

Mark 10:32-45

Intro March 9, 2006 The Crux of Sacrifice

While I enjoy sampling at the buffet of modern culture, I have little patience when culture dictates that Christian concepts be recast. While it is imperative our biblical framework must inform our culture, but that the gospel is expressed in a culturally accessible fashion. The starting point must always be to understand the text of Scripture and then speak to our world. It is far too easy to convey Christ to culture only to fail both Christ and culture. As a pastor I come across a plethora of books portraying a popular Jesus as the model for management. Google *Jesus* and *management* or *leadership* and you find all sorts of opinions on how to lead by following Jesus' example. Jesus makes our life better as a moral guide.

When Jesus becomes the moral grid for all of life, we oddly call on the Son of God in ways that miss the very point of the gospel. When we resort to religious language and imagery without the crux of the gospel, without the core of what He came to do, we render the gospel impotent.

Our passage is often a favorite text for discussing servant leadership, of Jesus' example for us on how we should run our churches, our homes, and our business. If you want to be great, be a servant, if you want to be first, top dog, make it big, then you've gotta serve somebody. Obviously, Jesus' words and works are selectively applied. There's no mention financial leadership of whip making and overturning economic tables or dealing with recalcitrant employees by firing them...in hell. But still, the comparisons flow. Like going to Moses for dietary advice the use of Jesus as the model leader results in a poor understanding of both Jesus and leadership. What books are out there?

The Leadership Secrets of Jesus ... Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership ... Transforming Leadership: Jesus' Way of Creating Vision, Shaping Values & Empowering Change ... and The Leadership Genius of Jesus: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Business (my subtitle would add ... "how to manipulate Jesus to make money!")

Such an enterprise is borne out of a desire that Jesus' life benefit us here and now in our minds, our families, or our vocations. We take seriously His life so we apply it to what we face. How's that wrong?

The error is the starting point. The culture asks the questions and we flip through the pages of our Bibles to find an answer, instead of allowing the Scriptures to set the agenda for us. When we begin with the ourselves and problems as we define them, we look to God's Word to make our lives easier, simpler, less complicated.

The cross challenges us to rethink the Christian life, to revise our notions of success, service and sacrifice. Like the disciples, we misunderstand that the crux of the Christian life is the cross of Christ, and so, misapply the benefits of what Christ has done for us and in us.

As the disciples follow Jesus toward Jerusalem, they are reminded what lay ahead. Jesus repeatedly tells them of the agony that is to come and they repeatedly confuse what that means for Jesus and for them. In Mark 10 Jesus is less than two weeks away from the cross, but with determination He forges up to Jerusalem. READ 10:32-45.

THE CROSS REDEFINES SUCCESS vv32-40

Our passage begins with the simple statement that helps shape Mark's gospel as one that portrays the Christian life as one that will entail suffering. Through the gospel Jesus and the disciples are on their way to Jerusalem, a place that consistently is mentioned to be one not of worldly success, not victory and glory as we would think it, but of a cross where there is suffering and resurrection.

Mark's picture of Jesus is resolute, fixed on what lay ahead. Jesus is in front, leading the way. He is not a prisoner lagging to the gallows, but knowing that success lies in suffering. The disciples, amazed at his determination, are fearful of what is next.

This is what Isaiah described 700 years before when writing of Jesus, as the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 50:6-7 (read). Jesus for the third time details what will soon happen, having already explained it in 8:31 and 9:31. Now with greater specifics he speaks of his betrayal to the religious leaders who will call for his condemnation, the gentile rulers who alone can execute, of the horrid process leading up to his crucifixion...then resurrection.

What happens next may arrest us, but we should not be too quick to wag our heads in frustration, for the request that passes the lips of James and John is not as outlandish as we may imagine.

When they step forward to ask their question, they do so in response to what they have just heard. Jesus will suffer...but he will rise again. There is success, there is glory, so, if we are following Jesus, we should identify with him and join him in his triumph.

James and John...Jesus gave them the nickname sons of thunder for good reason. Their bold request reveals their certainty of Jesus' success will flow from his suffering.

"We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." They're asking for a blank check, desiring to manipulate no less than a spouse opening with, "Do you love me?"

Graciously Jesus responds without rebuke. There is no sense of, "Uhm...what'd you just say? How dare you!" Rather he leads them through a better understanding of the success they seek, of the glory they desire.

Their request contains affirmation of faith. Grant us to sit on your right and left in your glory.

They believed he is willing and able to do what they desired. They treated him as though despite the suffering that will come, he will be victorious. By asking for the right and left they paid homage to his supremacy as the one who will be in the center. They know glory is coming once suffering is done. But they are really asking for is preeminence and power. They confess that God is the Comforter and they desire to be comfortable...what's so wrong with that!

Jesus responds, not with a rebuke for the tasteless request or a reprimand for their hubris. He follows up with two questions: can you drink my cup and be baptized with my baptism?

The cup in the Old Testament pictures God's allotment, sometimes positive, but often negative, of God's wrath. Again in Isaiah's servant section, in 51:17 this cup is described as horrendous. In the garden before the crucifixion Jesus prayed that this cup be avoided. In the same fashion baptism pictures that which overwhelms so that we cannot stand.

Their response confirms their self-confidence. Like many of us, they are often wrong, but never in doubt. Fixated on glory and confident of their union with Christ, they stand resolute in their request.

What Jesus says next may confuse. His question in v38 seems to be the requirements for their request, but in 40 Jesus says that these places of honor in glory are not for him to give. So why ask the question?

Jesus draws out for them what success will look like. It is not found in the halls of honor that they suppose. They will indeed drink the cup and be baptized. Our union with Christ means that the cup of God's wrath that he must drink is because it contains our sins. What he must endure is because Jesus is identifying with us and we, in turn when it comes to suffering, will identify with Jesus.

It is for this reason Paul says in Romans 8:17 that if we share in Jesus' sufferings we will share in his glory. But where is glory found Jesus? Where does God's glory, might and power ring out most clearly? Where does God's justice and love meet? For whom were the places of honor reserved? In a few days there will be two men on Jesus' right and left, for it was on the cross that Jesus' glory is made clear.

James and John will drink the cup. Not only as they are in Christ and that they will die with him on the cross and be raised with him on the third day. But it is James who is the first disciple to die as a martyr, as Herod beheads him as Luke tells us in Acts 12. John's death is known only to tradition, boiled in oil, they say, but his sufferings are described in Revelation, as an old man, imprisoned on the Island of Patmos.

Our world is full of James and John types: purposeful, driven, head strong, type A. Our church is populated with the same mentality...let's be honest, we are them to varying degrees. We honor the go-getters; we smile at status seekers, hungry for honor and prestige. So we measure success by achievement, always dreaming of what wonderful adventure lies ahead.

Bernard of Clairvaux, the French abbot of the 12th century, well understood Jesus' suffering as he wrote in his passionate hymn, O Sacred Head, warned against ambition as

"a secret poison, the father of spite, and mother of hypocrisy, the moth of holiness, and the cause of madness, crucifying and disquieting all that it take hold of".¹

But our pride obscures our need for the cross. We smugly imagine that we are well prepared for whatever God sends our way...until it comes. We think we are invincible in holiness, ready for whatever God sends our way, but are grouchy when we get the flu? God must laugh at our certainties. But fortunately for us we hear not his laughter, but we see His Son suffering for us. And that is where success will always be found for us, as we are conformed to the image of Christ.

But if we are going to define success in the Christian life it will not be found in victorious living, not crowing about the defeat of sin in our lives. Success must take on the shape of the cross, as we see each day not that *we can* follow, but that glory is found as we wrestle with sin, as we struggle to honor God and fail him daily...but Christ still leads us forward, loving us, caring for us, dying for us.

THE CROSS REDEFINES SERVICE vv41-44

For us service is self-interest

We like to hear of service, especially when we pronounce it *serve us*. The disciples' confusion continues as the ten others hear of James and John's request, so that Jesus redefines service.

When the others heard the request, they were indignant, but it was not a moral outrage at the impertinence of the two brothers but that they two beat the rest to the punch. So Jesus calls them all aside and gives simple instructions about service.

Rulers lord it, great ones exercise authority...these descriptions apply to all who seek dominance, authority, or position. In its worse Machiavellian form it is easy to critique. In politics or business we spot it, but in our hearts it may not be so simple, but it is there.

- It is in the family where parents demand respect with fist and voice, the father becomes a tyrant, imagining that this fulfills the biblical mandate of headship. All the while the wife is crushed and the children cower in fear.
- It is in the church as people jockey for authority, claiming scriptural principals are at stake, so that if they are not obeyed, God's kingdom will fail. Guilt and manipulation are weapons more mighty than any army possesses.
- You watch it in young and old as those on the fringe continue to be marginalized, as we long to be around the successful, but shun those who have little to offer us.

From the school playground to the corporate boardroom we jockey for position, using our own self-interest as the measure of what life should be. Nobody wants a flunky, a slacker, or a doormat. Lombardi's famous quip "Winning isn't everything—it's the only thing," defines how we wish to live. We sanitize this poison by making winning become biblical victories, taking on the righteousness cause, so that our service serves ourselves because it promotes our position.

The attitude we are called to adopt, in light of the cross, is one of a servant. But this is not designed to be a means to an end. Serve so you can lead. Rather, it is the end...you serve.

The cross redefines service as a loss of self-control

It has been said that you can tell whether you are becoming a servant by how you act when people treat you like one. Serving on our own terms is not what is called for here. Rather, the role of the servant, of the slave, is one who gives up all sense of control for the other. It is the willingness to set aside your rights for the other.

It is easy when we are in control and can do this. It is not so simple when it is foisted on us and we want to scream. If we don't take control, make things go our way, if we are servants and find ourselves hurt, what do we do?

We retreat into a cave of self-interest, angry and bitter when you realize that others have not served you well. What makes this hard is that you are right. You've suffered at the hands of critics and crusaders, of both dim witted and self-important people. You are bruised and hurt in the very place you know you should be treated with love and respect.

But even in that response there is a lording over, with a martyred groan, as you exercise authority, calling others to serve you. But if you are waiting for someone to notice you, it may not come or when it does you will reject it as too little, too late.

When your faith is defined by an innocent man dying unjustly for you, none of us has much room to yell, foul! Demanding my rights seems a tad ironic when we consider what Christ did for us.

This is why Peter, in 1 Peter 2, when arguing about unjust suffering, goes to the cross. The cross not only guides us to understand suffering, but is the power by which we can serve. The cross reminds us that successful service does not mean stuffing our need for control, acceptance and ease, but confessing we fail and need a savior.

THE CROSS REDEFINES SACRIFICE v45

In the final verse, Jesus grounds our ideas of suffering and service in the ethics of redemption. Here is one of the clearest statements that form the foundation of Jesus' purpose in coming.

Paul expands this argument in Philippians 2 just as Peter 2. The messianic mission is one of serving that is sacrificial at its heart. This short statement summarizes what Isaiah says in 53:10-11, in which there is an exchange, Jesus gives his life as a ransom *for* many, in our place, his death in our place so that we will not have to die.

The death of Jesus Christ is not a sad end to a brilliant life snuffed out in his prime. It is not a martyr's tragic end at the hands of injustice. Rather he fulfills the Father's justice by bearing the full wrath of the Father so that we would be the recipients of his grace.

There is a costly nature to any sacrifice. The cost, however, provides freedom

It is a ransom – a payment is made so that those in bondage are now free. What we are called to here is not just an increase dose of humility. We are being called not just to be more modest, but to be more dead. The drive to be first, to get glory, to pursue honor and position and esteem must die.

The cross forces us to see that all life-changing love requires substitutionary sacrifice.² Let's look at this at the most mundane level, parenting. Our kids come to us in the state of complete dependence, they are needy and rather unappreciative, especially at 2am. What is more, they will never grow out of this neediness unless you sacrifice your life, set your desires on the shelf for a couple decades. What will you do?

You'll read to them, boring, dumb, inane and repetitious books, over and over and over.

You will listen to them speak and the conversation will not be the most scintillating.

This will go on until they are 25 or so.

Unless you sacrifice your freedom, your rights enormously, and are willing to put life on hold to a great degree, they will not grow up and move out, they will not be whole and healthy. If you won't disrupt life that much, pouring yourself into the kids, they may age, but they won't grow up. They will remain needy and dependent. Either you sacrifice or you will sacrifice them.

What is true with our children is true with all of our relationships.

The degree of sacrifice will differ, but the need to sacrifice remains. As long as I focus on my needs, my growth, my relationship with Christ, I will never grow. The cross of Christ becomes for each of us the call to sacrificially serve others. The question remains, who then are you sacrificing yourself for today?

A fourteen year old girl was being interviewed just before the election of Pope John Paul II. A CBS newscaster roamed up and down the streets of Vatican City posing this question to people in the crowd: "What would you like to do if you were the Pope?" When he came to this 14-year-old girl, she replied: "I'd cover the communion wafers with chocolate."

We may chuckle at the naïveté of youth, but her response is not that far from our reality. When armed with power, what would you do? How tempting it is to wrap the gospel in a package of success and happiness so that the Bible is nothing more than a box of spiritual chocolates. But such sweet-toothed discipleship benefits no one. When sacrifice ceases to be our calling, we will not find life in the cross, but death by chocolate, as we hunger for that which will never finally satisfy.³

¹ Epistle 126. (David Garland, The NIV Application Commentary: Mark, p. 415-16)

² Tim Keller, The Meaning of His Death, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 1/14/07

³ "No Green Without Red," Homiletics Online, 10/20/1991, www.homiletics online.com