

Booking Through Ticketmaster

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[0 : 0 0] You may like to have open the Bible from the pews and page 823 from the Bible reading from Mark. We've got a sermon series through Mark's Gospel and that's going to take us up until Easter to the end of the Gospel of Mark.

Let's pray that God's Word will inform and reform us as we sit under it now. Heavenly Father, we pray that you'll write your Word in our hearts that we may not only believe it but follow it for the glory and sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

I'd like a couple of the best seats in the house, please. Maybe it's the dress circle, front row, certainly central if you're wanting to go to the theatre. A couple of weeks ago I went to see the Lion King and the friend I went with and I debated last year when we did our booking which would be the best seats in the stalls or in the dress circle or the balcony or whatever.

Maybe it's going to the football and you'd like a corporate box to get the best seats. It used to be that being a member of the MCC gave you the best seats at the MCG.

I'm not sure quite whether that's always the case but if it's cricket you do like to be fairly close behind the wicket so that you can watch the bowler bowling from behind or in front of the bowler.

[1 : 2 6] You can't always get that sort of seat, especially low down, the sight screen keeps getting in the way. What's the best seat? Front row of a theatre?

Back row of a church if you're Anglican it seems to me. Of course there's always value in a seat by who is in the next seat to you.

That is, if it's somebody rich and famous and important next to you, well it doesn't matter where they're sitting but sitting next to them you might sort of get some rubbed off glory. Of course in a plane it's very important to try and get the best seats.

If you are stuck in economy, well there's still some variation in economy about which are the best seats in economy and usually that's as far away from screaming babies as is possible. Well the sons of Zebedee were no different from us in wanting the best seats.

They asked Jesus, teacher we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you. And he said to them, what is it that you want me to do for you?

[2 : 2 9] And they said to him, we want the best seats in the house. Literally in verse 37, grant us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory.

Well is there anything wrong with that? We'd probably ask the same sort of thing if we thought about it. Pre-emptive strike to beat Peter to the best seat in heaven.

Why not stake an early claim? First in, best dressed, after all they're part of the original 12 disciples, why shouldn't they stake a claim for sitting next to Jesus in heaven?

But as is so often the case and consistently the case, the followers or disciples of Jesus keep getting it wrong. Two chapters before, in chapter 8, Jesus predicted his death for the first time in Mark's Gospel.

He predicted that he would die and the things associated with that and the resurrection. And on that occasion, Peter, the lead of Jesus' 12 disciples, rebuked Jesus and said, no, no, no, no.

[3 : 37] He knew Jesus to be the Christ, the Messiah. He couldn't countenance that Jesus would die. And so he rebuked Jesus for the prediction of his death.

And Jesus responded to him with a rebuke, get behind me, Satan. Peter had not understood where Jesus was heading.

In the very next chapter, chapter 9, they're easy to remember because it's chapter 8, verse 31, chapter 9, verse 31. Again, Jesus, this time, the second time, predicted his death and resurrection.

And again, the disciples respond, getting it wrong, showing a complete inversion of the values of Jesus going to the cross to die, as Peter had in chapter 8.

This time, the disciples are arguing who amongst them is the greatest. And Jesus again corrects them. And now for the third time at the beginning of today's passage, it's not quite chapter 10, verse 31, but 10, verse 32 onwards, Jesus predicts the third time his death and resurrection.

[4 : 42] See what he says in verse 33. We're going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes and they'll condemn him to death.

Then they will hand him over to the Gentiles. They will mock him and spit upon him and flog him and kill him. And after three days, he will rise again.

This is becoming more imminent. Jesus and his followers are on the way to Jerusalem. They're heading up to Jerusalem. We're told in verse 32.

They're within the last day to maybe three of walking to Jerusalem for this final Passover feast. It's drawing near. Indeed, you do walk up significantly as you go up to Jerusalem from the path Jesus would have taken from the Jordan River, from Jericho and so on.

And he's about to arrive in Jericho and then head up to Jerusalem. This prediction in verses 33 and 34 is a little bit fuller than the previous two. Each time Jesus is adding a little bit of detail.

[5 : 51] Notice that it's not simply a prediction of death. One level that would be straightforward enough. There's been opposition to Jesus for a significant part of Mark's gospel from at least back in chapter 2.

And so for Jesus to predict his death would be not particularly astonishing. But to predict the detail, the chief priest, that is the Jewish leaders, they will condemn him to death.

But they will then hand him over to the Gentile leaders, the Roman authorities that is. And they will not only just kill him but in the lead up to that they'll mock him, they'll laugh at him that is. They'll spit on him, they'll flog him.

All sorts of detail that is quite true because it happens but not necessarily obvious. And then of course the most astonishing part of the prediction each time is that on the third day he'll rise.

Exactly what Jesus predicts here in these two verses happens. As we read on in Mark's gospel and we'll see in the weeks to come, chapters 14, 15 and 16 show the complete fulfilment of this prediction.

[7 : 01] Showing Jesus' absolute knowledge of what would happen to him in the future. Well after the third prediction here, yet again the disciples get it hopelessly wrong.

This time it's James and John, two of the twelve. But as we'll see, in effect, the whole of the group of disciples share their complete misunderstanding about the nature of Jesus going to die and so on.

These two disciples, James and John, brothers, request the best seats. That is, theirs is a quest for glory, prestige, status, power in effect.

And what a contrast to Jesus' death. Defeat, shame, ridicule, mockery, ignominy, weakness.

They haven't understood what he's on about. As happened in chapter 8 and in chapter 9. They've completely misunderstood where Jesus is heading and why.

[8 : 13] Jesus asks them in response another question. You do not know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptised with the baptism that I'm baptised with?

No. No. No. That is, you could, literally, you'd ask the question this way. You aren't able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptised with the baptism that I'm baptised with, are you?

That is, the answer understood is no. We can't drink that cup. We can't be baptised with that baptism. The cup is an Old Testament image.

An image of the wrath and anger and punishment of God against sin. Baptism is the same. To be overwhelmed by the wrath and judgement and punishment of God against sin.

Both are Old Testament images. Both can be found in prophets and psalms. Jesus is using two images to refer to the same thing. His death on the cross that is imminent.

[9 : 23] Just predicted. Jesus is saying, I'm going to die carrying the wrath of God, the punishment of God for the sins of the world.

That's, by implication, what he's alluding to. Could you do that? He's saying to James and John. No, actually, he's saying to James and John, you can't do that, can you?

Jesus is saying, your request for the best seats in glory misunderstands the cross. He misunderstands what I'm doing in going to die.

You think there can be glory without pain. But you're wrong. The only glory Jesus will have is on and through the cross.

And yet they answer, showing their misunderstanding. Yes, we can do that. We're able to do that. We're able to drink that cup and be baptised. They misunderstand the Old Testament background.

[10 : 20] They misunderstand what he's referring to. They've got little idea. And yet in reply, Jesus then amazingly says, yes, you can. We expect him to say, well, you can't drink it.

We expect him to correct their misunderstanding in a way. But Jesus says to them in verse 39, the cup that I drink, you will drink. And with the baptism with which I'm baptised, you will be baptised.

Most likely what he's alluding to is their own future martyrdom or suffering for Christian faith for following Jesus. James, we're told in Acts chapter 12, died, was executed for his Christian faith, probably in the 40s AD.

John, who lived into old age but suffered persecution and exile on an island called Patmos, wrote letters later in the New Testament and wrote down the revelation that was given him in the final book of the New Testament.

Both suffered, one at least to die for their faith. And most likely that's what Jesus is alluding to here in verse 39. But then he goes on to say in verse 40, 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.

[11 : 38] Jesus is saying, I'm not the ticketmaster for heaven. I'm not the one who can issue who sits in what seat. It's already been determined.

He's alluding to God the Father in that respect. He's also saying here that he's not a magician. He's not the one who can just deliver whatever somebody asks for. If it's the wrong thing, he won't answer affirmatively that prayer, that request.

Warns us about what we pray for as well. The rest of Jesus' disciples, though, are no better than James and John. They get angry, we're told in verse 41, with James and John.

They're not angry because they understand and they're angry because, you know, your quest for glory. Don't you understand the cross? That's not their anger. Their anger is that they've got in first.

Their anger shows their own greed for glory and power and prestige and status as well. That is, their anger shows that they're in the same boat as James and John in their misunderstanding of what Jesus is on about.

[12 : 44] In this, they all are acting as the world acts. That's why Jesus says to them in verse 42, That's worldly power, Jesus says.

And he's hinting that you're the same. That is power that lords it over other people, that boasts about its power and pomp and glory and prestige and status, rather than what Jesus will go on to describe in the verses that follow.

The world often measures greatness by power. I think that's reflected in the aftermath of the death of Kerry Packer, for example, in our country.

It's not a new phenomenon. Alexander was called the great 300 years and more before Jesus because of the power he wielded over all of the then known civilized world.

And even by today's standards, somebody who in power was certainly great in ruling the world. The powerful are often eulogized and flattered and praised because they're powerful in early days as well as in our own days.

[14 : 07] But not only that, those who yielded power often did so as tyrants and again there's no change in modern society either. Certainly Pilate, Pontius Pilate, who was not the absolute ruler of Judea.

He was a Roman governor, procurator, but wielded a power as a tyrant. He was vicious and nasty, spilling much Jewish blood through his reign over Judea.

But even today it's the same. In recent decades we know of the absolute tyranny and power yielded by people like Hitler and Pol Pot. Saddam Hussein, Stalin, in our own days still to this very day.

Robert Mugabe for example is a clear example. But there have been many others who in their control and power lorded over others, often with brutality and viciousness.

But the lust for power is not far from each one of us. Few of us, if any, are going to be like Mugabe or Stalin in the exercise or the breadth of power that we might have.

[15 : 18] But nonetheless we all in our sinful natures lust for and quest for power. You see it in the petty power plays, in workplaces, in schools, between teachers and so on about who is the favourite of the principal or who exercises the most influence or power, who's better.

Sadly we see it all too often in churches where people have got their little realm or dominion of power, their control freaks and so on. Or their quest for status within the power because of what they give or what they do or how long they've been there or what role they take and so on.

Often it's the quest for knowledge is really a quest for power. That is, we like to know things that other people don't. That's why gossip is such an insidious practice.

Because people like to know something that other people don't. And they use the control of knowledge as an instrument of power over other people. Sometimes our desire for power over people is seen in the way we use flattery or manipulation.

To try and bring under us other people so that they look up to us, that we try and reach some element of status over people.

[16 : 38] Sometimes we just want to be in control. And so in our little realm of control we become dictators and tyrants. We like the prestige of good seats, the praise of other people, the acknowledgement of others.

And often that drives what we do rather than serving God. Status, power, prestige, the things that John and James lusted for lie close to the hearts of most of us at times.

But Jesus turns that quest totally on its head in the verses that conclude today's section. See what he says in verse 43.

It is not so among you. That is, it's not meant to be like that, among you. Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant.

A position of lowliness. A position lacking influence. A position lacking prestige and power and glory. But Jesus then takes it a step even further in the next verse when he says, And whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

[18 : 00] Not merely a servant, but actually a slave. Well, many servants were in effect slaves. But Jesus is pushing the description even further to be the lowest of the low.

Somebody without rights, in many rights anyway, in the Roman Empire. Not quite the slavery of the black slavery of Uncle Tom's cabin in America in the 19th century.

Roman slavery was not usually quite so brutal and disgraceful. But even so, the slave was the lowest of society. Not the first, which is what they're questing and lusting for.

But then Jesus takes it one step further again. In the final verse, verse 45, which hopefully we've got in a stuttering memory verse. Earlier on, James and John had asked Jesus to give them what they wanted.

That is, the best seats. And Jesus declined. But instead, this verse is telling us what he will give them. Same verb is used.

[19 : 16] He will give them something better than what they asked for. That is, he'll give them his life. He will serve them in a better way than they had asked for at the beginning, when they'd asked for the seats at his left and right hand in glory.

He will give them something beyond their understanding, at least at this point. We need to appreciate the astonishing way that this verse describes it.

Jesus describes himself as the Son of Man. It's a typical way that he describes himself. In fact, I think, apart from Stephen when he stoned in Acts chapter 7 or so, nobody else uses the expression of Jesus, Son of Man.

Jesus consistently called himself the Son of Man. And there's debate about the nature of what that meant. But in the prophet Daniel, the picture of the Son of Man is somebody who's majestic and strong and glorious, a position of power and rulership associated with God.

Jesus is saying that even the Son of Man, that majestic, glorious position or description of power, he came not to be served, which is what you'd expect of such a figure.

[20 : 35] He came to serve. And the idea of a servant picks up Old Testament imagery as well. Our first reading was from the prophet Isaiah, part of that famous passage called the suffering servant, the servant of the Lord who will suffer even to death.

And Jesus is saying that thread of prophecy is fulfilled in me as well. It's not just the positions of Messiah and greatness and glory and Son of Man in the Old Testament that come down to me in their fulfilment, but the position of the suffering servant, that finds its fulfilment in me also, he's saying.

And what is the service he'll do? Wash our feet? Do the gardening? That sort of stuff? Not at all. Something much more profound.

Will he do what they ask for? No, we've already seen. That's not the case. He will not give them the left and right seat in glory. His service, we're told at the end of verse 45, is to give his life a ransom for many.

That is, this verse is saying, the Son of Man came not to be served, which he could legitimately claim to be his right, but he's come to serve. And where we've got the word and, that is, is what it really means.

[21 : 48] He's come to serve, that is, by giving his life as a ransom for many. Three times Jesus has predicted his death thus far. Chapters 8, 9 and 10.

Each time he's described that he'd be brought on trial, he'll be mocked and passed over and killed. But what he's saying here is something more profound, really. Jesus gave his life.

It was not taken from him. He willingly gave his life. He was not just the victim of a sham trial.

Jesus did not have his life taken from him so much as he gave it deliberately, willingly, as an act of service for many, as a ransom.

The word ransom we use today in contexts like kidnappings and hijackings. For example, a plane will be hijacked, a ransom demand will be issued.

[22 : 52] It may be that the hijackers go to a particular country. It may be that prisoners in some country are released. It may be a lot of money. Various demand is made. Those demands, if they're met, become the ransom price, in effect, so that those who are on the plane will be freed from their being hostage on the plane.

Jesus, we're told, gave his life a ransom for many. That is, his life was the payment made to liberate many.

To liberate from what? Not from a hostage plane, not from a kidnapping, not from slavery physically, but slavery to our sins is how the Bible goes on to explain it so clearly.

Jesus' life, or his death on the cross, delivers us from our sins and their consequence. It enables us to have a relationship with God.

It enables us to have an eternal destiny with God at the cost of Jesus' life. No small cost. But since sin deserves death, death needed to be paid so that we may be liberated.

[24 : 07] And we're told at the end of this verse it's to give his life a ransom for many, in the place of many, we might say, as a substitute for us. You know, you can go to the theatre and sometimes you get the announcement at the beginning that tonight such and such a role will be played by somebody else.

They're substituting in for the lead actor or actress or whatever in the play. Jesus died where we ought to die. When we consider him on the cross, that's where we ought to be for our sins.

But he died there for us so that we do not need to die, so that we can live, be ransomed from our sins and have an eternal relationship with God.

It's a great memory verse, this one. It's profound in what it says. It goes to the heart of the Christian faith in many respects. And I encourage you, if not the song, but at least to remember the verse.

The greatest act of service was done by the greatest person who could legitimately claim to be served, but instead served in the lowliest of ways by giving his entire life on a cross to ransom many.

[25 : 24] As he hung on the cross, the Bible in some ways describes that as the glory of Jesus being revealed most significantly.

And yes, there's a glorious heavenly throne on which he'll be seated and so on in the book of Revelation. But in many respects, the glory of Jesus is most manifest on the cross.

On his left and on his right were not James and John. They didn't understand real glory. Because it's not so much that the glory comes after the cross through the resurrection.

In some respects, it's the glory on the cross as he dies. There the heart of God is most clearly seen. And on his left and right, not James and John.

In fact, not positions that people would really quest for if they'd understood it properly. But two scoundrels, bandits, robbers. One who died in faith and one who didn't.

[26 : 31] That's the cross that's truly glorious. James and John didn't understand what they were really asking for. You see, they, like the disciples, like you and me, like the world in which we live, we look for honour but without humility.

We look for the crown but not the cross. We look for glory but without suffering. We look for prestige and power but without the pain. See, James and John thought they could escape God's judgement and wrath.

They didn't understand the cup and the baptism. They thought they could lay claim on heaven's privileged seats next to Jesus in glory. But no, not to be.

Sadly, no matter how much glory and power and prestige we actually do have, it's never enough. and those who have some seem never to be sated and want all the more.

Worldly power, you see, is so illusory and so fleeting, so finite. Creates a fool's paradise for it cannot buy off the judgement of God no matter how much power, prestige, no matter how much glory or honour somebody has on earth.

[27 : 49] It's not enough to avert the judgement of God. What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? Jesus asked rhetorically back in chapter 8, what can a person give for his or her life?

He asked back in chapter 8. Nothing. And yet in place of that, Jesus does what no person can achieve. For many people forfeit their lives while trying to gain the world.

Jesus gave his life to save ours. It's one of the great sadnesses of our world is seeing people questing for glory and power and influence and wealth and control like Kerry Packer.

But forfeiting forfeiting their soul for eternity and ignoring the fact that Jesus who had it all by right gave up his life so that we may live and be ransomed from our sins.

What would you have Jesus do for you? What would you ask him for if you were with James and John on that road? Maybe this passage has directed our attention to the greatest thing we can ask for, the greatest thing we can receive, the greatest thing that Jesus could give and precisely what he came to give.

[29 : 21] For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.