

Meet Jesus: The Servant King

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[0 : 00] We're in Mark's Gospel, if you'd like to turn up Mark chapter 10 and you'll find that on page 846. Mark chapter 10, page 846.

And we're reading from verse 32. So Jesus and the disciples are on the way to Jerusalem. Verse 32, 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.

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. And they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise. 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.

[1 : 10] And he said to them, what do you want me to do for you? And they said to him, grant us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory. Jesus said to them, you do not know what you are asking.

You are able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism which I am baptized.

Talking about his crucifixion, isn't he?

And they said to him, we are able, which of course they are not. Not in an atoning way. Jesus said to them, the cup that I drink, you will drink.

And with the baptism which I am baptized, you will be baptized. And indeed, actually, James was martyred in Acts chapter 12, verse 40.

But to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those whom it has been prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

[2 : 12] 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.

But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant. And whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. So in Mark's Gospel, this is the third time that Jesus has spoken about his death.

And I don't know if you've been looking at this, but after each time that Jesus mentions his death, there's confusion. You might remember the first time, just after Peter had seen that Jesus was the Christ.

Peter, well, he didn't think that his Messiah could ever be crucified, could ever die. It was incomprehensible to him.

[3 : 22] And Jesus said to Peter, he didn't say, now, come on Peter, let's just think this one through. Why don't you read through the Old Testament and see the gravity of your sin.

No. Jesus went straight for the jugular. Do you remember? Get behind me, Satan. He said to Peter. For you don't have in mind the things of God, but the things of man.

And then in chapter 9, we have Jesus speaking the second time about his death. And just have a look at the reaction. Just turn back a page. Chapter 9 and verse 34.

It seems to go from bad to worse. Look there at verse 34. Can you see it? At the bottom of page 845. But they kept silent. For on the way, look at this, they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.

And now, in our passage, again, Jesus describes his death. And straight away, immediately afterwards, there's confusion. The disciples, you know, they want to feather their nests.

[4 : 30] And so, on each of these three occasions where Jesus mentions his death, there's immediately confusion. It's sort of juxtaposed.

So, it's Jesus' death and confusion. Are you with me? Jesus' death and confusion. Jesus' death and confusion. Three times. And then, if you think about it, the fourth time was actually his death itself. He was surrounded, wasn't he, by the confusion of the disciples and indeed afterwards. Total confusion, you see. And perhaps Mark, you know, he wants his readers to think that one through. Is it possible that we could be confused about the death of the Son of God? James and John. Well, they're the hapless pair this time.

And, well, we'll look at them in a minute or two. But just first of all, let's try and understand the undercurrents that might be behind this confusion, this misunderstanding.

[5 : 34] To sum it up, God has said in his word that he's going to send a king into the world. He's going to rule.

Rule from Jerusalem. And his reign isn't going to be like for about five years or 20 years or even 90 years. But for all of eternity.

Never ending. So the disciples are looking forward to this. The Jewish title is Messiah, isn't it? And the Greek title is the Christ.

You know, you know all about this from childhood. If you're a little Jewish child, you'd have memorized the text off by heart. You know, passages like 2 Samuel chapter 7.

And Isaiah chapter 9. Daniel chapter 7. They'd be able to just roll them off at the tip of the tongue, you see. Trouble was, the problem was, after the close of the Old Testament, there'd been 400 years of silence.

[6 : 40] It's like the prophets were queuing up for their unemployment benefit, you see. But then, what happens? Jesus turns up, doesn't he? Friends. The dead are raised.

He has total control over the climatic systems. He knows what you're thinking. And he can forgive sin. And he seems to be fulfilling the profile of the Messiah.

You know, you'd give him the job. And just think about what he's doing, though. His work on planet Earth is actually overloading the title of Messiah.

The disciples are saying to each other, Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him. And think about this. There's only one title remaining that can carry that sort of weight, that has capacity for him.

He is himself. God. Do you see? So it's a fast track to the throne. The disciples have got it all worked out in the thinking.

[7 : 52] You know, the Davidic king is here. He's going to have a worldwide kingdom. Soon there'll be some sort of confrontation with Rome. And the Romans will soon be paying the taxes to this theocracy.

With the Messiah there on his throne. They've got it all worked out. And you can sort of feel the anticipation. If you look at the passage, friends. Just look there at verse 32.

Chapter 10, verse 32. 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.

You know, they know it's all coming to a head. You could see it in Jesus' demeanour as he walked ahead of them. But their plans are different to his.

Jesus is anticipating execution. He's heroically striding towards Jerusalem. But his followers have in mind something else.

[8 : 51] Maybe there will be this little confrontation. And then it's a throne. That's what they're thinking. You know. And so it's like a battle plan.

In a time of war. Jesus briefs them. Just have a look there, friends. At verse 33. Just put your, cast your eyes down. Verse 33. Jesus says to them.

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. And they will mock him and spit him and flog him and kill him.

After three days he will rise. But the disciples are in denial. They didn't want to hear those words. Have you ever been in denial over something?

It's a little bit like. It's a little bit like a husband reading the newspaper over the breakfast table. And the wife's chatting to him in the background.

[9 : 50] But he's not really listening. You know, the occasional, yes dear, that's right. I say yes dear. But he's more interested in the football results than what she's saying to him.

And so he has a sip of coffee. And he's not, maybe his head pops up above the paper occasionally. But he's not really listening to his wife. He's in another world.

And, you know, he hasn't got a clue when he's supposed to be picking the children up. So the cross. It just washes over the disciples here.

There's no engagement. And here's a question I want to ask. Is it just a little bit like us at times? Jesus is telling us what he's done for us.

How he's died. And we're too busy. Too busy to engage with it. Too many things to do. Well, that's, friends, for you to ponder. So James and John, they're counting down the miles to Jerusalem.

[10 : 53] It's like going on a long car journey. And they're getting towards home. And they have things penciled in for their Messiah. You know, they have a big coronation ceremony.

They've got the satellite broadcasting arranged. The stage lighting. It lacks one thing. What does it lack? Seats for them. James and John.

They want to sit on each side. I don't know about you, but I can hardly believe their audacity. They want to sort of engineer themselves into power, don't they?

To sort of get next to Jesus in his reign. And they're sort of, they have an opportunity here. And they present to Jesus this ingenious request. Just have a look.

You'll see it there in verse 35. 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.

[11 : 47] Carte blanche. They want a lot, don't they? It's like they think they've got a genie or something and they can rub it and then ask any request, you see. They want to say, they want Jesus to say to them, yes.

Oh yes, James and John. I'll do anything you want. That's what they want, isn't it? But instead, Jesus asks them a question, doesn't he? What is it you want me to do for you?

And the Lord's prayer might have been appropriate. James could have said, your will be done, Jesus, on this earth as it is in heaven. That would have been an appropriate request.

Or John could have said, forgive us our sin. You know, Jesus, like you did with that paralytic. We've seen you do it. Forgive us our sin. But no.

They're like X-factor contestants. They think they're better than the other disciples and they want everybody to know about it, don't they? Verse 37. And they said to him, grant us to sit one at your right and one on your left in your glory.

[12 : 58] Perhaps it was because they were with Jesus at his transfiguration. You know, they felt that privilege there and it's sort of gone to their heads. It's tickled their ego.

Do you know what I mean? So they want ultimate status, don't they? I mean, it doesn't get much greater, does it, than sitting there reigning with the Messiah.

They're boxing him in. One on his right and one on his left. Top of the pecking order. You know, it's like deputy Messiah they want. Something like that. So that was our first point.

From fishing nets to a throne. And our second point is exchanging a life for a life.

Now, here's the problem. Chapter 8 and verse 34. Jesus had said, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

[14 : 01] But these disciples, they want it both ways. Yes, they want Jesus, but they don't want the lifestyle. You know, here's a question. In percentage terms, what sort of percent does Jesus want from his followers?

You know, from a Christian. What percentage does he want from us in percentage? It's 100%, isn't it? He wants us to follow him entirely. It's a life for a life.

100%. It's two-way traffic. 100% flowing each way. He gives us 100% of his life. He dies for us. And he wants us, his followers, in gratitude to give him 100% of our lives. You know, he left his father's glory, didn't he?

Made himself nothing, the form of a servant, says Paul. No form or majesty that we should look at him, says Isaiah. No throne.

[15 : 05] And Jesus simply asks, doesn't he, for the same humility from his followers. You see that in verse 44. Whoever should be first among you must be slave of all.

As we close, friends, what did James and John need to understand here? And what do we need to understand ourselves?

Three things. Firstly, the only thing that we deserve as rebels on planet Earth is God's condemnation and hell.

No thrones. Secondly, Jesus came to take our hell. Yes, friend, if you're a Christian, Jesus took your hell.

You'll see that in verse 45. Do you see? For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for you.

[16:13] That's you if you're a Christian. And thirdly, if we're Christians, it means that our old lives are over with. Doesn't it, friends? You know, Jesus has given us his life.

It's a life for a life. Romans chapter 6. We know that our old self was crucified with him. 1 Corinthians chapter 6.

You are no longer your own. You were bought at a price. It'd be great, wouldn't it? To wake up in the mornings feeling a bit dreary. But you're thinking about the day ahead and how the Lord will use you.

You look in the mirror. I'm no longer my own. I was bought at a price. Or you're at work and you've been tempted to compromise your faith. To go the world's way and not God's way.

You need to think that through. I am no longer my own. But Christ, aren't you? Do you see? He's bought you. Bought you at a price. So here's the thing, friends.

[17:19] This is what James and John needed to learn. And once we have our identity in Jesus, think this through. We don't need to promote ourselves, do we? We don't need the adulation of the world.

We're accepted by Jesus. Our eternity is sorted out. And so the opinions of this world are really quite inconsequential. Am I right?

You know, the thrones that we could arrange for ourselves, they're really quite pathetic. So small. It's liberating, isn't it?

When the penny dropped, the dungeon flamed with light. My chains fell off. I rose, went forth and followed thee.

And as Jesus comes into our lives and changes us so that we're more like his son, well, we no longer need to live, do we, for the status of this world, the things that this world offers us.

[18:21] And we begin, think about this, think of the logic, we begin to live for the only other thing that's left on the earth. What's that? Other people, isn't it?

We live for others. Other people. Sinclair says this, just listen to what Sinclair says in his commentary. In the kingdom of God, true greatness is measured by our service, not by the number of our servants.

It is seen not in how high the ladder we have climbed, but how far down the ladder we are prepared to climb for the sake of others. True discipleship has at its heart letting go of our desire for honour in this world in order to bestow honour on others.

Isn't it great when you see a saint living like that, a picture of how Jesus wants us to live? So on the road to Jerusalem, John and James were confused.

But John didn't leave this life without the Lord showing him his true destination. I looked, I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, adorned for a husband.

[19:46] Revelation chapter 21. Which world, friend, are you living for? Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending your son into the world, Jesus Christ.

We thank you how he's such a great visual aid for us of how we ought to live. We thank you that he gave his whole life for us. And we pray, Father, that you'll enable us to give our whole lives to him in gratitude for what he's done.

Help us in all the delicate situations we find ourselves in this afternoon. Help us to live for him and not for our old selves.

And Father, to that end, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all this day and forevermore.

Amen.