

## Mark 10:32-45

Lent 4, March 19, 2023  
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*And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him,<sup>33</sup> saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.<sup>34</sup> And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."<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."<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.<sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

"He's like a dog with a bone." So the saying goes when describing a person that just keeps coming back to the same idea over and over and just won't quit. Dogs are like that—when they start gnawing on a bone they just won't quit, or when they want to play fetch, they just keep coming back again and again and again so they can keep playing. Kids can be like that too—if they make a noise that gets someone to laugh, then they just keep repeating it over and over. "Like a dog with a bone."

Jesus is like a dog with a bone too. The thing that Jesus WILL NOT BE DISTRACTED from, the thing He has that one-track mind about is the cross. You see, this is the third time in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus has predicted to His disciples what will happen to Him once He gets to Jerusalem, and this time He gives them far more detail than the other two times. Here, He speaks in depth about the suffering that He will face, the mocking and the spitting and the flogging and the death that He will face for us.

So, He shows that He has His eyes fixed there on the cross, and He does this in our text in order to bring the disciples to be like a dog with a bone, too—for the disciples to be Christians focused on the cross above everything else. Because, you see, they by nature have a different sort of bone that they are focusing on, and that's earthly glory. They're very ambitious for the wrong types of things. Christ's eyes are fixed on the cross, but their eyes are not. And the question that James and John asked reveals this. Not really a question, I guess, as much as a demand: **"Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."** There's a serious disconnect going on.

Jesus has just gotten done telling them how He's going to be tortured, and suffer, and die, and all they can ask is, "Jesus, can we have the best seats at the party?" Now, there's a chance that they're thinking about heaven when they ask this, but I doubt it. Knowing what we know about the disciples at this point and what they think about Jesus and His kingdom, they're almost certainly still thinking in

terms of some sort of earthly kingdom that Jesus is going to establish when He overthrows the Romans (as they assumed would happen), and they're concerned about what types of positions of power and authority that they're going to get in the new world order.

Either way, Jesus again shows that He's like a dog with a bone about the Cross. And He brings the disciples back to that point. He says to them, "**Are you able to drink the cup that I will drink?**" He's referring to the cup of suffering, just like when He prayed in the garden, "**Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.**" (Luke 22:42) When Jesus asks them if they're able to be baptized in the way He would be, He's, again, speaking of His suffering under the weight of sin. And He says all this to bring the disciples' eyes to be fixed on the cross. And He says this to bring your eyes to be fixed there too, because we get distracted from that pretty easily, don't we? We too are like a dog with a bone. . . *in terms of earthly glory*. We get distracted by the good things going on in our life as well as the hard things. We get distracted by worries that we might have, about what sufferings might come for following Jesus. We can get distracted by the fleeting pleasures of sin and by the never-ending flood of materialistic things to have and to do and to be and to see. We get distracted by all the things to complain about.

But Jesus is teaching you to be like a dog with a bone—to be a Christian with a one-track mind on the cross—to fix your eyes on His suffering, BOTH as your *ransom* AND as your *example*. You see, there's a bit of a debate among some circles of Christianity, and it's not a very good debate, because the answer from the Bible is really obvious. But the debate goes like this, some people will say, "Jesus died on the cross as an *example*, to show us how to love one another." Someone else will say, "No, Jesus died on the cross as a *ransom* for our sins." And the answer of course, is, "Yes." It's both.

Our text makes that clear. You see, after the disciples have their little argument, Jesus contrasts the way things are among the lords and rulers of this world with the way things ought to be among the disciples. He speaks about how if you want to be the first, you should be last, how if you want to be the greatest of all, you should be the servant. And then He gives Himself as an example. He says, "**For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.**"

And Jesus indeed is the *PRIME* example of this. He is the *HIGHEST* of Lords. The *King* of kings. And yet, He makes Himself the lowest of the low for you. So, He's the perfect example of how we ought to live, BUT notice something about this. Even in the very phrase where Jesus is using his suffering as an example for how we ought to serve one another, He also states what the purpose of His coming was. He says, "**The Son of Man came TO SERVE and to GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY.**" He doesn't say, "To give His life as an example for many." Jesus is an example, but He did not come for that purpose. *His* eyes are fixed on the cross. His eyes are fixed on the cross because that is where He would work your salvation. And that is why we fix our eyes on the cross to begin with as well and meditate on His suffering, for of primary importance, is that eyes fixed there, we see our salvation.

He is our ransom, Jesus says. A ransom is a price paid to set someone free. I remember a few years ago, there was this popular singer, Lady Gaga, a popular singer, whose French Bulldogs were stolen. And she paid like \$600,000 to the dognapper to get her dogs back. That's a ransom price. Well, what price would you pay to ransom someone close to you, not a dog, but maybe a child? You'd give everything you have. That's what God did. He gave ALL HE HAD. To ransom you from sin and death and hell, He gave His *only* Son.

This is why we fix our eyes on the sufferings of Jesus. In them we see His love. In them we see His grace and His forgiveness, even for us! See how He went up to Jerusalem, knowing everything that would happen to Him. Knowing all that the Jews and the Gentiles would do to him, He went straight into that shame and pain. He knew how they would betray Him, how they would beat Him in the head with sticks and mock Him. How they would spit in His face and shame Him. How they would hang him from a cross and kill him. How they would shear through his back with their wicked spiked whips. In this, we see Christ's love. In this we find His grace and forgiveness, we see His cup of woe and wrath that He drank down to the dregs for you and for me. We see this baptism with which He was baptized, as if drowned beneath the waves of the weight of our sins. Fix your eyes there, on His cross and contemplate it, keep coming back to it like a dog with a bone, because His death is life to you. His sufferings are healing to you. His sorrows fashion your joy. And His woe works *your* salvation.

I want you to think about the account of that rich young ruler who came to Jesus asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. He knew that God would be the one to give salvation, but he was concerned that he wouldn't find his name on the will. He knew there was something still missing, and he wanted to change that. And *by yourself*, there is something missing. But this is why Jesus came. To pay your ransom, to buy you with a price so high that it cannot be compared or counted. To heap upon you the glory of His own righteousness that you could never hope to deserve. And in Christ's cross, you find your life in the price that He paid for you, AND you also find your example here.

See, Jesus is only an example for you because He is first a ransom for you. And that order is important. Think of a car. What is a car? What is it for? Is it for driving or is it for charging your phone? Well, it does both! I charge my phone in the car basically every time I drive anywhere. But the order of those two things is pretty important, isn't it? If you tried to charge up your phone in your car without ever driving it, pretty soon you would run the car battery dead, and it wouldn't work for either thing anymore. It wouldn't charge anything, and it wouldn't start so that you could drive it.

It's the same with the suffering of Jesus. It is both your ransom and your example, but if you get the order of those two things wrong, it ceases to be either one. The cross loses its power if we turn it *first* into our example. If we look at Christ's sufferings *primarily* as an example of how to live, then it's nothing, because its power is that it is your salvation. Its power is that by it the Son of Man came to serve you and ransom you and save you. That's the engine that makes the whole thing go. That's what makes *you* go and gives *you* life. That's what gives you the power to follow Him anywhere, even knowing the suffering that you might face for fixing your eyes on His cross. And that's what gives you power to serve others.

You see, work righteousness, the idea that *by* emulating Jesus in your life you can ensure your place on God's will, it always leads to pride and selfishness. Work righteousness is one of those ideas of earthly glory that we by nature keep coming back to, like a dog with a bone. We're tempted to turn Jesus into just another law. Live like Jesus, be like Jesus. And when we do that, we inevitably end up comparing ourselves with one another, and looking down on one another. "Well, he's not as Christlike as I am. She doesn't serve me as much as I serve her." And we're always going to think that, because we always overvalue our own works and our own sacrifices and undervalue everyone else's.

James and John displayed this sinful attitude (that we all share) with the question that they asked. They were exalting themselves above the other disciples. And the other disciples then react

accordingly in the same sinful way as we would by getting indignant and offended, and the whole thing turns into an argument about who's the greatest.

They were acting like the world acts, like we so often act. How often do we argue because we think we are better, because someone has offended us. Think about being offended for a second. When we get offended over what someone has said or done, it's *often* because we think we're better than them. It's because we are insecure. We get offended because we think that whatever they said or did is because they think they're better than us, and the only reason that we would care that someone else thinks they're better than us is because we think we're actually better than they are! And that's where all of this sin and all of this pride builds and builds and it's the way we all want to live.

But Jesus teaches us here that because He has ransomed us, instead of seeking after our own glory, we can fix our eyes on the cross, where we are ransomed, where we are forgiven, and *thus* where we learn to serve one another. See, if *God* has stooped so low to serve you, then what greater honor can there be than for you to humble yourself as Your Lord did. If He has died for your brother or sister and thus honored them, what greater honor can there be than for you to serve the one that Christ died for. If He has given His life for you and served you and saved you and given you the glory of His kingdom, then what earthly glory can compare with that! We don't need to pursue our own glory or try to prove our own worthiness, for God has given us more than we could ever attain for ourselves. So, let the world have its lords and kings and glory, and let there be none among us.

Here, in this congregation, there is none before or after another. None greater or lesser than another. The things which the world uses to measure greatness and power and influence have no meaning here. Not how much money someone has, not how tall they stand, not how old or how young, not gender or race or position in society. None of it matters. Only Christ's love for you matters, and because He loves you, we ought to love one another in the same way. Someone who gives much in offerings should not think that their voice should carry more weight than one who gives little. The one who is a founding member should not consider his or her many years as a matter of prestige over some brother or sister who is newly joined. Nor should the one who is young think that their youth or fresh ideas are more important than those of the elderly. If you would be great here, Jesus says, then serve. If you would be first here, then be last.

That's what Jesus' suffering shows you, that's the example it sets. So, follow Him. Because He has ransomed you. Don't be insecure about your standing in the eyes of the world, find your security in Him, because He has saved you! Be concerned with your standing in the eyes of God, and know this, that in His eyes you *have* been exalted to the glory of eternal life. So don't get distracted by this life but fix your eyes on the sufferings of Jesus. Be like a dog with a bone, be a Christian with the cross always on your mind. For of primary importance, it is the ransom for you. Because of Christ's cross, our names have been written in God's book of life, and there's no doubt about it. Knowing that, may Jesus' suffering and service to you now also be the example for you. May God grant each of us the willingness to serve one another, just as Christ served us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

***"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.