

The servant Saviour * Mark 10:32-45

April 2, 2023 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

Show of hands here – how many of you have watched a video on YouTube in the last month or so? (Not necessarily to watch one of my sermons again ;) , but just generally?)

Did you notice how they have these little ‘shorts’ as an option you can click? They’re like little short videos that autoplay just a bit to pique your interest and move on to the next. I think they’re YouTube’s way of trying to keep up with TikTok. And of course they’re there to get you to click and get their advertisers another view.

Well, I admit, that at one point in the last few weeks, I clicked on a video that had a ‘cool dude influencer’ reflecting back on some of his past antics. You know how they have these videos doing crazy, far out things? Like \$5 TOILET PAPER VS \$1000 WHICH IS BETTER? (YouTube is weird). This guy had two years back made a giant pancake that was as big as the kitchen he was working in. You see the video of him where he dumps in a whole bag of flour, dumps in all the eggs, makes a big show of his pancake making so that the people who see his video will say ‘man, this is cool!’ and pass it along to their friends and thus raise the profile and advertising potential of the pancake making influencer.

In this new video, it showed him watching the old video and shaking his head, like, what was I thinking? And then the text read something like ‘Maybe I should do it this way?’ And then it showed him in sped up fashion taking the same amount of flour and the same amount of eggs and making them into reasonably sized pancakes and packaging them up to take out to people on the streets who looked like they could use a meal.

Now that’s a great thing to do and a way better use of those resources. I acknowledge that he’s still doing it to raise his own profile – right – he wants people to like and subscribe – but he’s using his influence not just for himself but also for the benefit of others.

And that’s the idea that’s at the heart of today’s passage. We all have power, influence, status because of who we are and what we do – how are you using that power, influence and status? Are you using it exclusively for your own benefit or also for the benefit of others?

That’s the question at the heart of our passage today. Turn with me to Mark chapter 10; Mark 10, starting in verse 32. And I’ll show you why I say that. Jesus and His disciples were once again on the road. And...

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.

You can picture here a triangle headed down the road – Jesus up front, His disciples behind Him and then a larger crowd of hangers-on in the back. And given that they were headed up to Jerusalem, where Jesus said He was going to suffer and die, everyone was just a little on edge.

At some point along the road, they probably stopped for some water and at that point, Jesus ... took [the smaller group] the Twelve aside and told them what lay ahead.

And this is going to sound familiar to you.

33 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and 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."

Does that ring any bells? It should. This is now the third time that Jesus has said this very thing to His disciples. Chapter 8, chapter 9, chapter 10 – He just keeps telling them that He is going to suffer and die and rise. And each time He tells them, He raises the stakes a little.

Back in Mark 8, verse 31, just after the Transfiguration, Jesus told them:

31 ... that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

That's the basic idea.

Chapter 9, verse 31, just after healing the boy with the evil spirit, Jesus told them again:

"The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. (Not just 'I'm going to suffer and be rejected'; 'I'm going to suffer and be rejected because someone close to Me will betray Me. And so) They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."

Now here in chapter 10, verse 33,

33 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death (ok, we've heard all that before) and will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34 who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him.'

That's new. Up until now, it's been a Jewish religious thing, but now they're getting the Gentiles involved too. This is serious business. And yet Jesus doesn't fail to mention –

'Three days later he will rise.'

Why do you suppose Jesus told this to His disciples three times within the span of three chapters?

Repetition, repetition, repetition.

He wants His disciples to understand that this is going to happen. He's going to Jerusalem with the full knowledge that He is going to be betrayed and suffer and die when He gets there. And He wants them to be ready for it too.

Not only that though, He wants them to realize that even though He will suffer and die a violent, shameful death, God's plan has not been thwarted. Yes, He says, three times "I am going to die." But He also says times – "I will rise again." On Good Friday, it's sure going to look as though evil has overcome good, but we don't call it 'Good Friday' for nothing, do we? Jesus wants His disciples to know that His death is all part of the plan, a plan which includes triumphing over death by rising again to life.

And so He tells them. Again and again and again.

And yet they still don't seem to get it.

They're back on the road again, Jesus leading the way up front, and then, verse 35:

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."

They had seen Jesus in all His glory at the Transfiguration and they wanted a piece of that. They wanted places of honour in Jesus' upcoming kingdom.

And do you know what Jesus did? (Face palm).

Jesus has JUST told them that He is going to suffer and die and not just that; He's going to suffer and die because He was betrayed and not just that, He's going to suffer and die at the hands of filthy Gentiles and all the disciples can think about is who gets the glory in His kingdom.

Jesus of course keeps it together better than I would and so He says:

38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

ie., 'if you are going to get the places of honour in my kingdom, then you're going to have to do what I do and suffer the same things as me.'

In the OT, 'the cup' is often used as an image of God's wrath, like in Jeremiah 25:15, where God talks about 'a cup filled with the wine of His wrath that makes men stagger and go mad.'ⁱ And

the baptism thing; that was a 'plunging' word before it had anything to do with Christianity, so imagine being tied to the front of a boat and going down into and under the waves.ⁱⁱ

Jesus is going to drink that cup and be plunged violently under in 'baptism' and that's what His disciples can expect too. Now that gives me pause, but clearly it didn't the disciples, because they say:

39 "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized 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."

God alone determines who gets those privileges and not even Jesus will interfere.

Well, as soon as 41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

Of course they did! They couldn't believe that James and John would be so arrogant as to place themselves higher than them on the Kingdom pecking order. Probably not for altruistic reasons though; they're just mad they didn't think to ask for status first.

To settle things once and for all,

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.

ie., you know that the people in power in the world around us use that power for their own benefit. They may have that power to govern other people but instead of using that power for them, they use it to serve themselves.

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.

This is one of those moments that I remember very clearly from seminary. The prof said those words and then said that they put them on a banner at the back of the church so people would see it on their way out back into the world. Because this is something of a motto for followers of Jesus.

If you're out in the world, the motto is 'Do what it takes to get ahead.' Out in the world, people with privilege, influence, status tend to use that privilege, influence and status for their own benefit. There are so many stories out there of COVID fraud, where people in charge of using

COVID funds to support children with special needs doing online learningⁱⁱⁱ and a meal fund for children^{iv} have been charged with siphoning millions of those dollars into their own pockets.

There are fascinating studies online that show similar things. A study at UC Irvine showed that people who drove Fords and Dodges always ceded the right of way to pedestrians in a crosswalk, while people driving BMWs and Mercedes only did half the time. Researchers surveyed employees in 27 different countries and found that the more money you make, the more likely you are to approve of taking bribes or cheating on taxes.^v Maybe you've seen this kind of thing in your own experience.

'This is the way of the world' Jesus says. 'But NOT SO WITH YOU.'

In the church, as followers of Jesus, we do it differently. If you want to be great in God's kingdom learn to be the servant of ALL. *They* use power for their own benefit; *we* use our power for the benefit of others. They use their resources to benefit themselves; we use it to benefit others. Now certainly, we take care of our own needs, but we also keep an eye to how we can serve others too.

And then Jesus gives the reason for it all. Because really, why would you serve? Why would you use your power and privilege and status for the benefit of someone else?

Because, Jesus says, verse 45:

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."

To anyone who grew up going to Sunday school in Jewish synagogues (like Peter and James and John), that title 'the Son of Man' would have carried enormous weight. Daniel 7:13, a passage that all the disciples would have known, says this:

13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.

14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

The Son of Man is like Alexander the Great and Constantine and Charlemagne and Louis XIV 'the Sun King' and Napoleon and Superman all rolled into one. He is the epitome of power, the one who deserves all glory and honour and strength, whom all nations bow to worship.

But even He was not above giving His life for the benefit of others.

Jesus says 'I AM that Son of Man. And even though I am worthy of all authority, glory and power, I did not come to be served but TO serve.' If King Charles showed up at your place, you

wouldn't hand him the vacuum and say 'get to work.' You would wait on him hand and foot. If some CEO like Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg showed up at your work, you wouldn't say 'go get me a coffee, one cream, two sugars with just a little sprinkle of cinnamon.' He'd say 'yeah right, you go get ME a coffee.'

Jesus though says 'I, the Son of Man, the Sovereign of all, I came to serve. And not just to serve, to lay down My life as an act of service to ransom sinners.'

Up to this point, Jesus has not really talked about WHY He's dying. He's talked about suffering and dying and rising again, but not the redemptive reason that He's suffering and dying and rising again.

He will suffer and die to pay the ransom for our sin, to set us free from its grip. And He is going to rise again to cancel death's hold on us. The Son of Man came for the express purpose of giving His life as the ransom for sin. If we are going to follow Him, we will do the same.

And so that's why I think we can pull this all together like this:

Our Saviour is a servant who calls us to serve.

Let me unpack that one idea at a time.

So first – 'Our Saviour.' If you are a Christian, then you have a Saviour, someone who has come in heroically against all the odds to deliver you from some enemy that is holding you captive. In this case, the enemy is sin and death, which held sway over us until Jesus came to deliver us from them. And that is what He did. We are free because we have a Saviour.

But, second, our Saviour *is a servant!* Google 'Saviour/Savior' and you get an idea of what people think of when they say 'Saviour.' According to Google images, a saviour is glorious and triumphant, radiant in majesty. A saviour is the 'great white hope,' the highest of all, who deserves all glory and honour and praise.

And that's true of Jesus, but that's not all. Our Saviour is a servant.

At Christmas, we sing 'O come, o come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel.' And that's exactly what He did. At Christmas, He came to be our Saviour by ransoming us from sin on the Cross at Easter. His saving work was an act of service, laying down His life to give US life. He took all the power and glory and honour and perfection due to His name and put it to use for our benefit, to serve us.

If that's the case, if our Saviour is a servant, then it makes sense that we too would serve. Our Saviour is a servant who calls us to serve.

Jesus Himself says it at the foot-washing in John 13. John 13:3: 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. [And washed His disciples' feet].

And then, verse 13:

14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

Jesus washed His disciples' feet and then said 'what I have done for you as an act of service, you do for others.'

Jesus went to the cross to give us life and says to us now 'what I have done as an act of service, you do for others.'

Our Saviour is a servant who calls us to serve.

What does that look like? We can't die on the cross redemptively the way that Jesus did; that's not the kind of service that He's calling us to. What Jesus calls us to *is* servant-heartedness, a willingness and an eagerness to serve others and to share our resources for the benefit of others.

Really I think that Jesus is showing us what that looks like in verse 42:

Jesus calls His disciples together and says "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them." He's saying 'the people of the world use power for their own benefit.' If that's not so with us, what is? The people of God use their resources for the benefit of others.

I want you to think for a minute of all the tangible and intangible power, influence, status, privilege that you have in your family or community or volunteer groups or workplace. Who you are, the job you have, the circumstances you find yourselves in give you resources to use by virtue of who you are. In this passage, Jesus calls us to ask 'Are we using those things exclusively for our own benefit or also for the benefit of others?'

Again, I think that this is an idea that you've all taken to heart. I met another pastor this week and I said to him, 'you know, our church's unspoken motto seems to be not 'how can I benefit from this?' but 'how can I help?' And I assume that you take that perspective out into your lives and work and community too. Keep it up and keep asking, 'how can I use who I am for the benefit of others?'

Our servant Saviour calls us to serve.

To close here I just want to share with you something that Martin Luther King Jr. once said:

“You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You don’t have to know Plato and Aristotle. You don’t have to know Einstein’s theory of relativity. You don’t have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”^{vi}

To which I would only add ‘You only need to know that Jesus loved you so much that He died to ransom you and now beckons you to follow in His footsteps.’

BENEDICTION

1 Corinthians 15:58 - Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

<https://hbr.org/2016/10/dont-let-power-corrupt-you>

ⁱ 15 This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. 16 When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them" (Jeremiah 25:15; see also Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17; Jer. 51:7).

ⁱⁱ Of life’s calamities: Job 9:31; 22:11; Pss. 42:7; 46:3; Isa. 43:2; of God’s wrath: Isaiah 20:38 (Grant Osborne, *Mark* (Teach the text).

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.thestar.com/politics/provincial/2022/07/06/criminal-trial-of-ontario-bureaucrats-fired-in-alleged-11m-covid-19-fraud-to-begin-next-year.html>

^{iv} <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2022/09/20/covid-19-child-meal-program-fraud-charges/10435117002/>

^v Dacher Keltner, “Don’t let power corrupt you,” <https://hbr.org/2016/10/dont-let-power-corrupt-you>

“Studies show that wealth and credentials can have a similar effect. In another experiment, Paul Piff of UC Irvine and I found that whereas drivers of the least expensive vehicles—Dodge Colts, Plymouth Satellites—always ceded the right-of-way to pedestrians in a crosswalk, people driving luxury cars such as BMWs and Mercedes yielded only

54% of the time; nearly half the time they ignored the pedestrian and the law. Surveys of employees in 27 countries have revealed that wealthy individuals are more likely to say it's acceptable to engage in unethical behavior, such as taking bribes or cheating on taxes.”

^{vi} Quoted in David Garland, *Mark* (NIVAC), 417.