

The Power of Serving

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: 03 March 2013

Preacher: Rev. Alastair Sterne

[0 : 0 0] and pray with me. Father, we ask that you would incline our hearts to hear your word. And as we listen to your word, we ask that you'd apply it to our minds, that we not grow shallow, that you'd apply it to our hearts, that we not grow cold, that you would apply it to our feet, that we not just be hearers of your word, but doers also.

We ask all these things in the name of Jesus and in his mercy. Amen. Amen. You guys got off light, this service.

Last service, Dan made everyone during the kids' prayer memorize Mark 10.45. So you guys got grilled about birds, but you didn't have to do Bible memory verses, which is a delight.

I got thrown off a little bit. You saw David come over and talk to me, and then he's like, do you believe in the Holy Spirit? And he walked off. I'm not sure how that was supposed to help me prepare, but thank you, brother.

We do believe in the Holy Spirit. We do. And we pray he will speak. It's a fun thing as a preacher to be assigned one verse. It really is.

[1 : 1 2] Last time I got assigned one verse was Mark 1.1, and I preached for 42 minutes. That won't happen this morning. But here's a verse. It's fundamentally about death.

Death, it ravages. I got a call midweek this week from one of my closest friends growing up, and his brother-in-law passed away in a plane crash in Kenya, leaving behind a 29-year-old widow.

And his death is a tragedy. And my friend called me, and he said to me, the odd thing is that his death, I can't make sense of it, it makes me hate life.

It shows us death has this uncanny power. It's not just the end of life. It's a disruptor. It ripples through us. It fractures us. It takes from us.

At the loss of this man, many are now hurting, mourning. Lives will never be the same. The gospel of Mark is keenly in tune with this power of death.

[2 : 1 3] The shadow of death looms over almost every narrative. Unclean spirits, demoniacs, illnesses, suffering, children dying, selfishness, the misuse of power.

All of these struggles in the gospel show us that death is not just the end of life, that it's a disruptive power. And the passage we have at hand today, Mark 10.45, is arguably one of the most important passages in Mark, if not the entire New Testament.

It reads, The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. This passage is about death. It's about the death of Jesus.

And at this point in Mark's gospel, Jesus has foretold his death three times. He's given the facts, and he uses these heart-wrenching verbs to describe what's going to happen to him. When it takes place, he will suffer.

He will be condemned. He will be rejected, mocked, ridiculed, spat upon, flogged, and killed. And then mysteriously, he will rise.

[3 : 20] And so he's stated the facts three times. And three times, the disciples have failed to accept the facts, let alone to come to grips with what the facts might actually mean. After the first foretelling, Peter famously rebuked Jesus.

After the second, the disciples remain silent in fear. After the third, which we read today, James and John misunderstand Jesus altogether and make a power grab. And so Jesus takes a moment to infuse the fact of his death with meaning.

He came to die for us. And there's no other explanation for his life. He didn't come to impart some nice moralistic teachings. He didn't come to bring us to enlightenment. He didn't come to establish his power and might through his greatness.

And this sets him apart from every other religion. Most religious leaders in the world, they come to live. They come to set an example. Jesus, he came to die.

And he didn't come to die gratuitously either. He's not the victim of circumstances. This is not some meaningless tragedy. The New Testament is very clear about this.

[4 : 30] Jesus' death on the cross accomplished something that could be accomplished in no other way. And everything that took place, from the betrayal of Judas, to his trial with the religious leaders, from his trial with Pilate, to his very crucifixion, all of this unfolded by God's hand.

This was God's design and purpose. And this gets us to the heart of Mark's gospel. Essentially, his gospel is a passion narrative with an extended introduction.

Jesus as the suffering servant will die. And his death will have huge significance. And this is the point. This is why he came. And this is why Mark even writes the gospel. So there's three things we need to consider about this passage and its context in the gospel.

First, we need to move beyond the facts of Jesus' death. We have to ask, why did he die? What was its purpose? And once we come to see why he died, we then have to ask, can we accept what it means?

And what it says about us? And then finally, if we do accept that, we will see how it gives us power to live a new life. So first, what was the purpose of his death?

[5 : 42] There's really, there's a big part of me that has a ton of empathy for the disciples. Think about it. If you're hanging out with a friend and they start talking about their death as being imminent as it's coming quicker and quicker towards them and they're saying it with certainty, I'm pretty sure you'd have a tough time digesting that.

You know, in our culture, people get institutionalized for that sort of talk. But this is what Jesus does. And death, death's never an easy thing. But he starts talking about it and he starts saying, this is why I came.

Which means he didn't come just to take in the nice scenes of Galilee and heal the odd person here and there. God in Christ descended from glory and power for the most surprising task, to die.

If we want to make sense of who Jesus is and what Jesus did, then we have to make sense of his death. We have to make sense of the fact that his mission was to die. Every corporation in the world, they have mission statements.

Some, you know, are pretty amusing. McDonald's, I was shocked to find this. McDonald's mission is to be our customer's favorite place and way to eat. Perhaps a tad ambitious.

[6 : 55] I don't know about you, but shoveling fast food into my mouth in the convenience of my car is not always my favorite place and way to eat. Apple's, Apple's, to design the best personal computers in the world, lead the digital music revolution, and define the future of mobile media and computing devices.

Humble. McDonald's, they offer us Big Macs and fries. Apple offers us gadgets and widgets. But really, they both offer us something much simpler than that.

They offer solutions to problems. They offer solutions to felt needs. Hungry? Go to McDonald's. Need some gadget to feel relevant?

Visit the Apple Genius Bar. But Jesus, he speaks to a deeper felt need. He offers a solution to a bigger problem than hunger or the need to feel relevant. He offers the solution to death.

But his solution is to die. And so we're going to have to get a little bit technical in talking about the meaning of Jesus' death. And the point is not just to get bogged down in theology.

[8 : 04] The point is that Jesus wants his disciples to make sense of his death. Because the meaning of his death is deeply transformative. But to get there, we have to dig into the text for a bit.

Jesus says that he came to give his life as a ransom for the many. His death is unique. It's for others. This is his ultimate act of service.

He came not to be served but to serve. And the way he serves is by giving his life for many. And that word for in the Greek is anti. It could be translated as in the place of.

In other words, Jesus came to die in the place of others. He took their place as a ransom. The word for ransom, ransom, Lutron. Literally should be translated as ransom payment.

This was a payment made to release a prisoner or someone from slavery. It's an exchange. This for that. I give you this, you release to me that.

[9 : 07] And it's a costly intervention. Consider with me Psalm 49 verses 7 through 9. The psalmist speaks about the price of a ransom. He writes, truly, no man can ransom another or give to God the price of his life for the ransom of their life is costly and it can never suffice that he should live on forever and never see the pit.

The psalmist is saying that no one, no one could ever offer the price required to ransom someone's life from the inevitable, from death. And then later in the psalm, the psalmist admits almost despairingly, death shall be their shepherd.

Death shall be their shepherd. The shadow of death, it reigns. It directs human life with its destructive power. It's our shepherd. It leads us towards brokenness and decay.

It tarnishes relationships and infuses life with suffering. But there's a turning point at the end of the psalm and I love this, how it turns towards hope.

The psalmist writes, but God, but God will ransom my soul from the power of death. So Jesus gives his life as our ransom.

[10 : 33] And this, this is how God ransoms our souls from the power of death, from death being our shepherd. This is what the death of Jesus does. And Mark isn't the least bit concerned about who this ransom is paid to, despite how many pages have been filled by scholars trying to figure out the answer to that question.

What is clear, what is important, is how great a price was paid. A price no one but God himself could pay. And it cost God.

It cost God dearly to set us free. It cost him his beloved son. That's how much God's willing to pay.

And what Mark also makes clear is that Jesus, as our ransom, secures our salvation. The ransom is paid, the many go free, and Jesus takes our place as our substitute.

That's the point. That's the mission. So if we know Jesus is the ransom, then who are the many? Who are the many that are being ransomed? And here there's an echo, if not an allusion, to Isaiah and his prophecies about the suffering servant.

[11 : 44] If you look at Isaiah 53, 10 through 12, you see that the suffering servant is described in a way that just parallels Jesus' life and his death. It says that he'll be crushed.

He'll be put to death. His soul shall anguish. Jesus is the suffering servant. Then there's a couple of lines that help us make sense of the many. Listen to Isaiah. Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied.

By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous. And he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many.

And he shall divide the spoil with the strong. because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet, he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors.

The many are clearly transgressors. They're the sinners. And earlier in the gospel, Jesus has already told us this. In chapter 2, verse 12, Jesus says, I came not for the righteous, but for sinners.

[12 : 54] He didn't come for those with put together lives. Not that they could be found anywhere. He came for those who are separated from God. For those whose lives are tarnished by the accrual of sin after sin.

For those whose lives are ravaged by the power of death. Jesus descended from glory not to be served, but to serve by dying in their places of ransom to save them from death.

And after being stripped and nailed naked to a cross, Jesus is then clothed, but he's clothed in sin. Isaiah tells us that Jesus will bear their iniquities and pour out his soul to death and bear the sin of many.

And Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5.21, For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin. On the cross, Jesus actually, he ontologically became sin and died for our sins.

This is why Jesus came. He came to die. But can we accept this? Can we accept the death of Jesus? When he tells the disciples the meaning of his death, their response is not awe.

[14 : 18] It is not gratitude. gratitude. It is not humility and thanks and falling down at his feet. It's confusion. And I think like the disciples we can get a little confused about this.

We can say, Jesus, really? You know, we're modern. We're more civilized. We don't need blood to make things better. We're cultured Vancouverites.

Why did God have to have Jesus die in this way? Why can't God just forgive and be done with it? Simply put, all sin requires payment by someone.

Anytime sin is covered, it costs someone. Think about a couple of examples with me. Parenting. When I was seven years old, my dad let my sister and I play in his company truck.

And I have this crystal clear image of it because I loved getting to sit behind the wheel and pretend like I was driving. And I remember my sister was sitting in the passenger seat and she was drinking a banana flavored Slurpee.

[15 : 25] It's disgusting. But we were having so much fun. And clearly my dad underestimated the strength of my seven year old biceps. Because I managed to release the handbrake.

Now for those of you who own automatics, this doesn't seem problematic. But if you own a standard, you know that if your car is on an incline, you better park it in gear. Otherwise it's going to coast if the handbrake comes off.

And while my dad didn't leave the car in gear and so handbrake comes off, company truck begins to coast down the incline of our driveway towards the house and hits the wall.

And I just remember banana Slurpee everywhere. And my dad rushing out of the house like just flabbergasted like what did you do? What just happened? Now my dad my dad didn't make me pay for the repairs to the wall or to the truck.

He didn't shame me for how his ego was surely bruised when he had to tell his boss what had happened. No, I was at fault but he took my place. He absorbed the cost.

[16 : 29] He ransomed me and paid my penalty. Why? Well, I was seven and I had no money. But I had accrued a debt beyond what I could pay.

I had accrued a debt beyond what I could pay and the only way out of it was if someone took my place. And that's a fun jovial example. Let's think of something more serious. Forgiveness. I want you to think right now of someone who has hurt you.

And maybe you've forgiven this person already or maybe you're in the process of forgiving this person. But I want you to think back to that moment of what caused you pain. What inflicted the hurt upon you. What caused the need for forgiveness even to be extended.

And I want you to think of that moment and in that moment someone walking up to you and just saying just forgive them. Get over it. Doesn't everything in you just flare up at that thought?

Don't you start a running list and tally of all the ways these people have hurt you. all the ways they've harmed you and all the ways they don't deserve your forgiveness. They don't deserve your help and how you're right and they're wrong.

[17 : 37] Absolutely. This is how our hearts function. But you know, you know if you want to be redemptive, if you want to keep growing, you have to forgive or you'll get stuck in this cycle of pain or maybe a cycle of retaliation.

Forgiveness, it's this. When you want to think horrible thoughts about them, you don't. When you want them to pay you back, you don't ask again. When you want to run them down and gossip, you don't.

And when you think of something you want to do to that person and you don't, you feel the pain. You absorb it and you suffer instead of forcing punishment and pain on them.

Vaguely put, vaguely put, I experienced some abuse as a child. That's impossible for me to calculate how much it cost me. It traumatized me.

It rewired how I think. It took me down paths that I otherwise wouldn't have gone down. It fractured relationships. Part of me died. And on a practical level, I've spent thousands of dollars in counseling.

[18 : 46] There's no such thing as forgiveness that isn't costly. There's no such thing as forgiveness that doesn't involve suffering. I've forgiven that person.

But that doesn't erase what's been done. In a very real way, in a very real way, I had to absorb the hurt. I had to absorb the cost of their sin against me.

To forgive them, I had to accept the suffering. But only in absorbing it, only in accepting it, only in forgiving it, could true healing continue. So you can see in these examples, all sin is costly.

Be it a ding in your truck or forgiving abuse. It's costly. It costs something and someone has to absorb it. So back to the question, why did Jesus have to die in this way?

Why can't God just forgive and be done with it? Sin is what brought death into the world. And Paul writes, the wages of sin is death.

[19 : 56] If God is going to deal with death, if he's going to ransom us from death, then he has to deal with the cost of sin. But instead of making us bear his just anger and action towards our sin, instead of making us pay the wages of our sin, which is death, he allows Jesus to bear it all for us.

This is called the great exchange. his life for ours. His sinlessness for our sinfulness. And through Christ's death, the cost of our sins is covered.

And so once sin is dealt with, death can be dealt with. And so we see on the cross, Jesus poured out his life. He poured out his soul. His blood was shed so that our sins could be forgiven and covered and atoned for.

He took our place so our lives could be freed from the tyranny of sin. Freed from the impending judgment of God for our sins. Freed from the power of death. And try as we may, try as we may, the death of Jesus exceeds our attempts to explain it.

And while to a large extent it is a profound mystery, there is one thing that is very clear. There is not a simpler, nicer way that sin could have been dealt with.

[21 : 14] Sin has to be dealt with by death. Sin has to be dealt with. Your sin has to be dealt with. And this is another part where you can almost resist in a way.

Some of you might object. You could say, I'm not that bad. I'm a humanist after all. I'm a pretty good person. It doesn't, the mistakes I've made do not warrant the cross.

But what the cross tells us is that we're in such dire straits. But there is no other way to help us other than through the death of Jesus. We are precisely that bad.

There is no way, if you're honest, that you could pay back every sin you've ever committed against other people. Let alone every sin that you have committed against a holy, perfect, righteous, and pure God.

God. We are so saturated in our sin and we're so indebted to death that the only way God could reconcile us to himself was through the death of his son.

[22 : 22] So for God to offer us forgiveness and to free us from death, he couldn't just gloss over sin. He couldn't just wink at sin and say, forgive and forget, all is well. Sin is costly.

And what's transpired between us and God amounts to this betrayal, rejection, rebellion. And yet the cross, the cross is this ultimate revelation of who God is.

God must and will deal justly with sin. But Jesus on the cross shows us that God's love knows no bounds. That there's no place that God wouldn't go to set us back to rights with himself.

And on the cross, in our place, God absorbs the cost of our sin. God absorbs our sin. He takes on our sin and demonstrates his forgiveness in such a profound way.

And we're never going to fully understand or comprehend what happened on the cross. We can't dissect its mechanics. But we are meant to encounter Christ's death.

[23 : 30] death. And when we encounter it, we either receive it or we reject it. We can receive the meaning of his death.

We can receive forgiveness of our sins. We can receive Jesus as our ransom, which sets us free from the power of death.

Or we don't. And when we resist it, when you consider it foolish or irrelevant or too much, you actually refuse the power of God.

But when we accept Jesus' death on our behalf, our hearts, our hearts have to be humbled. We have to admit that we need Jesus to take our place. Because if we attempt to stand before God on our own two legs, we know we're going to be cut down.

Because God is holy and his holiness reveals how far we've fallen. And yet, the death of his son shows us that Jesus comes to the depths of our fallenness to bring us back to God.

[24 : 39] And so if we can accept the cross, this is what it means. It means that death is no longer our shepherd. You got to think about the good news of that.

Death is no longer our shepherd. We no longer have to fear death. Its disruptive power doesn't have to rob us of hope. Death doesn't have to make us hate life.

