

## Sacrifice Matters

- Mark 10:32-45
- We are on the way with Jesus, and time is short for the Savior to accomplish the purpose for which he came. He is discipling the disciples, preparing them for the next step of the journey. We have seen the Lord give foundational truth about marriage, about children, about money, about the centrality of the Gospel. He has told them about the high calling that each follower of Christ is given, to servanthood and to sacrifice, and because it is a hard calling and yet an essential one, Jesus will repeat that message several times before he demonstrates its power with the greatest sacrifice ever made. Let's look at this passage today under three headings: Walking ahead, Calling them in, and Giving his life.
- **Walking ahead (verses 32-34)**
- This is the first time Mark says Jesus was walking ahead rather than walking with his disciples. It is the first time that Mark tells us they were on their way to Jerusalem. Going up because of elevation, though their direction is south. Going up 3500 feet, a difficult climb to the suffering that awaits the Savior. But Jesus is not lagging behind, like a prisoner on the way to his execution. He is leading the way. There's a determination in the Lord who has, as Isaiah wrote, "set his face like flint." James Edwards writes, "When it comes to humility and suffering, Jesus does not only teach; he leads the way." Mark tells us that the people following him were amazed and afraid, and it is perhaps because they had never seen him like this, and they could not understand it. So, Jesus takes the 12 aside, as he has done many times, and he tells them again what is about to happen. This is the third time Jesus teaches about his sacrifice through death, and this is the most detailed of the three.
- In chapter 8, he told them the Son of Man would suffer many things and be rejected by the chief priests and elders, he would be killed and then rise after three days. In chapter 9, he added that he would be betrayed into the hands of men. Now Jesus adds that he will first be turned over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death. Then he will be turned over to the Gentiles (and we know this would be Roman soldiers), who will mock him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him. And after three days he will rise.
- The first time Jesus told them about his impending death, Peter rebuked him, tried to talk him out of it. The second time, the disciples began to argue among themselves about who was the greatest. "Which one of us is the goat?" Here it is, the third time and surely the third time's the charm, surely by now the disciples will have learned their lesson.
- **Calling them in (verses 35-44)**
- Nope. Same thing. The disciples again will jockey for position, this time starting with James and John. It is the only time in Mark's gospel that James and John are mentioned apart from Peter, and they are essentially trying to cut him out, to relegate him to a second-row seat in the kingdom! They have at least a hint of understanding that what they are about to ask is beyond the pale, because they start by asking if Jesus will give

them a blank check. “Hey, Lord, we have a request, and you know us, right? James and John! The Thunder Boys! And look, you know we have been with you in thick and thin, right there with you whenever you needed anything, and, well, we just want you to tell us before we even ask that you will give us whatever we ask for.” Even to do this is brazen, tone deaf, and self-serving, after what they have just been told. I love the way Jesus responds. He says the same thing to them that he will say in the next story to Bartimaeus: “What do you want me to do for you?” But oh, what a contrast! Bartimaeus wants to see Jesus, but James and John want to “be” Jesus, or as close as they can get to it. Bartimaeus wants to follow Jesus, but James and John want to be beside him in glory. They want Jesus to be in the middle, of course, the place of honor in Jewish custom, but they want to be honored themselves. Oh, how the “I” in sin can so easily rear its ugly head! I remember a conversation years ago with a young man who had been coming to our Elon service on campus and growing in his faith but had suddenly turned away, stopped coming, because he wanted to pursue some things that a follower of Jesus does not pursue. I said to him, “Hey, think about what you are doing, and ask yourself if what you are doing is respecting the Lord.” He said, “I think the Lord should respect me.”

- Jesus did respect James and John by telling them first that they did not know what they were asking. And then he asked them if they would be able to go through what he would go through, the cup and the baptism of suffering. Jesus will drink the cup of God’s wrath against sinners, and Jesus will be immersed, as in baptism, in the horror of being separated from the Father so that we who are in Christ will never suffer that horror. He then tells James and John when they say Yes, that they too will drink from the cup and go through the baptism. We know now what they did not understand then: we who follow Christ will suffer persecutions and go through trials and tribulations. It is a renewed call to discipleship and walking with the Master, accepting the suffering that He leads us through. But NO ONE drinks the same cup that Jesus drank. No one could.
- Verse 41: “And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant because they didn’t think of it first.” No, that’s a paraphrase, a bad one. But remember, we learn a lot by acknowledging what makes us indignant. Maybe they were just ticked off that these two were trying to get something for themselves in glory that would exclude the others from the same closeness to Jesus that they currently enjoyed. In either case, Jesus calls the disciples in for another lesson on what it means to BE a disciple.
- Verses 42-44 give us a lesson in leadership that we should all learn well. First, the way of the world is to use power to exercise control over others. To lord it over them, Jesus says, and to “exercise authority” over them. That’s a Greek word that means “to gain mastery or power over others.” That is the way the world works. We see it in every realm, from business to education to politics. We should NOT see it in the church. Second, Jesus rejects this model for the Kingdom of God. “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.” This certainly made an impression on Peter, because when he later writes something to the elders of the scattered churches, he says, “shepherd the flock that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:2-3) Peter reminds the elders what Jesus had said to his disciples on the way to Jerusalem. That

whether you are an elder charged with spiritual oversight, or you are one of the sheep following the Lord who is leading through the elders, to fail to be a servant is not simply to fall short of some ideal, but it is to choose to stand outside of the calling of the Lord on our lives to humble ourselves as servants. Edwards writes, “The preeminent virtue of God’s kingdom is not power, not even freedom, but service.” Jesus raises the stakes even more when he says, “and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.” That must have been shocking to the disciples, as shocking as the idea of a camel going through the eye of a needle. Slaves were on the bottom rung of society. Jesus says we are servants and slaves, nothing more, and this is true of leaders first of all. Greatness belongs to those who are not great, but who are merely servants. Jesus was teaching the future leaders of the church that the church does not exist for the sake of those who lead it. No leader is more important than the congregation, and no church belongs to a leader or a group of leaders; they belong to the church. Is that bar too high? Jesus then raises it up even more.

- **Giving his life (verse 45)**
- This is why we become servants and slaves. This is why we lay down our lives. This is why we love to the very end. Because that is the very posture of our Savior. “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” To serve means to give, and Jesus set the standard for both. Here is another foundational doctrine upon which we stand, the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement. “Penal” refers to the penalty, imposed by God upon sin, that Jesus paid for us. “The wages of sin is death,” Romans 6:23.
- What is “substitutionary atonement.”? This is where Paul uses a big word, “propitiation.” Romans 3:23-25, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” Propitiation means that we gained favor and forgiveness where before we had neither. “By his blood.” Penal substitutionary atonement refers to the glorious truth that Jesus took our place, our penalty, so that we could be atoned, forgiven, reconciled, saved! 1. Isaiah 53:6 “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all,” Isaiah prophesied. 2. 2 Cor. 5:21 “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus shed his blood and gave his life to pay the punishment for our sins. And to pay our ransom to God, a price that none of us could pay ourselves.
- Just read this morning, in John Piper’s devotions for today: He is alive to save. He is alive to give. And he is thrilled to be this way. He is not burdened down with your cares. He thrives on burden-bearing, not burden-giving. He loves to work “for those who wait for him” (Isaiah 64:4). He “takes pleasure . . . in those who hope in his steadfast love” (Psalm 147:11). His eyes “run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him” (2 Chronicles 16:9). Jesus Christ is exuberant with omnipotent service for the sake of all who trust him.
- Prayer
- **Testimony by Josh McClure**