

Mark 10:35-45 | 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.” ³⁶ And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” ³⁷ And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” ³⁸ 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?” ³⁹ 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, ⁴⁰ 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.” ⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. ⁴² 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. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 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.”

Mark 10:35-45 | Ransom for Many

This story is the central pivot of Mark’s gospel in which the mission of Christ is made absolutely explicit. We have seen Christ demonstrate his authority and kingship over creation, sickness, the realm of the spirits, and mastery in the truths of God. He is the truest most authoritative king. Now this king will go to the cross. The one who is at the top of the hierarchy will serve. When we understand the upside down nature of our world and what it means to correct that we will see how it could that the one who serves is greater than the one who is served, although no kingdom in the world is structured this way.

1. The world is structured Hierarchically

Mark 10:35-36 | 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.” ³⁶ And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?”

James and John are two of Jesus’ closest disciples. Peter James and John are the ones called to witness the transfiguration. John is the disciple whom Jesus loved. And James and John are brothers. Jesus refers to them as the “sons of thunder.” Likely for their shared intensity. We see their intensity and forthrightness demonstrated in today’s story. And what a line they use to open with. Teacher do whatever we ask of you! Coffee is for closers only. It might have felt authoritative and to the point but it is childish. Jesus responds graciously. He of course doesn’t commit to an oath without knowing what’s at stake. But he asks what they want. Jesus asks, “what do you want me to do for you?” Like a servant.

Mark 10:37 | And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”

Their request shows the slightest glimmer of faith. They do trust that Jesus will come into his glory. But nothing else in their request is to be commended. The context of this story matters. It is relayed just after Jesus announced his crucifixion for the third time. And just like the second time the disciples resort to jousting for position among each other. James and John perhaps sensing a new sort of urgency seek to get the upper hand. They get that Jesus is making a kingdom, but for all Jesus has taught they don't understand the kingdom he is building. They think the way up is up. Jesus takes them to the heart of the confusion.

2. Christ's right orientation

Mark 10:38 | 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?"

Jesus is explicit with them regarding their ignorance. You just don't know what you're asking. You see to participate in Christ's kingdom means to share in Christ's experiences and go where he is going. This is what it means to drink and be baptized. These show a fullness of sharing in the experiences of Christ, for good or bad. And Jesus knows what is coming. He will drink from the cup of God's wrath. He will be baptized into death.

Why is it that James and John would want to seek this glory? Well we all know what its like to be under bad authority. This is the fundamental curse of the world, that we are under the authority of Satan, and it is demonstrated in all sorts of cruel kings, mindless bureaucracies, untrustworthy bosses, harsh or disinterested fathers, devouring mothers. If I get to the top I also get out from underneath. Is that not freedom? Perhaps they thought its us or Peter and that guy is pretty rash and pretty fickle.

Jesus understands that their desire to attain this position and glory is at least in part to gain freedom from suffering. To be the ones who are served rather than the ones who serve. They don't understand Jesus' kingdom. They don't know what their asking. Because Christ's kingdom isn't like that. His glory is the cross. They're asking for a share in his glory but they're really asking to avoid his glory. Are you able to drink?

Mark 10:39-40 | 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, ⁴⁰ 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."

Their confidence is foolish, and will soon be undermined by their own actions of abandonment. But Christ sees beyond this. He is so patient and generous with his disciples. Even here he treats them according to what he will accomplish in their hearts. He does not treat them according to their sin. They will drink and be baptized. James will

be the first apostle martyred. And John will be the last apostle left on earth exiled to an island prison. After seeing what Christ does they will think of this as their glory.

But Jesus shows that authority and glory, those things which they are grasping at, are not things which are attained by the cunning of man. But they are given by the father. Even to Christ, his authority is given by the father. Here is the fallenness of the world, we hate all authority that isn't ours. The world is structured hierarchically, the hierarchy belongs to God. We want it to belong to us, God is not to be trusted as God. And like all godless revolutionaries we devour ourselves. When you kill your father to become king, the biggest threat to your reign is your children. Under Satan's rule ours is a world of fickle devouring single generation dynasties.

The myth of our culture is that hierarchy is the problem. It's an obvious conclusion because we see the cruelty oppression and selfishness manifest in so many hierarchies. If hierarchy is the problem then egalitarianism is the solution. But there is no such thing. The world is held together by hierarchy. You function by making judgements of better or worse. Suited or unsuited. When you say something is good that means you make it the judge of you and render other things bad. Modernism was a project of eliminating the transcendent and therefore there is nothing good above us. What is good is only up to you. All becomes equal. And all becomes meaningless. A will to power used only to keep yourself safe. Disintegration follows.

3. The top of the hierarchy is sacrificial love

Mark 10:41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

Don't you see the second James and John start acting in this way, the unity of the twelve is fractured. Once one gives way the others must turn on them to get ahead. In a world of only power the only unity is tyranny. In a world where everyone does what is right in his own eyes we get the devolution of the flood. To seek safety without God we build the tyranny of Babel. And this disintegrates just the same. The freedom of throwing off hierarchy always results in tyranny and disintegration. Did the 20th century not happen? Do you not see the self-devouring tyrannies war in our nation as we cast off God. I used to be interested in how societies fall apart. Now I'm interested in how anything could possibly hold together. Enter Jesus

Mark 10:42-44 | 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.

Jesus calls the disintegrating twelve to himself. You know how the world is structured don't you? And hear his irony, "those who are considered rulers" of the gentiles lord it over them. Their authority is for themselves and at the expense of those they rule. They

call themselves benefactors but you know that is a lie. They benefit themselves. Rich Men North of Richmond sang Simon the zealot.

Mark 10:43-44 | But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

But how dangerous, in fact it probably feels like certain destruction. If I go down in this world I'm signing up to be oppressed and taken advantage of. If I'm fundamentally self-created, and the only way I can get people to participate with me as I've made myself is by power and coercion then to move down is literal annihilation. But the hierarchy of the kingdom of God is different. So if there is not a tyranny holding together the world how will the kingdom sustain? What will prevent it from tearing itself apart? It is love. And this is what Christ came to accomplish.

Mark 10:45 | For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus refers to himself here as the Son of Man. An allusion to the prophecy about him in Daniel 7. One like a son of man who will be presented before God. *"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."*

This is the highest king imaginable. The true king enthroned by God with an everlasting kingdom over all people. The true king, came not to be served but to serve. Jesus is before them as the one who is entitled to this throne and he shows his authority in loving service. Even patiently bearing with his betrayers in this present moment and holding them together in unity and love. He came to serve. And not just serve but to give himself up absolutely even to the point of death.

He gives his life as a ransom. Because don't you see, you're enslaved to the authority you're under. And you need to be bought back. But your sin keeps you enslaved. Christ is the only one who can go to the bottom and bear the wrath of God to atone for the sins of man and come back out as the son of Man who has all authority. The hierarchy you're in now will kill you unless the Son of Man comes down from his throne to die in your place. He has accomplished this in his love.

Christ's life is a ransom. A payment made in full on behalf of all who come to him. You're freed from your own meaningless exchange of tyrannies into the freedom of service to the one true king. It is a freely given ransom from his love. And it is for many. Not all. Not all will be saved. Christ did not atone for all. But it is not few. And if you trust in him you will be saved from the wrath of God against your sin.