

A ransom for many

Please read Mark 10: 32-45, and pray; *“Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.” Amen.*

Last Sunday, we were considering the story which provides the main *turning point* in Mark’s gospel. This is the story outlining Peter’s clear and bold confession of who Jesus was and is – namely **the Christ of God**. (8:27-30). Furthermore, we also saw the reason why Jesus, who referred to himself as **the Son of Man**, came into the world. He came to suffer, die and rise again (8:31). As Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians, Christ came from glory, humbled himself and became a man (a son of man), and lived as a humble and obedient **servant** - even to the point of dying on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

We then saw the implications of these things for those who wanted to seriously follow him. Potential disciples were challenged by Jesus to deny themselves, take up their own cross and embark on a lifetime of following Christ and his teaching, whatever the personal cost. (8:34-38) It is *from this point* in the gospel narrative that Jesus began to look *toward Jerusalem* and the fulfilment of his earthly destiny.

You then move on in chapter 9 to the incredible story of the transfiguration of Jesus on the top of a high mountain. Three of his disciples witnessed this awesome event in which Jesus was transfigured and his “clothes became dazzling white” as God’s glory descended upon that sacred place. There is no doubt that the main purpose of this experience was to reveal the glory of God’s Son, and to help prepare him for his journey to Jerusalem and to the cross. Moses and Elijah appeared before Jesus to encourage him (9:4) at the outset of this final journey from which there would be no turning back. The three disciples who were with Jesus were told by God, **“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him.”** Peter was one of those disciples present on the mountain. He was instrumental in Mark writing this gospel, and he later wrote of the glorious personal impact the transfiguration had made upon his life and the life of *James and John* who were with him on that memorable day. **(read 2 Peter 1:16-18)**

So, we can see the purposeful progression in the gospel story;

- The revelation of the true identity of Jesus at this mid-point – that He is the Christ of God.
- The revelation of why he came – to suffer, die and rise again.
- The revelation of the calling of others to take up their crosses and be his disciples.
- The preparation for the cross through the transfiguration of Jesus.

And so, when we reach chapter 10, we now hear of the clear and determined aim of Jesus **to go up to Jerusalem**. This now occupies all his thinking and focus. This will dominate the remaining chapters of the story. We have Jesus’s third prediction of his death. Before we look briefly at this third prediction, notice verse 32, and the emphasis on Jesus’s **leadership** which will be the main theme of all that follows. Here Mark mentions Jesus’ leadership in terms of walking in the direction of his goal – Jerusalem. Later the story will fill out with his example and style of leadership, *that of a servant*.

They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. (v 32)

To be frank, the disciples did not fancy a trip to Jerusalem at that time. They knew that there might be trouble, opposition and dangers for Jesus and for them. It seems they were unnerved by Jesus’ firm resolve to go there. Nevertheless, they follow Jesus as he sets out to face all that lies ahead of him.

We ARE going up to Jerusalem (whether you like it or not)! (v 33) And why are they going? Here comes the third clear prediction from the lips of Jesus as to why they were heading to the capital. With his

third prediction, there is an even **fuller** description of **exactly** what awaits Jesus. Once again, he refers to himself as the Son of Man. He always did when referring to his humanity and suffering. (8:31, 9:12,31, 10:33, 45, 14:21, 41)

*“the Son of Man will be **betrayed** to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will **condemn him to death** and will **hand him over to the Gentiles**, who will **mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him**. Three days later **he will rise**.”*

This is not just an astonishing prediction by Jesus, but it is a detailed, precise and accurate prophecy from the heart of the Son of God. Look at the accuracy! Notice what Jesus already knows! Look at each one of the details of his prophecy;

- He will be betrayed – and he was betrayed. (Mark 14:10-11, 43-44)
- He will be condemned to death and handed over- and he was! (Mark 14: 61-65)
- He will be mocked, spat upon, flogged and then killed – and he was! (Mark 14:65, 15:16-20)
- He will rise. (Mark 16:6) He did indeed rise!

Bearing this in mind, with all the forthcoming horror, pain, distress and shame which Jesus spoke of, why only moments later did the brothers *James and John*, who had been with Jesus on the Mount of transfiguration, start to request personal favours from Jesus, favours to do with position, prominence and their personal elite status in the kingdom of God? They really hadn't taken in anything Jesus had taught about humble service on their journey so far (9:33-35) – even though when they were on the sacred mountain with him – God had told them to **listen to, and therefore learn from his Son**. They had not listened or learned. (10:15, 31)

They must have concluded that the march toward Jerusalem which Jesus was leading, was a march to victory and triumph over Roman oppression and opposition; the setting up of an earthly political kingdom where Messiah ruled from a throne of victory was now at hand. If this was the case, they wanted to get in their quick, with their applications for the best seats in the house (37), the prestigious ones on either side of the throne. Oh – how they failed to understand! They *still* did not understand, or want to understand how Jesus, the Son of Man, was the **Suffering Servant**. They did not grasp that the gateway to glory and exaltation would be through the bloody valley of suffering and death.

Jesus did know this. He knew that he would have to drink a most **bitter cup** – the cup of God's wrath against all evil and upon all sin. This cup would “not be taken” from him. (14:36) He knew he would have to undergo a baptism – Jesus would be overcome and plunged into a flood of suffering and pain resulting in his death. He knew he would be crushed for *our* iniquities, punished for *our* sins and our obsession with self-glorification. However, Jesus would drink this cup down to the last dregs. Why?

Because Jesus loves us, and fully understood and accepted that **he had come to serve, and to GIVE HIS LIFE as a ransom for many**. (10:45)

It is here at the end of this section of Mark 10, after teaching yet again about the absolute necessity of servant leadership and the nature of true greatness in the Kingdom, that Jesus shares with his disciples, (and with us) not only that he came to die, to give up his life for others, but how the giving up of his life *should be understood*. This is the high-water mark of this gospel. We have here, **in Jesus's own words**, what his death meant, what it achieved, why it was necessary! Jesus clearly states this;

My death, the giving up of my life, will provide a ransom for many! (see also 1 Timothy 2:5-6)

Jesus Christ came into this world to be a servant. That is what *he himself* states. To be even more precise, as the context of verse 45 reveals, he came to be the **suffering servant** as described in the great prophecy of Isaiah 53. He came to suffer for others, in the place of others, on behalf of others, as a substitute for others, as a ransom for others, for the salvation of others. His greatest act of service was his willing, humiliating, sacrificial death on the cross for “the many”. The giving up of his life will release and rescue “many” from the slavery sin and death, and the just punishment and wrath of God upon sin. The “ransom” price was his most precious and efficacious blood. As the apostle Peter pointed out in his letter, and would no doubt have pointed out to Mark who was his assistant;

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed (ransomed) from your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Later in the same letter, Peter wrote, once more echoing the words of Jesus and the prophet Isaiah;

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live to righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep gone astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:23-25)*

Dear friends, if you want to really understand the meaning of Jesus’s death and why we especially mark Good Friday, and what it means for those who put their trust in him, then you must grasp that his death was, to use his own words, “a ransom for many.” (10:45, 14:24) And if you want your understanding of that to be filled out further, then I strongly encourage you to slowly drink in the prophecy of Isaiah 53: (**Read Isaiah 53** and look out for the word “**many**” in verses 11 & 12).

Mark 10:45 (read it again) is really the high point of Mark’s gospel, because as Steve Wilmschurst in his book entitled “A ransom for many” explains, “this is the clearest, most magnificent expression anywhere in the Gospels of the meaning of Jesus’ death”. Jesus reveals why he is to die – and then the rest of the gospel story opens up all the details of the journey to Jerusalem and his death on the cross. It does not end there – for as Jesus prophesied – *on the third day he would rise*. The disciples also missed that vital bit of teaching. We see after Jesus’s death that they never, even for a second, anticipated his resurrection, even though he had specifically promised it! Everything Jesus faced, was spoken of in the law and the prophets and it *had to be fulfilled* – and it was fulfilled – down to the last detail. (Luke 24:44-47). God was sovereign over the timing and the fulfilment of his birth, his baptism and servant ministry, his suffering, his death and his resurrection!

In line with the plan of God, Jesus constantly referred to himself as the “Son of Man” (14 times in Mark). He was fulfilling Daniel’s “one like a son of man” prophecy (Daniel 7:13-14) just as he was fulfilling Isaiah’s Suffering Servant prophecy (Isaiah 53). This is what ultimately led to him being condemned and handed over to the Romans by the very people who should have recognised that he was the Messiah. Listen to **Mark 14: 61-65 which unlocks Daniel’s prophecy.**

In closing, ponder upon the questions Jesus asked James and John? They are addressed to us also. Some you can answer with only a “No”. Jesus expects a “No”. Others – it’s a “yes” or a “no” depending on whether you truly desire to follow Jesus, whose kingdom can only be accessed through humility.

Can you drink this cup? (No – only Jesus could) Can you undergo this baptism of suffering? (No – only Jesus could) Could you be a servant for Jesus? (yes or no) Will you be a humble servant of Christ? (yes or no). Are you willing to be the slave of all for his sake? (10:44) If your answer to the final 3 questions

is “yes”, and if you will seek to follow Jesus and his example of humility, **then Kingdom greatness and glory await you!** This is the promise and pledge of non-other than the Lord Jesus Christ. As we have seen today, *everything* he promises *always* comes to fruition! Thanks be to God! **Amen.**

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