

Mark 10:32-45 31st October 2021

Jesus predicts his death a third time

³² They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³ 'We are going up to Jerusalem,' he said, 'and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.'

The request of James and John

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.' ³⁶ 'What do you want me to do for you?' he asked. ³⁷ They replied, 'Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.' ³⁸ 'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said. 'Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?' ³⁹ 'We can,' they answered. Jesus said to them, 'You will drink the cup I drink and be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.'

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must 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 as a ransom for many.'

As we have looked at Mark's Gospel, we've seen Jesus travel around Galilee, go north outside Israel, go over the Jordan and into Judea. Now he's on his final journey, walking to Jerusalem and the Cross. This time Jesus is walking ahead on his own, followed by his disciples. For the fourth time, he tells the disciples what they really don't want to hear... that he will be mocked, flogged and killed by the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that three days later he will rise from the dead. The first time, (Mark 8:31-34) Simon Peter rebuked Jesus, who he had just acknowledged as the Messiah. Being rejected by the chief priests and teachers of the law was one thing the disciples understood, but being killed and rising again after three days wasn't part of their understanding of what was supposed to happen to the Messiah. Then in Mark 9:12-13, Jesus again says the Son of Man must suffer and be rejected. The third time is in Mark 9:31-32 he tells them he will be betrayed, killed and rise after three days, but this time the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus what this meant. This fourth time, the twelve disciples heard the same thing from Jesus and were astonished, while the others travelling with Jesus were afraid.

Let's look at what Jesus is doing and ask ourselves how courageous he was knowing what would happen to him. There two kinds of courage: the reactive bravery to deal with a dangerous situation where often unthinkingly people do brave things as result of their training, values, sense of justice, love of others. The other kind of courage is shown by those who know the danger and do not avoid it because that would harm others or put others at risk. This second kind of courage is the greater because it is faced rather than avoided. Jesus showed this courage as he faced what he knew would be a very painful experience, but one he had to endure for the sake of mankind.

Despite what they heard from Jesus, the disciples did not desert him, but carried on with him until the end... when they could do nothing but incriminate themselves with the authorities which would have meant suffering with him. However much they may have wished to leave him, the disciples loved Jesus and one thing about all of us which is pretty universal, is that we do not desert the people we love, no matter what they have done. The amount we put up with will test us, but true *love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1Corinthians 13:4-7).* The followers of Jesus go on their way and as we will see next week they will be walking to Jericho. Mark then changes the subject. In Matthew's longer Gospel, it's chapter 20 when the next passage occurs, but instead of James and John asking Jesus, it's their mother asking the same thing. Mark doesn't have Matthew's sensitivity or willingness to edit out anything negative about the disciples, anything that would be unworthy of an apostle, but it's here in Mark, warts and all. (A saying alleged to have originated from Oliver Cromwell when his portrait as Lord Protector of England was being painted without his skin blemishes, he is said to have told the painter, "take it away, paint me warts and all").

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The disciples still don't get it – but this time they know that Jesus will be a king and they want key positions in the new kingdom. They know Jesus can do anything. In Matthew's Gospel it is John and James' mother who asks the question. Many commentators believe that Matthew wanted to avoid people thinking that these two apostles were so selfish in the past - now that they were pillars of the church in Jerusalem- that they would have asked such a question. Mark's Gospel is one of the most direct and the fact that we see later that the other ten disciples were indignant with John and James in both Gospels, lends credence to the fact that they asked, rather than their mother. Perhaps their mother made the suggestion?

Jesus tells them that what they're asking has a price – to drink the cup of a king and be submerged (baptism means to drench, submerge) with or drowned by, the issues Jesus faced. Kings in those days passed their cup to their trusted servants and guests at a banquet, so they could share with the king the ups and downs of life. Using the metaphor of drinking from the cup that Jesus drinks from, implies that it may be a cup of joy or a cup of righteous anger (God's wrath) or a cup of sorrows. Do the disciples really understand that Jesus will be drowned with pain, hatred, sadness and death? The flip side is the resurrection, the joy of seeing people accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour, the joy of sending Holy Spirit to guide, comfort and inspire believers for centuries to come. The fact that they say "Yes, we can drink from Jesus' cup and be submerged or baptised with you" results in them both being persecuted and harassed for the sake of Jesus. James was beheaded (Acts 12:2) and John ended his long life in exile on a remote island... the only one of the twelve who died a natural death.

Jesus accepts what they say but they don't realise the consequences of what they asked. If they knew, they probably wouldn't have asked. The warning here is: be careful what you ask for from God, because He may give you what you ask. Many Christians have proclaimed that they were

willing to die for Jesus - and so many did die. Saying that today bears a risk. There is a line in many a hymn that some won't sing because it is making a declaration that is not expected to be taken up by God. For example "All that I have and all that I am, I give to Thee" or "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold". Declaring this to God may result in it being taken up by God so that, like the rich young man last week who was asked to give away all to the poor, we may be asked by Jesus to do likewise. How many of us are prepared to do that?

Jesus doesn't give John and James what they want, but offers them a choice which is to bear all he has to bear – a choice they accept - and as it turns out, they willingly bear because of their love of Jesus.

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Jesus has again to calm down his disciples when some of them appear to step out of line. In chapter 9:33-35, they were arguing "who was the greatest", and again the same thing has happened not a long time later. Jesus has to repeat what he already said earlier: "*if anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, the servant of all*".

Those in Jesus' kingdom who are in authority must be a servant, slave of all. This is one of the hardest things for anyone to achieve. It has its parallels in any organisation with a management structure that is well run. Every officer in the army is expected, when required, to do what the lowest private has to do. A good manager should be able to do the work of those under him - whether that means cleaning the toilets or stepping in to drive a van, man the tills and stack the shelves in the business, as well as ordering others to do what they need to do. Where people work 9-5 and not a minute more, where people drop everything because time's up and they'll not be paid extra for carrying on, where people do the least they can get away with... that is what selfish, uncaring and sinful people do, who paradoxically are the first to complain when the way they treat others is foisted on themselves. It is the opposite to the Christian way of life, where as servants and disciples of Jesus, he or she does more than is required, is helpful and caring even if it is personally inconvenient and costly, puts the needs of others above his/her own needs and loves people rather than being indifferent, judgmental and uncaring.

Human nature is full of pride. Human nature is selfish. John and James wanted position. The other disciples wanted position and whatever someone else got, they felt they should have too. Jesus turns a lot of the world's value upside down. Kings and despots who had power realised that they could do what they liked. Today that still applies to those in corrupt governments, and not so corrupt governments where influence is sold for personal gain and expenses are overclaimed. Those in the kingdom of God are free to do what God wants them to do, and before you think that you, as a Christian may be asked to do things you don't want to do, like being told by Jesus to be missionary in Mongolia, let me tell you that it doesn't work that way. God can change the desires of your heart so that if it is his plan for you to be a missionary in Mongolia, that will be something that is a burning desire in your own heart.

Jesus says what the world needs: people willing to serve others rather than lord it over others. Jesus was the most powerful man who ever walked to earth: he could have taken over the world with legions of angels. Yet he gave his life as a ransom for many. Some in the past have queried to

whom was the ransom paid? This is overthinking a simple statement. We say the price of freedom is blood, toil, sweat and tears, without asking to whom that price is paid. We may say sorrow is the price of love, because love cannot exist without the possibility of sorrow... but to whom is that price paid? Jesus is saying that his life is what it cost to bring men and women back from their sin into the love of God. The cost of salvation is paid on the cross. No deeper theology is needed. Jesus dying on the cross opened the way for men and women to be forgiven their sins and to be given the gift of eternal life.

Going on to some points to take home with you which are: (1) **If this story happened today, what would it look like?** (2) **What is this story saying to us today?** (3) **Could the story make a difference to my life? If so, how?**

(1) If this story happened today, what would it look like?

Today there are plenty of people who seek position in churches without being qualified. The qualification for leadership is found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7

Here is a trustworthy saying: whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

By grace we can be forgiven for being less than perfect and making mistakes – but leaders have to have the character that Paul says is necessary. Sadly the history of the Church over the past 2,000 years is littered with people wanting power, power over others, and personal riches. It takes someone who is brave enough to point out where they're going astray, like the prophet Nathan who told a story of rich man taking a sheep, the only sheep a poor man owned and thinking nothing of it. King David was indignant, and said that man deserved to die. Nathan told him that he was that man, who took Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and on discovering she was pregnant called him back from the war to let him lie with his wife, but Uriah didn't because the other men on the front didn't have that privilege. Then King David sent him back to the war and told his generals to withdraw from Uriah in the battle so he would be killed. Sometimes we don't see what we're doing clearly and it takes someone else to show us the truth.

(2) What is this story saying to us today?

Human nature is such that if we think we're as good as others, and are equal, don't we deserve the same as what others receive? We live today in a society where so many believe they deserve the same as everyone else without either working for it, earning it, or making any effort at all. Jesus says we must be slaves (the Greek word is *doulos*... usually someone who works without pay and hasn't any human rights) of all. Our reward is in heaven, and so we mustn't expect any earthly reward... yes it's nice if we receive something back, like thanks, or even gifts, but if we don't, we should happily carry on serving because we do it for Jesus, and not for the praise of men.

(3) Could the story make a difference to my life? If so, how?

I hope that Mark's Gospel is giving you an insight into the Christian life and what Jesus expects from his disciples. Each week we have seen how hard it was for the disciples to understand what Jesus was saying because much runs counter to the norms of our selfish society where people strive to get enough and more. To be a disciple involves serving and allowing others to serve so that God is glorified rather than our egos being stroked. God opposes the proud and gives his grace to the humble (Proverbs 3:4, 1 Peter 5:5 and James 4:6).