

**Mark:
Crossways**

Mark 10:32-45

By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)

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Now turn with me once again to the Gospel of Mark, and we are in the tenth chapter. We pick up the reading this evening at verse 32, where Jesus foretells His death in Jerusalem for the third occasion in Mark's Gospel. Before we read the passage together, let's come before God in prayer.

Gracious God and ever blessed Father, this is Your word, as we were reminded this morning, that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine and reproof, and instruction and correction in the way of righteousness, that the man of God might be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. So furnish us, then, O Lord, as we now read and study this, Your word, together. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Verse 32:

And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, He began to tell them what was to happen to Him, saying, "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 upon Him, and flog Him, and kill Him; and after three days He will rise."

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." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And they said to Him, "Grant us to sit one at Your right hand, and one at Your left, in Your glory." 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?" 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. But to sit on My right hand or at My left is not Mine to grant; but it is for those for whom it

has been prepared.” And when the ten heard 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, but whoever would be great among you must be your servant; and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Amen. And may God add His blessing to the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

On Friday morning, Ligon and I were interviewing John MacArthur of Grace to You Ministries in Los Angeles. His radio broadcast can be heard here in Jackson and in many of our cities here in Mississippi. And we were asking him about his 36-year-long tenure of ministry in what was the church in which his father was a minister before him. All of you know, I'm sure, John MacArthur; many of you will have bought and read and studied, I think, in discipleship groups here in the church his book on the twelve disciples. I think it's called *Twelve Ordinary Men*, based as it is on a series of sermons that John MacArthur gave at his church, which recalled the Master's men. And that book is a wonderful insight into the character and the development of the characters of the twelve disciples, and I would urge you to look especially at what he has to say about James and John that appear here.

I think we've got the wrong impression of John—John, the apostle; John, the writer of John's Gospel, the author of the three epistles of John, the author of the Book of Revelation. We tend to think of him as a loving, gentle, sweet, tender man. We probably pick that up because of what he was like at the end of his life, when he was carried on a chair into the church at Ephesus and he would say those words reminiscent of I John: “Love one another.” And we have this picture of him...some of the great masters, painters—Leonardo de Vinci, for example, has a sketch of John that portrays him in that sort of light.

But Jesus called him, along with his brother James, “sons of thunder.” A son of thunder...James, son of Zebedee (James and John were sons of Zebedee, and sons of their mother, Salome)...James, in two of the four lists of disciples in the gospels, appears next to Peter, yet we know very little about him. In fact, he never appears alive in the gospels apart from his brother John in any single incident. They're inseparable in the gospels - “James and John” — and James is always mentioned first, before John, perhaps because James is the older of the two; perhaps because he was the leader of the two, the dynamic one, the one with strength and zeal and passion. They were sons of Zebedee...a fishing family business up in the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. We know from the gospel records that Zebedee had many servants. It was a pretty good business. They probably had a fairly good upbringing in a fairly well-to-do home.

And yet, it's interesting, isn't it, when you come to the Acts of the Apostles, Herod will have Peter put in prison, but he will have James put to death...perhaps saying to us that James would be more trouble to him than Peter...and yet, we know so little about him.

Tonight we come to this extraordinary, embarrassing story. James and John—John, of all people!—coming to Jesus after He has given this extraordinary pronouncement of His impending death in Jerusalem, seemingly oblivious to everything that Jesus had just said, saying, 'We want You to do this for us: that we might have a place at Your side, on at Your left and the other at Your right, in the coming glory.' It's an extraordinary story, and I want us to see what Jesus does here, because He teaches us here something about discipleship. He teaches us something about the shape of discipleship, and that the shape of discipleship is that of a servant.

I. What a servant is not.

And He tells us, in the first place, of what servanthood is not like. It's not like what James and John are doing, asking that one might sit on His left and the other on His right. It's...well, I suppose, the modern Yiddish word would be *chutzpah*—it's gall! What nerve! You would never do that! It would never occur to you to say something like that—to go up to Jesus and say, 'Can I sit on Your left hand or on Your right hand in the coming glory?'

You remember, we'd seen something like this in the previous chapter. They haven't learnt much! Back in chapter nine, you remember, they asked back up in the north in Capernaum, they say to Jesus... well, they're having this argument, and when Jesus asks what are they arguing about, they say, 'Who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' Imagine that!

J.C. Ryle says that this narrative contains a bright mirror of human vanity. It shows us that proper and holy zeal is often accompanied by ambition, or some other vice of the flesh, so that they who follow Christ have a different object in view from what they ought to have. It's almost embarrassing to talk about, isn't it? None of us would want to be caught asking that question. After all, doesn't the Bible say that in Jesus Christ there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, there is neither Jew nor Greek, but we're all one in Christ Jesus? That, as far as our justification by faith is concerned, we are all brought in exactly the same way to the feet of the cross. We're all accepted in precisely the same way: by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. So a prince may come as well as a pauper, and both have access into the Father's presence.

But there are differences between Christians. Sure, there are. Some are mature and others are immature; some are strong and others are weak; some have one

talent, and Jesus says some have ten talents. Some are imminently more holy than others. Now, where we choose office bearers we discern differences. We discern God-given differences. We discern gifts and graces bestowed by Almighty God. There are differences between us. There is a concept of greatness in the kingdom of God, and the Bible recognizes that.

What do we know about James and John, that they should ask a question like this?

Well, we know that they came from a fairly well-to-do home. They had been brought up in a fishing business. We find them (in the gospels) working with their nets and boats, and hired servants. They're used to giving orders to people; they'd left, perhaps, a fairly salubrious upbringing to follow Jesus and to bring one of the disciples. It wasn't long before their mother, Salome, also became a Christian: a devout woman, a member of that group of women that we read in the gospels at the crucifixion of Jesus that she is there, taking care of the needs of Jesus and of the disciples.

We also know that James and John had a short fuse. You remember, in an incident in a Samaritan village, they wouldn't tolerate Jesus' preaching, and you remember what they said: "Shall we call down fire from heaven," they said, "and consume this God-forsaken place?"

When these brothers (as we saw in chapter 9 of Mark's Gospel)—when these brothers come across a Christian preacher delivering a person from devilish influences in the name of Jesus, they had him desist forthwith, explaining to Jesus that 'he doesn't belong to one of us.' These are disciples, whom Jesus had chosen, and that Jesus loved—John, in particular.

You notice the shape of their statement? You notice precisely what it is they say to Jesus? "What do you want Me to do for you?" and they said to Him, "Grant us to sit, one at Your right hand and one at Your left." 'Teacher,' they had said, 'we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You. We want You to do for us whatever we ask.' — that Jesus was there to meet their needs and their ambitions, and their goals. It's staggering, isn't it? And that's precisely what servanthood is not. It is not doing something for personal gain.

II. What is servanthood like? What is the shape of servanthood?

And Jesus begins to expand it. He's already mentioned it, but they haven't heard it, and He now begins to expound the nature of true servanthood.

There is a remarkable passage in First Corinthians 4 that opens this up a little. It's in a context where Paul in the passage, in I Corinthians 4, is using the very term that Jesus is using here: "So then, men ought to regard us as *servants* of

Christ.” It's in a context in which the Corinthians were developing a kind of popularity scale as far as the apostles were concerned. You know—some were for Paul, and others were for Apollos, and others were for Cephas, and others were the very super-spiritual ones, and they were for Jesus. And Paul is to say some pretty harsh things to them, and he comes to them and he says, “I don't address you as spiritual, but I address you as worldly.”

And among many of the things that the Apostle Paul says to them, he says this to them: “I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world and to angels, and to men. We've become like those who are last of all.”

And Paul is using a word that suggests that what he has in mind is the picture of a returning Roman army that's coming back from battle, and they're coming back victorious from a great battle. And first of all there would be the generals and the commanders, and those who have distinguished themselves in battle, and there'd be laurel wreaths, and flowers would be thrown down in the streets before these men; and then would come the troops. Perhaps your father, and perhaps your brother, and perhaps your son, and you'd shout welcomes and 'well done' to them. And then would come prisoners: the leaders of the defeated nations, and you'd 'boo' them and hiss them; and right at the end would come the condemned men—those on their way to the arena to fight with the gladiators and be thrown to the beasts: demoralized men, covered in mud and filth that had been thrown at them, bruised and bleeding from the rocks which young and old had hurled, torn by savage dogs that had been turned on them. These despised ones, last of all. And Paul is saying, 'That's us. That's us.'

Now do you see what Jesus is saying to James and John here? He says to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?” And they say to Him, “Grant us to sit, one at Your right and one at Your left in the glory.” And Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” ‘Sure!’ they said. ‘We are able.’

You want to go away and hide. You want to turn aside and be ashamed of what these disciples, James and John, of all people, are saying here. They're making a fundamental mistake. They're flaunting over the words that Jesus has just spoken, that He must needs go to Jerusalem, and when He goes to Jerusalem He will be handed over, He will be condemned to death, and He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They'll mock Him and spit on Him, and flog Him and kill Him. And they're saying, ‘Sure, we're able for that.’ But they don't understand the half of it. They don't understand the half of it.

Jesus says, ‘You've no idea what you're talking about.’ Yes, they're almost in the best seats in the kingdom, but you don't know the price of those seats!

There's a cup that Jesus would drink. Jesus is quoting the Old Testament as He always is in the course of His ministry. He's always quoting the Old Testament. He's alluding now to passages in Isaiah and passages in Jeremiah that speak of "the cup of the Lord"; the cup of God's holy wrath and condemnation against sin and defilement; the cup that He would speak of in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me!"; the cup of God's indignation against sin...but the cup that He would drink, and drink to its bitter end, as He would take our place and become our substitute and sin-bearer; as He would take our sin and our defilement and our guilt upon Himself, and the holy reflex of God's righteous character would be poured down upon Him, and He would be separated from His Father—the Son of God, the eternal Son of God who had fellowshiped with His Father for eternity—so that on the cross, as He drank of that cup, bearing our sin and shame and guilt, He would cry — not 'My Father' — as though the consciousness of His native Sonship had been obliterated from Him, and all that He was conscious of now was His frail condition as the servant of the Lord bearing the anathema of a holy God, and He cries, "My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?" We can't begin to imagine what that must have felt like, for Jesus to have been forsaken by His Father in heaven, to be in the place of the wicked damned.

Can you take that cup? Can you take that cup which is your own sin and your own guilt, and can you bear that cup? Can you bear the holy anathema of God against your sin? What about for others? What about for thousands and tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands, and even millions of others—all their collective sin and guilt? Jesus bore that sin in Himself, and the guilt of it, and stood before a holy God.

'Can you drink of that cup?' He says to James and John. 'Sure, we can,' they said. And Jesus says, 'You do not know of that which you speak. You do not know of that which you speak.' And He changes the metaphor, and He talks about baptism.

You know, when we baptize (and there was a baptism ceremony here this morning...there were several baptism ceremonies here this morning), and sometimes when we see and hear the words of a baptismal ceremony we often think only of the positive. We think of the promises of God to us and to our children, and they're very reassuring, and they're very comforting, and they've been the solace of many a heart here.

But there's also a negative side to baptism. As Peter refers to the baptism, and he refers to the deluge of Noah, and as Paul refers to baptism in Corinthians, and he refers to that which occurred in the crossing of the Red Sea as the waters came and drowned the Egyptians, that there's a negative side to baptism, too: a curse; not just the blessing of the covenant, but the curse of the covenant. And Jesus says, 'I have a baptism with which I must be baptized.' And that baptism...that baptism would be His initiation into His act of obedience as the

Servant of the Lord, to obey everything that His Father had commanded Him to do as the Servant of the Lord. And it would lead Him into a place of holy judgment, and it would lead Him into a place of holy condemnation. "I have a baptism with which I must be baptized." Who could endure what Almighty God the Son endured?

Do you see what Jesus is saying to James and John? He says to them at the end of the section...He says in verse 45, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Now, He's quoting the Old Testament again. He's picking up again one of the servant songs of Isaiah—you remember there are four of them, and He's alluding, without a shadow of a doubt He's alluding to the fourth of those servant songs, and probably verse 10 of Isaiah 53, when He speaks of this expression, "a ransom for many." It's an allusion to the payment that has to be made in order to secure the release of somebody who is in debt. And Jesus is saying, 'I have come to serve. I've come to give my life as a ransom for many, to pay the redemption price, and to pay it to the full.'

We were thinking this morning of great sums of money—great sums of money that perhaps for some of us are beyond anything that we could ever imagine. How much does it cost to free you from your bondage to sin and your slavery to that condition? And Jesus is saying, 'It costs the life of the Son of God. It costs the life of Jesus of Nazareth.' - that that's the purpose for which He has come into this world.

I wonder how many times Jesus took the servant song of Isaiah 53 and read it, as we read it. How many times did He go into the synagogue in Nazareth, or Capernaum, and take the scroll and open that scroll and read it and memorize that passage, and repeat it over and over and over to Himself:

"Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before Him like a young plant, like a root out of dry ground; He has no form or comeliness that we should desire Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid, as it were, our faces from Him.

"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, and we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement due to our peace was laid upon Him. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way; but the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

"He was oppressed and afflicted, and He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth."

I wonder how many times He read that, and said to Himself, 'That's Me. That's My calling. That's what I've come to do. I've come to be that Servant, that covenant Servant of the Lord, to bear the iniquities of My people; to drink of that cup; to undergo that baptism; to pay that ransom price.'

Ah, James and John....get those haughty peacock feathers down and humble yourselves beneath the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due season!

The other disciples are indignant, and you can imagine why. And Jesus is teaching them [that] whoever would be great in the kingdom of God must become least of all.

Was there ever a time in the history of the world more concerned about honor and prestige and importance, the cult of personality, than our own? What if somebody comes into the fellowship...they're not a lawyer, they're not a doctor, they don't own a great business, not a multimillionaire...they're just an ordinary person...and worse! Maybe somebody in need....and do you remember what James (not this James, now, but James, the Lord's brother)—remember what he says in his epistle about true religion? True religion, he says, is that it's to respond to the fatherless and to the widows, and those who have no voice and nothing to offer, who are going to be a drain on your resources.

III. And Jesus is speaking here about discipleship, the shape of discipleship, and it's the shape of a cross.

The shape of a cross: 'You want to be My disciple? Then you must deny yourself, and you must take a cross and follow after Jesus.' The wisdom of this world despises this kind of humility.

Western culture, I think, has been influenced by the power philosophy of Nietzsche: the emergence of the daring, and the super race, you know, the German word, *ubermensch*—the superman: small built, tough, masculine, brash, overbearing.

Who was the great disciple? Read the Christian magazines. Who was the great disciple? The rowdy sports personality, multimillionaire, spoilt? Look around, my friends. What is the church saying about great models of discipleship?

And Jesus is saying, 'You want to be My disciple? Then you will,' He says to James and John. 'Yes, you will be baptized.' He says, 'The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized you will be baptized. Yes.' Not in the sense that they will offer atonement like Jesus offers it only...not in that sense. They can never do that. But they will follow in the footsteps of their master.

James will make it only to the twelfth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Roman soldiers will come to him, and if he died according to tradition, three would come to him. Two would hold up his hands, and the other would thrust the sword in his abdomen and pierce his solar plexus, and he is dead. And it's only the twelfth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and he is dead.

And John will have his measure of sufferings. He'll be whipped by the Sanhedrin, in the Acts of the Apostles; he'll be banished to that Island of Patmos...because that's the shape of discipleship. It will cost you something. It will cost you something. 'You will drink the cup and you will be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with.'

This is a very sobering, sobering passage. It calls on us tonight to ask some very solemn questions. Do you want to be a disciple? Do you want to measure greatness in the kingdom of God? Then you must measure greatness insofar as you are willing to go down...down on your knees...and follow Jesus wherever He leads you...because true discipleship is always cross-shaped. May God help us so to heed these lessons of our Lord.

Let's pray together.

Our God and our Father, as we come now to the close of another Lord's Day, again you teach us that it is to Jesus Christ that we owe absolutely everything. Lord Jesus, we love You, but we have never loved You as we ought to love You, and we pray tonight that You would teach us again to love You more, to follow You with all of our hearts. Forgive us the sin of pride. Help us to be lowly servants. Help us, O gracious God, to follow in His footsteps. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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