

October 18, 2015
The Last Lesson of Discipleship
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Mark 10:32-45

A Third Time Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

³² They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³ saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and 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 they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

The Request of James and John

³⁵ James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." ³⁶ And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" ³⁷ And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." ³⁸ But 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 that I am baptized with?" ³⁹ They replied, "We are able." Then 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; ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

⁴¹ When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. ⁴² So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

In Mark 10 Jesus explained, for the third time, his immediate future: his arrest and execution by the Romans. Hearing him, two disciples - James and John - pulled him to the side to ask, "Hey, Jesus, we have an idea. We want you to do for us whatever we ask."

"And what would that be . . . ," Jesus answered, "this thing I can do for you?"

"When all this goes down," they said, "let us stay so close that to get to you the Romans have to come through us." That's what they said, right? Nope. Because that would suggest they'd actually heard what Jesus just said.

"When you ascend to your throne, put one of us on your right and the other on your left." *We think we are the best you've got. You'd be smart to give us the top jobs.* Were they listening, at all? Did they hear anything Jesus just said?

Like the time we were on vacation and I was sure the waiter told us we had very romantic children - which seems a very strange thing to say . . . except he didn't say we had romantic children. He said we had well-behaved children. Apparently half a glass of wine can cause hearing loss, as can fear, or fantasy, or ambition, . . . *whatever* kept the disciples from hearing what Jesus was saying. To their credit, it was a hard thing to hear. Terrible, terrible news - nonsense really.

Maybe their question was the only words they knew to say. *But everything is going to be okay, right? You're going to watch out for us, right? We are still your favorites, right?*

Jesus replied, "You've no idea what you are asking for. Can you drink the same cup I will drink? Can you be baptized with the same baptism?" These are Old Testament references from Isaiah and Lamentations and Psalms: the cup of wrath, the overwhelming flood, images of judgment and death.

"Oh definitely," James and John reply, from deep inside the delusion of their innocence. If Jesus had asked, "Can you jump over the moon and not fall?" Or, "Can you eat poison berries and not be sick?," these two would still have said, "Oh definitely." Listening, but still not hearing.

"In fact, you will," Jesus said, predicting their future as well as his own. "But for now, the ones on my right and left in my glory were selected in heaven already, and they are not you." We know who they were: not disciples, but criminals. Ones guilty beyond doubt, they shared in his suffering, knew it far better than his own friends.

About then, the other ten overheard and were furious to be left out of this meeting, exposing themselves to be no less deaf than James and John.

It's essentially the same sermon as last week - just replace the word "money" with the words "power," or "position," or "control." It's Jesus' last lesson of discipleship: *money doesn't work the same in my kingdom*, he taught last week. *And neither does personal power, or professional position. In my kingdom, you don't control anything: not your future, not other people.*

Not here. Not you. Here, among yourselves, you serve. Power - Greatness - is measured in acts of service. The greatest among you is the one who serves all of you. The one who is slave to all, who understands her life as belonging to others.

"For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

From here, in Mark's gospel, Jesus didn't teach. He acted. His disciples didn't so much listen, as watch . . . and choose to follow, or not. They didn't. But then they did.

Again, they can hardly be blamed for their confusion. But as I said last week, Mark didn't write to the disciples, who heard Jesus in real time. He wrote to the church hearing Jesus in hindsight - in our case, 2,000 years of hindsight with which to listen and hear Jesus predict what for us is the oldest news of all, THE gospel: *I suffered, I died, I rose. And you will too.*

And if we can hear him - truly hear him - not with ears, but with heart and mind and soul, we will discover another way to live. A way absent of fear, absent of competition, absent of constant jockeying for position, absent of the need to control every detail of our lives, absent of the pressure this world delivers to our heart every single morning, noon, and night . . . to do more and be more of whatever we are supposed to be and do!

Not you! Jesus says to his church. *Not here, among yourselves.*

You don't ask for favors, you give them. You don't compete with each other, you serve each other. You don't jockey and strategize and outsmart each other. You stay together and help each other. The whole group moves no faster or further than the slowest and the weakest among you.

Is it efficient? Is it productive? Is it successful? -- Depends on who's measuring.

The Kelley School of Business Supply Chain Academy?

HolyCow Church Consulting? (Yep, that's a thing.) -- They ask of churches almost the exact same questions business consultants ask businesses.

Are we growing a business here? Then we should definitely be asking those questions. But I'm not sure that's Jesus' measure of discipleship. Seems to me service is his measure. Not what we gain and grow, but what we give . . . and what we lose . . . in serving one another.

Serving one another knowing that we can never, NEVER do more for one another than Jesus has already done for us. And being not discouraged by that, but encouraged - confident that the best life to be found is in the trying to imitate him.

If you want a great life, Jesus said, give your life away.

At first his disciples didn't get it. But then they did. Just like he said they would. None of us knows what tomorrow will bring, Friends. But he does. None of us has any control over the future. But he does. Because in him our lives and our future has been bought and paid for.

We have this day. We have this life together. We have time and energy and ability the world needs. And we've nothing to hold back. We can give and give and give and give, in faithfulness and joy, as long as life allows.

Would you pray with me?