



BUT TO SERVE

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Let's take a walk together this morning. Without even leaving your seat, we'll join Jesus and His disciples as they climb the road to Jerusalem for an annual feast. We'll listen in to their conversations. We'll observe what motivates them. And maybe... we'll learn a great truth and be forever changed. It can happen today!

We'll walk through Mark 10:32-45.

Setting the Scene

³² They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful.

Mark set the scene for us: Jesus led His followers toward Jerusalem for the annual Passover feast, commemorating their ancestors' Exodus from Egypt and four centuries of slavery under the Egyptian whip. Jesus was resolute in His journey, though He knew what evil treatment was waiting for Him.

Anticipating their destination, two groups followed Jesus to the festival: His disciples, who were in awe of Him—what manner of Man He was, how He marched confidently into the hornet's nest—and the rest of the attending crowd, who followed more tenuously, fearful of what was to come.

A Dreadful Revelation

And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, ³³ saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again."

Jesus confided many details of His life and ministry to the Twelve He had chosen. On this occasion, He reminded them (as He had told them before, more than once) what He expected to encounter: condemnation by the Jewish religious leaders, mockery and brutality at the hands

of the political power brokers. This would lead, unquestionably, to His death, and unexpectedly, to His resurrection.

Jewish men, like His disciples, were very familiar with the theme of resurrection—the bodily return of the dead to life. It was however, a promise reserved for all the righteous, both of Jews and non-Jews, at the “last day” (as when Martha acknowledged that her brother, Lazarus, would surely rise *“in the resurrection on the last day.”*) But the suggestion that one Man, Jesus alone, (instead of everyone together) would rise from the dead *in advance* of that Day, simply did not compute, no matter how many times Jesus predicted it. They had no reasonable place to file such words; they only confused them.

Do Us a Favor

As if to show how oblivious the disciples were to Jesus’ announcement of an event the world had never before witnessed, nor suspected—His unique resurrection—the Sons of Thunder, James and John, asked Jesus for a favor, shifting the subject away from His dread to their own aspirations.

³⁵ *James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.”* ³⁶ *And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?”* ³⁷ *They said to Him, “Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.”* ³⁸ *But 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?”* ³⁹ *They said to Him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized.”* ⁴⁰ *But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”*

James and John really didn’t know what they were asking. Oh, they knew what they wanted, but they still had no clue about the nature—the upside-down nature—of the realm of which Jesus was King.

Jesus graciously listened to their ambition, and hinted at the heavy price of such closeness to Him, but, in the end, simply explained that what they asked was outside of His authority to grant.

“It is for those for whom it has been prepared.” Isn’t that fascinating?!? In a few days, at the Last Supper, Jesus would tell them, *“I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am you may be also.”* Think of this for a moment: Your destiny is (right now) being *prepared in advance*. It is not “catch as catch can”; it is intentionally and thoughtfully prepared. And it is prepared just FOR YOU, suited appropriately for YOU.

What's more, remembering the upside-down nature of Christ's Kingdom, your destiny in Christ is *"exceedingly abundantly above and beyond all that you can ask or imagine; for the last will be first and the first will be last."*

Posture, Not Position

⁴¹ *Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John.* ⁴² *Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them.* ⁴³ *But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant;* ⁴⁴ *and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.* ⁴⁵ *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

Christ's Kingdom is upside-down, from bottom to top. It's not like the world that we know, where rulers act like lords, corrupted by the power they have been given by the people.

Christ, the King, is a Servant, and His servants are kings and priests.

In this Kingdom, we have a lot of *unlearning* to do, in order to mature as citizens of Heaven. Unless we clearly understand the concept of leading by serving, and commit ourselves to practice it, we will surely slip back into the natural patterns of power and control through fear and intimidation. It's not like that in God's House.

Ambition is not the problem; the question surrounds the means used to achieve it. Will we rely on our own wit or the wisdom of God? Will we depend on threatening tactics, or a towel and basin? Will we lord it over them, or love them over to us?

If you wish to be great or to be first, fine, but know this: Whatever you want to be, first requires a *process* of becoming. And there are no shortcuts. No one is born mature. Maturity is a demanding development, particularly in the area of natural pride.

"Even though Jesus was God's Son, He learned obedience from the things He suffered." (Hebrews 5:8) That's also the way we learn it; that is, learn to practice it.

"Even the Son of Man..." How much more you and I? You must take (and pass) this class, if you hope to graduate.

"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." It's not that He doesn't *deserve* to be served; He just doesn't *demand* it. Not then, not now.

But those who get this, and serve the Lord Jesus without His insistence, without being forced by threats or shame, are the ones He chooses to be with Him... forever. They become His servant-leaders.

Sharing Life and Ministry

Oh, one more thing... The service that Jesus gave was to *“give His life a ransom for many.”*

He looked beyond our faults, and saw our need, and served that, with His whole heart and life. One life for many. The Just One for the unjust many.

A *ransom* is a price paid for another person, but it specifically addresses the destiny of that person. Ransom is not a purchase price; it is an emancipation price. It is given to set free a captive or a slave.

We know that Jesus did that for us, in a very concrete way. What we are slower to pick up on is that He also gave us an example to follow. While we cannot ransom others in the same (eternal) way that Jesus did, we can do something similar—something in the same vein, something short-term that both releases others *and* points them to Jesus (whom we have imitated by our service).

Paul was a good example of this, and a faithful teacher of this kind of “service of ransom.” He said, *“I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for His body, the Church.”* (Colossians 1:24)

And again, *“Even to have such lawsuits with one another is a defeat for you. Why not just accept the injustice and leave it at that? Why not let yourselves be cheated? ⁸ Instead, you yourselves are the ones who do wrong and cheat even your fellow believers.”* (1 Corinthians 6:7-8)

And still again, *“I beg you to live lives worthy of your high calling. Accept life with humility and patience, making allowances for each other because you love each other. Make it your aim to be at one in the Spirit, and you will inevitably be at peace with one another.”* (Ephesians 4:1-6; Phillips)

But the clearest example was Jesus, as recalled by an eyewitness, Peter, who was writing to persecuted believers about how to manage suffering: *“Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you. For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in His steps.”* (1 Peter 2:20-21)

The thing that pleases God is not our suffering (He gets no delight in that!), but the way we handle it. When we suffer (unjustly) after doing a right thing, and we take it patiently, like Jesus did, it demonstrates our trust in the Father's orchestration of events and control of their outcome. That is how we "follow in Jesus' steps."

To clarify, Peter added, *"He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when He was insulted, nor threaten revenge when He suffered. He left His case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly."* (1 Peter 2:22-23)

And that's how we should do it, too. But, of course, we don't many times. So, Jesus went the last mile of the way for us:

"He personally carried our sins in His body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right" (1 Peter 2:24), with the result that we should be "deadened" to temptations (our faith and will unbroken), and even to the sins of others against us.

And then, *"By His wounds you are healed."* What an outcome of His faithfulness! What a fruit of our faith! Jesus was willing to bear our sins, our sicknesses, our banishment, and our death, so that we might find healing. His wounds released healing balm for us. Yet, there are so many who remain broken and captive today. Who will set them free?

At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus cried, "Come out!" and the man who had been dead stumbled out of the grave, still wrapped in grave clothes. Jesus turned to the stunned onlookers, and said, *"You unbind him and set him free."*

Having reflected today on what Jesus did for you and I, as a gift *and* as an example, can you begin to conceive the possibility that your wounds (the ways you might suffer when others sin against you) could release deliverance and healing in someone else (when you suffer injustice patiently and faithfully and lovingly)?

Could this be why Jesus taught us to *"forgive those who sin against us"*?