***Servant and Savior -Mark 10:32-52***

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church.]*

Take your copy of God’s Word and meet me in Mark 10:32…

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of greatness? This week, I googled the words *great* and *greatness*. What I found was a good deal of images of royalty, both kings and queens. I also saw images of renowned rulers and conquers, such as Alexander and Constantine. I saw what appeared to be Rocky with his hands raised high in Philadelphia. What I didn’t see was a dishwasher in the kitchen of a restaurant working 12-hour shifts. What I didn’t see was a picture of a young child cleaning up their room at the behest of their parents. I didn’t see a shoe shiner working hard for a tip from his customer.

I found this to be a helpful exercise, as it fully displays what many of us equate greatness with. Royalty, power, fame, authority, and might. We’re not much different than the disciples in Jesus’ day, who allowed the Roman culture to inform their understanding of greatness. It’s human nature. But in typical Jesus fashion, he flips the cultural norm on its head and provides the disciples with a new Christian ethic. He doesn’t rebuke their desire to be great; he simply deconstructs their current definition. Here are our three points this morning:

1. His Death Foretold (vs. 32-34)

2. True Greatness Explained (vs. 35-45)

3. Sacrificial Service Modeled (vs. 46-52)

Let’s start with verse 32. So, there appear to be two sets of individuals following the Lord Jesus based on how the sentence is constructed. There are his twelve apostles and then another group of followers. It’s worth noting that in Jesus’ ministry, he had more than just the twelve who followed him. However, his disciples had a unique position in that they were going through hands-on training endowed with apostolic authority. The text says “they” were amazed, referring to the twelve. After a year or two of following the Lord Jesus, they’re just as stunned as ever at his glory and beauty. I pray that the Biblical author could make such a statement of us as his disciples—even those who have followed Jesus for years. Do you remember the amazement you felt when you discovered your sins could be forgiven? Do you recall your astonishment at the fact that God himself would go to such great lengths to purchase you as his own? Do you recollect your wonder at the love, grace, and mercy of the God of the Bible? Don’t let all of that sensation remain in the past. That amazement should be rekindled every time you read God’s Word, gather with the saints, pray, and spur others on to good works. This is another reason why I greatly encourage you all to read the whole Bible next year. For the Spirit-filled believer, it’s impossible to behold him and not be amazed!

The text also says those who followed were afraid. Although they didn’t fully comprehend what would occur in Jerusalem, not even the twelve did; they were aware that something grim was afoot. Perhaps they thought, “If Jesus has received all this pushback and opposition in these surrounding regions, what’ll happen in Jerusalem?” And that would’ve been an accurate thought. This is probably why Jesus has avoided Jerusalem all this time because it wasn’t his hour yet. However, as the hour draws near, he’s now setting his face towards Jerusalem. Perhaps the Lord Jesus has the Servant song of Isaiah 50 in his mind:

*But the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. -Isaiah 50:7*

And then, in verses 33-34, Jesus provides the most graphic and detailed description of his death to date. This is the third time he gives his disciples a prediction of his death. Let’s reread the verses. Compare this to Mark 8:31-32 and 9:30-31.

So, for the first time, we’re told that his death will be in Jerusalem and that both Jews and Gentiles will be involved. This future knowledge of the Lord Jesus is not mediated through a voice or vision, but it’s declared directly from his voice, signifying his role as prophet is above and beyond those of old. Moses prophesied that God would send a prophet like him, but this prophet is God himself. And through this third prediction, Jesus reassures an audience that typically associates the cross with criminals and shame. He wants his people to know this is not a mistaken tragedy but a part of God's predetermined counsel and will. Although the human agents have already been named, make no mistake that the divine agency of God is behind it all. And if God could preordain Jesus’ suffering and persecution for his glory, he would do the same for Mark’s audience, the church in Rome suffering for their faith.

However, it’s clear that this prediction and declaration was once again lost in translation by the disciples. James and John’s request makes this very evident, which takes us to our second point this morning. And this has become a pattern in the gospel of Mark. Jesus foretells the passion, the disciples have a foolish response, and then the Lord graciously teaches them a lesson on disciples, service, and true greatness.

Consider 8:32-33 and Jesus’ response, 9:33-34, and our text this morning. These are all teachable moments for the disciples. Let’s read verse 35-36. Let’s stop there. Jesus’ gracious response is noteworthy. Here, we have two grasshoppers approach the God of the universe, saying, “We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” Jesus doesn’t say, “Want to run that by me again?” Or “How dare you speak to me that way!?” He responds to these two disciples with a gracious question. Hopefully, it’s not just me here this morning who’s thankful that God doesn’t respond to our lack of reverence. How often does our mind go astray when we pray or are being led in corporate prayer? How often do we fail to sing to the King and each other as commanded in scripture? How often do we have full energy in every other endeavor but suddenly get tired when we read Scripture? All of this is from a lack of reverence for God. However, he is gracious to his people. He knows we are but flesh. And he responds to our weaknesses and ignorance with grace.

Let’s continue by reading verse 37.

James and John tell Jesus they’d like top places in his cabinet when he takes power. They want top spots so they, too, can rule with authority over others, perhaps even over the other ten disciples. This request is a clear indication that they didn’t understand what Jesus was plainly teaching them about his death, IE, the role of the Messiah. They got the *who* right but not the *what.* Therefore, they possess an incomplete understanding of the Lord Jesus. Perhaps you remember that Mark’s gospel can be split into two sections. The first half addresses his identity as King and Messiah, and the second addresses his work as the King and Messiah. They affirmed that Jesus was the promised Messiah and King but misunderstood the work of this promised figure. So, they’re half right: Jesus will reign in power and glory, but he first must suffer, which brings us to verses 38-39.

The cup and baptism Jesus is referring to is his suffering under the wrath of God. If you’ve been with us, you know we’ve examined how the Old Testament frequently employs this cup analogy to refer to God’s wrath. This points back to Jesus’ prediction and foreshadows verse 45, where he again explicitly references his substitutionary death. Jesus’ passion and death were also a type of baptism or deadly immersion into waters. Once again, we read this type of language in the Old Testament.

The Lord Jesus is introducing a paradigm shift to the disciples! What happens to the master shall pass down to the servants. It’s almost like seeing the end product but missing the process.

“I see you get the glory piece. But I don’t think you understand the road to exaltation. In order for you to reign with me, you must suffer with me, although the position of left and right are not mine to give.”

Let’s consider the analogies given by the Lord Jesus. Drinking a cup with someone speaks of sharing with that individual and experiencing an oneness. We get this idea of the Lord’s Supper.

***16*** *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? -1 Corinthians 10:16*

Do you see how there’s this idea of mutual participation when drinking from the same cup? We get a similar picture with baptism.

*For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,* ***2*** *and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,* ***3*** *and all ate the same spiritual food,****4*** *and all drank the same spiritual drink… -1 Corinthians 10:1-4a*

So this baptism identifies with another, which involves sharing the same experience, in the Israelites' case, the experience of food and drink. Jesus informs his apostles that they will drink the same cup of suffering and be baptized in the sea of persecution like their Lord. Again, this is a new concept for them. They were plagued by a twisted prosperity theology devoid of suffering yet packed with glorious reigning. What the prosperity preachers of today get right is that Christians will prosper. What they get wrong is the timing of that prospering. Jesus is correcting this false understanding in his disciples in this passage.

And it won’t be long before James understands thoroughly what Jesus is referring to.

*About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.* ***2*** *He killed James the brother of John with the sword…-Acts 12:1-2*

The Messiah must first suffer a crown of thorns before he receives a royal diadem.

***12*** *if we endure, we will also reign with him…2 Timothy 2:12*

***16*** *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,* ***17*** *and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.****18*** *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. -Romans 8:16-18*

And we make this same commitment at the point of baptism and every time we partake of the Lord’s Communion. I think this is what Jesus considers as a precursor in this passage. This is why an honest gospel presentation up front is so necessary. Jesus instructs the crowds to count the cost of being a disciple because it will cost you. When immersed in the baptismal waters, it’s a declaration to the faith community and the world that you identify with Christ and are willing to suffer with him. And the same goes for when we partake of the cup of communion.

Let’s continue reading verse 41 to see the disciple's reaction. Chances are slim that this was a pious response from the disciples. They were probably provoked by their own desire for such a special place of honor in the kingdom. Almost like a, “Why didn’t we think of that?” But the Lord Jesus beats the same drum of providing a discipleship lesson after a foolish reaction from the disciples as a response to a foretelling of his death. Let’s read verses 42-44.

So, here we have the GOAT himself explaining greatness to the disciples and how to achieve it. He starts with a truism of the culture, which probably references the Romans since they ruled Israel. So greatness in the world is defined by mastery and ruling over others. And in this text, he’s not pushing back against evil and oppressive ruling. However, you can find that very command in other texts. Here, Jesus is teaching his disciples that true greatness involves being a servant to others. And there’s no better model of this truth than Jesus Christ! Let’s read verse 45.

Before we dive into this verse, let’s consider a remarkable complementary passage in Philippians 2.

***3*** *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* ***4*** *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.* ***5*** *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* ***6*** *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,****7*** *but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* ***8*** *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* ***9*** *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,* ***10*** *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* ***11*** *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. -Philippians 2:3-11*

Similar to Jesus, Paul is seeking to teach the disciples at Philippi a lesson on humble service to one another. And like our passage this morning, he points to the example of the Lord Jesus as a humble servant par excellence. In doing so, he points to the incarnation. And is this not the very story of Christmas? How God the Son traded in his heavenly throne for a lowly manager, choosing a life of obscurity and service instead of luxury and extravagance. So, there are practical implications to the incarnation. It isn’t just a theological class in seminary nor a cute little nativity scene. It’s a biblical truth that should transform how we define greatness and serve one another.

Returning to our passage, the point is this: if this is the Son of Man’s roadway to glory, what makes you think you’ll be any different? Let me remind you all of who the Son of Man is in case you’ve forgotten.

***13*** *“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.* ***14*** *And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. -Daniel 7:13-14*

This is the Son of Man! And the disciples rightly understood that this Son of Man will one day sit in power and glory. But the road to that seat is filled with sorrows. And it’s this eternal Son of Man who came to serve! That is mind mind-blowing!

Let’s consider an example of him serving before we consider the phrase “to give his life as a ransom for many.” Let’s reread verses 46-52.

I read a tragic story this past week. On Thursday, October 20, 2011, a little two-year-old girl named Yue Yue was struck by a can in a hit-and-run accident in China. Then at least 18 people passed by, some going out of their way to avoid her. She was then struck by a second van that also didn’t stop. She was finally helped by a trash collector. It was, tragically, too late. She was declared brain-dead at a local hospital and declared dead early the next day. One of the passersby later said, “This wasn’t my child. Why should I bother?”

No one cared enough to stop and help little Yue Yue. Jesus would have. And Jesus did with this poor blind beggar named Bartimaeus. He embodied what it means to be a slave of all. We must remember the context of 1st-century Palestine so the full weight of the Bartimaeus predicament can hit us. This was before the government-funded social programs. His livelihood literally relied on the sympathy of those passing him by. Not only was he poor, but he was blind, which would only exacerbate an already horrendous situation. And yet, he hears that the Lord Jesus is passing by with his disciples. The people reacting to his cries seem strikingly similar to those in China who passed over Yue Yue.

He cries out for the Son of David! Which was a messianic title derived from the Old Testament. So, this man believed that Jesus was the promised Christ and had the power to heal him.

***12*** *When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.* ***13*** *He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. -2 Samuel 7:12-13*

Solomon was the immediate and partial fulfillment, but Jesus would be the final and climatic fulfillment, as Bartimaeus well knows. Consider his response to hearing that the King called him in verse 50. He responded with faith. His cloak would have been his comfort and possibly what he used to collect alms from the people. However, he knew that if Jesus was calling, he was as good as he was healed!

Verse 51 again displays the humble disposition of King Jesus as he asks this man what he’d like him to do for him. That is the core of Christianity—a “Help Available” sign and not a “Help Wanted” sign. This relationship is not about what you can do for him but rather about realizing you need him to do something for you and having the humility to ask. You see, the riches of life didn’t harden him like the young ruler last week. He’s already conditioned as a helpless and needy beggar. Therefore, he was comfortable to beg before the king!

Consider the Lord Jesus in verse 52. Not only was this man saved from his physical blindness, but also from his spiritual blindness! The Son of Man came to serve! He lived a life of service. But the ultimate act of service occurred at the cross. Let’s look back at verse 45.

The word “ransom” in the culture of Jesus’ day would refer to the idea of a payment to secure the release of a slave or captive. In other words, Jesus is buying us back to himself (or bringing us to himself) by taking on flesh and dying as a substitute. This is truly what Christmas is about! Any story of Christmas that mentions the manger but not the cross is incomplete. Yes, he came as a baby, but he came ultimately to die for his people who were enslaved to sin! This is how he became the GOAT!

Now, we are to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus by adjusting our definition of greatness to match the Lord Jesus’ teaching. Perhaps over lunch, you can discuss ways that you’d like to begin serving your brothers and sisters in Christ in the year 2024.

Let’s pray.