

“He Gave His Life a Ransom for Many”
Mark 10:32-45

Over the years, I’ve preached about 25 Easter messages, and have also preached about the same number of Palm Sunday and Good Friday messages. I’ve preached several dozen communion sermons related to Christ and the cross, and preached through all of the gospels of Mark and John and through a significant portion of Matthew. And in my messages that don’t have to do with Christ and the cross, I suppose I’ve still talked about the gospel hundreds of times.

The response to all those sermons about Christ haven’t always been favorable:

- ✓ One congregant called to complain about my emphasis on Christ after one communion sermon saying, “I get it: Jesus died for our sins; now move on...”
- ✓ Another person complained one time, “are we having communion *again*?”
- ✓ And when Raye Jeanne told someone (who is not part of our church) about a sermon series I was preaching on the cross, her response was “all he ever does is preach about the cross...” (it wasn’t a compliment).

Friends, there is no “moving on” from the cross. Everything we are and everything we have is bound up in the cross. It is not only our life and hope in the future, but it is our life and hope now! If you tire of Christ and the cross there is, frankly, every reason to wonder if you have ever really loved Jesus.

So this morning, as we come to the table of communion, I want us to reflect on one of the great statements Christ made about His cross-work and crucifixion, Mk. 10:45 — “Even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

That statement is made in the midst of a pivotal interaction with His disciples; as we examine vv. 32-45, we will find —

THROUGH THE CROSS, JESUS CONFRONTS AND PROVIDES FREEDOM FROM OUR SINFUL DESIRES.

Context (vv. 32-34):

- ✓ This is the FOURTH prophecy of Christ’s death
- ✓ Notice the disciples’ RETICENCE
- ✓ Notice the Savior’s DETERMINATION

1. The Disciples’ PRIDEFUL Request (vv. 35-41)

- ✓ “We want to be with Jesus!” (vv. 35-37)
- ✓ “Do you understand what you are asking?” (vv. 38-41)

2. Jesus’ HUMBLE Plan (vv. 42-45)

- ✓ The cross is not a means to GREATNESS (vv. 42-43a)
- ✓ The cross is a calling to SLAVERY (vv. 43b-44)
- ✓ The cross is a provision of FREEDOM (v. 45)

Context (vv. 32-34):

• This is the FOURTH prophecy of Christ's death

- ✓ The longer Jesus was with the disciples, the more He revealed about the looming cross. In the first weeks and months of his ministry, little was said about the cross; and then there were brief allusions, and then there were very direct statements:

- *Mark 8:31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.*
- *Mark 9:9 As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead.*
- *Mark 9:31 For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later."*

- ✓ The disciples didn't like those direct statements so much:

- *Mark 8:32-33 And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."*
- *Mark 9:10 They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.*
- *Mark 9:32 But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.*

• Notice the disciples' RETICENCE

- ✓ When Mark says, ***They were on the road going up to Jerusalem***, it seems to be a harmless statement about geography. But it's more than that. When they had last been in Jerusalem, Jesus had resuscitated Lazarus and the response of the Pharisees was less than favorable (Jn. 11:53; 12:10-11), so Jesus and the disciples had retreated to Ephraim (Jn. 11:54). And now they were (quickly) returning back to Jerusalem.
- ✓ So it's no surprise that Jesus was ***walking on ahead***. They were hanging back, wondering about the wisdom of this decision. And there evidently was another crowd even further behind the disciples — ***those who followed***.
- ✓ And the disciples were ***amazed***. That word can mean "amazement," or "wonder," but it can also mean astonishment from fright or terror. That's probably a better sense of the word here.
- ✓ The disciples were uninterested in returning to Jerusalem and the crowds and Pharisees.

- Notice the Savior's **DETERMINATION**

- ✓ The disciples may have been reticent, but not our Savior. He ***was walking on ahead of them***. There was a sense of determination in His actions. This was unusual for Jesus; generally He would walk with the disciples and teach them. Not this time; He has an appointment to keep in Jerusalem.
- ✓ And to make clear why He was determined, He talked to ***the Twelve*** separately from the crowd. And He explained what awaited Him. He noted that ***we are going up to Jerusalem*** (present tense, and a reference to *all* of them — ***we***), and eight things ***will*** (future tense) happen (to Him): there is certainty and promise in His words.
- ✓ He ***will*** be delivered, condemned, handed over to the Gentiles, mocked, spit on, scourged, killed, and will rise again. And notice that the One that suffered this was ***the Son of Man***:
 - ***Son of Man*** was Jesus' favorite title for Himself (used 83x).
 - ***Son of Man*** was a clear reference to His Messianic position (**Dan. 7:13-14**).
- ✓ It's somewhat ironic that Jesus had to tell them this for two reasons: 1) He'd been talking about it repeatedly in the latter part of His ministry (but they could not fully understand, so they evidently chose to ignore His words); 2) the OT spoke repeatedly of the suffering Messiah (but the teachers of the Law repeatedly misinterpreted and skewed the OT teaching). *So Jesus told it again.*
- ✓ And immediately following Jesus' declaration there is a most puzzling response —

1. The Disciples' **PRIDEFUL Request (vv. 35-41)**

- "We want to be with Jesus!" (vv. 35-37)

- ✓ I say this is a puzzling response because their request is completely disconnected from what Jesus just said. But on the other hand, this is just how the Twelve had responded the last time (**9:32-34**).
 - The request evidently was spoken by their mother (Mt. 20:20) — since she was Jesus' mother's sister (and thus James & John were cousins), she may have been asserting family privilege — "Jesus, you owe this to your aunt." But since Jesus answered James & John, it was their request.
 - Note also that James and John were part of the "inner three" (**9:2**). Perhaps they were discontent with that position and wanted to edge out Peter? They saw themselves as superior.
 - Their request was open-ended — ***whatever*** = we want *carte-blanche*! Like a child to a parent!
- ✓ Jesus refused to answer but instead asked, ***What do you want Me to do for you*** (v. 36)? It was a question to reveal *to them* their own desire and motive. But they missed the implication and dove in with their full request — revealing their hearts for all to see (except themselves).
 - We want to ***sit on right and left in Your glory***. These were the two greatest positions of honor at banquet — they not only misunderstood their "rights," but they misunderstood the nature of Christ's advent (they'd already forgotten vv. 32-34 — there is no coming Messianic banquet!).
 - Their request attempted to give the perception of proximity — "We just want to be close to you, Jesus," but it was really a veiled attempt for power and position. "We want prominence."

- “Do you understand what you are asking?” (vv. 38-41)

- ✓ When God says, **You do not know what you are asking**, it’s time to pay attention! And think about who would be on Jesus’ right and left in just a few hours — the two thieves. James and John really did not know what they were asking!
- ✓ Jesus further asks, **Are you able...** He anticipates a negative response — “you can’t drink...can you?” They quickly and confidently affirmed they could drink Christ’s drink. What were these?
 - To share a cup with someone commonly meant to share the same fate as that person; it might be used of a royal banquet and a king and his most honored guest sharing a cup.
 - But **to drink the cup** in OT had one dominant idea: to experience God’s judgment for sin.

Ps. 75:7 *But God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another.*

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 the wicked of the earth must drain and drink down its dregs. cf. Jer. 25:15-28

- **to be baptized** meant to be overwhelmed with disaster and danger (Job 22:11; Ps. 69:2) — “a spendthrift is said to be *submerged* in debt. A drunk is said to be *submerged* in drink. A grief-stricken person is said to be *submerged* in sorrow.” (They should have thought of vv. 33-34)!
 - ✓ Christ is not asking if they want to die with Him, but He is asking if they can accomplish and do what He is doing — **are you able** (v. 38 = “do you have the power?...”) **We are!**
 - ✓ Jesus’ response to their brash and prideful statement is two-fold —
 - “You will receive what you asked for, but it won’t be what you think it is” (v. 39b). They would suffer — James was the first apostle martyred (Acts 12:2) and John lived long, but alone and died in prison (**Rev. 1:9**).
 - “What you really want I can’t promise, because you’re asking for something earthly that has already been decided in Heaven by the Father” (**v. 40**). Those who will sit there will be fit for it.
 - ✓ We don’t know James’ and John’s response, but the others of the Twelve were **indignant** — they’d missed an opportunity to promote themselves first. They weren’t angry against sin; they were angry that they’d missed the opportunity to ask Jesus for the same thing first!
 - ✓ How tragic that when the confrontation of Christ calls for humble self-examination (for the 10) and confession (James and John), there is only self-righteous indignation.
- **SUMMARY:** Jesus is pointed to the cross and God’s eternal plan for Him to absorb God’s wrath and all the disciples can think about is position and prominence.
 - ✓ They wanted to be seen while Jesus wanted to be seen slain.
 - ✓ These interactions on the road to the cross contrast the motives of the 12 and Jesus.
 - Jesus wanted to please the Father; the 12 wanted the pleasures of worship (that wasn’t theirs).
 - Jesus is talking about the greatest humiliation and the 12 are talking about the greatest exaltation.

This simple request of James and John quickly revealed the nature of their hearts. The interaction leads us to do the same kind of examination Christ was doing with them —

- *Why do we want Jesus?*
- *Do we really understand what we are asking?*
- *How will we respond if/when Jesus doesn't give us what we want?*

The answers to those questions reveal not only the desires of our heart in general, but why we desire (or don't desire) God Himself.

2. Jesus' HUMBLE Plan (vv. 42-45)

- **Calling them to Himself** = “gather around men — let’s think about what just happened” (debriefing)! Jesus offers three correctives for ungodly and sinful desires and demonstrates what the cross is all about (remember this all began with eight statements related to the cross in **vv. 33-34**)...

- The cross is not a means to **GREATNESS** (vv. 42-43a)

- ✓ The disciples began with an assumption about what Christ would do and be (not too dissimilar from the masses) — get rid of Rome, make great earthly kingdom...
- ✓ The kingdom of God is not accomplished in the same way as the kingdoms of the world.
- ✓ Worldly kingdoms have men who are self-exalters...
 - Worldly leaders use their position to promote themselves and diminish those “beneath” them (**lord it over them**). For instance, some coins minted in Caesarea Philippi showed the head of the reigning emperor, Augustus, with the inscription, “He who deserves adoration.”
 - Worldly leaders are not only **exercise authority**, but are tyrannical and exploitive.

“The world has always been filled with ambitious, overconfident, competitive self-promoters, who know no limits to their ambition. Many reach the heights of power. Driven by corrupt, proud hearts, they seek power at the expense of others. Ambition, overconfidence and competitiveness mark the worldly pursuit of greatness by self-promotion.” [MacArthur, 108.]

- ✓ **It is not this way among you...** This is not the way God works.
 - The contrast here is not between two kinds of ruling but between ruling and serving.
 - The cross (vv. 32-34) demonstrates that God does not value self-exaltation. The world may “reward” tyrannical strength — but not God. You cannot be a follower of the cross and be a self-exalter. Self-exaltation and service are inconsistent and mutually exclusive of each other.
 - This is not the first time they’ve had this lesson (**Mt. 18:1-6**).
 - The cross demonstrates that greatness is not “what can I get?” but “what can I give?”

- The cross is a calling to **SLAVERY** (vv. 43b-44)

- ✓ Jesus uses two words in these vv. for the kind of people the cross calls us to be:
 - **servant** (43) = “deacon” — referring to anyone who offers useful service to others; it is a choice.
 - **slave** (44) = “doulos” — means slave — he may do the same thing as the **servant**, but his duty is required (not a choice) and he always serves from a position of humility and lowliness (interestingly, this word is not used of Christ).
 - “The basic trouble in the human situation is that men wish to do as little as possible and to get as much as possible. It is only when they are filled with the desire to put into life more than they take out, that life for themselves and for others will be happy and prosperous.” [Barclay]
- ✓ If you want pre-eminence in the eyes of God, you will be a slave to God and that means you will be a slave **of all** — no exceptions (v. 44). Other’s needs and interests always supersede my own.
- ✓ This is Jesus’ very point in **John 15:12-13**. We don’t follow Christ to receive glory from Him or others; we follow Christ to enslave ourselves to Him and others. We are servants now because we will be servants in eternity; we lay aside “lordship” now because there is only one Lord.
- ✓ And we further are able to do that because —

- The cross is a provision of **FREEDOM** (v. 45)

- ✓ To this point of the passage, it might be said that Jesus is simply an example to follow; but this changes that. Here He is clearly said to be the means out of our sin.
- ✓ He against calls Himself the **Son of Man**, the exalted Lord and all-glorious King of **Dan. 7:14**. And notice that **even** He is not exempt from the principle of v. 43!
- ✓ **He did not come to be served**. Yes, some served Him, but that was not why He came.
- ✓ **He came to serve**. His life was totally given to service and ministry — “Although he was infinitely great himself, omnipotent to lord it over all, he came...on a mission that is the very opposite.” [Lenski]
- ✓ And the supreme way He served was by **giving His life as a ransom**.
 - The word **giving** emphasizes that the gift of His life was voluntary (unlike the sacrificial lambs). His death was not forced on Him, but His loving gift in harmony with the eternal Triune plan.
 - the gift He gave was **His life** —
 - ... We think first of His blood (death) — an infinitely precious commodity (**1 Pt. 1:18-19**).
 - ... But His life is an equally precious commodity — He fulfilled the Law and that righteousness is later said to be imputed to us (Mt. 5:17).
 - ... His life was in fact a **ransom** — the price that was paid for one’s release. Scripture uses this word to picture a man imprisoned by an enemy, enslaved (bondage) to his sins, and condemned to death because of his sin (Is. 53:10; **Rom. 3:24; 8:23**; Col. 1:14; **Tt. 2:14**). Christ’s ransom payment releases the sinner from all these “debts.”
 - ... N.B. The ransom was not paid to Satan because the offense was not against him but against God; only God has the power to inflict the eternal death penalty (**Mt. 10:28**).
 - ... N.B. The ransom was not a “fine” against sin. It was “a rescue.”

... Notice also that this ransom was **for** many. It was the *substitution* of Christ's life in the place of my sin — He served; He gave; He gave His life; He ransomed Himself; He did it all **FOR many**. That's the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. And it was for **many**. One life provides redemption for any and all who will believe in Him.

... How could Christ's single death provide so much for so many?

- Christ could pay an infinite debt because He possesses infinite righteousness and life.
- Man cannot pay an infinite debt because his righteousness and life is limited and finite (which is why infinite judgment by God is not unjust — God's infinite/just wrath can never be satisfied by finite "payment").

✓ With all this being explained about the work of Christ, don't miss connection to vv. 35ff

- The disciples thought that the advent of Christ (and the cross — whatever they understood that to be) was to establish places of prominence for His "favorites."
- Christ did not come to fulfill our greatest earthly desires; Christ came to liberate and free us from those earthly desires and give us a heavenly, God-exalting desire to be enslaved to God so God is seen as being pre-eminent!
- The things the disciples cherished were very things Jesus died to liberate them from!
- They not only *shouldn't* have those desires, but Christ made it possible not to have them!

✓ Friend, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, this is what the Lord of the universe has done for you!

✓ Friend, if you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, you are hopeless — unless you repent, confess your sin, and trust in Christ alone to free you from your sin. Would you *today* give up your sin and trust in Him, that He satisfied God's righteous anger against you when He died on the cross? Would you give up being enslaved to your sin and sinful desires and instead be enslaved to Christ.

- Sin is a terrible master that will destroy you.
- Christ is the great Master who will save and free you from sin and adopt you into His family.

CONCLUSION: One poet has appropriately written:

I am like James and John.
Lord, I size up other people
in terms of what they can do for me;
how they can further my program,
feed my ego, satisfy my needs,
give me strategic advantage.
I exploit people,
ostensibly for your sake,
but really for my own.

Lord, I turn to you,
to get the inside track
and obtain special favors,
your direction for my schemes,
your power for my projects,
your sanction for my ambitions,
your blank check for whatever I want.
I am like James and John.

But I am also like James and John in one other way — my Savior has ransomed me from my sin!