

## **Mark 10 Sermon – Glory?**

Isn't it fantastic that we can look forward to the glory that's coming in heaven? It makes all the struggles of this world just pale in comparison, doesn't it? In this passage we see a really big moment for James and John, two of Jesus' closest friends, as they come up to Jesus, and look to their glorious future with Him in eternity. They've got the right focus in life, haven't they? Haven't they?...

Well let's look more closely, because Jesus doesn't let James and John off lightly, they've got the wrong end of the stick in a way, because future glory may be great, but life following Jesus is by no means going to be easy, and Jesus wants James and John, and the rest of His disciples then, and us, His disciples now, to understand that.

### **1) Jesus is going to die**

So backtracking a bit, let's look at Jesus and what He says is going to happen to him. We're jumping in at a strange point in Mark's gospel, sort of in the middle of a section. There's sort of a turning point in chapter 8 as Peter says to Jesus "You are the Messiah", but then Jesus says he's going to be killed, and the disciples are a little surprised by that – their ideas about who He is and what He's going to do are a bit skewed. So Jesus keeps saying this, in chapter 8, chapter 9, and now again in chapter 10, he tells His disciples that he's going to die. He needs them to know what kind of a Messiah he's going to be.

Let me read from 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." Can you feel the tension? Nobody dares speak! They're following behind Jesus, anxiously waiting to see what He does next.

And he takes the twelve (he was being followed by a great crowd of believers, now he just takes the 12 apostles) and tells them what's going to happen. "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." Oh, that's new! It's going to be in Jerusalem is it? As in, where we're going now? Jesus, if you know you're going to get killed in Jerusalem, let's turn around, let's go the other way! And it's also a pretty humiliating death by the sound of things, he'll be handed over, not just to the Jewish leaders, but to foreigners, Gentiles! The Messiah, the one who will save the Jews is going to be murdered at the hands of the enemies of the Jews. How outrageous is that!

But note that Jesus says it's not the end, He is also going to rise, He says this each time he predicts his death in this section. It's not all doom and gloom. Jesus is going to rise from the dead into glory, but his death is coming first.

### **2) Jesus' followers are going to serve**

And this brings us to James and John. And hopefully now we see how their angle on things is more than a little bit bonkers. If Jesus is going to go through all this suffering, how can those who follow Him expect to have an easy ticket into glory? No, and this is our second point, Jesus' followers are going to serve.

When James and John come up to Jesus, they latch onto what Jesus says about rising, completely glossing over all the suffering and dying stuff He's talked about before. They say "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand, and one at your left hand, in your glory". They're latching on to what Jesus said about rising. James and John have been listening pretty selectively to what Jesus has been saying, "Ah, you're going to rise, that's interesting, what's in it for me?" More than that, they want to get a shortcut to the best seats in the house – they want super special ultra-glory, right next to Jesus

And Jesus comes right back at them and says, "Were you even listening?" Jesus had spelled out in great detail all the suffering He was going to experience, and it seems James and John didn't really think that bit was important, they just glossed over it, forgot that He said it.

And when Jesus asks them, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?" He's using imagery to ask them if they're able to participate in this suffering too. And they answer without a second thought, it's just one word in Greek, the equivalent of them smiling and going "Mm hmm!" it's so flippant, unthinking.

And Jesus says "Yes, you're right, you will suffer, and who gets the special glory, well that's not up to me." What a shock to the system this must have been for James and John.

We could get wrapped up in how seating in heaven will work, whether there are seats at Jesus' right and left, and who gets them, who decides them, but Jesus doesn't seem to think it's important, He turns the focus away from the future glory, so I don't think we need to spend too much time thinking about it, as interesting as it may be. It's not that central.

But anyway, here come the other disciples, in they come ready to give James and John a right royal telling-off "What are you doing asking Jesus for special glory! That's not what he's about, we need to be ready to suffer!"

Well that's not really what they say, is it. We don't know what they do say, but I think we can make a fairly good guess. Let me read v 41-43. "And when the ten heard about it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 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". This is addressed to all twelve of them, so we can make a rather good guess that their issue with James and John wasn't one of rebuke, but one of jealousy. Sounds like they wanted the special glory just as much as James and John.

And so Jesus' rebuke goes to all of them "It shall not be so among you, for whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all". Now, this confused me when I read it, because at first glance, it does look like Jesus is saying "You should only serve because you want glory, you can grasp after glory, that's ok, but you've got to do it in a subtle, underhand way." And what I found surprising, is that Jesus isn't quite saying what we think he is. There's no cause and effect there, he doesn't say "In order to be great, you must be a servant." No, what Jesus is doing is telling those who follow Him to take their desire for greatness and let it go. Let me read that verse again "It

shall not be so among you, for whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all". He's saying: In the world, the great ones are those who Lord it over everyone else, but we don't do that kind of greatness. You want to be great? Well that's not how we do things here. You need to be a servant. You want to be first? Well actually, you should be a slave.

And this is hard. Because I really want to be great! I want to be first! Deep down in all our hearts is that desire. I don't mind saying, it's dangerous for me whenever I get up here and preach. There's always the danger that I'm doing it because I want to be great. Maybe the same is true for each of us, when we think about getting a promotion, or winning a competition. Does our desire for greatness outweigh our willingness to serve? I think for all of us, that desire is really hard to overcome.

### **Jesus is going to serve**

So how do we do it? How does Jesus expect us to obey such a difficult command? Well He doesn't demand of us any more than He himself is ready to give. Last point, Jesus is going to serve. Look at the famous verse 45. "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many". The word there for life is the same as the word in chapter 8 "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul." That 'soul' word is the same word translated 'life' here. What Jesus gave is the very thing that is worth more than the whole world. It's what you can't give anything in exchange for. And Jesus gave it up.

Why? As a ransom. Imagine a crime drama, where a criminal demands a ransom – they say "Pay this amount, or we won't let you have the president back" or something like that. And you pay the price, and you get them back. In this culture it was less about criminals, but the buying back idea was still there, it was just more about slaves, buying slaves back. And Jesus' life, his soul, was the ransom for many, that was the price that needed to be paid to buy us back.

Jesus didn't make Himself great, or put Himself first. He humbled Himself, He was a servant, a slave, He gave His very soul.

And if we truly get that, then we will follow His example. We will gladly be those who are the servants of all. In Church, talking to the guest, wiping down the chairs afterwards, rather than rushing off to watch the football or to get back and do the gardening. And in our day-to-day as well. Let's go about our interactions with non-Christians with a Christlike attitude of service, and pray that they'll see Jesus through us. Let's love our husbands, wives, children, parents, brothers, sisters, friends, neighbours with an attitude of humble service. Because that's what Jesus did.

And one final thing. Let's take our eyes off our own actions for a minute, and stand in awe of Jesus. Because we will never be those who serve others, unless we first accept His service of us. And as we share in the bread and wine now, let's remember Christ's sacrifice as a ransom for each one of us [say names]. Let's look at the cross and see His humility, His amazing, jaw-dropping act of service for us. Whenever we're tempted to be a bit selfish, to

grasp for power, and be less humble, less of a servant, let's look to the cross, and marvel at how Jesus served us, giving his body and blood that we can be ransomed. And when we've grasped that, we will gladly be those who are the servants of all. Let me pray.