

"What Do You Want Me To Do For You?"

It doesn't take too much flying on commercial airlines to become jaded to the preflight instructions. You know, how right before takeoff the flight attendant gets up and tells you all the important details like where the exit rows are, how to buckle and unbuckle your seatbelt, how the seat cushion underneath you can be used as a flotation device in the event of a water landing, how should there be a drop in cabin pressure the oxygen masks will drop from the ceiling, and how you need to put on your own mask first before you help your loved one next to you, etc, etc. All the typical things. And yet if you watch carefully, most people will ignore the instructions, many just continuing on their conversations as if the flight attendant wasn't even talking. Most people figure that they have heard these instructions so many times before, there is no need to listen to them again. Even the flight attendants sometimes fall into this same monotony. I've seen some flight attendants rattle through the preflight safety instructions as quickly as humanly possible, partly to be funny, partly to just get the red tape out of the way, I'm guessing. Whenever something like that happens, and I've seen it a few times, I always think, "I hope it's not anyone's first time on a plane today."

It's not that everyone is an expert on these instructions either. Maybe they have them memorized, but that doesn't mean they have really mastered them. For example, I read a news article online from 2007 that reported about how a plane had a drop in cabin pressure, the oxygen masks fell down, but only about half the people actually put the masks on. Finally, an attendant had to get on the speaker tell the rest to put them on.

My point is, that we can often hear the same sort of instructions over and over again, and think we've mastered the information, even when we haven't. We can often zone out when we hear the same information or lesson again. This is despite the fact that we all know that repetition is a key to learning.

In our passage for today, we have three specific events all of which are very similar to things that have already happened in Mark. The first event is in verses 32-34 where Jesus is predicting for the third time his upcoming suffering and death. The second event is in verses 35-45 where James and John, and really all the disciples, are arguing again about who would be the greatest among them. The third event is in verses 46-52 where Jesus heals another blind person. Each of these three events are not new events in Mark. I mean, yes, they are new and distinct events in the history of Jesus' ministry, but what's going on and the general lessons that are being taught are some of the very same specific points that have just been taught in the last few chapters.

And so our temptation today might be to zone out. We could say, yes, yes, I've heard these lessons before. I know about Jesus' sufferings on the cross. I know that we are not supposed to be competitively trying to get ahead of our fellow Christians but are supposed to serve them. Yes, I know Jesus healed the blind. I've heard these lessons before. And yet the fact that Jesus is reteaching even the disciples here some of the same lessons, shows that we sometimes need these lessons repeated. We can be like the people in that airplane - we've heard the oxygen mask instructions countless times, but when the time finally comes, we don't actually act to follow the instructions. That's actually what we see going on with the disciples here even - not getting the lessons that Jesus was teaching, and falling into some of the same sins that they've always have. And so Jesus

reteaches them some of the same lessons, and he teaches us again some of the same lessons. But to both of us, both us and the disciples, as we look closer at some of these same lessons, we see that Jesus is not only repeating the previous teaching, but he is also adding some additional nuance and insight. And so as we look at these three specific events today from this passage, I want us to look at the teaching Jesus is reaffirming in each, but I also want us to look at what new insights he is giving as well. And so as we look at each of these three events, we'll review the previous teaching and look at the new insights that Jesus gives. Then at the end, I'm going to try to tie these events together for us.

And so let's begin with the first event in verses 32-34. Here Jesus predicts to the disciples for the third time in Mark that he will suffer, die, and rise again. The first time Jesus told this to the disciples in the book of Mark was immediately after the disciples confessed that Jesus was the Christ in Mark chapter 8. A very similar prediction by Jesus occurred again in chapter 9. After both of these first predictions, we find the disciples not getting it. After the first prediction, Peter rebukes Jesus. He must have thought that Jesus' messiahship had more to do with earthly glory than suffering. After Jesus predicted his death the second time in Mark 9, immediately afterward we find the disciples arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. So the response by the disciples after the first two predictions by Jesus shows that they were still thinking about the kingdom only in terms of glory, not in terms of a mission of suffering. As we see in this passage, that's actually what happens again here. Immediately after this third prediction, we find James and John focusing on the glory of the kingdom. It's as if it still isn't registering to them that Christ first had a mission of suffering to go on.

But as we look at this third prediction of Jesus' sufferings, we notice some specific new aspects. First, notice the setting. Here Jesus and the disciples are on the road again. Jesus seems to be all the more charging ahead with one destination in mind: Jerusalem. This is the first time we are told in Mark that his final destination is Jerusalem. We've seen him heading in that direction. He'd recently left Galilee, and was making his way south through Judea. Now he is on his final advance to Jerusalem.

And look at the disciples' response in verse 32. They were amazed and afraid. We're not told exactly why, but it seems connected with their destination of Jerusalem, and how boldly Christ is heading toward it. If the disciples were still thinking about the glory of the kingdom, Jerusalem was exactly where they would need to head. Maybe they were thinking to themselves, "This is it!" "We are on our way to Jerusalem. Something is really going to happen now." They probably were both scared and excited at the same time.

But it's at that time Jesus repeats the prediction of his death and suffering. And if you look at this prediction, it's the longest of his three predictions. It contains the most information of all of the predictions. He describes his suffering with more detail, with this list of mocking, scourging, spitting, and finally killing, verse 34. But he also talks about the role of the Gentiles. Not only will his own people betray him, being condemned by Israel's religious leaders, but then the Gentiles, the pagan nations, will execute the death sentence upon him. The disciples likely thought the glory of Christ's kingdom would be something where the people of Israel would join in together with, faithfully following the Messiah into victory over the Gentiles. Maybe that's what they hoped would start to happen when they arrived in Jerusalem. Instead, Jesus says that quite the opposite would happen. He says that when they get to Jerusalem, the Israelites would deny him, and the Gentiles would kill him. Not quite what the disciples had in mind, it seems.

What might be the greatest description of his suffering comes actually in verse 45. Jesus says that he came to give his life as a ransom for many. That little word ransom is very important. When we talk about Christ's death on the cross, we call his death a substitution. We talk about the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Christ died on the cross as a substitute for us. He died for the many, referring here to the elect, in their place.

And yet despite the fact that Jesus now has for the third time in Mark predicted his suffering to the disciples, they still seem to not get it. They still have only glory in mind. They don't realize that their trip to Jerusalem is for a mission of suffering. Jesus is resolutely charging forward to Jerusalem to suffer and die, *and rise again*, for his people. But yet look at the disciples response in the second event in our passage for today. This is in verses 35-45. Here we find James and John making a rather bold request of Jesus. They come to Jesus in verse 35 and basically tell Jesus that they have a request for him, and they want him to agree to grant it, even before they ask it. (Parents, don't agree to this if you children come to you with such a request!) Instead Jesus says to them in verse 36, "What do you want me to do for you?" And so they proceed to ask that they could have the highest positions of honor and authority when Jesus comes into his glory!

As I've already alluded to, this is the same exact sort of thing that already happened with the disciples. Back in chapter 9, the disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. Here James and John basically pick that up and go to Jesus directly to try to secure the best position. Of course, the other 10 disciples don't take kindly to this request. In verse 41, the other 10 disciples become greatly displeased with James and John when they hear of this. Of course, when the other 10 react in this way, it shows that James and John were just representative of the whole group. They all wanted the place of prestige and honor. It's almost like pirates looking for treasure. Think of pirate movies or cartoons; this is a very typical thing. When pirates get really close to finding the treasure, they all start plotting on how they can have all the treasure for themselves. They recognize that they need the other pirates to help them get the treasure, but when they finally do, their greed comes up and they want to try to take it all for themselves. Well, the disciples know they are getting closer to Jerusalem. They are obviously thinking that the time of glory is just around the corner. And so the same attitude they had back in chapter 9 is resurfacing again. They seem to be all looking to benefit from their relationship with Jesus, benefit in some way of glory. And they don't mind pushing the other disciples aside to get that glory.

And so in one sense, Jesus responds with the same message that he gave before. Back in chapter 9, Jesus basically rebuked the disciples and said that in his kingdom, greatness and prosperity comes through striving to be least and last. If you were to excel in Christ's kingdom, it would be through becoming the servant of all and last of all. Jesus reiterates that teaching here in verses 43-44. But Jesus also adds some new teaching. He compares their attitude with the attitude of the Gentiles. Remember, the disciples were probably looking for the Messiah to conquer the pagan Gentile nations. They didn't want to be compared with them. And Jesus points out that the Gentiles lord their leadership over one another. In other words, Jesus challenges the disciples with the way of the world versus the way of his kingdom. Jesus is saying that his kingdom is not going to operate like the way that the world operates. The world's kingdoms are full of humans pridefully exalting themselves over others, looking to dominate one another and control them. But Christ's kingdom would not be founded on force, it would be founded on some very radical principles. It would be founded on radical sacrifice and love, beginning with the king himself. Jesus would die as a ransom for many. He

would die in the place of God's chosen people, that they could be redeemed from their slavery to sin. Jesus' actions on the cross were thus a model for all who belong to the kingdom.

But Jesus goes even one step further here. He not only calls the disciples to be least and last in light of what Jesus himself would do on the cross. In verses 38-40, Jesus actually promises the disciples that they too would share in the sufferings of Christ. When James and John make this bold request of Jesus, Jesus responds with a question of his own - "Can you drink the cup that I drink and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Amazingly, they say "yes". In one sense this is very presumptuous response since they obviously have no real idea about the full extent of Christ's sufferings ahead. But what's more amazing is that Christ agrees with them! Now the disciples should be afraid. But Jesus is right. James and John, and all the disciples, would share in Christ's sufferings. It's not to say that they will each suffer on the cross and die for the sins of God's people. No, that alone belongs to Jesus. But they will share in Christ's sufferings. As they are identified with Jesus, that will include a sharing in his sufferings. Of course it will also mean sharing in his glory as well, which ultimately fulfills all the desires here of the disciples. But first would come suffering. James would die a martyr's death. John would be persecuted and exiled on the island of Patmos. The other disciples would also suffer persecution for the sake of Christ. And we too, as we are identified with Christ, will find suffering and persecution for his sake. And so Jesus takes this principle which he had taught about becoming "least and last" and takes it to the next level. In Christ's kingdom, greatness comes through sharing in Christ's sufferings; loving and serving one another, even as Christ has done for us. This is radically different than the ways of the world!

The third event from our passage is found in verses 46-52. Here Jesus heals another blind person. Jesus already healed a blind man back in chapter 8. And back in chapter 8, one thing that was shown by this healing is Jesus ability to heal people's spiritual blindness. In other words, we saw Jesus healing people's physical senses, but it was in the context of Jesus' teaching; his teaching that said people were spiritually blind and spiritually deaf. People had eyes but did not see, ears, but did not hear. We saw that the disciples were undergoing some of that same spiritual dullness. Of course it's very fitting here to see Jesus healing another blind man, when the disciples are showing that they still suffer from some spiritual dullness. The disciples still weren't understanding about the imminent suffering of Christ; they were more focused on visions of grandeur and glory. And so in some sense, I think this same lesson we learned the last time we saw Jesus heal a blind man, is still in view here as well. Just as Jesus' heals the blind physically, he also has power to heal our spiritual blindness as well.

But there is more to this incident as well. Notice that we learn this man's name. His name is Bartimaeus, and Mark goes out of his way to tell us that he was the Son of Timaeus. Well, that's exactly what Bartimaeus' name means in Aramaic. It's literally, Son of Timaeus. Now granted, Mark was writing to a Greek speaking audience, but surely Aramaic was well known enough to recognize that Bar-Timaeus means Son of Timaeus. It's like the Spanish word "hola". You probably don't need to really speak Spanish to know that means hello. But it's interesting that here the Son of Timaeus cries out twice to the "Son of David."

Don't let that slip past you. Bartimaeus is the first one in the gospel of Mark to call Jesus the "Son of David." That's a very Messianic title. And how fitting this title is right before Jesus enters Jerusalem. The very next passage is the triumphal entry where the people will declare the coming kingdom of David as Jesus rides into the city. In chapter 12, we'll see Jesus teaching about how the scribes

call the Christ the Son of David. And so people were beginning to refer to the Christ as the Son of David. And yet as the people begin to consider Jesus as the Son of David and the promised Messiah, the very question that the disciples are wrestling with will be raised with the people. What kind of Messiah and what kind of kingdom is Jesus bringing? Is it about earthly glory, or is Jesus looking toward the way of the cross. Obviously our passage tells us today that Jesus' focus here is on the cross.

And so to Bartimaeus Jesus says in verse 51, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus, having abandoned his outer cloak, the very cloak he probably used to collect alms on, he comes in faith to Jesus and asks that his sight be restored. And that is what Jesus does. As Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem, he shows what it means for him to be the Son of David. He is opening eyes and ears and hearts to his good news. The good news that he came to suffer, and die, and rise again, as a ransom for man.

All three of these distinct events in this passage have reminded us of truths that we've already learned in Mark. But I hope we've also learned some additional aspects of these truths. I'd like to now think about the relationship of these three events. In some sense they might not seem to be too related, but I do think Mark is weaving them all together. The first event and second event clearly have Christ's mission of suffering in mind. The first event explicitly predicts that suffering. Jesus ends the second event with his suffering as the example for the disciples. So clearly the first and second events have a connection regarding Christ's coming mission of suffering as he enters Jerusalem.

The second and third events both have a common question that ties them together. Jesus asks James and John, "What do you want me to do for you?" And he asks blind Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" In the Greek, these are almost identically stated, the only real difference being the plural case. In Greek, there are plural forms of verbs and nouns that you use when speaking to multiple people instead of just one person, kinda like using the word "y'all". In other words, Jesus asks James and John, "What do ya'll want me to do for y'all?" But otherwise, it's the same question. So it's the same question, but a different response. Jesus denies the request of James and John and grants the request of Bartimaeus. And yet, Jesus' mission of suffering is behind the answer to both.

For Jesus to not grant the request of James and John is in light of Christ's mission of suffering. His mission of suffering says that their request was not appropriate. It wasn't appropriate in light of Christ suffering, or in light of the nature of the kingdom which is founded upon Christ's suffering. But for Jesus to grant Bartimaeus' request is exactly in light of Christ's mission of suffering. He is coming to free people. He is coming to give sight to the blind. The physical miracles of healing point to what he is doing spiritually in people's lives. And he does that through his mission of suffering. For Christ to heal Bartimaeus has the same effect as his turning down the request of James and John. Both are Christ's way of saying, "I've come." I've come to do the mission given to me by the Father. I've come to suffer and die so that my people will not suffer and die - not eternally that is. That's the irony of course. Jesus promises James and John and all of us that there is suffering and persecution ahead on earth for his disciples. But Jesus frees Bartimaeus from earthly suffering. But both look forward to eternity. Both look forward to the final freedom from suffering. We will have freedom from suffering for all eternity when our Lord returns. Right now we participate in that spiritually already. But yet we know in this world we share in some of Christ's sufferings right now for his sake.

And so all three of these events has Christ's mission of suffering in view. And if that's the case, it's so ironic Jesus' repeated question here. What do you want me to do for you? That Jesus would ask this right as he pulls up to Jerusalem. That Jesus would ask us what *more* he could do for us just as he is about to give his life for us. That we could even have the presumption to ask anything more of him! And yet in Christ's great love for us, he asks us this question still. Even now, he asks this question of us! He wants us to bring our requests to him. He wants us to ask of him. Oh, how we do not have, because we do not ask. Certainly Jesus does not grant our every request. But if he calls us to ask of him of our needs, why would we not? Oh what great and amazing love Jesus has for us. He gave himself as a ransom for us. He suffered the torture and death described here in our passage. He did this all for us! For his saints. And to him that evidently is just the beginning of his love. Now he continues to call us to ask of him. And he delights in showing us the full extent of his love.

Saints of God, I hope you never grow tired of hearing this great news of Christ's amazing love. I hope you never close your ears to the good news that Christ suffered and died for us. I think of penny. During my college ministry days, one of our fellowship leaders showed us a penny quickly. Then he took it away and asked us to draw that penny, front, and back, on a piece of paper. Oh, we each got parts of it. But it's amazing how much we missed... and yet how many times have we looked at a penny? That's the problem. We can think we've heard a message so many times before. We can think we don't need to hear it again. But we do. How true that is for some spiritual lessons. We needed to keep hearing them, and we need Christ to keep working on those issues in our lives, because we still in our actions and thoughts show that we fall short.

And so in closing, I'd like to apply further some of this passage. How does Christ's mission of suffering call us to act? Well first, it calls us to put off. It calls us to put off our old way of thinking. Our old way of thinking is like that of the Gentiles. Like that of the pagan nations. Like that of the world. But if we belong to Christ, then our thinking shouldn't be modeled after the world's ways, full of competitive pride and selfishness. It should be modeled after the way of the cross. And that means that in our prayer life, when we ask of Jesus, it should not contain the requests that the world might make. Our prayer requests to Jesus should not be for things that are in conflict with Christ's kingdom.

And so second, let us not just put off these pagan thoughts and ways, let us also put on the ways of Christ and his kingdom. We should think Christianly. Our desires should be consistent with Christ and the kingdom. And that should be reflected in our prayer life as well. Our prayer requests should be in line with the way of the cross.

Here's what I'm saying. Because Christ suffered and died for us, it should affect our desires and it should affect how we express those desires in prayer. For example with your job. If we desire to get ahead *at all costs*, just to move up the corporate ladder of success and wealth, we need to rethink those desires. Those desires probably shouldn't make up our prayer requests to God. They aren't consistent with being a Christian saved by Christ's grace. But how then might you pray about your job? Maybe you will ask God to help you to work hard at your job. To serve honestly. To be responsible and above reproach at your work. Of course, doing so, might help you to move up the ladder at your job. That is not a bad thing if that happens. But we need to understand Christ's mind and heart and make that our own. It's my hope and prayer that having that perspective will radically change how you look at life; what you desire; and have you pray.

Saints of God - Christ died for us. And he rose for us. He has given us so much, and he continues to come to us and ask of us what he can do in our life. What a gracious Lord. May we then bring to him the sorts of prayer requests that he desires for us to bring. Not - "may our will be done", but "thy will be done!" May Christ's great love for us change everything - our heart's desires, and even how we express that in prayer. Amen.

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