



### Time to Reflect

- What does the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross mean to us? How do we respond to this incredible act of love?
- Can we think of an occasion when we were quick to speak and hadn't thought the issue through? What did we learn from the experience?

Last week we focused on one of the most searching questions that we find in the Bible – “...what must I do to inherit eternal life?” In his answer to this question Jesus challenged us to think about Christian discipleship. This week our attention is drawn to the third occasion when Jesus predicted his death and his selflessness is contrasted to the selfishness of James and John. In response to their bold and ambitious request, Jesus taught about ambition and humility.

**“Mark draws attention to the recurring prediction of our Lord about His coming death which stands in stark contrast to the ongoing discussion of greatness and position among the disciples.”**

(Victor Maxwell, *The Authentic Servant In Mark's Gospel*, p110)

### Specifics

- Our passage begins by telling us that Jesus and the disciples were on their way to Jerusalem (v32). The passage clearly informs us that Jesus was leading the way.
- We sense that Jesus was walking alone, ahead of the disciples, with much on his mind. Even these early reflections enable us to discern that the shadow of the cross was weighing heavily on Jesus.
- (v32) also highlights that the disciples were experiencing mixed emotions. They were astonished and afraid. We conclude that they were astonished at the remarkable teachings and miracles of Jesus. Yet they were afraid of what was going to unfold once they reached Jerusalem.
- Jesus spoke about his suffering and death on two previous occasions (8:31; 9:31). Now, on the way to Jerusalem, he raised the issue for a third and final time with his disciples.
- (v33-34) are very revealing and detailed. Ralph Earle observes, “He gathered the twelve close to Him and gave the third and final prediction of His passion. As would be expected, He added some details to His previous predictions. In fact, seven phases are enumerated here (vv.33-34): the betrayal, the sentence of the Sanhedrin, the handing Him over to the Roman authorities, the mockery, the scourging, the crucifixion, the resurrection. Now the picture was complete.”<sup>1</sup>
- Jesus spoke to his disciples with openness and honesty. This prediction was revealing and shocking. Jesus travelled towards Jerusalem in complete obedience to the will of God the Father. He spoke with tremendous courage, knowing the horrors that awaited him when he reached Jerusalem. He demonstrated incredible selflessness.
- Bishop J C Ryle reflects on all of this and he concludes, “From the beginning of his earthly ministry he saw the cross before him, and went to it a willing sufferer. He knew that his death was the needful payment that must be made to reconcile God and man.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Earle, *Mark: The Gospel Of Action* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), p88.

<sup>2</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Mark: Expository Thoughts On The Gospels* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 2012), p170.

- In contrast to the selflessness of Jesus, the selfishness of the disciples (particularly James and John) resurfaced once again. Remember how they had previously argued about greatness and position on the road to Capernaum (9:33-34). Interestingly, this took place immediately after Jesus had predicted his death for a second time (9:31-32) and was followed by a teaching on humility (9:35-37).
- This same pattern reappears within this week's passage. After hearing Jesus predict (even more clearly than before) his suffering and death, James and John made a bold and ambitious request (v35-37).
- These two disciples had been on the mount of transfiguration (9:2-13) and their request is comparable to the offer made by Herod when he offered anything, up to half his kingdom, to Herodias after she danced at his banquet (6:22).
- By asking for the privilege of sitting at the right and left-hand side of Jesus in his Kingdom, James and John were requesting the positions of honour. Victor Maxwell deliberately focuses on this request and he writes, **"Their request was for what they wanted rather than what God willed. Selfishness is like that. It over-estimates self-importance and under-estimates the importance of others."**<sup>3</sup>
- Immediately Jesus indicated to them that they didn't know what they were asking for. Note (v38) **"You don't know what you are asking...Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"**
- This statement was a call for them to stop, think, and reflect before they spoke. Yet these two brothers responded with enthusiasm and zeal, without having fully understood what they were saying (v39).
- Words can flow so easily – both positive and negative words. But have they been thought through? Often, we need to sit back and see the big picture before we vocalise our thoughts.
- The passage moves on to indicate that the other ten disciples were angry at James and John for making such a bold request (v41). Perhaps they desired those positions for themselves and as such demonstrated jealousy.
- Jesus used this situation as an opportunity to teach his disciples about what constitutes true greatness. Note how he instructed his disciples, **"...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all"** (v43b-44).
- True Christianity is not about doing things so that we can exalt ourselves, with the aim of drawing praise or the places of honour. True Christianity is about servanthood and humility. It is about radiating the way of Christ.
- The way of Christ is highlighted clearly in (v45). Ralph Earle refers to this verse as **"...the most significant theological passage in this gospel."**<sup>4</sup> This is a massive but accurate claim.
- (v45) is a summary of the Gospel message, the good news of salvation. It is a revelation of the extent of God's love for every man, woman and child. It reveals the humble selflessness of Jesus.
- Roman society was defined by titles, positions and prestige. Victor Maxwell helpfully highlights, **"Emperors had crowns; governors had palaces; generals had armies, and soldiers had medals. A slave was considered at the bottom of the heap. Jesus Christ dignified servanthood by indicating that He also was a servant. By His life and death He elevated service and sacrifice to its rightful place."**<sup>5</sup>
- As Jesus walked towards Jerusalem, under the shadow of the cross, he demonstrated amazing love, courage and selflessness. He didn't cling onto status or greatness. Rather, he embraced humility and sought to be obedient to the will of God the Father – and he called his disciples to do the same.
- This week, we are challenged to follow the example of Jesus and embrace servanthood. We are called to radical and selfless obedience, committing ourselves entirely to the will of God.

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<sup>3</sup> Victor Maxwell, *The Authentic Servant in Mark's Gospel* (Belfast: Ambassador Productions, 1996), p111.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Earle, *Mark: The Gospel Of Action* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), p90.

<sup>5</sup> Victor Maxwell, *The Authentic Servant in Mark's Gospel* (Belfast: Ambassador Productions, 1996), p111.