

The Pattern of Serving

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[0 : 00] bow our heads and pray. Our Father, as we turn to your Holy Word and to these words of Jesus, we ask that your Spirit might stir our hearts, and we'd see ourselves in a fresh way, because we see you in a fresh way.

We ask that the Holy Spirit would give power into our hearts to change us, to make us desire what you desire, and to live as you would have us live. And we ask this in your Son's name.

Amen. Amen. Well, if you would like to open your Bible to Mark chapter 10 that was just read for us a moment ago.

Thanks to Dan for the beard comment. I would like to have a comeback, but I don't have one. But wait. I will think of one.

Well, now, I don't know if you're aware or not, but there's been quite a fanfare in the last 12 months about an idea which is called Humanity 2.0.

[1 : 21] A famous book was written about 12 months ago by a professor in England. And the idea of 2.0 is not, it means something completely new, something completely different.

It's not 1.0 with some additions. And I think it came from the internet. Ten years ago, there were big changes in the internet.

And the internet experts called it Web 2.0. And now, scientists and philosophers, the kinds that speak at TED Talks and at think tanks, are very excited about Humanity 2.0.

The idea is that with medical advances and computer technology and nanotechnology, the idea is that we're not going to be limited by our physical bodies for much longer.

But it works more closely as well. We're now using algorithms on dating sites to know who we should go out with and who we should possibly marry.

[2 : 27] And there are a spate of books on how the brain works. In fact, when I was off, someone gave me a book called The Brain That Fixes Itself, which I was deeply insulted by.

But the idea is that if we can just figure out how the brain works, what we can do is we can overcome anxiety, we can overcome Alzheimer's, we can overcome aging itself.

And if we all just work together and give enough money to these scientific projects, humanity 2.0 is just around the corner. Well, if this passage that was just read for us in Mark 10 is right, humanity 2.0 started 2,000 years ago in this very passage.

We're in this little midsection of Mark's Gospel, chapters 8 to 10. And during this section, Jesus takes his 12 disciples and gives them an intensive masterclass, if you will, on discipleship.

The crowds drop out of the picture. There's only one miracle at the beginning and one miracle at the end. And as Jesus moves toward Jerusalem to his crucifixion, these three chapters, Jesus teaches his disciples.

[3 : 45] And he has, what he teaches them is two things that belong together. It's a combination of two things. He speaks to them about his death on the cross.

Three times he predicts his death on the cross. What's going to happen, how it's going to happen. And at the same time, he speaks about what the life of a disciple means, what it means to follow him.

And the two of them must never be separated. In fact, the two of them are combined together. And today in our passage, we have the third and most detailed prediction of his death, combined with the revolutionary establishing of humanity 2.0.

Let me read to you the key verses. Verse 42. Jesus called them to him and said to them, This is humanity 2.0.

Two completely incompatible value systems, worldviews, ways of life.

[5 : 16] Jesus holds up the pagan way there. He calls the Gentile way the way of the world. It's the way of power. It's to get on top. It's to be above others.

It's to raise yourself in the world. But the other group, humanity 2.0, if you will, lives different lives with a different worldview. Instead of trying to get up and be served by others, this group serves. Instead of being on top, they make themselves slaves of all. And the dividing line between the two groups is that first line in verse 43. It shall not be so among you.

It shall not. It's not a try harder statement. It's merely a statement of fact. He says there is a different way for disciples, a different way among you.

That is, the mark of disciples, the mark of communities of disciples is this. It is the life of serving. It is the life of downward mobility, if you will.

[6 : 24] The way of the cross. Humanity 2.0 in Jesus' mind is a community, many communities in this world, that serve one another.

And what we have in this little section 8 to 10, going up to Jerusalem, is absolutely wonderful, really, because what the disciples do is the disciples say what we think.

They are a fabulous illustration of how conflicted we are when we first hear about Jesus' new way of life. And I'm afraid that the disciples give us a picture of what it means to be committed to humanity 1.0, to the old way of working.

You can see this every time Jesus predicts his death. After each time, the disciples do something to say which shows they have not understood. So, back in chapter 8, you remember the first time Jesus announced that he was going to Jerusalem to be killed, what does Peter do?

Peter says, stop it, stop saying that. He takes him aside and says, that's madness. And Jesus turns to Peter and he says, Peter, you don't have your mind on the things of God, you have your mind on the things of man, on human ways of thinking.

[7 : 52] And the human way of thinking is not God's way of thinking. Do you remember this? God has a way of thinking and acting that violates the common sense human way.

So let me try and explain it like this. God created us in the beginning to live and to flourish by walking in his world, by walking in his presence, by walking in his ways.

Do you remember? We walked away from God. We walked right out of the garden and we kept walking. And as we walked out of the garden of Eden, we had to develop an alternative value system, an alternative way of seeing things, a way of mastery, a way of getting to the top.

So the whole way we think about our lives and our own honour and our own glory is now upside down. God created us for his glory, to share his glory with us.

And part of what it means to be human is to desire glory. That will never go away from any of us.

And that's why ambition by itself is not wrong. But when we walked away from God, we have a glory deficit.

[9 : 06] And so we have to replace the glory of God with a different glory. Our own glory. Our own greatness and sovereignty and majesty and power.

That's what it is to be humanity 1.0. It's about achieving my own glory. It's about getting ahead, getting on top, being over others.

And the more people you have beneath you, whether it's intellectually or financially or relationally, the more human glory you have for yourself. And the problem is, it just doesn't satisfy.

It doesn't do, you know, our own glory. It doesn't do the job that it's made to do because we were made for more. It's the wrong glory and we try and get it the wrong way. Because God is the only source of true glory.

It's his to give. And the way he gives it to us is through the humility and serving of his son, Jesus Christ. And you know who he gives it to?

[10 : 06] He doesn't give it to those who are in positions of prominence necessarily or who take precedence. He gives it to those who receive it like little children. So in chapter 9, right after the second death prediction, the 12 disciples have a big argument.

You might just want to look back there. Chapter 9 verses 33 to 37. I know Dan spoke about this a little. He's just spoken about his death a second time.

And in verse 33, they came to Capernaum and when he was in the house, he asked them, what were you discussing on the way? But they kept silent. Why did they keep silent?

For on the way, they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. It's just fantastic, isn't it? I mean, we would never be caught dead doing this, would we? Even though we do it all the

time in our hearts.

So he sat them down and called the 12 and he said, look, if anyone would be first, you must be last of all and servant of all. And he took a child and put him in his midst and taking him in his arms, he said, look, whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.

[11:19] Whoever receives me receives not me, but he who sent me. See, they're talking about greatness, but Jesus wants them to see that the way of following him is a complete reversal.

And so we come to today's passage, which begins in verse 32. And here is the fullest prediction in the first couple of verses there. And in verse 32, if you can see it there, it's a strange scene.

It's ominous. Jesus is steaming ahead of the group. He's out in front of the group and the group is behind him. He set his face to Jerusalem where he's going to die, like the servant from Isaiah.

But he's not walking like a man who knows he's going to the gallows. He's not drawing, dragging his feet reluctantly. He's out front. And the 12 disciples are astounded and not a little afraid.

They've heard enough to know that things are not going to go well in Jerusalem and it's incomprehensible to them that there's anything worth giving your life for. And then we read verse 33.

[12:27] Jesus says this, See, we, not just me, we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles, which is an Old Testament phrase.

And they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him and after three days he will rise. It's interesting, the specifics of his suffering come from the Old Testament and each one took place as he said they would.

And immediately, there ought not be a heading in between in the Bible text. You know the headings and the paragraphs are not in the original. Heading someone just put in there. But immediately, we get another picture from the disciples of humanity 1.0.

In verse 35, James and John, the sons of thunder, they see this is their chance to get the choice spots in Jesus' kingdom. So, here's the picture.

Jesus is marching ahead. They leave the other ten behind them and they sneak up to Jesus. They know what they're about to say is a little bit dirty because they don't just come out and say it.

[13:44] They've thought about this, you see. So, they take the indirect approach. Teacher, they say. We want you to do whatever we ask of you.

It's a great, it's a great prayer, isn't it? Do you think that's a great prayer? It's the kind of, it's the kind of thing you say to a genie. If you find a bottle that has a genie in it, you rub the bottle, the genie comes out.

What's the first wish you give? You say to them, do whatever I wish forever, right? The blank check approach. And so, Jesus says, what do you want me to do for you?

It's an excellent question, isn't it? It'd be a very good thing if all of us could be really honest with him about what we truly, deeply, deep down want him to do.

And then their request demonstrates they're all about humanity 1.0 still. Give us, give us the key seats of highest place and prominence and position and power and status.

[14:46] One at the left and one at the right in your glory. They want status, they want honour, they want greatness. They think that Jesus is playing the game of thrones and so they want the thrones closest to his.

And it's interesting, it demonstrates that they have been listening to what Jesus has been saying but they've been listening selectively. They've heard what he said about glory but so deeply ingrained is humanity 1.0 that they've filtered out all this stuff about the cross and serving others. I pause and say that Jesus' teaching at this point is so radical and so revolutionary our tendency is always to try and tame it down and to domesticate it.

One way of doing that is by making our following of Jesus to serve our own goals. Let me tell you what I mean. When I was at university I was a Christian and I read all that I could find of George Whitefield.

George Whitefield was a stunningly successful preacher and evangelist in the 18th century. He was much better than Wesley in my view. Although he was cross-eyed he was kindly thoughtful and preached to far greater numbers.

[16:12] And I as I read these books I kind of wanted to be a new George Whitefield except without the cross-eyes. I wanted to use preaching and Jesus for my own selfish ends.

And I struggled and I still struggle with these words here because Jesus is calling us to be nothing to be willing to be nobody.

Another way we try and domesticate the radicalness of this is by pretending humility. I'm not good enough to serve Jesus. That's for those who are more spiritual than I am.

or if I do serve him who's going to serve me? Another way of avoiding this is to think well I've given enough to God.

Now this was the story of the rich young ruler in the very last passage. He'd obeyed all the commandments he thought but he really didn't feel he could trust God with his money.

[17 : 17] He thought I've given enough to God. I'm in danger of outgiving God. Perhaps the best way to avoid the radicalness of what Jesus is saying is just to be selective in our obedience.

Yes, yes I agree with the idea of serving it's a very good idea I'm 100% behind it I've just never got around to doing it. I've served in the past that ought to be enough.

It's all humanity 1.0 thinking and the other 10 disciples have the same thinking because when they hear what the other two are talking to Jesus about they are infuriated mostly because they didn't get in first and so Jesus takes time to explain and here in these little verses he unveils his plan for a new humanity the core of what it means to be a disciple and to follow him just a few words he outlines the contradictory value system and world view so verse 42 begins he called them to him that's a summon something quite serious is going to happen and the first thing he does is he explains the value system of humanity 1.0 I read it again you know that those who are considered rulers the Gentiles lorded over them the great ones exercise authority over them now this is so obvious it almost goes without saying the great ones in the world they are the ones with status they are the ones who have got to the top that's why we call them the great ones everyone agrees with this whether it's through their artistic success or through their business or financial success or their family connections we call them those in power those at the top the great ones are great ones because they have more status

I mean it's just common sense isn't it and the two key words Jesus uses to describe them in the Greek come out in people who have power over others they exercise authority over others the idea is being above and mastering others it's used later on in the book of Acts in the unfortunate story of the seven sons of Siva remember this the seven traveling exorcists who they had watched the apostle Paul do mighty works in the name of Jesus and so they thought they add the name of Jesus to their bag of tricks and use Jesus name an incantation so they come to a guy who is possessed by a demon and they try and cast him out in the name of Jesus and we read this in Acts 19 the evil spirit answered them Jesus I know Paul I recognize but who are you and the man in whom was the evil spirit leapt on them mastered all of them and overpowered them so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded so don't take on an exorcist ministry if you're not sure about it my point is that's the word the overpower mastery word that's the word

Jesus is using here and then Jesus says gives us the slogan our slogan is his people it shall not be so among you and with one word Jesus sweeps away our whole value system the whole way we put the world together the scale of importance and status all the natural assumptions and the valuations we put on one another he says they no longer apply to those who follow me notice please this is a shared mutual communal reality it's not just for deluxe disciples it's for us as a Christian community he says in verse 43 it shall not be so among you whoever will be great among you whoever will be first among you it's a community of the cross in other words in

[21 : 36] Jesus mind if we're a community of disciples of Jesus Christ we're meant to be a community of contrast with values and thinking that's just the opposite of what's obvious an alternate society humanity 2.0 whoever would be great among us must be our servant whoever would be first among us must be slave of all it's completely upside down the slave is someone who has compulsory service to another zero social status in fact in Jesus day in the Greek culture the one value above all others was freedom to be a slave was undignified unattractive Jesus says this is the Christian life choosing to be restricted not just in isolated actions but in terms of the use of your life and the servant word is also an undignified and contemptuous job it's only useful to be a servant in

Greek culture if you're going to get something by serving either being close to a great one or as a means to an end or developing your own skills but to just renounce your rights and to give yourself in active service that's not in a million years see Jesus is talking about the trans valuation of values he's got nothing against greatness and ambition just has to be attached to the glory of God not the

glory of me and the way it shows is by actively serving others it means taking action in love for the good of others and it involves a personal choice and a personal commitment to act it means an ongoing giving up my selfish ambition to have godly ambitions for those around us to use my power and to use my resources and to use the gifts god's given me for others so those of you who are married husbands serve your wives don't wait for them to serve you wives serve your husbands don't wait for them to serve you if you're an employer serve your employees if you work for someone serve those around you and serve your boss but particularly within the Christian community Jesus expects us to be actively serving and I know there are seasons in our lives where this is severely limited but if we are a Christian community and if Jesus is at the center we ought to be marked by all kinds of sacrificial serving on behalf of others every member who's following Jesus the sense that I'm committed to the spiritual well-being of those around me and they are committed to mine and I'm not talking about being busy for the sake of being busy some of us are very busy serving others and it is possible if you're busy serving to neglect what's really important that's what happened to Martha but this is the pattern of the new humanity that Jesus establishes active serving of others and so I want to ask you the question are you serving are you doing that if

Jesus were to visit us this morning would he find you serving in this community or not because it's when you give yourself to serving and following Jesus that's what it means to be a disciple can't call ourselves disciples unless we're serving and I don't think he's talking about the grand demonstrations he's talking about the quiet the little ways not giving other people what they want necessarily but doing what's spiritually best for them and it can't happen apart from a heart attitude doesn't come from guilt can't be forced from the outside it comes from a changed heart that's why all the church programs in the world make no difference if our hearts are not engaged to serve each other a community of true self giving love can only be created by Christ Jesus well now this is it's this aspect of Christianity that Nietzsche really despised you can trust

Nietzsche to say these things he says Christianity is a slave morality not a master morality it's a moral system that inverts our human nature elevating weakness over strength it's disgusting he says it lowers humanity it stops us embracing our desires and I quote he says I call Christianity the one great curse the one intrinsic depravity poisonous the one immortal blemish on mankind and Nietzsche always gets the wrong end of the stick but he nicely captures how you look at Jesus teaching if you're committed to humanity 1.0 and I want to finish and say that this is not just difficult it is of course humanly impossible we just don't have the resources in ourselves to climb out of humanity 1.0 into version 2 we can grind away and look like we're serving but this complete reversal does not come naturally to us and so

[27 : 19] I want to say three quick things I want to point to three quick things as we finish and the first and most obvious thing to point to is Jesus because the passage finishes with verse 45 right for even the son of man came not to be served but to serve how give his life as a ransom for many so Jesus death his life and death is not just a model for us to follow but it is the power which gives us the ability to do what he's doing yes his death is the greatest act of service ever I mean he of all human beings deserved to be on it didn't he but he took on the form of a slave and he deliberately and lovingly gave his life away to death and in his death he ransomed us from the power of death and from all that keeps us enslaved and there's so much involved in this verse verse 45 that I've asked someone to preach on it in two weeks time but the reason I mention it here in terms of motivation is because these words of Jesus tell us something of the inmost character of

God himself here is the son of God speaking and he says to us God is a serving God God cares about us and serves us God finds the centre of his interest outside himself in us that's what our God is like God's like God's life if you will in the Trinity is one of self-giving outward looking sacrificial love the father gives to the son the son gives to the father and even the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life Jesus was not in it for himself he came to ransom us and to create this new humanity with very different values and hopes and he breaks us free of the grip of humanity 1.0 even though we struggle with it until we die and he gives us a new life and I think that's why incidentally he calls us to take up our cross and follow him and deny ourselves because the only way out of humanity 1.0 into humanity 2.0 is not a moral correction or adding new activities it's life from the dead so firstly

Jesus is the one who does it secondly I want you to notice there is happiness in this I slipped over this right at the beginning in verse 32 the little word road there is an important word this word is

used seven times in these chapters and it's the way the way of the Lord it's the same word that the book opened with the voice of one crying in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord this is the highway of our God every time the road is mentioned in this little section it is speaking about the road of God where every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill made low and the crooked places made straight where the springs of water will flow where the crocus will blossom in the desert where the ransomed of the Lord will walk on that way the highway and everlasting joy shall be on our heads in other words as

Jesus walks up to Jerusalem this is what he has in mind that the way of the cross is the highway of God and as we walk that way we find the joy of God the everlasting joy shall be on our heads so Jesus and his way and thirdly and I finish with this there's more there's more Jesus great act of service on the cross was not just a one-off a couple of years ago when we were preaching through Luke I'd never seen this before but in Luke chapter 12 Jesus tells a parable about the master who goes away and he wants his servants to wait for his return and then he says to the disciples and what will the master do when he comes back and finds his servants waiting and I read blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes truly I say to you the master will dress himself for service and have them recline at table and he will come and serve them in other words the same master who served us in the cross in his resurrection he's going to serve us in the kingdom forever so that if you're in a tough place now and you may be finding it very difficult to serve others and you need encouragement to continue here is the assurance from Jesus Christ that when he comes again and he brings us into that great feast where we sit down with his people and eat and drink with him in the kingdom he will serve us forever and I think that's very good news amen here you you you