“FOR EVEN THE SON OF MAN”

Mark 10:32–52

Key Verse: 10:45

“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.”

 In the New Testament each of the four Gospels has a major emphasis about Jesus. Matthew says that Jesus is our King. Luke says that Jesus is the light to all the people of the world. John says that Jesus is God. But Mark says that Jesus is a Servant. It’s a radical, revolutionary idea, and it reveals the main characteristic of Christianity. Mark’s theme climaxes in today’s passage.

Mark’s other major theme is how Jesus trained his disciples. In part one, 1:14–6:6, Jesus ministers in Galilee and calls his disciples to share life together. In part two, 6:6–8:21, he goes to areas outside Galilee and gives his disciples fieldwork training. In part three, 8:22–10:52, he concentrates on helping his disciples know who he really is and what he really came to do.

And part three of Mark’s Gospel begins and ends with Jesus healing a blind man (8:22–26; 10:46–52). The two healings really happened, but they also serve as a metaphor for Jesus’ efforts to help his disciples. Even with repeated teachings their spiritual eyes remain closed. In today’s passage Jesus’ example shows what it means to have our spiritual eyes opened. In contrast, the disciples show us the danger of being spiritually blind. Finally, we learn from Bartimaeus how our eyes can really be opened. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living word today.

Look at verse 32a. “They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid.” It’s a fascinating description. They’re now about ten miles from Jerusalem, and from this point on, the road ahead is going to be all uphill. Jesus has already been predicting that the religious leaders would reject him, and that he would suffer and die. But despite the ominous hardships ahead, Jesus here is leading the way. He’s so clear about what he’s doing. When they see his spirit and determination, the disciples are astonished. They’re wondering how he could be so courageous and so clear. And those following are afraid of the conflict with the contentious religious leaders that seems sure to come. Jesus’ commitment to accomplish his mission was especially moving to the author Mark, who had deserted Paul and Barnabas in their ministry (cf. Ac12:25; 13:5,13; 16:37,38).

Look at verse 32b. “Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.” This is now the third time Jesus predicts his upcoming suffering, death and resurrection. Read verses 33,34. This time Jesus gets the most specific. For the first time he mentions that he would be handed over to the Gentiles, meaning the Romans. For the first time he mentions the mocking, spitting and flogging. It implied crucifixion, for this is how the Romans executed people. It was all pretty horrible, but Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them about it again, for the third time. Each time he predicted these things, the disciples failed to understand; in fact, they really didn’t like it. It went against what they wanted to happen. But Jesus kept telling them. Why the repetition? It’s because his suffering, death and resurrection are the gospel, the good news for us all. Through his suffering, death and resurrection we can be saved and have a living hope in God’s kingdom. The disciples didn’t like it but Jesus kept talking about it. He was predicting these things before they happened. It was to help the disciples not lose faith in him when they did happen. It was to help them realize that in fact, his suffering, death and resurrection were the fulfillment of the Scriptures. They were all part of God’s plan. Even the mocking, spitting and flogging were predicted by the Old Testament prophets (Ps22:6–8; Isa50:6). God was in control of it all, accomplishing his own good purposes.

So how did the disciples respond this time? Read verse 35. It seems a bit odd for these two to make a personal request of Jesus now, when he’s just finished mentioning the painful things about to happen to him. What does Jesus say to them? Read verse 36. It shows his patience, as well as his servant’s heart. And what is their request? Read verse 37. Wow! Jesus and his disciples are on completely different planes. While he’s only thinking about accomplishing God’s will, they’re only thinking about personal glory. How ridiculous they sound! And yet, how real it is. There *are* some *good* things about their request. They believe that no matter what, Jesus *will* enter his glory. They also believe that Jesus cares about them and will listen to whatever they ask. But what they’re asking is nothing but selfish ambition. The Bible says that selfish ambition is one of the acts of the sinful nature (Gal5:19­–21). James and John, along with Peter, were already among Jesus’ top three disciples. But Peter seemed to be number one, and James and John evidently had always been looking for the chance to push him out. Even after three and a half years of life together, they were not really friends. They were seeking personal glory through Jesus. It was foolish, because Jesus was on a mission to suffer and die. We may be quick to condemn them, but honestly we’re not much different. When given the chance, most people opt for personal glory.

After pouring himself into mentoring these men, it must have been a discouraging moment for Jesus. Their selfishness exposed like this must have pained his heart. But how did Jesus respond to their request? Read verse 38. Jesus wants to help them see that his glory comes only after much suffering. Here, “the cup” and “the baptism” refer to drinking the cup of God’s wrath and undergoing the baptism into suffering and death. In other words, those who want to share in Jesus’ glory first need to share in his sufferings (Ro8:17b). Most people have no idea how intense these sufferings can be.

How do James and John reply to Jesus? Look at verse 39a. “‘We can,’ they answered.” This might indicate their love for Jesus and willingness to suffer anything for him. But more realistically, it shows how naïve they are. It shows that they’ll say anything just to get what they want. How does Jesus respond? Read verse 39b,40. James and John would someday drink the same cup of Jesus and undergo the same baptism. James would be beheaded as the first martyr among the Twelve. John, when he was nearly 90 years old, would have his skin peeled back and his body dipped in hot oil, in an effort to force him to deny his faith in Jesus. But despite their sufferings that awaited them for following him, Jesus still couldn’t promise them the top positions in his kingdom. Read verse 40 again. Basically, he’s teaching them about God’s sovereignty. God’s special blessings and the glory and honor he bestows are under his sovereign grace. So many people get jealous and compete with one another. But Jesus’ words here help us solve this problem from our hearts. To be set free from competition and jealousy we need to deeply accept God’s sovereignty.

Look at verse 41. They’d been arguing about which of them would be the greatest ever since Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain to see his transfiguration (9:33,34). Now when they hear about James and John making this move, the others become furious. They seem almost ready to break out into a fistfight. They’re so angry with James and John but also partly with themselves, thinking they were not smart enough to do what James and John did.

In this situation what did Jesus do? Look at verse 42. First he calls them all together. He refuses to let this conflict divide them. He also draws their attention to an example they can all relate to. The expression “rulers of the Gentiles” mainly refers to the officials in the Roman empire, beginning with Caesar, and including governors, prefects, consuls and even army officers. The behavior of these men was well-known even among the Jews. Those men exercised their authority sternly over their colonial subjects. Those in power today still love to lord it over those under them. People love to exercise whatever little authority they may have. Even a manager at McDonald’s loves to exercise absolute authority over the minimum wage earners selling hamburgers and French fries as if it were the most important position in the world. Jesus is saying indirectly here that all the disciples also had this desire hidden in their hearts. And he’s helping them to see how ugly it is. Jesus wants them to see a much more noble way.

Read verses 43,44. Jesus had taught this before (9:35). In his kingdom, greatness is measured not by title and position but by humility and service. It’s the exact opposite of the worldly way. The more humiliating and focused on others, the higher the spiritual greatness. Obviously there’s no stampede among the disciples to become servant or slave of all. In fact, they all had a strong aversion to it. They all were looking out for themselves. But Jesus says being a servant or slave of all is the way to true glory. It goes against the grain of our sinful nature and worldly values. But it is God’s principle and God’s truth. Jesus didn’t just teach this as an abstract theory; he taught it from his own life example.

Read verse 45. The verse begins, “For even the Son of Man.” Jesus, the Son of Man, is actually the sinless and one and only Son of God. He shared glory with the Father before the world began (Jn17:5). But when he came to this world, he didn’t come with any expectations to be served. Instead, he came to serve. How did Jesus serve? In this Gospel Mark has been describing it. It might be that originally Mark didn’t like serving. But after repenting and receiving Jesus’ grace, Mark was most moved by Jesus’ life of serving. Jesus served people from top to bottom. He touched a man with leprosy, to show him love. He called a paralyzed man “son,” to show him love. He welcomed a tax collector Levi to be one of his Twelve disciples, to show him love. He healed sick people late into the night, and got up early while it was still dark to pray, out of his great love. He sacrificed a large herd of pigs for a troublesome demon-possessed man’s healing, because he loved him. He healed a nameless woman with bleeding at the same time that he healed a synagogue ruler’s daughter, because of his love. He taught the Bible so much that he and his disciples often didn’t even have a chance to eat. Even when a crowd of hungry people interrupted his plans to get some rest, he fed them out of his great love. Even when the Pharisees were testing him, he welcomed little children, and even a rich young ruler, out of his love. There was no one whom Jesus considered too low to be served by him, no one unworthy of his love, including a centurion’s servant, the deaf, mute and blind. In the midst of serving all these people, Jesus was always serving his disciples with extra teaching and extra love. No matter the time, place or his personal situation, Jesus was always ready to serve. His entire life was focused on serving, on helping people know his grace of forgiveness and the hope of God’s kingdom. Jesus is indisputably the greatest in God’s kingdom, and he is the greatest servant of all. Currently the disciples are blind to see it. But following him means learning to serve humbly like him and becoming great in the way he is great.

Read verse 45 again. Jesus was even ready to give his life as a ransom for many. He’d been predicting his death; this is the first time he actually explains its meaning. His death would be a ransom sacrifice for our sins. We may think we’re doing fine. But our sins put us in bondage to the devil. Our sins make us helpless, with no way out. Our sins leave us in torment. No amount of money, no human ability, can release us from our sins. But Jesus gave his own life as the ransom price to set us free. Because of our sins we don’t deserve to be ransomed, but Jesus loves us anyway. He came to this world to rescue us. Though he had to go through so much suffering to do it, he had no complaints. We all need to experience the grace of Jesus that ransoms us from our sins.

What’s more, Jesus is calling all of us to share in his life’s spiritual purpose. Of course, we can’t die on behalf of others; only Jesus could do that, once for all (Heb9:12). But Jesus is calling us here in verse 45 to follow his example. He’s calling us to live for him and for his gospel (8:35; 10:29). He’s calling us to be willing to give our lives to ransom others and bring them back to God’s kingdom. It’s the best, most meaningful life there is. In fact, in history, wherever there was someone willing to suffer and give their lives for Jesus and for the gospel, many other people were saved. It was true of Apostle Paul, and of so many others. So what are we living for? Are we on a path of pursuing personal glory at any cost, even at the cost of others? Or have we found the life purpose that gives our lives true greatness and true meaning?

In verses 46–52 Jesus encounters Bartimaeus, the blind man from Jericho. He’s an example of the persistent faith that’s required in prayer. He’s also an example of the attitude we need in prayer, asking only for Jesus’ mercy, humbly. And he’s a stark contrast to the disciples. Jesus asks him the same question he asked James and John, “What do you want me to do for you?” But instead of asking for something silly, something that would actually bring pain and misery into his life, he asked for what he really needed—his sight. And when he received his sight, he followed Jesus along the road. So often we’re totally blind spiritually. Like Bartimaeus, we need to cry out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” “Open my spiritual eyes, Lord! Help me follow you, not blindly follow my sinful nature.”

Today we saw Jesus’ efforts to help his disciples open their spiritual eyes. We saw Jesus as the best example of someone whose spiritual eyes are opened: he was very clear about God’s will for him, ready to serve, ready to suffer, ready to give his life as a ransom for many. We also saw the disciples as an example of the danger of being spiritually blind. Though they had Jesus right there with them, they had personal glory on their minds and were about to miss out on the life God was calling them to live. May God help us open our spiritual eyes to see how he’s calling us to live, to follow Jesus the Servant, and even be willing to give our lives to ransom others.