



**Mark 10:32-45**  
**The Supreme Servant**

**Summary:** Greatness is found in helping others, not in helping yourself.

There are, broadly speaking, two kinds of leaders in the world – the most common by far, are extractive leaders, men and women, who use their position to extract benefits for themselves. They appreciate their position because of what it does for them, gives to them, or means to them.

Extravagant leaders on the other hand are rare and treasured. These people use their position, access, and experience to benefit the people they lead. They work for the good of others, solve problems for the sake of others, and even sacrifice for the sake of others.

In simpler terms, we might cast the distinction as selfish vs. selfless leaders. And, of course, if asked, we all know which kind we should say we want to be. I believe that somewhere inside most decent people, is the desire to do the right thing and be good a leader.

The problem is, there's something else inside us too - a grasping, greedy, extracting, spirit of self-indulgence that makes excuses for us and our behavior and thinks we *deserve* a position with a little more money, a little more voice, a little more freedom and the authority to finally fix the things that agitate us. Or that we should at least be given enough independence to be left alone to do our thing.

And then we come to church. And even though there's a pretty powerful fan at the front door here at City Gates, it doesn't blow that stuff away. The truth is: we bring all the junk that's inside us with us even when we come to church. And then after church we go around trying to live for Jesus with all this stuff still fighting it out within us.

This morning we'll watch this truth unfold with some of Jesus' closest disciples – the people who knew Him best, and we'll see what Jesus has to say about what it really means to lead and love and serve.

Read with me

**Mark 10:32** Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: 33 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; 34 and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."

Now, if you have been with us for a while, I hope you've noticed the pattern – Jesus explains His upcoming death and suffering for the third time – once in chapter 8, once in chapter 9, and now here again. And if you recognize the pattern, you know what happens next – the disciples completely misunderstand Him because they're focused on themselves and how they will personally profit from being associated with Jesus the king.

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask."

36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

37 They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."

Can I take the liberty of just one tiny little rabbit trail for a minute? Because I want you to see how one thing this whole interaction exposes for us is that sometimes, we ask stupid things of God. James and John want to be on the right and left of Jesus when He is glorified.

Well, in a few days, Jesus will be executed on a cross between two thieves, there will be one to His right and one to His left as He is glorified as the ultimate sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. I don't think that's where James and John really want to be, do you?

You see, this is one great reason to include a caveat in all of your prayers – "nevertheless, not my will, but Your will be done Lord." Recognize that God has absolute veto power and editorial control over every request you send His way. Celebrate that. Ask Him to keep you from things you're not ready for.

Well, enough of that rabbit trail, let's get back on the main path.

38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

He's talking about all the things He just described to them – betrayal, arrest, condemnation, a death sentence, mocking, scourging and crucifixion – this is what He has to look forward to. So, Jesus asks them, do you really want a part of that? Can you really endure all of this?

39 They said to Him, "We are able."

Just a little speculation on my part, but here's what I think is happening. Jesus has been speaking to them in parables for years now. It's quite possible that they think that's what's happening now. It's possible that they don't think He means real, actual, death, they might think He means it metaphorically – like, it's going to be tough guys, but we'll come out on top. And these men, being good men, were like – 'alright boss, we're willing to follow you anywhere! Let's Go!'

In fact, in just a few days Peter will make a similar claim, promising to stand by Jesus through thick and thin, and Jesus tells him, 'Peter, before this night is over, you will deny Me three times (Mark 14:27-31).'

You see, we often *overestimate* our ability to endure or achieve and *underestimate* the chances of our failure or quitting, even in the spiritual realm. And yet, God knows us far better than we know ourselves, and He patiently loves us anyway.

*You are going to blow it in front of Jesus.* You might even mess up when trying to do something *for* Jesus – your motives might be a tangled mess. God sees it. He knows. And He patiently loves you anyway as you lean into Him.

(vs 39 cont'd) So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; 40 but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those* for whom it is **prepared.**"

Jesus says the answer is no, but notice this, because it's very important – Jesus tells the brothers, you can't have that, because it has been **prepared** for someone else. Which brings us to our first point this morning:

### **1. God has a plan.**

God knows what He is doing and He's already working on His desired outcome, He's making preparations.

Here's why that's important: it means God knows the end from the beginning. He is working things together, methodically developing His divine plan. He's not figuring it out as He goes, reacting to the latest developments. He is in control, guaranteeing that things work out in a very specific way. He has plans for things that haven't even happened yet but He knows they will. He has prepared for them.

Sometimes we need to be reminded that God is in control of everything that happens in the world. He has a plan and it will come to pass. No matter what happens in the elections, no matter what happens with the economy, no matter what happens in Ukraine or Israel or the South China Sea, it doesn't matter if an asteroid is headed for earth, or if the globe is or isn't warming – **God has a plan**, He is moving the pieces, and He is irresistible and unstoppable.

Let that truth settle down deep in your soul. **God has a plan.** It might involve hardship. It might involve suffering. But He knows. And He cares. Would you just breathe in deeply right now and remind yourself: God has a plan and He loves me.

God told the prophet Isaiah

**Is 46:9** Remember the former things of old,  
For I *am* God, and *there is no other*;

*I am God, and there is none like Me,  
10 Declaring the end from the beginning,  
And from ancient times things that are not yet done,  
Saying, 'My counsel shall stand,  
And I will do all My pleasure,'*

I love the absolute defiance of My God. He says, 'I do what I want and no one can stop Me. I have My reasons. I have My ways. I have My timing. *I am God* and there is no one else like Me.'

Now, that might be a put off for some people. You don't like that. You don't like claims of absolute power and control.

And you're right. It can be terrible and ugly, it can be harmful and destructive, when the heart and mind of the individual in power is selfish, racist, sexist, and hateful. But that's not what God is like. God is righteous, perfectly just, entirely holy and He says nothing can resist or deny, frustrate or derail His plans to ultimately make things beautiful and peaceful again. In other words, yes, God has ultimate power, but He uses it for ultimate good.

And, amazingly, that ultimate good includes us. You see, we – those who have heard His call to repent and surrender – to stop living for ourselves, to stop rebelling, resisting, and begin submitting to Him – His unstoppable plan involves tremendous blessings for us.

Sometimes we ask for things, like James and John, and God has to tell us no. But the Scriptures tell us He is actually preparing countless blessings for us *even when our specific request is delayed or denied*.

In the famous 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm David thinks on all the blessings of God and writes:

**Ps 23:5 - You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies**

In other words, God sees and knows my troubles, my difficulties, He sees my enemies, but He's not stressed out, He actually **prepares** a table for me in their presence. Christian, do you realize, you never suffer alone, God **prepares** for everything that happens. If you're going through difficult times right now, maybe this is something you need to do: prayerfully consider – how has God **prepared** me for this or **prepared** this for me? He is good and merciful and *nothing* takes Him by surprise.

In Psalm 31 we read

**Ps 31:19** Oh, how great is Your goodness,  
Which You have laid up for those who fear You,  
Which You have **prepared** for those who trust in You  
In the presence of the sons of men!

Over and over again Scripture informs us – **God has a plan**, He is laying things up, He is **preparing** things – He tells James and John no, because He’s already made plans for someone else, but He has *other* plans for the brothers and He has plans for you and me.

Jesus told His disciples on the night before He was crucified –

**John 14:2** In My Father’s house are many rooms; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to **prepare** a place for you. **3** And if I go and **prepare** a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.

Jesus tells His disciples this is all moving toward something very intentional. Something planned since the dawn of Creation. God is not in reactionary mode, He knew what would happen, He knows what is happening now. **God has a plan** and there is a purpose to it all.

Now, it would be great if we could just stop there. The boys got ahead of themselves, they asked for something they shouldn’t have and then they had this kind of awkward conversation with Jesus where He tells them, in a sense, I can’t make that kind of commitment, let’s just be friends, I still think you’re nice guys. It’s kind of embarrassing and awkward for James and John. But it turns out the other disciples overheard the conversation and they’re *not happy* about it.

**41** And when the ten heard *it*, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John.

Now wait a minute, pastor. Are you telling me there was envy and mistrust *even among Jesus’ disciples*? Oh yes, there was.

The other disciples are bothered because *they almost missed out* – the brothers almost pulled off a backroom deal – Matthew tells us the same story in his gospel and says their mom was part of the whole thing too. But the other disciples aren’t upset because James and John had the audacity to ask for such a thing; they’re upset because they didn’t think of it first. They’re *all* jockeying for privilege. They *all* misunderstand what Jesus is doing and what it means to follow Him.

So Jesus uses this as a chance to talk to them all about what’s really going on in their hearts by contrasting what leadership looks like in God’s Kingdom with what leadership looks like on earth.

**42** But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **43** Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. **44** And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. **45** For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

## 1. God has a plan

## 2. Jesus planned to serve

Which is particularly stunning when you understand Who Jesus is and where He came from.

It's amazing that He would even come down here to earth at all. There was no need for Him to get involved. He had *no* obligation. God made the universe, He made our planet, He made human beings, and gave us everything to enjoy along with one rule – just one rule. But we broke that rule and everything else along with it.

And so, it's human beings, and our pride, our greed, our insatiable desire for more and better, that are responsible for countless wars, crime, violence, social injustices, environmental pollution and most of the things that make the lives of other people miserable – this is what we have done with what God entrusted to us.

And He could have just sat back in Heaven, washed His hands of it all and turned His back while we destroyed each other, the planet, and ourselves. But He didn't.

He chose to come down, to get involved, and not as a king, or a general, or a professor, not as a medical doctor, or tech wiz, but as a servant. God put on human flesh and He washed human feet. God touched human beings. God ate food prepared by human beings. God wore clothes made by human beings. And ultimately, God allowed Himself to be abused and murdered by human beings.

Jesus did not have an entitlement mentality. He said, [we are going up to Jerusalem and I am going to suffer, and rise again](#). These things WILL happen, I know they will, *but I continue on anyway*.

Why? Why did He do it? Because His death was necessary to secure our salvation.

We all agree that at times we do bad things, wrong things, we're not the person we want to be. When we are honest, we will admit we have varying degrees of impurity in our lives and it needs to be filtered out, but *how? What* will remove it? *How* will we be reconciled with a Holy and pure God?

Even the best of us know that as long as we live we continue to sin, we don't stop. We feel like we improve in one area, but there's always another trip wire that we know will make us blow up or fall down again. We're imperfect and try though we may, we can't get all the wrinkles out and hold it together all the time.

So, many of us simply expect God and everyone else to adjust the scale. We want to be able to talk our way into a better grade because we're doing the best we can or we're not as bad as so and so. But God says no. He won't adjust the scale. We are trapped in our failure and we need to be rescued by someone outside.

That's where Jesus comes in. He suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

He did it voluntarily, it's not as if He was powerless to prevent it. He knowingly and willingly allowed Himself to be betrayed by one of His own disciples, to be condemned by His own priests, though innocent, and to be handed over or delivered by those He established a special relationship with to those outside His covenant, and was ultimately mocked, scourged, and crucified.

Yet the Bible tells us He did it all for the [joy](#) of the result

**Heb 12:2** [Jesus], for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

This is what God has planned, and endured, for you and for me. This is how **Jesus serves** the Father and us. The disciples thought they needed Jesus alive so they could benefit from knowing Him and receive a position of power and honor in His Kingdom, but what they really needed was for His plan to be fulfilled so they could benefit from His death and resurrection forever.

**God has a plan, and Jesus planned to serve**, so now as a Christian, as a follower of Christ

### **3. I serve because I've been served**

Jesus tells the disciples, what I'm doing should have an effect on you. He calls us to follow His example. He says don't be like the people you see around you every day. Think and act differently. He says, (vs 44) [whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.](#)"

There should be a shocking difference between leadership exercised by Christians and leadership exercised by other people. And this applies to leadership in all forms and in all places. There should be a difference in the way Christian men lead and love their wives, a difference in how Christian parents lead and love their children, how Christian bosses supervise their employees and most certainly servant leadership should be on display in the church itself. And the difference should be driven by the fact that there's a difference in how Jesus leads us.

Whatever position you find yourself in, whatever title you hold, whatever responsibility you've been entrusted with at work or school, in the house or the church, remember this:

**Phil 2:3** *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*



This kind of servant leadership, this mindset that says I value others more and prioritize myself less is hard, but remember: Christ has already done this for you. He's calling you to receive all the benefits of a relationship with Him and then to reflect the goodness you've already received to others.

It's the pattern God has always used: first He gives, then He asks you to follow.

He gave Adam and Eve the Garden to enjoy and *then* told them to obey.

He delivered the Jews out of Egypt and *then* gave them the Law.

He told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the power of the Holy Spirit and *then* to go out in ministry.

Friends, God *has prepared* salvation for you and He *is preparing* a place for you in Heaven. He gives you supernatural gifts and strength to serve the people around you because He *has prepared* good things for you to do and be a part of. Go read 1 Corinthians 12, read Ephesians 4, read Romans 12 refresh yourself with the knowledge of all that God is giving you to enable you to serve.

You are the beneficiary of God's unstoppable plan, the preparations He has made from the beginning of time and which He continues to work out at His own expense. The Bible boldly declares whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved – it's a promise that is made possible because Christ was willing to suffer, even when those closest to Him were seeking their own benefit.

And so today God calls you to live a different life, to do things differently, not to be or look like the people around you. It's going to be hard at times, but He has also done more for you than you can possibly understand.

He is calling you to move out into a position of service FROM a position of strength - you can serve others because of what you receive in Christ. You can be a selfless leader, an extravagant leader, because you don't need to take things for yourself, you've already been given what you need.

So let's take a minute pray individually, personally, where you are. And here some things you might want to reflect on as you do.

1. God has a plan. (Trust Him with your situation)
2. Jesus planned to serve. (Thank Him for His sacrifice)
3. I serve because I've been served. (Let your life reflect what you've received)





## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### Mark 10:32-45 The Supreme Servant

**Summary:** Greatness is found in helping others, not in helping yourself.

- What are some key ingredients of good leadership? What are some toxic traits?
  - o We all lead in some situation – when you do, what are the most important things you hope to represent? What character qualities do you hope people will observe in you?
  - o What aspects of your Christian faith do you feel make you a better leader? What aspects do you find hard to integrate with your leadership?
- What is one way you could serve this week? Or, what is one way you could have a better attitude as you serve?
- Review the following verses. What do you learn about proper, godly, ambition?
  - o John 15:7
  - o Psalm 20:3 (also, Ps 21:2)
  - o 1 Corinthians 12:3
  - o 1 Corinthians 14:1
  - o 1 Timothy 3:1
- Have you ever asked God for something you later regretted or saw differently? What was it? What did you learn in the process?
- The brothers thought they were able to go through what Jesus would experience. How do you balance healthy self-confidence with dependence on God?
- Why is it important to know that God has a plan? How does this help us navigate life?
- Jesus came as a servant. What effect does this have on:
  - o How we view Him?
  - o How we view servants and others in lowly positions?
  - o How we view ourselves?