

## Gospel Shaped Living: Set Free, to Serve!

Mark 10:35-45

**Introduction:** When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up? We just had our last WOL Olympian meeting this week. I asked our Olympian parents to help me by asking their kids that question. Sometimes it may be that kids want to follow the example of one of their parents, or someone that they admire, or something they like. Here are the few of the answers I got... all boys from two families. From one family (the dad serves in Law Enforcement): Andrew, “maybe” a mechanic, Avery, an ambulance driver and EMT, and Kameron, a policeman! The four boys from another family responded: Eric age 11 has the most developed plan, he says that he would like to be a soldier and work on military vehicles. Then he'd like to be a diesel mechanic or a welder. Christian (9) says that he'd like to be a mechanic and also an artist as a hobby. Matthew (7) would like to be a home builder when he grows up because he really likes to build forts now. David (5) would like to be a digger so he can dig up anything that he'd like, but mostly worms! I didn't get any answers from girls, so I checked the answers of a couple on YouTube. One, maybe 10, said she wanted to be a Doctor. When asked why, she said, “Duh, everybody knows doctors make more money than like anybody in the WORLD!” Another girl, maybe 4 years old, was asked what she thought about salary, she answered, “I don't like celery, I like carrots and corn!” A “little miss” communication!

I am thankful that our WOL Olympian Kids are being raised in the way of the Lord! (We trust they'll keep up doing quiet times this summer!). God loves every one of them, and He has a plan for each of their lives. Whatever our occupation or profession, believers in Christ are called to follow Jesus' example of willing service. We'll look in some broad strokes at this passage, leading to v.45, one of the key verses in this gospel, in preparation for the Lord's Table.

**Context:** Jesus had just predicted, for the third time, his betrayal, torture, death and resurrection which would soon occur in Jerusalem.

**The *Maine*\* Idea:** As we follow Jesus' example of selfless service, we are lifted up in the eyes of God.

**I. The World's view of greatness:** Can a person really consider others as more important than himself (35-40)?

<sup>35</sup> *And 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."* <sup>36</sup> *And he said to*

*them, "What do you want me to do for you?" <sup>37</sup> And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." <sup>38</sup> Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" <sup>39</sup> And they said to him, "We are able." And 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, <sup>40</sup> 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."*

Selfish ambition of the disciples. This response by James and John is even more amazing in light of the context. Clearly, they were not “hearing” what Jesus was saying about His suffering and death, much less His resurrection, which was about to happen in Jerusalem. Rather than striving for understanding this teaching which Jesus has been repeating during this journey to Jerusalem, they jump ahead in their thinking to the coming messianic kingdom. If Jesus is going to establish His kingdom on earth, he will need a few good men at his side! James and John were obvious choices, right? They thought so! After all, they had been with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. They had been privy to some teaching for which most of the twelve weren’t present (yes, Peter was always there, but that guy was always putting his foot in his mouth!). So, these two brothers decided to get their names in the mix, before someone else beat them to it! Their approach to “asking” Jesus here is almost humorous, I’m referring to the “request before the request.” Almost like a child would ask a parent, thinking they can lay the groundwork so they can’t get a “no” answer: “*We want you to do whatever we ask... say yes, then we’ll tell you what it is!*” Did your kids ever try that on you? Did you try it on your parents? How did that work out!?

Rather than rebuking these two, especially in light of the teaching about humility and serving that He has already been giving, but also in light of His teaching in the near context about what was coming in Jerusalem, Jesus asks James and John if they are able to drink the cup He will drink, and baptized with the baptism with which He is baptized. Obviously, this is a rhetorical question, and the assumed answer is “of course not!” Jesus is clearly talking about His coming passion, His suffering and death. He is not only referring to being mistreated, tortured, and killed by men, but also alluding to being the substitute for us who would drink the cup of the wrath of God. Later in this gospel, as Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples, we read in Mark 14:33-36,

*<sup>33</sup> And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. <sup>34</sup> And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even*

*to death. Remain here and watch." <sup>35</sup> And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. <sup>36</sup> And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."*

Of what cup was Jesus speaking? The cup of suffering is cup of the wrath of God! God is holy and He must punish sin. Jesus willingly took that cup, the One who was without sin was made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. He is about make the ultimate act of service and sacrifice. He has repeatedly told the disciples what was going to happen (10:32-34; cf. 9:31; 8:31). And instead of pondering Christ's example of selflessness, these men are jockeying for positions 2 and 3 in His kingdom! Rather than directly rebuking the disciples, Jesus asks them a question which is designed to provoke self-examination and a reality check: Are you able to drink the cup, and receive the baptism that I will receive? The disciples' answer reveals their still dull hearts...

The clueless presumption of James and John – "Yes, we can!" They had no understanding of what Jesus would suffer, and so their confident affirmation was pure presumption. I can't imagine that the disciples got this *totally* turned around, that they were thinking of the "cup" and the "baptism" in terms of kingdom blessing and initiation. But clearly, they had no understanding of what Jesus would soon endure. We are able, you can count on us Lord!

Believers and the suffering of Christ . If Jesus' question was rhetorical and the expected response was "no," why does Jesus answer as He does? Why does He agree that they will indeed share in drinking the cup and experiencing the baptism? Jesus has been teaching that the cost of following Him will include suffering and self-denial. He has said that a disciple must be willing to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Him. For James, martyrdom, for John exile.

*<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you (I Pet 4:12-14).*

Believers do, in a sense, share in Christ's suffering. The world is at enmity with God, and just as Jesus was rejected by the world, the world hates those who follow Him. That enmity, that conflict and hatred, gives occasion for us to share, in a limited way, in the suffering Christ endured. Part of my devotional reading

this morning was from the last letter written by Paul, a prisoner, shortly before his death at the hands of Nero, he wrote to Timothy,

*<sup>8</sup> Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! <sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. <sup>11</sup> The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; <sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself... (2 Tim 2:8-13).*

In Christ we have a new life, we are part of a new creation, our citizenship is in heaven. Even so, for a time, He has left us on assignment in a fallen world. So, as the world hated Him so it will hate us. The huge difference is that for us, the wrath of God is averted, because of Christ's atoning sacrifice. That is mercy! Jesus came as the promised "Servant," the *Suffering* Servant. As we follow Jesus' example of selfless service, we are lifted up in the eyes of God.

## **II. Greatness redefined:** Exaltation through humility and service (41-44).

*<sup>41</sup> And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. <sup>42</sup> And 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. <sup>43</sup> But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all... (cf. 10:31).*

The indignation of the ten. I don't get the impression from the text that this is "righteous indignation" on the part of the ten. They are probably angry that these guys stepped ahead of them in the line! Peter may have been thinking, "What about me, I was there on the mountain too!" Jesus is contrasting the prideful, self-aggrandizing leadership of the world, with the servant-leadership that reflects His kingdom. The "reversal-theology" He had taught had not yet taken hold (31)!

*"But it shall not be so among you..."* The kind of leadership that exists in the world is contrary to what God has in mind for His disciples. We are to think like Jesus, as Paul told the Philippians, *"Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus..."* He took the form of a servant. He willingly laid down his life for our sake.

The "greatness" of service in the eyes of God – In the upper room Jesus gave a simple but powerful illustration of humbly serving one another. It was

appropriate for a host to have a servant at least bring water, if not actually wash, the feet of his guests. Here they were visiting Jerusalem for the feast, the room was ready, the preparations made, but no one offered water for the dusty feet of the group. And then Jesus, the one they called “Lord and Master” stooped down and washed the feet of his disciples. Jesus said *as I have done for you, so you should do for one another*. He was not giving an ordinance, but an illustration. As we follow Jesus’ example of selfless service, we are lifted up in the eyes of God.

**III. How far would Jesus go?** All the way to Calvary, to pay a price that we could not pay (45).

*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

“For even the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve...” That is, follow His example! Jesus is saying listen, look and learn, you call me Messiah and Lord, and you are right about that. But I am not here to be served, but to serve, even to the point of death on the cross. For even the “*Son of man*”—the Rescuer for whom you have been waiting, the Savior spoken of by the prophets, the promised Son of David, even I have come to serve. If the King is a *Servant*-King, should not you all be *servant*-followers? Remember the scene in the upper room, as Jesus took a towel, and stooped down to wash the feet of His disciples. The humility of that moment! But even that was only a prelude, a glimmer, of the humiliation that He would experience in his passion, and ultimately His crucifixion. The words of Paul to the Philippians speak to the point Jesus is making here...

*<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, <sup>8</sup> he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father... (Philippians 2:5-11).*

Consider who He is, think of what He did! How should we respond? Free, to serve.

“...not to be served, but to serve...” The verb is repeated, Jesus didn’t come to be served (passive voice) but to serve (active voice). The verb is *diakoneo*, “one

who waits at table.” The idea is humbly serving another. It doesn’t imply thinking badly of yourself, but rather putting others first, doing what is best for them.

“...and to give His life as a ransom for many...” The English word “ransom” for me connotes a very specific idea: paying a price to free a hostage. The use of this Greek word in the ancient world was different, it commonly to refer to the price paid to “manumit,” or set free, a slave. That is the idea here, “*payment of a redemption price,*” typically to set free a slave. If the Son therefore shall make you free, you are free indeed! The price for our redemption was the life of the Son.

The question of the meaning of “many” here is not the main point. Jesus was not entering into the limited atonement debate, “many” or “all” (cf. I Tim 2:6)? The argument is concerning the One who is given to set free the many, “the one and the many.” He gave His life as a ransom, a redemption price, for many. The preposition *anti* has the idea “*in place of.*” So, we see the idea of substitution. Jesus died to offer salvation to all, and to purchase salvation for those who will believe. It seems certain that Jesus expected the disciples, and Mark expects us, to remember (the passage I quoted last week from the prophet) Isaiah, 53:4-6...

*<sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

*He gave His life as a ransom for many.* That is the extent of His love: *while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* Jesus laid down His life for His friends.

**What is God saying to me in this passage?** As we follow Jesus’ example of selfless service, we are lifted up in the eyes of God.

**What would God have me to do response to this passage?** Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He paid a price He did not owe, to pay a debt we could not pay. As Paul told the Romans, “*The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord...*” (Rom 6:23). Have you trusted Christ? Have you received the gift that He is offering? If not, why not?

Now that you are grown up, what do you want to be? For those who have trusted Christ, remember that we are called to follow His example of service. How do you know if you have the attitude of a servant? Ask yourself (or, better yet, ask your spouse) how do you react when someone treats you like one? Think of what

Jesus did for us. Are you willing to humble yourself and follow Him? How can you serve the Lord, by serving someone else in His name this week?

The Lord's Supper is not just a nice little ceremony we do each month. It is an opportunity to reflect, to remember what He did, and to worship Him. As we do, by His grace, through His Spirit, we will be motivated to follow Him! AMEN.