

Mark 10:32-52: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Mark chapter 10 verses 32 to 52. 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.

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.

Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? 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.

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. And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

And Jesus called 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.

[1 : 35] 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 to give his life as a ransom for many.

And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside.

And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me.

And Jesus stopped and said, Call him. And they called the blind man, saying to him, Take heart, get up, he is calling you. And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.

And Jesus said to him, What do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said to him, Rabbi, let me recover my sight. And Jesus said to him, Go your way, your faith has made you well.

[2 : 39] And immediately he recovered his sight, and followed him on the way. As we move through Mark chapter 10, Jesus is moving towards Jerusalem. They're on the road, as they have been for the last few chapters, steadily travelling the whole length of the land down to Jerusalem.

They're travelling down for the Passover, so there are presumably many others on the way with them. And here Jesus makes the third prediction of his death. He's going to Jerusalem. He's ascending to the place where he will be condemned and crucified.

And his disciples are amazed, and the followers have a sense of trepidation. They know that this isn't a regular journey to Jerusalem, but that the ministry of Jesus is arriving at a critical point.

It's important that Jesus declares his death beforehand. It's important to make clear that it is not an accident, or fate overtaking him unawares. And Jesus predicts in incredible detail what will happen. The participants, what exactly they will do, and what the result will be, that he will rise again on the third day. Having just described, however, the manner of his death, Jesus is approached by James and John, asking for prominent positions in his kingdom.

[3 : 49] And Mark maybe spares a few of the brothers' blushes by telling the story in a way that hides the fact that they made the request through their mother, Jesus' aunt. They want to be on his right and left hand in his kingdom.

They want the thrones of honour, or the highest places at the feast. Yet Jesus makes clear that if they want those places, they will need to drink the cup placed before them. In chapter 14, verse 24, we read about Jesus' cup, the cup that he must drink, the cup of his suffering.

They will also need to be baptised with Jesus' baptism. Jesus states that one day, indeed, they will share in his suffering in this sort of way. When they do, they won't just be like the people on the right hand and the left hand in the feast, they will also have to be like the people that we see on Christ's right and left in chapter 15, verse 27, the thieves on either side of him on the crosses.

They will have to share in his suffering, and it will only be through that that places of honour are enjoyed at the feast. Jesus' reference to his baptism here is interesting. It seems strange to refer to Jesus' forthcoming death and resurrection as his baptism.

What could be meant? Well, a number of things. First of all, it's a transitional event. It's a passage from one form of life to another. Jesus' discussion of his baptism presents it as a sort of trial by ordeal, an entering into the waters of the grave, or like Israel passing through the waters of the Red Sea.

[5 : 19] And the Apostle Paul would later speak of Christian baptism in connection with Christ's death in Romans chapter 6, verses 1 to 8. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?

We were buried, therefore, with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. It is through dying with Christ that we end up living with him.

[6 : 21] It is through entering into his death and his suffering that we end up with honour in the kingdom of God. There will be people in these positions of honour, these places of honour at the feast, but these places aren't granted according to ambition.

The other disciples at this point are indignant, but it seems that the irritation at James and John arises more from their desire for such honours rather than any principled opposition to what James and John were doing.

In response, Jesus speaks to the whole group, pointing out that the pursuit of greatness and superiority is characteristic of the Gentiles. They lord it over others. But this is not how the kingdom of Christ is to be.

It is not the case that there is no honour in the kingdom of Christ, but it is not obtained through jockeying for power. Rather, it is found in the way of humility and service. The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

He came. He's the one who has come from heaven. He's come on a mission, as angels would come on a mission. What is meant by the service here? Are we thinking about Christ assuming the position of a servant relative to a master, a sort of lowly manward service?

[7 : 37] It seems to me that the importance here is that of carrying out a charge. He's one with a commissioned agency or ministry, not as one to be surrounded by attendants as a typical king.

Jesus came to perform the task of the commissioned servant of Isaiah, not to get status for himself. The focus is not here upon Christ as the humble servant of men, but upon Christ as the one on a mission from his father, a mission whereby he will give his life as a ransom for many.

In a similar way, ministers in Christ's church are not supposed to gather attendants around them as kings of the Gentiles would and assume status for themselves, the highest places and feasts, things like that.

No, they are sent on a mission. They're acting in Christ's name. And that mission or ministry is to be for the good of all, not to set them over others. Leaving Jericho, he's followed by a multitude of people.

They're excited by this prophet, teacher and potential Messiah. And the blind man calls out to him as the son of David. This is the first time that Jesus has been addressed in this way in the gospel.

[8 : 47] The messianic secret, as it were, has slipped and the time is nearing for open revelation of Jesus' identity. Bartimaeus is the first person outside of the disciples to speak of Jesus in this sort of way.

We should also notice, once again, that Jesus is being addressed by someone socially marginal, without status, who wishes to get close to him, but is rebuked by others and prevented by others. And once again, Jesus insists that the person be allowed access to him and explicitly calls for him. A question to consider. How might Bartimaeus be seen as a model of the disciple of Christ more generally?

