

Understanding the King's Work

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[0 : 00] Colonel Gaddafi ruled Libya for 41 years. Initially, he was a revolutionary with a vision for Libya's prosperity. He wanted to see Libya really prosper, particularly in the Middle East and Africa.

Eventually, though, he ended up ruling as a despot who would torture and murder anyone who threatened his rule. Many of his countrymen he did too.

Later in his rule, he declared himself to be the king of kings of Africa. He's the king of kings of Africa. He ended up going mad with grandiose visions of himself before being murdered by his own people in 2011.

At the time of his death, he had amassed a personal wealth of approximately \$200 billion. That was three times richer than the official richest person in the world at the time.

And at the same time that he amassed a \$200 billion personal fortune, his country starved under the weight of UN sanctions. Every culture, every culture, no matter where you go to, sees that the way to influence society is through power.

[1 : 20] You wield power to conform society to your vision of your life together in that society. And then along comes Jesus, the king to end all kings, as we've seen in Mark's gospel.

He is the king of kings, not just of Africa, but in fact of the universe. And he gives us a clear vision here in this text, especially of the character of Christian discipleship and of Christian leadership in this passage.

And it's not about grasping for power in order to assert influence. It's actually about giving up power in order to gain influence.

And so if we misunderstand Jesus and his mission, we will totally misunderstand of what it means to follow him and what he requires of us.

Jesus has left us in no doubt so far in the second half of Mark's gospel that he came to die. He made many allusions to it at the beginning of Mark's gospel, but in the second half, he's made it really clear. He made sure the disciples knew it.

[2 : 27] We've seen that he told them three times, chapter 8, chapter 9, and again here in chapter 10, verse 32. So if you've got your Bibles, it'd be great if you could follow along because there's a few details I'm going to hone into in a moment.

But first of all, chapter 10, verse 32 to 34, they were on their way up to Jerusalem with Jesus leading the way. So the first thing we're told here is that Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem and he's the one who's taking the lead.

He's the one leading his disciples in that direction. He set his face to Jerusalem. And then it says, Again, he took the 12 aside and told them what was going to happen.

Verse 33, So this is the third prediction of his death.

But in this prediction, he gives us more details about his death. For a start, we know now for the first time that his death will happen in Jerusalem.

[3 : 44] And for the first time, we are told that both the Jews and the Gentiles will reject him. In chapter 8, we are told only that the Jewish religious leaders.

Chapter 9, we have got this general reference that he will be handed over or be delivered into the hands of men. That's a vague reference to the Gentiles.

In chapter 8, he said that he would be rejected by the priests and the scribes. But now he mentions that he will in fact be condemned to death.

That is, it's a legal term. Jesus will be, his death will involve him being tried, convicted and executed within the bounds of the criminal justice system.

And he'll be tried by the Jewish leaders, but he'll be handed over to the Gentiles for execution. So they're conspiring together.

[4 : 46] The arch enemies, the people who hate each other are conspiring together to get rid of Jesus. We also have here more graphic detail, description of his final days.

They will condemn him to death. They will hand him over to the Gentiles who will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him. Now, I haven't got time to unpack each one of those things as to the significance of being played out in each one of those things.

But what really stands out in chapter 10 is for the very first time, Jesus tells us not just that he will die, but why he will die.

Verse 45. And this verse is the key verse in all of Mark's gospel. Now, that statement, when Jesus says that, it sets Jesus apart from every other religious leader in the world.

You see, their purpose, the religious leader's purpose in this world, or philosophical leaders, is to live and to be an example. Jesus is to die, to be an example, but to die as a substitute.

[6 : 13] Now, verse 45. Let's just hone in on this for a bit. It's a key verse for Mark's gospel, and it's rich with implications. So let's take a really close look at it. A few words here, which are really key.

He uses the word come. And he uses this word come to allude to the fact that he existed before he was born. He came into his world.

And this points us back to the early part of Mark's gospel, where Jesus established his identity as the king of kings who ruled the universe, who created the universe and exists outside of the universe.

And this is also assumed in his statement that he did not come to be served. That is, he had every right, every right to be served when he came, simply because of who he is.

But he did not exercise that right. And the final phrase, to give his life as a ransom for many, sums up the reason why he came to die.

[7 : 25] Jesus came to be a substitute sacrifice. And it's there in that little word for. The little word for. To give his life as a ransom for many.

And that little word for in the original text means instead of, in place of, as a substitute. And the word ransom describes the purpose of his death.

In English, it's a word that's rarely used nowadays outside of a kidnapping case. The word, as Jesus uses it here, means to buy the freedom of a slave or a prisoner.

And the ransom in Jesus' time would be a huge sacrificial payment that matched the value or the debt of a slave or a prisoner in order to secure their freedom.

And Jesus came to pay that kind of ransom. The slavery to sin is a cosmic slavery, a cosmic evil.

[8 : 34] And so it requires a cosmic payment. And Jesus says here in verse 45, I've come to pay that cosmic payment that we could not possibly pay.

And in doing so, he will buy our freedom. And the price was his death on the cross. It's a rich verse. Verse 45.

And there are three things that flow out of that. Many more than three things. But at least three things here that I want to look at in this text. That his sacrifice was a willing sacrifice.

Secondly, it was a humble sacrifice. And thirdly, it motivates a life of grateful sacrifice on our body.

So first of all, a willing sacrifice. This issue of Jesus' sacrifice for our sin is one of those difficult concepts that our modern mind struggles to come to terms with.

And in fact, it's one of the reasons why people have rejected Christian faith. The concept of a substitutionary atonement, a penal substitutionary atonement on behalf of the Lord Jesus.

[9 : 49] You see, on the surface of it, the cross of Jesus appears to be one of those, another one of those ancient primitive stories of bloodthirsty gods worshipped by ancient primitive bloodthirsty societies.

That's what it just appears to be one of those cases. So is that what's happening here? Is the cross of Christ another one of those, a savage culture that's ruled by a cranky God demanding another blood sacrifice for his appeasement?

Is that what's happening here? That is, why is there a need for Jesus to die? If God is loving, I don't know if you've heard this before, if God is so loving, why doesn't he just say, I forgive everyone? If he's sovereign and he's loving, why doesn't he just say, I forgive everyone? And the answer is simple and yet profound. The answer is simple.

Jesus didn't have to die despite God's love. He had to die because of God's love. He had to die because all life-changing love is substitutionary sacrifice.

[11 : 14] I'll say it again. All life-changing love is substitutionary sacrifice. Now, loving someone who has it all together, if you ever meet such a person, there's probably four or five of them in the world, loving someone who has everything together is so easy.

And all the boyfriends lean across to their girlfriends, you're so easy. Romantic moment there. Loving someone, on the other hand, who's messed up, who has needs, who's in trouble, who's emotionally damaged, like all of you and me, is going to cost you.

It costs you. You can't love someone like that without it costing you. And the more messed up someone's life is, the more it costs you in order to love them.

That is, what happens in that moment, for you to genuinely love that person, a transfer has to take place. Some of their burden has to fall on you.

That's why so many people avoid those kinds of people. They see someone who's desperately needy, and they look at their watch and go, I just don't have time for that. I just don't have time for that.

[12 : 39] And we try to find a graceful exit. It can be exhausting being a friend to an emotionally damaged person. And the only way that they are ever going to be emotionally filled up is if someone loves them.

And the only way to love them so that they're filled up is to allow yourself to be drained. It's the only way it'll happen.

It's the only way that you will truly love a poor person is by becoming somewhat poorer yourself. It's the only way. A transfer has to take place.

The only way to truly love is through substitutionary sacrifice. Another example of this is parenting. When you have children, they are dependent on you.

They are so needy, and they don't grow out of their dependency on their own. They don't just kind of like, well, sit back and see what happens. It just doesn't happen. And the only way that children will grow beyond their dependency into self-sufficient adults is for parents to essentially abandon their own independence for 20, 30, 40, 50 years.

[14 : 18] That's the only way it happens. For a child to go from dependency to independency, a parent has to go from independency to dependency. The transfer has to take place.

You've got to lose some of your independence. See, when children are young, you have to read to them and read to them and read to them. Otherwise, they won't develop intellectually.

And for most cases, for most parents, the books that you read to them are boring, tedious. It's like, come on.

Get on with the plot here. And you also have to listen to them and listen to them and listen to them as they say all kinds of things that make no sense whatsoever.

Then there's the dressing and the feeding and the bathing, the teaching them to do things for themselves. And add to that, children need at least five affirmations to every criticism you bring to them.

[15 : 23] Unless a parent sacrifices much of their freedom and a good bit of their time, their children will not grow up healthy and equipped to function.

Either parents have to make the sacrifice or in the end, the child has to make the sacrifice. Either parents suffer in a temporary way and in a redemptive way or the children suffer tragically in a wasteful and a destructive life.

Either way, either way, someone has to give. Someone has to surrender. Someone has to sacrifice. All genuine life-changing love is substitutionary sacrifice. And anybody who has ever done anything that made a difference to us personally, whether it be a parent, a teacher, a mentor, a friend, a spouse, they have sacrificed in some way to love us in that way.

They stepped in and accept some of the hardship so that we would not get hit with it ourselves. And so why would God, who is more loving than we could ever be or imagine to be, why would he expect him to be any different?

[16 : 42] Why would we just expect God, just, don't worry about it. It makes no sense that this God, a God who comes into this world to deal with the ultimate evil, the ultimate sin, it makes no sense that he would not make a substitutionary sacrifice in order to love us.

Even as flawed as we are, we know that you cannot just turn a blind eye to evil. We know that. Deep down, we know justice is right.

We call for it all the time. Evil cannot be dealt with, it cannot be removed, and it cannot be forgiven just by simply saying, ah, forget about it.

It must be paid for, and dealing with it is costly. The debt must be removed. But the God of the Bible is so loving that he was willing to die in order to do it himself.

This God is radically different to all the ancient, primitive, mystical gods of old. The ancients understood the idea of the wrath of God, and they understood the idea of the justice of God.

[17 : 55] They understood the idea of debt and necessary punishment, but they had no concept at all, no idea, that this God would come and pay for it himself.

The cross is the self-substitution of God. Love that really changes things and redeems things is always a substitutionary sacrifice.

C.S. Lewis, in his classic book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, puts it like this, referring to ultimately the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross. He says, when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in the traitor's stead, the table would crack and death itself would start working backwards.

A willing victim. The Lord Jesus willingly went to the cross. Willingly sacrificed. But we also see here that it's a humble sacrifice.

Jesus told his disciples three times now the reason why he had come and the reason was to suffer and die. And Jesus' heart is on full display in Mark's gospel, what his passion is, what his heart is.

[19 : 16] And so too, the hearts of James and John in the very next verse, in verses 35 and 36. It says, then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him, teacher, they said, we want you to do whatever we ask.

It's a great way to start a conversation. Try it after church. I want you to do for me whatever I ask of you. Make that the first thing that comes out of your mouth and see how it goes.

Now add to this, remember, these guys are speaking to the one who they've just, Peter's just declared to be the son of God, the Christ. He's demonstrated that he's the God of the universe.

And so this is in effect a prayer. And so imagine starting your prayers with, dear God, I want you to do for me whatever I ask. I just don't think it's a great way.

You know, you start a conversation like that with me and I will say, whoa, hang on a bit. Let's go back and rethink. Go away and rephrase that sentence.

[20 : 24] And yet, what does Jesus do here? Verse 36. What do you want me to do for you? Then, here comes the reply in verse 37.

Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory. One at your right and one at your left in your glory. You see, what they're looking forward to here is Jesus on the way to Jerusalem.

He's going to beat up the Romans, kick everyone out. He's going to reign supreme enthroned in Jerusalem and can one of us be the prime minister and the other one chief of staff? You know, when the spotlight's on you, Jesus, is it okay if we just kind of bask in the glory in that moment? Sort of like, you know, photo bombing someone who's on TV kind of thing just so that you can wave to mum or something. It's that we get a bit of glory in that moment too. And the irony of their request is that Jesus' moment of greatest glory, the moment he most shows forth the glory of God's justice, where he most profoundly reveals the glory of God's love, is in fact on the cross just outside of Jerusalem.

In that moment when he is crucified, there will be someone on his left and there will be someone on his right, but they are both criminals.

[21 : 59] Jesus is saying to these two, you don't know what you're asking for. So let's keep reading. Verse 38, you don't know what you're asking, Jesus.

Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I'm baptized with? We can, they answered. Jesus said to them, oh, you will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with.

But to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they've been prepared. And when the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Now when Jesus refers to the cup here, he's talking about, he's using a metaphor from the Old Testament that pointed to the just judgment of God against evil. And what Jesus is saying here is when he talks about drinking this cup, he's saying, I am paying the ransom.

I'm going to drink the cup. I'm going to bridge that gap. I will take the just punishment of all human evil upon myself. I will take the overwhelming experience of being condemned so that you are free from all condemnations.

[23 : 12] and yet these disciples don't get it at all. They just simply just do not get it.

I can't tell you the number of times I've read this text and I'm going, what is wrong with these disciples? And yet I've discovered how unwise it is to ask that question.

how unwise it is to just simply think, what's wrong with these guys? What's wrong with them? Why can't they see? It's better for us to ask, what am I not getting about the cross of Christ right now? What am I not getting about its implications for my life right now? What am I missing about the magnitude of the cross?

You see, when we see how James and John respond and we realize how hard it is for anyone to take the magnitude of the cross and what it really means and to understand it, then I think we are starting to take steps towards the gift of humility.

[24 : 34] Despite their association with Jesus and despite their piety, these disciples saw greatness. They saw greatness according to the world's definition. They saw Jesus as the fast track to power and glory.

See, James and John had fallen to the world's idea that seeking the place of authority and personal power was right for them. They got a glimpse of glory, they got a glimpse of power, a glimpse of influence, and they wanted it.

They wanted the glory, they wanted the adulation, they wanted the power and their hearts are on full display here. As the Puritans used to say, what we dream about, what we hope for, is the true picture of what our hearts are like.

So where does your mind go in a moment of quietness? What is it that you dream for? Now the other disciples, I'm not picking on James and John, the other disciples became indignant with them. And it's not because they understood what Jesus was on about, but they were upset with James and John for getting there first. It's like they asked for left and right, it's like what's left for us, third and fourth and fifth.

[25 : 59] And so what Jesus does here is he takes the opportunity to teach them a lesson on substitutionary sacrifice, about their life of substitutionary sacrifice.

Take a look at verse 42 with me. Jesus called them together and said, you know that those who are regarded as rulers and of the Gentiles lord it over them and the high priest exercise authority over them?

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be a slave of all. For even the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

So Jesus is talking here about the difference between the way his disciples influence society and the way that every other culture and society thinks you influence society.

And he says, you're being sucked into your society's view of it, your culture's view it, and he says, I'm not so with you. This is not how you influence society.

[27 : 06] He says, the way our world seeks to influence society is not the way his disciples are to influence society. Jesus is, he's set the pattern.

He's not just our substitute and our redeemer, he is also our pay setter. So, the route to gaining influence for the Christian is not the taking of power.

Christian political parties are not the answer. Christian political parties are not the answer in changing society.

influence gained through power and control doesn't change hearts and therefore it doesn't change people and therefore it doesn't change society.

Jesus is calling here for a different approach. He's calling his disciples to be so sacrificially loving that the people around you who don't believe what you believe will soon be unable to imagine society without you.

[28 : 25] They so appreciate your contribution to society. I actually think that one of the worst indictments of the Christian church in this country is that there are large large parts of our society that do not see cannot see what contribution the church makes.

They can't see any good that we contribute, any value that we contribute. So the disciples of Jesus need to love and serve in such a way that those who disagree with us will trust us because they can

see that we're not actually trying to gain power and authority for ourselves but in fact doing it for the weak and vulnerable and for the flourishing of all of society.

What that means is that when people look up to you because of your love and because of your service you've actually gained influence.

When people look up to you because of your love and your service you've gained influence over them and it's an influence that they give you rather than influence that you take from them and frankly well over a thousand years of Christendom in the western world should have told us that. Just because the government agrees with Christian values doesn't mean that hearts get changed at all. See this is what Jesus has done.

[30 : 10] How did Jesus respond to his enemies? He didn't call down legions of angels to fight them. He died for their sins. As he was dying he prayed for them.

That's what Jesus did. He didn't come to be served but to serve. He didn't come to grasp for power in order to influence.

He came and gave it up in order to influence and what an influence he's had for two thousand years. If at the very heart of your world view is a man who is God, dying for his enemies as it is the world view of this church, then the way you're going to influence in society is through service rather than through power and control.

That is we need to look beyond ourselves and we need to look to Jesus. What Jesus has done for us drives us out in grateful sacrifice ourselves. If Jesus is our substitutionary sacrifice, if he has paid for our sins, if he has proved to our insecure, skittish little hearts, that we are worth everything to him, then we have everything we need in him.

It's all a gift to us by his grace. We don't do things in order to connect to God or to feel better about ourselves. If we really understand the cross, we are blasted out into this world in joyful humility.

[31 : 56] You see, in Jesus, you don't need to help people, you want to help people to resemble the one who has done all this for us.

So this is the logic of this passage, it's really simple. If the one who created both the supernova and the superfly, if there is a superfly, firefly, and holds everything together, including all the bugs, by the power of his word, according to Colossians chapter 1, if he became our servant, became our table waiter, how dare we do anything less than that with others.

Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf, a German nobleman, he was born into great power and privilege in 1700. He's one of the founders of the Moravian Church, and over the years, he spent his enormous wealth down to practically zero, meeting needs, everywhere, people's needs everywhere.

He literally poured his life out for the sake of others. Why? He mentions one key crucial thing in his life.

It would have been numbers, but this is the one thing. As a 19-year-old, he was sent by his parents to visit the capital cities of Europe to complete his education.

[33 : 40] One day, he was standing in front of a portrait of the crucified Lord Jesus with a crown of thorns on his head in an art gallery in Dusseldorf.

He stood there transfixed by the image of the crucified Christ. He said that this image of the servant king, king, so moved him, and especially what the artist had written as an inscription at the bottom of the portrait.

He wrote this, all this I did for thee, what dost thou for me? That inscription and that image of the servant king changed Zinzendorf's life at 19 years of age and he spent the rest of his life pouring it out for people.

Has it changed you?