

WHY JESUS SUFFERED

Mark 10: 32-45

In our reading today Jesus again predicts his passion, his suffering and death on the cross, and then has to deal with some rather astonishing demands from his disciples. Please open your Bibles at page [***] so that you can follow along with me as we look at this passage together. This is the third time in Mark's gospel that Jesus has predicted his passion, as part of his continued preparation of the disciples, but it's the first time he has named Jerusalem as the place where this will take happen and it's much more detailed than the previous predictions. Look at verses 32-34:

“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. "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, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.” (Mark 10:32-34 NIV)

People normally spoke of “going up” to Jerusalem and the Temple, because Jerusalem was a city on a hill, and going there was usually to attend a festival and so joyful – but Jesus brings in a solemn note here. He's walking ahead of the disciples, as was the normal Rabbinic custom, but much more is involved. Discipleship is following Jesus along the road, to know Jesus is to follow him. Jesus is also anticipating the action of the Risen Lord going ahead of the disciples into Galilee as Jesus promises in Mark 14:28:

“But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” (Mark 14:28 NIV)

These verses also give us an image of a powerful saviour who leads his people with purpose and direction and also an image of Jesus going resolutely to the cross. I believe that the astonishment and fear of the twelve disciples and Jesus' other followers that we see in the

second part of verse 32 is not so much due to an awareness of what's going to happen in Jerusalem, but comes from the power of Jesus himself – which brings on their awe and fear.

Jesus then takes the disciples to one side and tells them plainly and directly what is going to happen to him in Jerusalem. He's now making absolutely plain, just to the twelve disciples, what his two previous revelations had revealed less plainly. He tells them in precise detail the events which are going to occur – his betrayal, his condemnation to death, the mockings, the floggings and finally his crucifixion. This was indeed no less than was predicted by OT passages such as Psalm 22:6-8 and Isaiah 50:6 which speak of the Messiah being mocked and insulted and Isaiah 53 which speaks clearly of his death. The only really new element is the statement that all this will be done by the gentiles. Nothing is directly said of crucifixion, but given that the gentiles in question can only be the Romans, this will necessarily be the means of his death. Crucifixion was the way that the Romans executed people other than Roman citizens. But Jesus leaves the disciples on a hopeful note. His death won't be the end – on the third day he will rise. Death cannot hold such a one as our Lord Jesus Christ.

These statements of the greatest solemnity and seriousness are immediately followed by acts of incredible presumption and selfishness on the part of two of the disciples. Look at verses 35:37: "Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." (Mark 10:35-37 NIV)

This really parallels similar presumption by the disciples after Jesus' second prediction of his passion at the end of chapter 9 when the disciples argued about who was the greatest among them. Here they are demanding what were the first and second places of honour next to a king or person of importance – the most important place being at his right and the second at his left. These repeated failures by the disciples show that they haven't understood the meaning of what

Jesus is saying at all. No doubt they are still expecting Jesus to arrive in Jerusalem as a conquering king and restore the kingdom of Israel. They acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah, but they have totally failed to understand Jesus' Messiahship and the way of the cross – the self sacrifice and service which the cross requires. But you know we're no different today, we often don't get it either. How often do we try and get one up, to get ahead, to gain the best place. Christianity today requires the same sacrifice and self service from us – Jesus' disciples of today – that Jesus demanded of his disciples then. In Jesus' eyes the greatest at a banquet is the slave who does the serving not the one who sits on the right of the guest of honour.

Often servant-hood is just being there for people. Some time ago Newsweek ran an article about street gangs. They told the story of a minister who was trying to reach slum dwellers for Christ. When he first moved into a rough neighbourhood and met with a lack of success he spoke to a drug dealer to ask him why he was so successful at recruiting people into his lifestyle. The drug dealer said I'm there when these kids go out shopping or go out to meet their friends. I'm there you're not – that's why I win, it's all about being there. Let us all show our Christ-like servant-hood by being there for those who need us.

Jesus gives the disciples a swift and sharp response, he explains that to share in his glory means also sharing in his suffering – look at verse 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?"”
(Mark 10:38 NIV)

the Greek text of this verse makes it clear that Jesus is saying that it is impossible for the disciples to do this. The language of the cup and the baptism speak of Jesus' voluntary sacrifice to pay the penalty for the sins of all mankind. In the OT the cup of wine is usually a metaphor for the wrath of God's judgement on the sins of mankind. Jesus is saying that he will accept in his own body God's wrath and judgement for the sins of us all.

This seems to be applied to the disciples in verse 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,” (Mark 10:39 NIV)

but here Jesus is really speaking of their participation in his suffering as his disciples. After the crucifixion and resurrection they will endure great suffering and tribulation because of Christ. But, neither they nor anyone other than Christ can atone for our sins through suffering or death or in any other way.

Jesus then goes on to say that the grant of the places of honour at his right and left is a prerogative of the Father – look at verse 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.” (Mark 10:40 NIV)

Jesus says they will go to the persons for whom the Father has prepared them.

The other ten disciples were indignant because they were jealous of their own dignity and fearful lest the two brothers, James and John, should secure some advantage over them – look at verse 41:

“When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.” (Mark 10:41 NIV)

It’s amazing that Jesus was able to arrange for the building of the church out of such unpromising raw material steeped in selfish ambition and rivalry. But that should encourage all of us in our own failings in the church today. If men like the disciples could create and build a vibrant church then so can we build up the church in spite of our own failings today.

Jesus then contrasted the conduct of Gentile rulers with the submission to service and sacrifice which is appropriate to discipleship – look at verses 42-44:

“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. Not so with you. Instead,

whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.” (Mark 10:42-44 NIV) In their struggle for rank and precedence, and the desire to exercise authority for their own advantage, the disciples were actually imitating their Roman rulers whom they almost certainly despised.

The reversal of all human ideas of greatness and rank was achieved when Jesus came, not to be served, but to serve – look at verse 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.”” (Mark 10:45 NIV) Jesus voluntarily veiled his glory as the Son of Man, the Son of God, and assumed the form of a slave who performed his service unto death because this was the will of God. In this verse, the death of Jesus is presented as his service to the Father and as a substitutionary death for many which brings release and forgiveness from their sin. When we study the scrolls of the Qumran community – the Dead Sea Scrolls – we find that the phrase ‘the many’ is used as a technical term to refer to God’s people. This corresponds perfectly with the ideas of Isaiah chapter 53. So here Jesus is saying that he’s ransoming all those who will come to accept him, all those who will become his disciples – and that includes us here today. This corresponds perfectly with the “all” of Isaiah 53:6 – “for we all like sheep have gone astray”.

The idea of the word ‘ransom’ here takes its meaning from the concept of the purchase of a slave, or a captive or a prisoner for a price – that is the ransom – in order to secure their release. So Jesus paid the very costly price of his lifeblood to ransom us from our captivity to sin, to ransom us as prisoners who were formerly under the penalty of death to which our sins had condemned us. What happened to Jesus is what would have happened to us if he had not stood in our place.

Again we see links with Isaiah chapter 53, especially verse 10, where the Servant of the Lord gave his life as an offering for the sins of others. We also see links with the guilt offering of the Day of Atonement. The release brought by this offering overcomes

mankind's alienation from God, our subjection to death, and our bondage to sin. Jesus' service and sacrifice is offered to the Father to release men from their indebtedness to God because of their sins. This one verse 45 is the theological heart of Mark's gospel.

So, Hallelujah, our sins are forgiven, we are released, we're free, from condemnation and stand justified before God. So let us in gratitude take up our crosses and follow Christ in a life of service and self sacrifice, the service and self sacrifice that Jesus calls each of us individually to offer to mankind – not because we need to do this in order to be saved, our salvation is a free gift by God's grace, but in love and gratitude for what Christ has done for us.

Let's just close with a few words of prayer. Father thank you that you sent your Son to pay with His blood the costly ransom price necessary to rescue us and ransom us from our sins. Thank you that we can now stand before you not under condemnation for our sins but justified and righteous in your sight. Thank you that because of this we are now able to enter into the eternal life which you have freely granted us. Let us enter into a life of service to you out of love and gratitude for what has been done for us.