

# Mark 10:32-50

*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: 05 February 2023

Preacher: Canon David Short

[ 0 : 00 ] So, if you would take up your Bible and turn back to Mark 10, verses 32 to the end, if anyone looks like they're falling asleep, I'm going to pick up Jeremy's apron and serve him some cookies and Vegemite.

We're on our way to Jerusalem with Jesus in the Gospel of Mark and we come to the final passage in chapter 10 before he arrives in Jerusalem and it is simply the most important passage in the Gospel with the most important verse in the Gospel.

It opens to us the heart of the Christian faith and it reveals to us the two fundamentally different approaches to life, the two polar opposite approaches to life.

If you like, two forces at work in our world today. On the one hand, there's a force at work in our world and in our hearts. It's the force of pride and it asks the question, how can I get you to serve me?

How can I show I'm better than you? And there is the force of Christ on the other side. It's the force of mercy and love and it asks the question, how can I serve you?

[ 1 : 28 ] How can I sacrifice myself so that you'll become the person God wants you to be? So, that's what it's about. We start at verse 32 and we read they were on the road.

That's a loaded term. They've been on the road since chapter 8. And if you look at verse 32, as they march along, Jesus is striding out ahead of them.

He's not hiding or running away or looking for a way out. And such is his dreadful seriousness and gravitas that it amazes the crowd around him and puts them in fear.

And Jesus takes the 12 aside and for the third time now announces with great clarity what's going to happen to him in Jerusalem.

You remember chapter 8, he did this. Chapter 9, he did this. And now in chapter 10, he does it for a third time. And this time it's the fullest description of his suffering, his crucifixion and his resurrection.

[ 2 : 31 ] And all of this is just now days before his crucifixion. But here is the strange thing that we've noticed. Every time Jesus announces that he is going to give his life, it sets the disciples off fighting for position.

Who is the greatest? Which one of them is the best? Which one deserves the highest place? It's almost as though the clearer Jesus gets about giving his life, it irritates, it aggravates and creates self-centred display of egotism.

I don't want to be too hard on the disciples. Yes, they are walking with Jesus. And they're going to continue walking with Jesus until things get really tough. They have some inkling that he is the Messiah, but somehow they haven't allowed the grace and mercy of Christ to penetrate their hearts. They're still working with a scarcity mindset. They feel they need to show how good they are. And it comes out in a kind of competitiveness where they're concerned for their own glory.

We saw this very briefly last week in the last passage. Remember how Jesus shocked the disciples with his view of wealth and the rich young ruler. And Peter says to Jesus, we've left everything and followed you.

[ 4 : 00 ] And they had, but they were still keeping score. Look what I've given up for you, Peter says. I jolly well hope this is worth it. And implied in his words is that you're in my debt, Jesus.

Look what I've done. When I went through seminary many, many years ago, I had a friend who was in my year in seminary who came from a very well-paying career.

And each year he calculated and told me how much money he'd given up to join the Anglican ministry. He didn't last, but he left several churches devastated with people he had used badly.

And this sense of entitlement is deeply rooted in all of us, even after we begin to follow Jesus. We slip into this thinking that he owes us, that somehow we can put him in our debt. And we'd never say it out loud. We're much too polite or frightened. But inwardly, we begin to think, well, maybe we are better than other people.

[ 5 : 10 ] And we talk a good talk of grace, but in our hearts, we're just not sure we can really trust God with everything. And so we still have to prove ourselves.

And this is a blindness that persists in us, even after we start gaining spiritual sight. And that's what this passage is about, this last passage in chapter 10.

It's the contrast between those who can physically see, the disciples, but they're still spiritually blind to grace. And this one man who is physically blind, but he sees who Jesus is.

And twice Jesus exposes our blindness by asking the same question. Comes twice. In verse 36 to James and John, in verse 51 to Bartimaeus, what is it you want me to do for you?

It's a very good question. So let's have a look at this contrast. First, between a kind of spiritual blindness, even after we're following Jesus, and spiritual sightedness.

[ 6 : 15 ] So the spiritual blindness passage is verses 35 to 44. So right after Jesus has announced his death for the third time, they're in the shadow of Jerusalem, in the shadow of the cross.

Two of the 12, James and John, the sons of thunder, take Jesus aside from the others. They don't want the others to hear this.

It's a brazen attempt to exploit Jesus for their own purposes. And it's very sneaky, because they don't want Peter as part of this.

They leave Peter out of it. They don't want him to have any of their glory. And they've cooked up a plan. And the way they say it to Jesus is, it's the way you would speak to a genie.

You know, when you find, when Aladdin finds the lamp in the cave, and he rubs the lamp, and a genie comes out, and he says, I'll give you three wishes. If that ever happens to you, you know what your first wish is, don't you?

[ 7 : 19 ] You give me everything I wish for. So what they say to him, in verse 35, is they say, Teacher, we want you to do whatever we ask of you.

Here is a blank check, Jesus. Just sign it, will you? We've got something very specific in mind, but just tell us you're going to do it. And Jesus is kind of lovely, the way he deals with them.

And he has a question for them in verse 36. What is it you want me to do for you? It's such a great question. And I wonder how you would answer that today.

I wonder if you're being honest with yourself. What would you say if Jesus says, what do you want me to do for you? I mean, you're likely someone who follows Jesus.

You're likely someone who prays. But in your secret heart, what do you really want him to do for you? Well, here we have a moment of transparent, transparent, bare-faced pride.

[ 8 : 21 ] They say, we want you to give us the seat of the right hand and the left hand in your glory. We don't want to put it in so many words, Jesus, but we want to exploit you for our own glory.

We want to use our discipleship to get a better place than the other 10 disciples, especially Peter. We have a sense that you have some power.

You may be the Messiah. And we want to cash in on that and come out on top, ahead of everyone else. We want to have the best seats. We want to be seen as important. We want to be higher and better than others.

We want them to serve us. And we want you to serve us in this way so that others will end up serving us and we'll finally get the recognition that we deserve.

We are the sons of thunder. Now, you'll recognise this. This is standard operating procedure for everyone who belongs to this world. It's the way of self-promotion and self-protection and self-justification.

[ 9 : 27 ] And the reason we do this is that we have a terror of not being loved. We have a terror of being rejected. And the way we cover our insecurity is to find ways to get others to serve us.

We do it very sneakily. We even use our devotion for self-promotion. It's so natural. It's so instinctual that we're blind to it.

I mean, elsewhere in the New Testament, Jesus describes this as a kind of a slavery where I lock myself up in the dungeon of my own ego. And the longer I am there, the more I get used to it.

And the more I get used to thinking and acting this way, the less I see it until it becomes not just normal but desirable. We think that the desire to be better than others or to be treated better than

others is what I really need for my personal flourishing.

And I could add a thousand commercials to show you that's what we think. And so we become experts at transactional relationships. We become savvy at manipulating and exploiting others so they'll serve me.

[10:40] And Jesus is astonishing in his kindness and grace and how he responds to them. He doesn't blast them. He doesn't boot them out of the... Go back to Galilee.

He doesn't say, you just want the splendor without suffering. You're not worthy of this. Nor does he give them what they want. Thank goodness the Lord does not often give us what we pray for.

And in verse 38, he gives them two pictures, they're loaded pictures, of the path to glory, the cup and baptism. Are you able to drink the cup I drink or be baptized with my baptism?

The cup is an Old Testament term for the wrath of God. Jesus is talking about his death where he's going to go to the cross where he'll drink down the judgment of God for our sins.

And baptism is a very similar picture. He's going to be immersed, drowned, if you will, plunged under the waters of God's judgment. Are you able to do this?

[11:45] And the boys say, not sure on confidence, they say, yes, we are the sons of thunder. Bring it on. Just so long as we get the best seats. And again, you see Jesus' gentleness here.

Of course they cannot do what Jesus is going to do. I mean, Jesus' suffering for the whole world is utterly unique. But there is a lesser sense in which they will join Jesus in suffering, as does everyone who follows Jesus.

But what they do not see is that their suffering will serve Jesus, not their own egos. And there's a lovely touch in verse 41.

As soon as the other 10 hear about it, they're furious. Because James and John got in first before they were able to say these things.

They're furious because there's only a certain amount of glory to go around, they think, and they're frightened they're going to miss out. And so Jesus turns this into a wonderful moment of teaching.

[12:54] Verse 42. He says, our world lives and leads by domination, by power, prestige, by pride. And the way to do this is seeing each other as competition and trying to be above others and better than others to come out on top.

And the disciples are not completely blind. I think they are like the half-healed blind man back in chapter 8, 24.

In fact, I think that's why that miracle is recorded for us. Remember the man who is healed in two stages? Jesus puts stuff on his eyes and he says, yeah, I can see they look like trees walking around.

That's the disciples. They're half-blind, if you will. But pride is so deeply rooted it hides in our lives, it hides behind our virtues.

It's the root of every other sin. And the symptoms of blindness to pride go like this. People around you often feel like they're used.

[13:58] You'll find yourself very quick to anger. You feel worthless or rejected and you need to establish your sense of worth at the expense of others.

We're looking for respect and for love and for confidence every place other than Jesus Christ. And here's another symptom, you hate it when you're not in control. And Jesus just cuts all across this in verse 43.

He says, not so among you. It's beautiful. It's not a command. It doesn't say it should not be so. It's just a statement. He says, kingdom of God, not this way. God's ways, they're not our ways. So if we're failing to serve each other, we're still working on the basis of pride.

It's not we're letting down the side, but it's we haven't understood the basic realities of the kingdom of God. And here are the basic realities. Verse 43, whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

[15:07] And whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. I think this is the sharpest difference between life in our world and life in the kingdom of God.

Our world values power and authority and ability and prestige. Jesus values weakness and serving and sacrifice and love.

And the highest value in the kingdom of God is not success or even security. Serving. Serving certainly comes out of security that we're loved. Serving is love made tangible in the ordinary and mundane things of life.

Serving is love made tangible. And this is the paradox at the heart of the Christian faith, the Christian life and the Christian church.

That greatness and firstness comes in serving. It comes in counting other people better than yourself. Which means that the Christian fellowship does not exist for our sake but we exist for the sake of the fellowship.

[16:20] There's one to think about. Now all of this that I'm saying is ridiculous, isn't it? I mean it's absurd if it weren't for Jesus and his overflowing mercy. So that brings us to the blind man who has spiritual sight and this is the second little part of the passage.

Verses 46 to 52. What is this spiritual sight? This is the last healing miracle in Mark's gospel and it's the only healing in Mark where the person is named Bartimaeus.

And Bartimaeus went blind sometime in his life and he's now reduced to begging and there he is in Jericho which is three and a half thousand feet below Jerusalem a 40k walk up the hill to Jerusalem.

And when he hears that Jesus is coming he begins to cry out in his loudest voice Jesus son of David have mercy on me. It's a beautiful combination isn't it?

He's understood the power of Jesus and the kindness of Jesus. And Mark who loves irony has this story here because while he's lost his physical sight he sees the truth of Jesus more clearly than the 12 disciples.

[17:35] And the crowd around him tells him to shut up. Bartimaeus they say you're a nuisance. You're someone to walk by not to deal with but not to Jesus.

And the more they tell him to be quiet the more he yells out son of David have mercy on me. This is this is this is an utterly wonderful cry from him and it shows both desperation and faith.

I mean I'll explain that in just a moment. He comes to Jesus not reminding Jesus of all that he's given up. He's not asking for the right hand of glory. He comes without any claims on Jesus whatsoever.

I've got no rights no entitlements with Jesus. I've come I'm asking for mercy. If anything is going to happen Lord Jesus it's going to be completely of your grace not by my deserving have mercy on me.

Jesus loves that prayer. It's his favourite prayer. prayer. And he hears the cry for mercy and he stops the whole crowd stops this poor powerless marginalised man beside the road with no claim on Jesus apart from mercy.

[18:53] Jesus stops the swarm of people and calls him and then he asks him in verse 51 exactly the same question that he asked James and John what do you want me to do for you? Seems fairly obvious doesn't it?

But Jesus is asking him not for the obvious he wants him to find his voice his voice of faith to articulate what his prayer is it's hugely humanising and dignifying for this man because to Jesus he's not a problem he's a person that's how mercy works and he doesn't ask for power and prestige and position he asks for his sight and what Jesus does is Jesus gives him two gifts not one he gives him his sight his physical sight back and he brings into the group of his disciples and if you look at the last phrase of verse 52 immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way there it is and here is the difference between the sons of thunder and blind Bartimaeus they still think this is a lot about position and performance they are following Jesus they haven't grasped his grace but Bartimaeus is following on the basis of mercy kindness and grace so here we are we're Anglicans we say

Lord have mercy on us many times several times in this service yes when our eyes are spiritually open we say that with both desperation and rest because Jesus loves this prayer he loves it when we call on him for mercy because he is so rich in mercy as we'll say later in the communion service he delights in showing mercy mercy is who he is and I just want to finish with this this is the point of verse 45 this key verse if you read through the passage verse 45 is the hinge between the semi-blind James and John and the open-eyed Bartimaeus it's the turning point from spiritual blindness to spiritual sight and what Jesus does in verse 45 is he explains the point of his death to us which is the heart and core of the Christian faith so if you are unsure about what Christianity is here it is in one verse verse 45

Jeremy has already quoted it to us for even the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many Christianity is about Jesus Christ and what he came to do he's not looking for people who can be good he's not looking for people who will be particularly good at

serving him he has come not to be served but to give his life as a ransom for many now we know this word you pay a ransom when someone's kidnapped or someone is taken captive in war it's the price paid to free them this is what Mark has been showing us since the start that we are captive to spiritual forces that are way more powerful beyond our strength which are impossible for us to throw off not just death and Satan but pride and what makes these spiritual forces so dangerous to us is we're blind to the captivity but it is by Jesus' death that God opens our eyes and it is through his death that he ransoms us and frees us from the dungeons of our own egos how does Jesus' death do that?

how do we move from this pathological need for other people to serve me wanting to serve them it's not by an ethical system but it's by the person of Jesus himself just look back at the verse he says for even the son of man the heavenly son of man came full of glory all the glory of God even the son of man has come not to be served but to serve by giving his life so what Jesus does in his death is to destroy and overturn power and dominance and control and he does it through the grace of giving so it's only the person of Jesus that can cure our pride the way he does it is by giving and serving us there's no such thing as mercy apart from Jesus and what we need to do is we need to increasingly bring ourselves and our fears and our insecurities and our pride to him and to his mercy we have to allow

[ 23 : 56 ] Christ to do battle with our pride because the mercy we receive will not keep us without him which is why we come to him so later we say this you are the same Lord who always delights in showing mercy grant us therefore gracious Lord so to eat the flesh of your dear son Jesus Christ and to drink his blood that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body and our souls washed through his most precious blood and that we may forever dwell in him and he in us it's a great prayer to which we all say Amen