

**The Memoirs of Peter
So You Want To Be Great?
Mark 10:35-45
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I always have a couple of books that I'm reading; actually several would be more accurate than a couple. My nightstand, my desk at home, my desk at the office is always cluttered with a stack of books either that I'm about to begin or are in the middle of. Right now one of the books I'm in the middle of or have recently begun is William Manchester's two volume biography of Winston Churchill, one of the classic biographies of Churchill. Certainly Churchill is admirable in some ways; he is certainly one of the great men of the twentieth century and possibly even of human history. But even as I say that that he's one of the great men it really raises an important question. When we refer to a person in history as great, what do we mean? How do we define greatness? In the end there are only two ways. One is by the greatness of the person's character, and the other is by the greatness of their accomplishments; either by the greatness of who they are inherently or by the greatness of what they do. So, who then in human history has manifested true greatness? Who has manifested the greatest moral character? Obviously it's our Lord. This is the testimony of history; this is the testimony of His enemies who could find nothing wrong with Him, no fault in Him as Pilate said. It's the testimony of His friends; it's His own testimony of Himself. John 8, Jesus said, 'which one of you convicts Me of sin?' There isn't a single person in human history who could utter that statement and get no response the way our Lord did, apart from Him. Also in John 8, He says, 'I always do the things that are pleasing to the Father.' Who else in the sweep of human history can say that?

C E Jefferson writes, "The best reason we have for believing in the sinlessness of Christ is the fact that He allowed His dearest friends to think that He was. There is in all His talk, no trace of regret, no hint of compunction or suggestion of sorrow for shortcoming or the slightest vestige of remorse." Think about that. Not one word of sorrow or remorse for what He has done in anything in our Lords life. Jefferson goes on to say, "He taught other men to think of themselves as sinners, He asserted plainly that the human heart is evil. He told His disciples every time they prayed they were to pray to be forgiven. But He never speaks or acts as though He Himself has

the faintest consciousness of having ever done anything other than what is pleasing to God.”
Pretty remarkable. Without question, Jesus demonstrated the greatest character in history.

So who in human history has achieved the greatest accomplishments? Again it's our Lord. Yale historian Jaroslav Pelikan writes this, “Regardless what anyone may personally think or believe about Him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure of Western culture for almost twenty centuries. If it were possible with some sort of super magnet to pull out of that history every scrap of metal bearing at least a trace of His name, how much would be left?”

So both in terms of His character and in terms of His accomplishments Jesus Christ is the greatest human who ever lived. Who better then to define what it really means to be great? Not by the assessment of human history. Not by the human biographers. But by the assessment of God Himself and Jesus does exactly that in the passage that we come to tonight in Mark's gospel.

I invite you to take your Bible, turn to Mark chapter 10 and verse 35. Mark 10 verse 35.

“James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.” And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?” And they said to Him, “Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.” But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” They said to Him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? They said to Him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. “But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise

authority over them. “But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

That passage makes one great powerful point. True greatness is redefined by the only one who has ever been truly great. Mark develops this theme and the record of this interchange in two parts really. In verse’s 35 to 40 you have the question of James and John along with Jesus’ response to them. And then in verse’s 41 to 45 you have Jesus teaching of His disciples regarding what true greatness really is. Or if we generalize that specific account we could say in verse’s 35 to 40 you have the selfish pursuit of human greatness and in verse’s 41 to 45, the selfless pursuit of kingdom greatness.

So let’s look first at the selfish pursuit of human greatness. This section begins with a longing in the heart of two disciples, a longing for position and authority. Verse 35 begins, “James and John the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus.” Remember the circumstances now; we’re still on that same day we began the morning with Jesus blessing the children, the rich young ruler runs up to Jesus. They’re walking from the city there in Perea where they had spent the night on to Jerusalem. This event happens after Jesus makes that third private prediction of His death and resurrection to His disciples that we studied last week in verse’s 32 to 34. But before they actually arrive in Jericho where Jesus heals two blind men, including a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, and where Zacchaeus will believe. So Jesus is on the road, walking with His disciples, He’s just prophesied His coming death and resurrection, keep that in mind, and on the heels of that announcement comes this event. Jesus is walking out in front of the twelve, the crowd of pilgrims all behind them and they’re all slowly making their way from wherever it was in Perea they spent the night on the other side, the eastern side of the Jordan, now making their way toward Jericho and ultimately Jerusalem.

Mark says that the brothers, James and John, the sons of thunder, as they are also known, came up to Jesus. Now Matthew provides a little more color commentary on this episode. Matthew

tells us this in Matthew 20 verse 20, “Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down, and making a request of Him.” So here come the three, they’re all on their way to Passover, James and John obviously with the rest of the twelve and their mother is along with the pilgrims headed down for the Passover, and the three of them come up to Jesus. Apparently the mother makes the initial request. But it had to be with the prompting and the support of the sons because Jesus addresses His answer to the men.

Now before you get too far down the road thinking that James and John must have been utterly wimps, because they send their mother on this errand there is a good reason. They certainly were not wimps, they were known as sons of thunder, they were hardened fishermen. There’s a good reason that their mother is involved and we’ll see that shortly. Verse 35 goes on to say, so the mother along with “James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, come up to Jesus, saying, “Teacher we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.” Here was the son’s initial request through their mother. And this first question honestly even as I read it, you probably were struck with this, it sounds like the question of a child. Would you do a favor for me? Without giving you any hint of exactly how great this favor might be. We want you to do for us whatever we ask. They’re asking Jesus for a sort of signed blank check here. And Jesus like a wise parent doesn’t agree to any generic request. So in verse 36 He comes back and He said to them, ‘what exactly is it that you want Me to do for you?’

By the way, can I just stop there and say, your answer to that question from the mouth of Jesus speaks volumes about the maturity of your heart and about the maturity of my heart. What do you want Jesus to do for you? If Jesus were like a genie and He’s not, what would you want Him to do for you? Your answer will tell a lot about the maturity of your heart. Here’s their answer through their mother, verse 37, “They said to Him, “Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.” Literally the sentence begins in the Greek text, ‘give to us.’ Give to us thrones, positions of importance, in fact the two greatest positions of importance in Your glory. That ‘Your glory’ by the way refers back to what they had just heard Jesus say about Himself a few minutes before in the encounter with the rich young ruler. In

Matthew 19:28, “Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne.” That’s the picture in their minds. He just said that the same morning and so they have this picture of Jesus, rightly, of Jesus sitting on a majestic, glorious throne and of course there’ll be people and officials scattered around Him and they’re just asking for a place on the right and a place on the left. Lord when you are reigning as King in the regeneration; give us the positions on Your right and on Your left. Now in Jewish, Greek, and Roman culture the positions on each side of the host were the positions of the highest honor. We still do that today, first the right and then the left. As far as which one of the brothers gets the right hand and which one gets the left they’re content to leave that with Jesus. Big of them, don’t you think?

Now where does this come from? What are these guys thinking? What possibly could have motivated such a request? Well it’s not nearly as farfetched as it might seem on the face of it. There’re several reasons why it really made good sense to them. Let me give you these reasons because I think it will help you understand them. First of all, they believed that Jesus would soon establish an earthly kingdom. In fact they probably thought in spite of what Jesus had just prophesied in that third prediction of His death and resurrection that they were on their way to Jerusalem for Jesus to reveal who He really was and to establish an earthly geo-political kingdom. After all this had been prophesied in the Old Testament. Look back in Isaiah, you remember this great prophecy, Isaiah chapter 9, in Samuel of course God had told David that a son of his would sit on the throne but here it’s made much more specific, Isaiah chapter 9, notice verse 6, “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” Now watch verse 7, “There will be no end to the increase to His government or His peace, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish this.”

That's pretty clear isn't it? They understood that the Messiah was going to establish an earthly geo-politically kingdom. And when Jesus was born this same concept came up. Turn back to Luke chapter 1, when the angel Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her that she's going to have a son and undoubtedly this word has spread and even among Jesus followers they knew this story. Luke 1, verse 31, "And behold," the angel says "you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

They understood this and they expected it, not in the future, when Jesus returned for a second coming but at this point they expected it soon and very soon. You say how do you know that? Well in this same time period Luke records this. Luke 19:11, "While they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem." So this is the same context, "and they" that is, the disciples, "supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately." So they think they're on the road to Jerusalem, Jesus is going to set up this kingdom and so they're trying to get in their plea for the best spots. It's getting close. They're less than a day's journey away.

There's a second reason this made sense to them and that is they were reacting to a prophecy that Jesus had made just that morning about them. Again, in the context of the question, you remember after the rich young ruler left, Jesus says, and this is recorded in Matthew 19:28, Jesus says, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." So that morning the antennae go up. Twelve thrones. So, which of us is going to be the farthest removed from Jesus and which of us is going to be the closest to Jesus? So this is in their mind at this point.

A third reason that they felt justified in raising this is they were really overplaying their own personal credentials and their own privileged position. After all, James and John had been with Jesus from the very beginning of His ministry. At least John had probably become a follower of John the Baptist and then a follower of Jesus shortly after His baptism, so really from the very beginning. And that was true with James as well. Jesus had chosen both of them to be a part of the twelve after all back in chapter 3, they were hand picked out of all of Jesus' followers to be the ones that would be with Him, that would be His proxy's that would be His official representatives. But they were not merely part of the twelve, these two, they were two of the first who were called to accompany Jesus and they were part of the inner circle. Remember? Everywhere Jesus went the twelve went with Him, but occasionally He would call a small group of them aside, leave the others and go and take the three with Him, Peter, James, and John. It was Peter, James and John who accompanied Jesus into the room of Jairus's daughter, you remember, when He left the other disciples outside. It was Peter, James, and John who accompanied Jesus to the mountain of transfiguration back in chapter 9. The other's down the hill. So they were part of the inner circle. So you can see how their minds working here, I mean this doesn't, this isn't as irrational as it may first appear.

In addition to that they apparently were often seated near Jesus at meals. In fact at the Last Supper it appears that John was guess where? At Jesus' right hand. And they were after all if Jesus was going to establish a political kingdom they were after all the most politically connected of the disciples. I mean you had tax gatherers and just simple fisherman, but after all their family, even though they lived in Galilee, their family was well known to the High Priest according to John 18:25, John was able to actually get in and watch some of the trial of Jesus in the High Priest's house. So they were connected, it just made sense.

But there's another reason that sort of overshadows them all. I don't know if you remember our, our discussion of this back in chapter one or not, but James and John were probably here borrowing on their physical relation to Jesus. You see, their mother was probably Salome, the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother. We dealt with this back when I went through that in back in

chapter one, I won't do it again but you can compare these texts. It's very likely that Jesus was related to James and John, that He was their cousin. If their mother was Mary's sister as it appears that is true from the Scripture texts, then Jesus was their cousin. Well guess what that makes their mother, Jesus' aunt. You can kind of put it together in your mind now. Let's keep this thing in the family, Peter doesn't belong here, he's really not one of us. There's going to be one of the three there's going to be two of the three, the innermost circle, the ones that are always with Christ, and we're after all family. Nepotism R us. You put all those reasons together and you can see why it made perfect sense to these two men to ask this question and to do so through their mother, the aunt of Jesus.

Now when you look at this request, it's easy to be really sarcastic about it, but on the one hand their request showed an amazing faith in Jesus, because nothing they have yet seen from Jesus has looked anything like a political kingdom. They just have His word that someday there will be one. And now they're marching to Jerusalem and they have enough confidence in the word and promise of Jesus Christ, having not seen anything like this yet, that they're already jockeying for position in this kingdom. So, on the one hand you have to commend them for that faith, on the other hand, obviously this shows serious selfish ambition. They longed for position and status and power to the exclusion of the others by asking for the two most important positions what were they doing to the other ten? They were pushing them to the periphery. They weren't as important, they weren't as deserving, which showed an utter lack of understanding of what Jesus had already taught them.

Look back in Mark chapter 9 verse 33, you remember this? When they came back to Capernaum, when they were in the house, He began to question them? Jesus said to His disciples, 'So, um, what were you guys talking about on the way here?' "But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. Sitting down, He called the twelve and He said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."

So Jesus had already addressed this issue but it obviously had not taken root in the hearts of these disciples. So in His response Jesus gives these two disciples what we could call a lesson in personal qualification in verse's 38 and 39. We've seen their longing for position and authority now comes the lesson in personal qualification. Verse 38, "Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking." You know that's an interesting insight into God's response to our prayers, isn't it? I'm sure there are many times we have prayed and if our Lord were here and present with us we would hear His voice say to us, exactly what He said to them. You have no idea what you are asking. Sometimes refusing our request shows grace to us.

James and John didn't really have a clue what they were asking, verse 38, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" Now Jesus here uses two images to describe what is about to happen to Him. The first image is the cup. This is a common Old Testament image of something that is given to you by God. Sometimes it's a cup of joy; you see that in a couple of texts. But most of the time in the Old Testament when this image is used, it describes God's judgment and wrath. Let me just give you a couple of examples, there're others. Psalm 75:8, "For a cup is in the hand of the Lord, and the wine foams; it is well mixed and He pours out of this; surely all of the wicked of the earth must drain and drink down its dregs." A cup of wine is pictured as a cup of the wrath of God that the wicked must drink. In Isaiah 51:17, "Rouse yourself! Rouse yourself! Arise, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the Lord's hand the cup of His anger; the chalice of reeling you have drained to the dregs." Here there is going to be some hope for Israel after she has experienced the anger and wrath of God pictured as a cup of wine she has drunk to the dregs.

Jeremiah 49 verse 12, "For thus says the Lord, "Behold, those who were not sentenced to drink the cup will certainly drink it and are you the one who will be completely acquitted? You will not be acquitted, but you will certainly drink it." Again the picture is of impending judgment; a cup of judgment. This is exactly what Jesus means. Turn over to Mark chapter 14 and look at verse 36, this is in the garden of Gethsemane on the night of the betrayal. Verse 36, "He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what

I will, but what You will.” This gives insight by the way into what Christ was praying. He wasn’t praying that He would not have to endure the physical suffering of the cross; He was praying that if there was any other way than for Him to drink fully the dregs of the wrath and the anger and the curse of God against your sin and my sin, then let that happen. So the cup then which Jesus was about to drink refers to the suffering of divine punishment and wrath in the place of sinners, in the place of the guilty. That’s the first metaphor.

The other metaphor Jesus uses is baptism, the baptism with which I’m going to be baptized. This metaphor is really not one that’s common in the Old Testament. It’s created here by Jesus, it refers to being immersed into something, to being plunged into something, to being flooded or overwhelmed with suffering or sorrow. There are similar expressions in the Old Testament, for example Psalm 42:7, “All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me.” It’s like I’ve been plunged into the depths of the ocean. That’s the suffering and sorrow I’m in the middle of. Again, this is referring to Jesus’ coming suffering and death. He is essentially asking these two boys, these two men if they are able to endure what He’s about to endure. The clearest implication behind His words is that a request for glory which is what they were asking, is really also a request for suffering. And to ask to share the great glory of the Messiah is to ask to share in the horrible suffering He was about to endure. Are you able? His question called for a negative answer. Absolutely not. But they didn’t get it. So verse 39, “They said to Him, “We are able.”

You remember that hymn, it’s an older hymn, it’s not sung so much anymore, but, ‘Lord we are able’, you remember that? They weren’t and we aren’t either. That’s the point. They were loyal, they here expressed their willingness to suffer with Christ and for Christ, although they really had no real sense of what’s coming, what’s looming in Jerusalem. But, they’re clearly overconfident in their own commitment because when all of it unfolds about a week later when Jesus is arrested in the garden, what happens? Where are James and John? Gone. Fled. Oh, Peter and John find their way back to sort of follow Jesus in the shadows to see what happens to Him. But no, they weren’t able, and that was Jesus’ point.

Verse 39, Jesus does say, while you may not be able to drink the cup I'm going to drink in its fullness or be baptized in the baptism which I'm going to be baptized in in its fullness, He says, "the cup that I drink you shall drink and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized." Jesus tells them that the time will come when they will endure intense suffering for His sake. It wouldn't be at the same level of suffering as His, because it wouldn't be enduring the wrath of God for others. Their suffering wouldn't be substitutionary like Jesus' suffering but they would suffer for His name. In fact as He tells them this I'm reminded that James was the first disciple to be martyred. In Acts chapter 12 verse 2 we read, "And Herod had James the brother of John put to death with the sword." Early in church history the first martyr was James. He drank the cup of suffering. While tradition tells us that John died of old age in Ephesus, that was not before being arrested, being mistreated, being exiled to Patmos, being caused to work there on a Roman penal colony, and he writes this and he writes this in Revelation 1:9, "I, John, your brother and partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, (and I was there) because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." They both did drink the cup in one sense, they did experience the immersion, the plunging into suffering in one sense, not the same sense that Jesus did, but they experienced it. But Jesus' point with these men was to let them know that they were not personally qualified to have the honor Christ Himself would have because they would never drink from exactly the same cup that He was about to, nor would they be baptized with exactly the same baptism He was about to face.

Now that brings us to a lesson in sovereign appointment. Verse 40, "but to sit on My right hand" you're going to face suffering, you're going to drink the cup, you're going to have the baptism of suffering and sorrow, "but to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." Matthew adds this in chapter 20 verse 23, "it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." Now that's an amazing statement. Notice the verb tense in both Matthew and Mark. It's what in Greek is called the perfect tense. It has been prepared. It already happened; it's a reality with continuing results. Do you hear what Jesus is saying? Jesus is telling these two men that in 30 AD, God the Father had already decided who

will occupy the places of honor on the right hand and on the left hand of Christ in His kingdom. And the implications seem to be that it's going to be a surprise. It won't be based on any of the things James and John were considering. So just like we're tempted to do James and John were selfishly pursuing human greatness; greatness that was all about status and position and power and authority. Give us the two greatest positions in Your kingdom. In response to their request, Jesus teaches them and us instead of the selfish pursuit of human greatness, instead we should be after the selfless pursuit of kingdom greatness.

We see this in verses 41 to 45, look at verse 41. "Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John." Now there's an understatement. Apparently the ten were within earshot of all of this conversation with their mother and James and John, and Jesus' response to them. Or at least one of the other ten were within earshot and reported it to the others. Somehow they all found out about it and they weren't happy, when they heard they were angry. This isn't because they were righteously indignant that they understood no one should ever do that, they would never do that, instead they were angry because they had gotten beaten to the punch. By the way, can I just make an aside here? This reminds us of the tendency we all have to see and condemn in others that which we overlook and excuse in ourselves. They are angry with the two, but the same things going on in their heart that was going on in the two. It's like Paul says in Romans 2:1, when he says don't you see that when you point your finger and condemn others you are condemning yourself because you do the same things. We have that tendency don't we, and you see that here.

Now in spite of their circumstances and where they are remember now they're on the road headed to Jerusalem, about to reach Jericho, Jesus decides to use this occasion as a teaching opportunity. And His teaching opportunity here begins by defining normal greatness, human greatness as its normally defined. Notice verse 42, "Calling them to Himself," literally the word calling means summoning, summoning, He summoned them, if you're a parent you know this word. Jesus called them over. It's like when I say, 'tell your sister I said to come here, now.' So Jesus calls them to Himself there on the road as He's headed to Jericho and He says this,

“You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.” The rulers and great men of the Gentiles, by the way it’s not that this wasn’t true of the leaders of Israel in the first century, but they were under the thumb of the Romans so they really didn’t know what it was like to have unrestrained power and authority. The Romans did. And so He picks the Romans here, the Gentiles. And notice the two key descriptions of worldly power and greatness, He says they lord it over them. Literally they lord it down on them. It means to gain power over others and to subdue them under your power and they notice the second expression, exercise authority. They used their position to order others around.

William Hendriksen puts it very well, the great Presbyterian commentator, “They spend all their energies to get to the top.” Tell me if this sounds like what goes on in your workplace. “They spend all their energies to get to the top, and once having reached that peak they cause all others to feel the weight of their authority, once they’ve arrived at the top, they think only of themselves.” Human greatness, Jesus said, is about achieving a position that puts you over others and then using that position to your own advantage. That’s how human greatness and human rulers express themselves. R T France writes, “These expressions convey the oppressive and uncontrolled exploitation of power, the flaunting of authority rather than its benevolent exercise.” In its extreme form think Muammar Gaddafi. Human greatness, get the power and use it to get what you want and to keep what you want.

Then Jesus redefines true greatness in verses 30, verses 43 and 44. Look at 43. “But it is not this way among you,” Now folks you have to read your Bible carefully. In the NAS we have a very good translation, very literal translation. Notice what Jesus does not say, He does not say, ‘it should not or it will not be this way among you.’ This is not an admonition to change something, instead Jesus makes a simple statement of reality, the way things are in His kingdom. It is not this way among you. Greatness in Jesus’ kingdom is achieved by pursuing exactly the opposite path to greatness in the world of unbelievers. Notice what He says in verse 43,

“whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.”

So you want to be great? Not great with the people around you, but great in the sight of Christ? Become the servant of others. That Greek word for servant is a very common word, a very familiar word. It's the word, diakonos from which we get the word deacon. When it's not used in the New Testament of the office of deacon it is most often used of serving tables, of being a waiter. What is Jesus saying? He's saying greatness in My kingdom is defined by voluntarily becoming a person who serves even the menial needs of others. That's greatness in My kingdom. If you want to be first, He says, to be the greatest in My kingdom then notice what He says, become the doulos, the slave of everyone else. If you want to be great in the sight of Christ, He says pour yourself out in self-giving serving love for others. Not in some ethereal sense, but in the down to earth, every day practical sense of what can you do to serve another person. How can you give them a cup of cold water in the name of Christ? How can you be like a table server in their life?

But He doesn't just redefine true greatness, He demonstrates it. Look at verse 45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” This by the way is the most important verse in all of Mark's gospel. So I want to come back next week and look at it in much more detail but for tonight I just want you to see how it fits into the context. Verse 45 makes several huge theological points. But in the flow of the conversation, that wasn't Christ's main point. The main point is this. If you want to see what it looks like to serve others, to become a slave of everyone else, look at Me in the incarnation, Jesus says. I'm the perfect example of what I'm talking about.

Now to really understand and appreciate this you've got to go back to Daniel. Look at Daniel chapter 7. Jesus just called Himself the Son of Man. Let's see what Daniel says about the Son of Man. Daniel chapter 7 verse 13, he has this vision, he said, “I kept looking in the night

visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days (his is God the Father, the Ancient of Days) and this Son of Man was presented before the Ancient of Days and to Him (to this Son of Man) was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, (watch this) that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might (what?) serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.” Jesus Christ had been promised by His Father that every nation, all peoples, men of every language would serve Him. With that promise, with that position that He would be exalted to the top, what did Jesus do? He didn’t, as Paul says in Philippians 2 consider that position to be something to be grasped, to be held onto at all costs. Instead He became what? A servant. He who had every right to be served came instead to serve. The One we should be serving didn’t come so that we would serve Him; He came to serve us. How? By giving His life as a ransom. Jesus Christ is the supreme example of pouring yourself out for others, even those who are under your authority who really have the responsibility to serve you.

What are the lessons for us from this remarkable account? First of all let me give you a couple of peripheral lessons. These aren’t the main point of the passage, but they just sort of ooze out of the passage, so I want to call them to your attention. First of all we should be patient with the slow progress of people around us, as Jesus was with James and John. Imagine what was on Jesus’ mind that day as He marched out ahead of the crowd on His way to Jerusalem. Imagine the weight of the world that was literally on His shoulders. Yet here He is having to deal with this petty arguing and bickering and this outrageous request from His closest followers and yet how does He respond? He responds with tenderness, with gentleness, with great patience, He instructs them again what He had just told them in recent days. How do you respond to the spiritual immaturity of the people around you? I’m not talking about tolerating sin. I’m talking about people who are still growing and giving them space to grow even as Jesus does here with the disciples.

There's another lesson that sort of jumps out of this passage at me and that is as believers we should have complete confidence that Jesus will one day establish a literal geopolitical kingdom on this earth. Did you notice that when the twelve think this is about to happen Jesus doesn't say to them, no, no, no, no, no, you've got it all wrong, there isn't going to be a future literal kingdom. Haven't you read the books of your covenantal brothers? Jesus never denies that such a kingdom will come; He just tells them their views about when it will come are all wrong, because even after His death and resurrection the twelve are still asking this question. In Acts 1:6, "So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" And Jesus doesn't say you guys are out to lunch, where did you ever get that idea? He says in verse 7, "It is not for you to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority." Folks you can have confidence that Jesus will deliver on what He promised. He will one day establish a literal kingdom in which He will reign.

But those aren't the central point of the passage, let's go to the main point. What's the main point of this passage? This account is intended to be a serious rebuke to our own selfish ambition for status and position. You know it's easy to look down our noses at the twelve, but if we're honest with ourselves don't we do the same thing? We don't want merely to serve Christ in His kingdom; we want a higher position than we have now and certainly a higher position than that other person over there whom we envy. We want to be more visible, we want to be more recognized, more appreciated. We want to be over more people, we want to have a larger ministry, we want to have a greater influence, a wider following. That's the temptation we all have. We want to be recognized. We want to have that position, that status. Jesus says we've got it all wrong. To be great in the sight of Christ is to imitate Him. Our greatness, listen carefully, our greatness is not measured in the number of people under our power and authority or influence, rather it is measured in the number of people we are serving in every day kind of ways. And the greatest person in Christ's kingdom will truly be the slave of everyone else. We are called to imitate the selfless service of Jesus Christ throughout His life and certainly most profoundly in His death. We must serve rather than seek to be served. That's what this passage is all about. We have to turn our whole idea of what matters on its head. And realize that the

most important thing you and I can do is not to be recognized, not to spread our influence, not to have a larger ministry of whatever our particular ministry might be, but rather to be seen by Christ as having the heart of a servant toward everybody around us.

There's one other crucial lesson that comes out of this passage. Seeing ourselves in the story, and we do, should remind us why we need Jesus to come and to serve us by giving His life a ransom for many. Sin is so much a part of who we are, that it even shows its ugly head as the disciples journey to Jerusalem for Jesus' death for sin. This passage should remind us of the cup of the wrath of God Jesus drank. Of the flood, of the baptism of suffering He endured, and He did it not because it was His, He did it because we deserved that cup, we deserved that baptism. He did it because of His love for us. He did it to serve us. This passage is really Jesus' own biography. He alone will be the first in the kingdom, because He alone truly became the slave of all. One of the great themes of the gospel of Mark is that Jesus is in fact the Messiah the Old Testament had promised and it's no surprise when you go back and you look at the Messiah who was promised in Isaiah; the Messiah is called more than anything else, what? The Servant of Yahweh. And He became our servant as well, in life and most importantly in His death. And we'll look at that in its fullness next week. Let's pray together.

Father, we are astounded at this passage and honestly Father we are astounded at our own hearts. We do see ourselves in this passage. We see our own longing for position and status and influence. Father forgive us. Help us to have the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. Father help us to be not wanting to be served, not wanting to have a position, but instead wanting to serve as He did, to become the slave of all. Lord this is so contrary to our nature, but I pray You would produce this in us. And Father I pray above it all You would give us an even greater appreciation for the cross, for what Christ accomplished on our behalf. He served us most profoundly in drinking the cup of Your wrath that was intended for us. We should have drunk it. We should have drained it to the dregs through all eternity, but instead He drank it in our place. Father we bless You and we thank You and we praise You for such grace. Help us to live lives

of humble service to our Lord and to all those around us. Give us the grace to live like that. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.