

# IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU

MARK 10:32-52

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On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus is continuing to reveal his mission as the the Christ and his commission for those who desire to be his disciples. He has delivered the call to radical self-denial (8:34) which is a call that has been confirmed by God in his command from the cloud to "Listen to his Son" (9:7). As Jesus continues on the way to fulfilling his mission, his teaching is becoming increasingly specific in regards to this call to self-denial. And here in this last instruction concerning his death and resurrection, Jesus reveals how radical discipleship is a death to status and a devotion to unconditional service.

Now in looking at this particular passage, Mark notes that "they were on the road [to Jerusalem], and Jesus was walking ahead of them" (10:32). Despite being fully aware of what awaits him in Jerusalem, Jesus continues to courageously march on in an unwavering humility and willingness to suffer.

Jesus is not simply teaching moral lessons on self-denying discipleship; he's leading the way while the disciples are lagging behind astonished and afraid. As James Edwards puts it:

"Our discipleship is never as noble as we imagine it."<sup>1</sup>

On the road to Jerusalem, Jesus takes the opportunity to once again "tell them what was going to happen to him" (10:32).

"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. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise." (Mark 10:33-34)

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<sup>1</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 318.

Three times within the last three chapters (8-10), Jesus has instructed his followers about his impending suffering in Jerusalem, and all three times his followers seem to be too concerned about their own status to even notice what he's saying. They were expecting Jesus to establish his reign on earth as a King, and therefore they were expecting great privileges as the appointed disciples of the soon-to-be King. And so, in their behavior, we kind of see the subtle way in which the pursuit of power and glory can plague all of us no matter our closeness or relationship to Jesus.

Have you ever taken the time to contemplate why God has graciously granted you the ability and the opportunity to do what you do? Have you ever carefully examined what it is that you are truly pursuing through your own platform that God has graciously given you?

In chapter eight, Jesus foretells of his death and resurrection (8:31), and the disciples rebuke him because we're told that they have their minds set on the things of man rather than on the things of God (8:32-33). Jesus responds with his teaching that true disciples must willingly deny themselves and take up their cross (8:34).

In chapter nine, Jesus again foretells of his death and resurrection (9:31), and the disciples immediately start arguing about who among them was the greatest (9:34). Jesus responds with his teaching that true disciples must willingly take the lowest status if they wish to achieve true greatness (9:35-36).

And now here in chapter ten, Jesus foretells of his death and resurrection a third time (10:33-34), and the disciples respond with a request concerning positions of honor (10:37). And so, Jesus responds with his teaching that true disciples must willingly seek to serve the world and be willing slaves to all (10:42-45)

In observing these three passages, we might come to regard this request of honor by James and John to be perhaps the most blatant example of human self-centeredness of the three cases listed. But Jesus graciously puts up with their selfish approach to him and simply asks the two brothers, "What do you want me to do for you?" (10:36)

How would we answer such a question from Jesus? Some serious contemplation in regards to such a question has a way of exposing the motives of our heart and whether we too are seeking selfish gain or selfless service to the glory of God.

It's interesting that this question asked here by Jesus is the exact same question that we see him asking Bartimaeus in the next narrative. But there is a big contrast between Bartimaeus' answer and the answer here from Jesus' own disciples. Bartimaeus asks for faith while James and John ask for fame. Bartimaeus wants to follow Jesus "on the way", but James and John want to sit with Jesus in glory.<sup>2</sup>

In a section of Scripture full of teachings on discipleship, it is Bartimaeus (not the Twelve) who stands out as the one who demonstrates the kind of faith, insight and devotion that is expected of those who truly desire to be disciples of Jesus. The blind bystander sitting on the street corner cries out to Jesus for mercy, and through sincere faith becomes a fellow follower on the road with Jesus and his other disciples.

Edwards writes again:

"Faith that does not lead to discipleship is not saving faith."<sup>3</sup>

## **The Way of Selflessness**

How many of us are quick to claim the benefits of following Jesus but are slow in considering the costs associated with being one of his followers?

In responding to their request, Jesus simply tells the brothers, "You do not know what you are asking" (10:38). Like the disciples at this point in their lives, how many of us might still be unclear on what it means to truly be a Christian and a follower of Jesus? Many people come to Jesus looking for a greater life rather than coming to Jesus because they have found him to be greater than anything else in life. Any concern for glory or honor in this world is the wrong concern for a follower of Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> Edwards, 321

<sup>3</sup> Edwards, 331

The glory that awaits the Christian is a glory that is hidden among the plans and purposes of God. However until that day when what has been 'prepared' is finally revealed to us who believe, it is our continual call to walk in humility and self-denial seeking the glory and honor of God over any glory and honor for ourselves. This is the way of the true Christian life which was taught and preeminently walked by Christ himself. If we want to gain a greater life, then we must be willing to lose the life we currently have constructed for ourselves. And if we want to gain a greater status, then we must be willing to take on the status as a slave to all.

The disciples were guilty of pursuing personal glory and honor through their platform as the disciples of the King; are we guilty of pursuing personal glory and honor through our own platforms that we possess in this world?

Jesus points out that it is the way of the world to gain power and then use that power to be praised and served by others. Jesus says that men of this world may pursue personal glory through great power, but then he declares that "it shall not be so among you" (10:43). For the man who desires to follow Jesus, glory is to be gained through the way of selflessness.

Jesus' declaration that "it shall not be so among you" is (in the words of Edwards) "not an admonition to behave in a certain way as much as a description of the way things actually are in the kingdom of God, and even among disciples of the kingdom. Thus, to fail in being a servant is not simply to fall short of an ideal condition but to stand outside of an existing condition that corresponds to the kingdom of God."<sup>4</sup>

How much of our lives are we spending towards the pursuit of personal freedom and power in life when the foremost and most distinguished virtue of God's kingdom is service to others in love?

This is not to say that freedom and power are inherently bad just as things like food, sex and money are not inherently bad either. However, the desire and pursuit of power has a way of leading us to primarily place most of our attention, energy and focus upon ourselves which then suppresses our desire to actually love and serve others like we should.

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<sup>4</sup> Edwards, 325

By now, we ought to be coming to the understanding that the King and his Kingdom doesn't exist primarily for us; rather we exist primarily for the interest of the King and his Kingdom. Jesus says greatness is gained through giving up everything.

- Give up your selfishness when it comes to your commitment to love your wife.
- Give up your desire for security and control when it comes to your wealth.
- And give up your self-gratification and the pleasure of prestige when it comes to your pursuit of status and power in this world.

Whoever does not bear his own cross and follow the way of selflessness commanded by Jesus cannot truly be one of his disciples. As Jesus taught elsewhere: Who would set out to build a new home without first sitting down to consider the cost and whether or not he has enough to complete what he's starting? Therefore, anyone who does not renounce all that he is and all that he has is not prepared to continue on the way as one of Christ's disciples.<sup>5</sup>

## **Selfish Selflessness**

Now, while it is clear that we are called to follow Jesus on the way of selflessness, if we're not careful we can even turn our radical selflessness into a subtle and selfish pursuit of power and glory for ourselves.

So how could we do that?

Various scientific studies and psychological research have proven that living an unselfish life of service to other people gives people an overwhelming sense of meaning, value and significance in life. These studies have actually concluded that when people only seek to gain things or do things that bring personal pleasure for themselves, they end up addicted to the pursuit of pleasurable 'fixes' or 'highs' in life, and as a result, they find themselves more often than not feeling unfulfilled and increasingly unhappy. However, when people sought to give more of themselves to service and selfless acts of kindness towards other people in need, they found themselves feeling more fulfilled and increasingly happy.

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<sup>5</sup> see Luke 14:#3

And so, if we were to read the advice found in scientific journals and the latest philosophies in psychology, we would be told that we ought to live a more selfless life because in the end that will bring us the greatest sense of fulfillment and happiness in life. But has Jesus called us to meet the needs of others in order to also meet our own need for meaning, value and significance in life? The wisdom of this world is not always the way of our Lord.

The moment we begin to serve those in need in order to meet our own need is the moment we are subtly beginning to act in selfish selflessness.

If I'm primarily doing things for other people in order to feel good about myself then I'm not ultimately doing those things for other people; it's fairly obvious that I'm ultimately doing them for myself.

Religious moralism has a way of leading us into this trap as well. If you give your money to the church or to the poor because you're hoping your act of service will get you eternal benefits, favor with God or entrance into heaven then you're not acting out of a love for God or a love for others but primarily out of a love for yourself.

We are not following the way of our Lord if we're living a selfless life for selfish reasons.

Selfish selflessness gives us the same sense of superiority that we look for in many other pursuits for personal power. It helps me to feel good about myself, and it gives me the authoritative grounds to exalt myself over others as I compare my acts of kindness in measure to theirs.

The wisdom of this world will tell me to be unselfish in order to selfishly secure greater happiness for myself. The way of religion and moralism will tell me to be unselfish in order to selfishly secure eternal happiness and heavenly blessings for myself. If neither of these offer the true unselfishness instructed by Jesus, then how do we truly become unselfishly selfless?

## The Selflessness of Christ

The supreme kingdom virtue of service to others and the sacrifice of ourselves is obtained in the realization that this was not simply a principle of the kingdom taught by Jesus, but rather a pattern of his own life and the posture of our Lord himself. Edwards writes that, "The life to which the gospel calls believers is not an ethical system but 'the way of the Lord' (1:3), of which Jesus is the pattern and incarnation."<sup>6</sup>

We are called to become slaves of all because "even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45).

The purpose of every other great moral or religious leader was to live and be an example for others; Jesus' purpose in life was to die and be a sacrifice for many.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus selflessly offered up himself as the substitutionary sacrificial payment to God in order to cover the debt accumulated by our own sin that we would have never been able to pay. Through his selfless willingness to endure the pain and punishment of the cross, Jesus purchased our freedom from our imprisonment and slavery to sin. Only the grace of God demonstrated in the cross of Christ possess the power to shatter our selfish pursuits for any personal glory. If you are truly captivated by the love of Christ, then you find yourself truly motivated to live your life in selfless humility.

Only the gospel can provide the proper motivation to live selflessly for truly unselfish reasons. As Timothy Keller puts it: "Now you do not need to help people, but you want to help them, to resemble the One who did so much for you, to bring him delight."<sup>8</sup>

A good measure of your Christian condition is whether or not your desire to serve others trumps your desire for personal happiness.

Do you find yourself serving others out of your love for Christ and how he has served you?

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<sup>6</sup> Edwards, 326

<sup>7</sup> Tim Keller, *King's Cross*, (Redeemer CityNet, 2011), 140.

<sup>8</sup> Keller, 151

As followers of Jesus, we ought to find ourselves able to selflessly love others because of the selfless way that he has first loved us.

- Jesus is the faithful husband who abandons his marital rights and continues to pursue us in spite of our spiritual adultery.
- Jesus is the Rich Ruler who has gone and sold everything that he had in order that we who are poor might be rich.
- And Jesus is the Son of God who sacrificed his status and took on the position of a slave in order to serve his people and give his life as a ransom for many.

May we consider our Lord who was the infinite Creator of life, and yet in his incarnation became a servant to his own creation at the cost of his own life. If Jesus was willing to sacrifice the privileges of deity and endure the pain of suffering and death in order to serve us, what is it that keeps us from sacrificing our own privileges and pleasures in order to serve him through our love and service to others?