

THE SCROLLS

Meeting The Messiah | Mark 10:32-45

Life Lesson

True discipleship is not about position, power, or personal gain; it's about service, sacrifice, and surrender. The measure of our discipleship is not found in titles or recognition, but in how willingly we serve and how faithfully we reflect Christ's servant heart.

Examine Scripture

32 They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. The disciples were astonished, but those who followed him were afraid. Taking the Twelve aside again, he began to tell them the things that would happen to him. 33 "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death. Then they will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34 and they will mock him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him, and he will rise after three days." 35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached him and said, "Teacher, we want you to do whatever we ask you." 36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked them. 37 They answered him, "Allow us to sit at your right and at your left in your glory." 38 Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink or to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" 39 "We are able," they told him. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink, and you will be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with. 40 But to sit at my right

Descending the Ladder of Greatness

Mark 8-10 offers an incredible journey through Jesus' expectations for His followers. These three chapters provide perhaps the clearest and most concise teaching on true discipleship. The pattern in these chapters is interesting: Jesus predicts His suffering and death, the disciples respond foolishly, and then Jesus redirects them by teaching the pattern of true discipleship and spiritual greatness.

Time and again, Jesus outlines the costs and rewards of true discipleship; however, even the Twelve are slow to grasp the significance of His words. In our passage, we see that two disciples, James and John, sought a higher place in the kingdom of God. They were choosing a path of self-promotion. Yet again, Jesus shows James and John, the other disciples, and us that true discipleship is not about self-promotion but about self-denial. Following after Jesus requires upside-down thinking: last shall be first; you must die to live; and you must serve and be a slave to all to be the greatest.

Vs. 32-34

Here is Jesus' third prediction of His coming suffering, death, and resurrection. Notice the intentionality and focus of Jesus. They were walking toward Jerusalem, but "Jesus was walking ahead of them" (v. 32). It was not a nervous, fast-paced walk; it was with purpose and determination. There is little doubt that Jesus was gazing intently, not just toward Jerusalem, but toward the cross. As one scholar puts it: "He is inflexible in His determination to do the will of God." The words of The Obedient Servant from Isaiah 50:4-7 must have guided His steps toward the cross, knowing the suffering He must endure is the price of our sin:

*The Lord God has given me
the tongue of those who are instructed
to know how to sustain the weary with a word.
He awakens me each morning;
he awakens my ear to listen like those being instructed.*

or left is not mine to give; instead, it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” 41 When the ten disciples heard this, they began to be indignant with James and John. 42 Jesus called them over and said to them, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

- Above v. 33-34, write (Is. 50:4-11 and 53:1-12)
- Circle “drink” (2x) and “baptized/baptism” (6x) in v. 38 and v. 39. Connect the above circles and write “suffering and sacrifice” in the margin.
- Bracket “has been prepared” in v. 40. Write (Rev. 5:9-10) above it.
- Circle “indignant” in v. 41. Write “jealousy” above it.
- Bracket “lord it over” and “act as tyrants” in v. 42. Write “self-promotion.”
- Box “But” indicating contrast in v. 43. Write “self-denial.”
- Underline “great” and “first” in vs. 43-44. Double underline “servant” and “slave” and connect with a line to “great” and “first.”
- Circle “to serve” and “to give” in v. 45.

Personal Notes

***The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious;
I did not turn back.
I gave my back to those who beat me,
and my cheeks to those who tore out my beard.
I did not hide my face from scorn and spitting.***

***The Lord God will help me;
therefore I have not been humiliated;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know I will not be put to shame.***

There was something in His eyes or demeanor as the Disciples were astonished, while others were afraid. The kindness and grace of His eyes were now filled with holy determination to end the bondage of sin and death once and for all. In other words, His focus was not just Jerusalem nor the cross; it was the face of every person that was held in the bondage of sin. He was not just intently walking toward Jerusalem; He was walking toward you! He was bridging the gap that our sin has caused. His determination led to our salvation.

Knowing the Disciples' astonishment and concern, Jesus turns to them and explains, a third time, what must happen to Him. He will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, the very ones He has been able to silence with His authority. Additionally, they will deliver Him to the Gentiles to be mocked, flogged, and killed. The Disciples, thinking that Jesus came to establish an earthly, renewed kingdom of Israel, must have been shocked. It was a clear message that God's will is for the Son of Man to suffer for the sins of the world. Mark wants his readers to understand that Jesus' suffering and death were neither a tragedy nor an unlikely turn of events, but a divine necessity. It was the providential plan from the beginning. To obey the Father's will, Jesus set His eyes on Jerusalem to drink from the cup and embrace the cross. He would bear the sins of the world, even becoming sin (2 Cor. 5:21), drink the cup of the full wrath of God upon sin and disobedience. Jesus must fulfill all that was prophesied, from the Obedient Servant in Isaiah 50 to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.

Vs. 35-37

Though Jesus could not have spoken more clearly about His upcoming suffering and death, it seemed to fall on deaf ears. As the Disciples heard what Jesus would endure, instead of being filled with sorrow, two of them saw it as an opportunity, perhaps their final chance to secure their place in the kingdom. We should not be surprised by their persistence because they were called “The Sons of Thunder,” but even this seems unusually bold considering what Jesus just said. James

Personal Notes

and John asked, “Teacher, we want you to do whatever we ask” (v. 35). Like children asking for something without specifying it, they wanted assurance that Jesus would grant their request. His suffering and death seem insignificant compared to their desire to get what they wanted from Him. Instead of seeking to serve Jesus, they wanted Jesus to serve them. Similarly, many times our hearts are seeking something from Jesus instead of seeking to serve Jesus.

Jesus, knowing their hearts, asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” (v. 36). Wow! Instead of immediately rebuking them or giving a holy eye-roll, Jesus asked what they wanted from Him. Why? Jesus knew what they wanted, and He understood it was an opportunity to connect His coming suffering and death to what they would experience in serving Him. Again, the Disciples were taught the ultimate cost of following Jesus. There was no doubt that they were entering a ministry of service and sacrifice.

However, James and John still did not understand, so they asked to sit at His right and at His left when He comes into His glory, upon the throne of the kingdom of God. At least, they understood a little eschatology; they knew enough that Jesus would reign forever and ever. However, they did not know at what price. Perhaps at the foot of the cross, as the only Disciple there, John connected everything Jesus taught them. We know at some point John would fully understand as he pens (Rev. 5:6): “Then I saw one like a slaughtered lamb standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders.” Yet, in this moment, James and John had no idea what awaited them as followers of Jesus and the ultimate sacrifices they would make to further His kingdom and the Gospel.

Vs. 38-40

Jesus asked if they were truly willing to follow Him completely, drink from the cup He would drink, and be baptized with His suffering. Naively, they responded, “We are able” (v. 39). Jesus assured them that they would suffer as He would. He left no doubt: “You will drink the cup I drink, and you will be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with” (v. 39). The cup and the baptism are metaphors of their suffering and deaths for the sake of the Gospel.

In fact, church history shows that James was the first disciple to be martyred, beheaded on the orders of King Herod Agrippa I. John was exiled to Patmos, but not before being poisoned and boiled in oil; they tried to kill him, yet he miraculously survived. So, no! They did not fully understand the cup and baptism Jesus was referring to. At that moment, they were prideful and arrogant, but later, they suffered and were martyred for God's glory. Only then did they fully understand Jesus' words.

Personal Reflection

1. Am I following Jesus out of love and obedience, or am I seeking something from Him for myself?
2. In what ways do I struggle with self-promotion instead of practicing self-denial and humility?
3. How can I demonstrate a servant's heart in my daily life, as Jesus modeled for His disciples?
4. When God's will leads through difficulty or sacrifice, do I follow with the same determination Jesus showed toward the cross?
5. Do I truly understand the cost of discipleship? If so, how does my life reflect this understanding?

Commentaries

Exalting Jesus in Mark by Daniel Akin

MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Mark 9-16 by John MacArthur

BECNT: Mark by Robert Stein

Mt. Zion's Mission

*Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to
MAKE, MATURE, and MULTIPLY
disciples of Jesus Christ.*

Even so, they still would not be promised a seat at Jesus' right or left in the kingdom of God. Why? Jesus said, "But to sit at my right or left is not mine to give; instead, it is for those for whom it has been prepared" (v. 40). This place to reign with Jesus was not just for the Disciples, the Jews, or even martyrs. It is for all who follow Him in faithful discipleship and faithfulness. John himself would write: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slaughtered, and you purchased people for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth." (Rev. 5:9-10). This includes you if you follow Christ in true discipleship and faithfulness!

Vs. 41-42

In keeping with their temperament, the other Disciples were angry with James and John, probably because they did not think to ask for the same thing. Even though Jesus previously rebuked their jealousy and competitive nature (9:35), the Disciples again show their immaturity and lack of understanding. They believed the path to greatness was through self-promotion and self-gain. Jesus explains to them that this is the way of the Gentiles; it is not the way of the kingdom of God.

The path to greatness is not about self-promotion, but self-denial. Once again, Jesus teaches His Disciples that true discipleship involves a life of service. Similar to the lessons of "first shall be last and last shall be first" we've already seen, Jesus emphasizes this point even more: "On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all" (v. 43-44). Jesus underscores what "first and last" truly mean: becoming a "servant" and a "slave" to others.

This stands in stark contrast to what James and John were requesting and what the other Disciples secretly desired. Nobody aspires to be a slave or servant. Yet, Jesus states, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (v. 45). In essence, "If you want to follow Me truly, then do as I do; be a servant and sacrifice yourself for the Gospel." Jesus set before us an example to follow.

This calling isn't just for the Disciples but for all of us! True discipleship is costly; it requires self-denial, determination, focus, and faith. We are never more like Jesus than when we serve others. The path of discipleship and greatness in God's kingdom is rooted in service and sacrifice—being willing to give all for His glory!