

Discipleship and Authority

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 January 2022

Preacher: Jared Blankenship

[0 : 00] And in the process of the last few weeks, we've learned about discipleship and how it relates to things like faith, humility, children, discipleship and divorce, discipleship and wealth, and so on.

And what's clear in all of Jesus' teaching is that the life of one who belongs to his kingdom is radically different than those who do not.

Our lives as believers should stand in stark contrast to those who belong to this world and to this world's ways.

And part of what Jesus is doing through this training of his disciples is he's explaining who he is and why he's come. And then in relation to that, saying, now this is what it means to follow me.

This is what it really means to belong to me. This is what the kingdom is like. And this is what the people of the kingdom are like. And this is how they live. And almost every one of those passages, all those stories, all of those lessons that we go through, we find where what Jesus was teaching the disciples was almost a surprise to them because they were immersed in a culture that taught very differently than Jesus did in every one of those categories.

[1 : 21] And the one that we cover today is no different. In this particular text, we find Jesus teaching his followers how they are to understand and exercise power and authority.

And as always, the answer is found in Jesus. He is the answer. And we find in this passage the perfect example and then also the perfect instruction for what Jesus desires of his disciples in this way.

The first thing we see in verses 32 to 34 is the gospel backdrop to the whole issue. This is now the third time in Mark's gospel that he has explicitly stated the process by which he will accomplish his atoning work.

And here, even more than the other two instances, he gives dramatic detail. And here Jesus is telling his disciples not only that he is going to suffer, but he's walking them step by step through how it's all going to unfold, through the betrayal of Judas, though he's not naming Judas, through the handing over to the Jews, the Jews handing over to the Gentiles, and then what the Gentiles are going to do to him in the process of crucifixion.

And he just lays it out step by step for him in tremendous detail. And the main point of instruction comes through this exchange between James and John and the rest of Jesus' disciples.

[2 : 49] But the backdrop of this entire scenario, this entire scene, is the declaration of Jesus' coming suffering, death, and resurrection.

So in light of the theme of this passage, Jesus' gospel, his suffering and death, is teaching us not only about what he would do and his identity and purpose, but it serves as an example to us of what he was about to teach these disciples in this passage as well.

I want you to notice his resolute determination. Look with me at verse 32. They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them, and they were amazed.

Those who followed were afraid. Remember, Jesus and the disciples had been in the Transjordan area up to this point. That's east of Judea, across the Jordan, in the area called Perea at that time.

And they're moving away from that area on their way to Jericho. Next week, we're going to talk about blind Bartimaeus. That whole scenario unfolds in the city of Jericho. So they're on the road to Jericho on their way to Jerusalem is where they are.

[4 : 05] And Luke had written, as we've discussed over and over, that while Jesus was in Galilee, he had already set his face toward Jerusalem. It was a statement of intense focus.

He was passionate. He was ready. He was prepared, and he was on his way, on his mission to Jerusalem where he would make this atoning work. But this is really the first time that Mark gives us a textual clue about this intense focus that Jesus had.

We see in him an unwavering determination to accomplish the mission for which he was sent. And we discern that partly in the reaction of the people who were with him.

Something about him, something about his demeanor, something about his spirit, something about the way he was going about these days of travel was speaking volumes to the people who were with him.

And we're first told that the disciples were amazed by it. They're actually amazed at Jesus' determination to get there because, after all, for three times at least, Jesus has said, when I finally get to Jerusalem, they're going to kill me.

[5 : 14] They're going to torture me and kill me. Any one of us would be going in the opposite direction. But not Jesus. He's resolute. He's determined to get there.

He's on the road there, and the disciples are amazed by that. They're still not convinced that that's what's going to happen, I don't think. But even if that's true, they're amazed that Jesus wants to go and do that, that that's the fate that he awaits them, and yet he pursues that path.

But then we're told that there's other people along with them, perhaps a large caravan that is now traveling with Jesus and his disciples, probably people who were following Jesus in faith, or at least were intrigued in a unique way by Jesus and following him.

These people, we're told, were afraid. Something about the way that Jesus was carrying himself brought a spirit of fear on the group that was following with them.

They could sense that this trip was not going to be a joyous trip. Something serious was on the mind of Jesus, like a child who can recognize the severity of a parent's tone or the severity of a parent's expression.

[6 : 29] You know what that's like. Some of you, you know the look. You know the look that you can give your kid or the spirit of urgency that you can have without them having the information of the circumstance, and yet they can sense that, right?

Our kids can sense that on us. These people that are traveling with Jesus sense his determination, and some of them are amazed, that are clued into what he's actually doing. The rest of them are scared to death because something serious is about to go down with Jesus in Jerusalem.

But no one could prevent him. No one could stop him from doing what he came to do, which he explains to his disciples again in verses 32 to 34.

Taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to them, saying, See, we are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes.

They will condemn him to death, deliver him over to the Gentiles. They will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him. And after three days, he will rise.

[7 : 34] We find here that the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus, they were not a horrible accident, as some people may tend to think.

This was the definite plan of God. It was the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament law and prophets had foretold.

And Luke, when he wrote about this event, emphasized that fact. In Luke chapter 18 and verse 31, Luke said, And taking the twelve, he said to them, See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.

This was no accident. Jesus was not simply a good man that suffered a tragically unjust death. No.

He's the perfect Lamb of God, sent to be the sacrifice for sin. Judas betrayed him. The Jewish leaders condemned him, and the Romans crucified him.

[8 : 46] But it was God the Father who delivered him. It was God the Father who delivered him into their hands for this purpose. Peter eventually picked up on this.

In Acts chapter 2, we'll read it next week. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, he says, This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by hands of lawless men.

This was the plan of God. Paul wrote in Romans chapter 4, Well, Judas and the Jews and the Romans, they weren't concerned with delivering Jesus for atonement's sake.

No, that's God the Father that delivered him up for our trespasses. Good Isaiah 53. That's the greatest chapter in the Old Testament that describes step by step the suffering of Jesus.

And what does it say in verse 10? It was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

[10 : 07] It was God the Father's will for this to happen. Jesus knew that. Jesus knew it would prosper. And he was determined to get to Jerusalem in order that it would take place.

It's not as if he was an unwilling participant. Jesus is one with the Father and the Spirit. That makes this his divine will. And he said as much in John chapter 10, I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, Jesus says. And I have authority to take it up again.

This charge I have received from my Father. He says that he was an unwilling participant. He wanted to do this. He was determined to do this.

But he never spoke of this with the spirit of doom and gloom. In every prediction of his own death, we have the assurance of his resurrection. In every one of them, he says, after three days, I will rise.

[11 : 20] He insisted on his resurrection. And he did that too. All of these things he did, he fulfilled. Jesus could precisely predict his coming fate because that was the whole reason that he came.

And now he's there and he's on the road and everybody around him can sense something big is coming. Many of them don't realize what it is.

Some of them are hardened to what he said, but he's on the way. And then the question is, well, why? Why is Jesus so determined to do this?

Why did he care to come? Hebrews chapter nine says, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

But as it is, he has appeared once for all to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Why did Jesus do this?

[12 : 32] Why was he so determined? Because there was no other way for you and I to know forgiveness of sins. There's no other way for us to receive eternal life.

As we talked about over Christmas, it was out of his everlasting love that he came. It was out of love that he was set, determined, resolutely pursuing his messianic purpose on the way to Jerusalem for you, for me.

And he welcomes, he welcomes all who will come to him in faith. Do you want your sins forgiven? Do you want to know eternal life with God to be reconciled to him?

That's why Jesus came, to provide that salvation. And if you but come to him in faith, he will receive you and forgive you and love you.

Well, this is the third gospel proclamation that Jesus has given to his disciples. And it's the backdrop of what unfolds in this event with James and John and the other disciples. So we see this backdrop of the gospel.

[13 : 55] Now I want you to see in verses 35 to 41, their desire for glory. Their desire for glory. Now I mentioned Luke chapter 18 a moment ago. Luke said that when Jesus was teaching this to his disciples, he emphasized that this was everything that the Old Testament had foretold would take place.

But then Luke follows that up with this. But they understood none of these things. The saying was hidden from them. They did not grasp what was said. Now it wasn't that the 12 didn't understand the words that Jesus was saying, but they couldn't come to grips with the thought of a Messiah who would suffer and die.

Their hearts had been hardened to Jesus's true purpose. They were hoping to get the glory without the cross. Surely there was another way. Surely he is going to bring the kingdom now.

And they expected that this trip to Jerusalem would establish a political kingdom, a physical kingdom on earth over which they would rule with Jesus.

And it was this misunderstanding of Jesus's purpose that led to the exchange. And I want you to look at their selfish request, at least James and John's in verse 35. 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.

[15 : 19] 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.

Now I want you to think about this for just a second. Perhaps some time had passed between verses 34 and verses 35, but it's still all in the context of on the way to Jericho.

Couldn't have been that much time. Jesus opens up once again. I have come to die for you.

And the first thing on James and John's mind, and really all of them, is what kind of glory will we get out of this?

Lord, will you let us sit in the places of honor when you finally establish this kingdom? They were essentially asking Jesus to write a blank check to fulfill their wishes.

[16 : 20] Notice the first thing they say. Lord, we want you to do whatever it is we ask of you. Matthew tells us they were so serious about it, they invited their mother to come along and actually be their spokesman.

Lord, do whatever we ask. Write the blank check. Rather than seeking and surrendering to the Lord's will, they approached the Lord selfishly, concerned with what they wanted from him.

First. It's not so uncommon for us to fail in the same way as it is. Coming to God as if he's duty-bound to fulfill and grant our most passionate desires.

Isn't that where they first go wrong here? Jesus has just said, I have actually come to give you everything, but that's not registering. They're thinking we want more.

Lord, do whatever we ask of you. And Jesus is so gracious with them, isn't he? Lord, what is it that you ask? When they finally get to the request, we find that what they desired was glory and power in God's kingdom.

[17 : 32] They wanted to be in the highest places of honor when Jesus brought his kingdom to earth. The seats that they requested, the right hand and the left, they were the customary positions of thrones.

The king would be in the center. His right hand man would be on the right. That's where we get that phrase from. His second in command is going to be on the right. And then third in command is going to be on the left.

There's levels of power, but they recognize Jesus is in the middle. Jesus is preeminent, but we want to be above everybody else. That's what they're asking for.

We want to be above everybody else. We want the glory. We want the power and the control to sit. We don't want yours, but we want it over everybody else. That's their desire. That's what they're asking Jesus for now.

Even rabbis, from what I've read, followed a similar picture to this. If they were traveling and walking with two of their disciples, the greater would be on the right and the lesser would be on their left.

[18 : 31] That's what James and John are requesting. R.C. Sproul said that there's something about being created in God's image that produces in us an aspiration for significance.

And there's not necessarily anything wrong with that. God has put that in us. We all want our lives to count. We want to live a life that isn't meaningless or purposeless or insignificant or wasted.

But there's a difference between an aspiration for significance and a desire to dominate everyone else. And we do with this idea what we do with everything else.

God puts in us something good, a desire for significance to make our lives count and then sin in us perverts and mars that image of God in us so that what we end up doing is turning it into something else.

We turn it into a search for self-glory. We're consumed with self-interest and the whole idea becomes self-serving. It diminishes the values of others that God has created.

[19 : 47] It's good for us to want our lives to count. Now, I want you to ask yourself this morning, who do you want your life to count for? In your pursuit, in the things that you do, the things that you really are working hard at and you're really aiming your time at, the focus of your mind, are you pursuing, are you pursuing that your life would count for you or that it would count for God?

That's the difference. James and John are in a position here, they're not concerned with glory and power in order that they might first serve the Lord with it.

They're looking for glory and power in order that they might exalt themselves with it. They want their lives to count for them. Is your pursuit of significance motivated by the glory of God?

The brothers hope to honor Jesus, says James Edwards. While honoring themselves, how easily worship and discipleship are blended with self-interest.

Or worse, self-interest is masked as worship and discipleship. We see there's selfish requests.

[21 : 10] Then we see an ignorant claim. Look at verse 38. Jesus said to them, you do not know what you're asking. Guys, you don't know what you're talking about. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?

This is a rhetorical question. It demands a negative answer. They can't do what Jesus has come to do. Therefore, they can't experience the same glory that he experiences. But he goes on.

And they said to him, we're able. 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.

So Jesus immediately acknowledges their ignorance. Because they had misunderstood Jesus' purpose, they didn't understand what they were actually asking for here.

Because the place of honor comes at the end of the path of suffering and surrender. But the brothers wanted the glory of the kingdom without the cross.

[22 : 19] So Jesus says, guys, you don't realize what you're asking. You're ignorant about this right now. Your hearts are hard.

The Old Testament often used this metaphor of drinking the cup as a symbol of facing God's wrath for sin.

Baptism doesn't usually carry that same meaning, but the context here demands that Jesus was referring to his suffering with this analogy. Only Jesus was able to drink the cup in place of sinners.

But all disciples will have to identify with it in some way. The brothers were ignorant of this truth, and they answered the Lord with tremendous overconfidence.

They said, we're able. Yeah. And I think probably what they have in mind is bearing their swords and being prepared to fight to establish this kingdom in Jerusalem.

[23 : 26] I think that might be where their minds are in this moment. And Jesus is saying, are you prepared to do what's necessary? Yes, we're ready. But they were, because they didn't really know what they were asking.

In all honesty, a week later, they were going to abandon the Lord out of fear. Rather than lay their lives down for Christ, they were going to run in fear that their lives were going to be taken.

And then we see Jesus is just tenderness here. He doesn't drop the hammer on these men in this moment. He teaches them. He helps them. Though he recognized that it was the Father who grants and has the authority to assign glory.

Jesus did imply here that true disciples will experience a measure of glory and honor in eternity.

Do you pick up on that? He says, it's not mine to grant. He says, that's prepared ahead of time. God has established that.

[24 : 38] And what he wants will come to fruition. He's insinuating, he's implying there that there will be glory in the kingdom. There will be honor in the kingdom. But the path of that glory is the same path of suffering and surrender as Jesus walked.

In some sense, all who follow Jesus will drink this cup of suffering and endure this baptism of self-denial. This is just another description of discipleship that Jesus has repeated so often in Mark's gospel.

We go back to chapter 8 and we see what is it that Jesus says. If anyone will follow me, if you're going to be my disciple, you're going to have to deny yourself and take up your cross. Identify with this cup and follow me.

But every disciple will in the end receive the glory and honor of God's kingdom. That's the promise of it. Do you see? That's the blessing of it.

Paul wrote about this in Romans 8 to help maybe bring some sense if I'm not making sense now. In Romans 8, right in the middle of the chapter, Paul talks about how those of us who belong to God, disciples are joint heirs with Jesus.

[25 : 55] We are adopted into the family of God. You recognize that? That means that we are with Jesus in this and what we receive in glory and the benefits of the kingdom. We get to enjoy that along with Jesus as we have been adopted into the family of God.

That's what Paul's saying. Here's what he wrote about it. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs. Heirs of God.

Fellow heirs with Christ. Provided that we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

But then he says, very next verse, but I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.

Do you see? Jesus was teaching it to his disciples. Paul was teaching it to the Romans. There is wonderful glory for those who belong to Christ, but it comes on the path of suffering.

[27 : 07] It comes on the path of sacrifice. It comes on the baptism of self-denial, of denying everything else in this life and pursuing him alone. And at the end of that pursuit is the glory of the kingdom.

You will in some measure drink this cup. You will in some measure experience this baptism. And where you are in terms of honor in the kingdom, that authority belongs to the Father.

But rest in the promise that glory awaits all who belong to God. Then we see the indignant friends in verse 41. And when the 10 heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

Greatly angered. Immediately it's a reminder that a selfish desire for glory always disrupts our relationships with others. But why exactly are they angry here?

Well, one, James and John were bad friends. For them to be honored in the places of power in the kingdom means that they thought they were more worthy than everybody else in the group.

[28 : 21] They're bad friends. And it's in secrecy that they go to Jesus to try to make this happen. They're trying to pull one over on their buddies at this point.

But I think there's more to it than this. I think there's probably a measure of annoyance and maybe animosity in the hearts of the other disciples because James and John beat them to the punch.

Every one of them probably would have asked the same thing of Jesus. James and John saw an opportunity with their mom to ask him before they actually got to Jerusalem. And now everybody's irritated about it.

Everybody's mad. Perhaps they've broken out into another one of those arguments about who's the greatest. We've already seen them do that in Mark's gospel. And so what does Jesus do?

He brings them all together and he sits them down and he teaches them a lesson about what authority is like and how it is exercised in the kingdom.

[29 : 18] And that's where we see our final point for the morning, the responsibility of authority. Jesus' introduction or instruction here was not about how they could gain authority.

That's not what this lesson is. But it was on how they were to exercise it when they found themselves inevitably in some type of position of power.

Power and glory aren't to be the pursuit of our lives, but all of us will be entrusted with some measure of power. Every one of us will be in some sense. And what Jesus taught in these verses is how we're to view it and use it.

Let's look at it quickly. First, the role of power. Verse 42. 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. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant. Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

[30 : 33] Jesus immediately reminds the disciples that their lives were to be very different from the unbelieving world around them. They were acting like the world.

Their animosity with one another, their pursuit of this power and this control and this self-glory, that was not an example of one who belongs to the kingdom. That was one who belongs to this world.

Both the Roman and the Jewish views of power were concerned only with dominating others and exalting the self. But Jesus said that those who follow him must operate differently than that.

Like the disciples, we are immersed in a society that is ruthless and self-consumed and its influence is destroying families and churches who are looking increasingly less and less like Jesus.

And we can't overstate this fact enough that Christians are not to follow the way of the world, but the way of Christ. So Jesus says, this ought not to be so among you.

[31 : 44] This is not how you should live, men. Jesus used two words in verses 43 to 44 to illustrate the purpose and function of authority.

Servant and slave. Servant and slave. Servant. The word for servant here is diakonos. It's the word we get the term deacon from in the church.

It literally means to serve tables, a waiter, someone who stands by ready to serve the needs of someone else. That's the word.

The word for slave is doulos, and it's exactly what you think it is. It's not like modern ideas of slavery that involves men stealing. That's not the context that Jesus is using that here.

This is someone who, of their own accord, has surrendered all their rights, even surrendered over their identity in service to another. And Jesus says, in the kingdom, if you're gonna have power and authority, the great ones in the kingdom, this is what they do.

[32 : 47] This is not how they get it, but this is what they do. They serve. They're like waiters who wait over to the side until someone else has a need and they immediately rush to serve that need.

That's greatness in the kingdom. That's power and authority and it's use in the kingdom. But they're also the slave of all. They surrender all self-interest. They surrender their own identity.

They surrender their own desires and their own wants in the benefit of others, serving others with the position and the responsibility that God has given them.

And let's put this into a practical perspective for just a moment. The New Testament consistently teaches this principle over and over. It emphasizes it in especially two categories, the home and the church.

In the home, the emphasis is on husbands. Husbands, your place of leadership in your home is not for you to dominate your wife and dominate your children.

[34 : 01] It's to serve them, to love them, to give your life for them. Ephesians 5, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.

Can I ask you men, the way that you exercise headship in your home that God has given you, does it reflect Christ in the way that he gave himself for his bride?

The way that you love and care and nurture your wife and children, is it self-sacrifice? Or is your leadership exemplified rather as self-interest?

They are here for me. They support me. They do what I want, no questions asked. That's the world's view of power.

That ought not be so among you. Colossians 3, Husbands, love your wives. Do not be harsh with them.

[35 : 25] Peter would later say, dwell with them according to knowledge. Nurture them. Protect them. Fathers, Paul writes, Do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged.

Rather, train them in the nurture, admonition of the Lord. Do you see the difference between the world and the kingdom? It's not a denial of the fact that there are certain benefits and privileges that come with power and authority.

It's not a denial of authority itself. Jesus isn't saying that if you serve people, you will become greater than them. That's not what he's saying. He's saying in the kingdom, when you are granted with power and authority and a measure of control or whatever it is that God has granted to you, the responsibility you have in the kingdom, you serve.

You're a slave. You're a waiter of tables. That's what the great do. It's emphasized in the New Testament as well in terms of leadership in the church.

Peter says in 1 Peter 5, I exhort the elders among you, shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight. It doesn't deny headship.

[36 : 47] It doesn't deny authority. But he says, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

As the Lord sees fit to build his church here, as we're praying for leaders to be raised up and developed in our congregation here, when the time comes for us to, as members of our church, cast our vote, an affirmation of certain men to serve in these places of leadership, we're not looking for those who are the most capable and gifted.

We're looking for those who are the ones that Jesus has put a desire in their heart, who has the character to follow after Christ, who will serve his church, not domineer over it. And if God cares so much for authority in the home and church, to function as servants and slaves, do you suppose that he thinks differently of the authority we exercise in other contexts?

Of course not. You may not be the head of your home. You may not be a leader in the church, but God's given you some type of influence. Are you using that for your glory?

Or are you using that to glorify the Lord? Are you a representative of this world in the way that you lead your crew at work? Or are you a representative of the kingdom?

[38 : 16] Do the people around you exist to serve you? Or are you there to serve them? We'll finish with verse 45. Here's the model to follow.

For even the Son of Man, Jesus said, came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Remember how we described discipleship at the beginning. To be a disciple is to follow Jesus in faith, imitating his life, and obeying his commands.

We're to mimic the Lord Jesus in everything that we do. Jesus, we're told, is the creator of the world.

He's the ruler of all that is. He is the sovereign Lord. He has all power, and all might, and all glory belongs to him.

[39 : 17] He is high and exalted above all. And how is it, in his example, that we see him exercising his authority for us to mimic?

Not to be served, but to serve. How? By giving his life as a ransom. It's the first statement in Mark's gospel where we see Jesus plainly speaking of his death as a substitution.

Men, follow me, Jesus says. The one who did not come to be served, but to give his life a ransom for wicked sinners.

Alistair Begg said, the reversal of all human values is embodied in the Lord Jesus himself, both in the living of his life, and the giving of his life.

Jesus stood before those men as Lord and God, and a week later, he's gonna get on his hands and knees and wash their feet. He is the God against whom they had sinned.

[40 : 39] Yet he gave his life as a ransom for theirs. And this truth first. It should prompt us. It should draw us to Christ.

Won't you believe him? Follow him. Forgiveness awaits you. He did this for sinners. But then those of us that belong to his kingdom, disciples here today, this is our pattern to follow.

If Jesus became the servant of all, why would we ever think that we are greater than anyone else? If Jesus exercised his authority and his power to serve sinners, how is it that you think we should exercise ours?

We're to be servants. Slaves, even. Disciples.