so clearly there's a context here of being right with God clearly a context of faith and trust in God I think biblically if we put together because there are a number of other statements about prayer in the Bible that seem similarly bold about prayer being answered we need to see that prayer that is answered is always according to God's mercy according to God's will so a prayer in faith knows God's will that is it's not just a prayer that believes oh God's going to give me fine weather today because I really believe it and I don't have any doubts about it and I'm praying in faith and I've forgiven my brother so therefore it's going to be sunny tomorrow that's not I think what this this verse is about I think someone who's got faith in God knows the will of God that faith is expressed by being right with God I think that's part of the implication of verse 25 it's certainly a great encouragement to pray let me say and it I guess also the wider context is it's come out of the earlier bit about the house should be called a prayer for all house of prayer for all nations so it's partly out of rebuke for those who have missed or have abused the the temple as a place of prayer [58 : 03] the question is the example is if we assume that it's the will of God that all people are saved and so we pray for that how does that then match that if people have free choice I think human free choice is a limited free choice I think in the end the only people who are Christians are because God has acted in their heart to soften their heart to respond with faith in the end the reason why you and I are Christians is because God acted in us first not because we exercised a choice for him so that should be all the more reason to pray that God acts in people's hearts God is Chopin You