

60 Mark 10:32-45

Ignorance

Text

32 And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, 33 saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. 34 And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

35 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36 And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

38 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?" 39 And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Introduction

"Oh, Man, look here! Look, look, down here!" exclaimed the Ghost.

They were a boy and a girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked, and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.

"Spirit, are they yours?" Scrooge could say no more.

"They are Man's," said the Spirit, looking down upon them. "And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased."¹

We are resuming our study in the book of Mark and find ourselves at the tail-end of chapter 10. The first 8 chapters Jesus was ministering in the Galilean region with some tours into Gentile territory. He has been constantly teaching and healing and teaching and casting out demons. It has been all action. The kingdom of God has arrived on the scene with a great display of power and authority.

Then at the end of chapter 8 Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Christ." This is Peter's great confession. Aside from the first verse of Mark, that was the first time that the title of Christ was used. After all that working and teaching and ministering, the disciples acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, the Anointed One of God.

After that confession, things begin to change. Jesus begins focusing more on his disciples than on the crowds. He has given three suffering predictions including today's passage. He has been, "On the way" ever since Peter's confession. The end of chapter 8 through ch 10 is characterized by a journey. "Each of the three major prophecies of the passion is set within the context of the journey, but now for the first time Jerusalem is named as the destination where Jesus will accomplish his mission."²

This "Journey" section of Mark's gospel is framed by the healing of two blind men. In chapter 8 Jesus healed the blind man in two phases. He performed a partial healing and the man remarked that he could see men that looked like trees walking. He could see, but only vaguely, only dim, undefined shapes. Only after the second application did the man see clearly. That two-stage healing mirrors the ignorance of the disciples. They recognized Jesus as the Christ, but they had only a vague, undefined understanding of what that office entailed.

In verse 31 of chapter 8 Jesus talks about his suffering and death, but Peter rebukes him. Jesus rebukes Peter in return. Do you think that the message of suffering and humility and servant-hood got through? In verse 30 of chapter 9 Jesus again talks about his suffering and death. The disciples follow hard on that teaching by arguing about who was the greatest. Jesus rebukes them again and talks about being a servant of all. John responds arrogantly prohibiting others from doing good because they were not part of his clique. Jesus responds again with a lesson on being a servant. In verse 13 of chapter 10 the disciples prohibit the little one from coming to Christ. The very kind that Jesus earlier taught them to receive! He tells them once more that they need to be like children to enter the kingdom and follows that with teaching on how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom.

Humility! Suffering! Servant-hood! Persecutions! Lowly ones! Do you think the disciples have it yet? Not yet. Today's passage continues more of the same. The ignorance of the disciples is astounding. It is not for lack of clarity in Jesus' teaching that they are having a hard time with it. Rather, they seem to be ignorant in the same way that the people in Romans 1 are ignorant.

"18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of

1. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, Stave 3

2. Lane, 375.

men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. **19** For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them" (Romans 1:18-19). The displeasure of Jesus is revealed against his disciples, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about suffering, humility and servant-hood is plain to them, because Jesus has shown it to them. He has made these truths clear, but they refuse to give in to them.

The March to Persecution

On the Road

32 And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid.

Jesus resumes his long march to death. The mood of this group is like that of soldiers going on a mission from which they know they will not return. It is like a people making a final stand at a fortress that will not be able to survive the night. There is a cloud over this group.

Jesus has twice predicted what awaits him in Jerusalem. "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 8:31). Peter did not miss the significance of what Jesus said for he pulls him aside and begins to rebuke Jesus. In the next chapter, Mark 9 starting in verse 30 we see this, "They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." 32 But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him." What the disciples did not understand is how all of this fits with what they expected of the Messiah. Yet they were afraid to ask for clarification, not because they had zero understanding, but because they were afraid that their fears would be confirmed. They knew enough to know that they did not want to know more.

The disciples are aware of the conflicts that have existed between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees. They know that these religious authorities want to put Jesus to death. They have constantly been there to challenge Jesus and fight against him. This alone would be reason to avoid Jerusalem. It was the hotbed of Judaism. This was the heart of scribal thought. The Scribes and Pharisees are consumed with putting an end to Jesus, the crowds are frenzied over the whole thing. Jerusalem is a wasps nest that has been shaken. Messianic expectations are at a fever pitch. There is electricity in the air. The city is like a school of sharks with blood in the water. So eager to eat that they may devour one of their own before the frenzy is over.

The tensions are too high. It is a volatile situation. This taken together with Jesus' predictions of betrayal, suffering and death are too much for the followers of Jesus. When their leader confidently, and deliberately heads out on the road to Jerusalem, what other response should we expect than amazement and fear? Jesus is in front, boldly leading the way. His disciples and the larger group of his followers cautiously bring up the rear.

The Final Passion Prediction

And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, 33 saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. 34 And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

In the midst of their fear and amazement, Jesus given them no false expectations. He is not a doctor who will tell the terminally ill that everything is all right. They are afraid, and he confirms the basis of their fears. They are amazed that he is going to Jerusalem, and he confirms his resolve to meet this horror head on.

This is his most specific prediction yet.

- 10:33 1. The Son of man shall be handed over or betrayed into the hands of the chief priests and the scribes. Fulfilment [Mark 14:53](#).
- 10:33 2. They shall condemn him to death. Fulfilment [14:55–64](#).
- 10:33 3. And shall hand him over to the Gentiles. Fulfilment [15:1](#).
- 10:34 4. They shall mock him and spit upon him. Fulfilment [15:16–20](#). Cf. [14:65](#); [15:29–32](#).
- 10:34 5. And shall scourge him. Fulfilment [15:15](#).
- 10:34 6. And kill ("crucify," [Matt. 20:19](#)) him. Fulfilment [15:24](#), [37](#).
- 10:34 7. Three days later he shall rise again. Fulfilment [16:1 ff](#).

The Mission for Glory

35 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36 And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

James and John ask what seems to be an entirely inappropriate question. The contrast could not be more stark. Jesus has just given the most detailed and graphic description of his death thus far, and James and John ask about positions of prestige! During the last passion prediction we observed that the disciples did not understand. This lack of understanding still attends their thoughts. They cannot fathom how the Messiah can die! How can the forever King die?! How can the one who brings in everlasting righteousness die!?! How is it that the Son of David, the Jewish Christ, who will establish a city to which the nations will flow, how is it that he can be given over into the hands of Gentiles? How is it that the Anointed One who will crush the enemies of God's people, be handed over and crushed by these Gentile oppressors?! None of it makes sense.

James and John are unable to shake the notion of glory and power and pristine rule. In the face of these predictions of suffering and death perhaps James and John seek reassurance as much as they seek position. "Is there not a kingdom?" "Will you not reign?" "May we not rule with you in your kingdom?" "We are afraid Jesus, are these things not true?" Although they are clearly wrong, and Jesus is well within his right to rebuke them, I myself am in no such position to criticize. I stand on equal ground with James and John seeking affirmation in the light of paradigm-shifting teaching. Their world is being turned up-side-down. Although they were wrong, my heart identifies with their cry. I see myself in them, but Lord willing you see yourself

in them as well. But let us not stay in this place of existential identification with fellow sinners; rather let us accept the correction and challenge that our Lord issues in order that he may lift us to a higher plane.

Ignorance

38 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?" 39 And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

"You do not know what you are asking." The disciples, and James and John in particular, have no concept of what the reign of Christ will look like. They have no concept of its nature. They are still thinking of a physical kingdom in the dusty land of Palestine. Jesus will not rule Palestine like Herod did. Nor will Jesus rule the known world like Rome did. With all the glory that was Rome - its buildings, its roads, its unrivaled army, built upon the back of Greece with its literary excellence, artistic expression and philosophical sophistication - it still pales in comparison to the kingdom that Jesus will rule.

Jesus is not head of state. He is not even the ruler of the world that will one day die. He is the ruler of the world throughout its entire existence! His kingdom will reach its consummate form in the age to come where all his enemies are gone. Jesus will have vanquished every last enemy, and there will not even be a trace of a sinful thought in the minds of his glorified subjects. Jesus will rule over an eternal people who have come of age spiritually. His domain will not just be earth, but the entirety of creation. "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9). James and John haven't a clue what they are asking for.

Jesus tries to deflect their ambition by asking whether they can drink the cup or be baptized with the baptism with which he is baptized. When Jesus asks if they can drink the cup, he is not setting condition whereby they may sit at his side, rather he is pushing their thinking into the realm of suffering rather than glory. His question clearly supposes a negative answer. The cup that Christ had to drink down to the bitter dregs was nothing less than the wrath of God for the sins of the world. There is no conceivable way that they can drink that cup. Being finite creatures, it is simply beyond them.

James and John are unmoved and answer, "Yes, we are able!" Their zeal is commendable but it carries on its back a most burdensome child called Ignorance. Why do they not stop at the words of their Master and realize they have spoken about things too great for them? The cup that they envision is likely some form of trials. Christ, in mercy, condescends to their ignorance and states that the cup and baptism, such as they conceive it, will indeed be theirs to drink and undergo. But the positions of highest honor in the kingdom of God are reserved for the Father's judgment.

Knowledge

41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

Lest we think that James and John are the bad one of the group, Mark tells us that the remaining 10 were indignant with them. Why? Because they wanted to be first! They wanted the seat of glory. They are only upset that James and John beat them to the punch. If you regard others as more important than yourself, why would you object to such a request? Only pride and jealousy account for their indignation.

J.C. Ryle remarks, "Blessed is that man who can sincerely and gladly rejoice when others are exalted, though he himself is overlooked and passed by!"³

42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus teaches them once again. Humility, the welcoming of suffering, a servant-like heart, these things are completely antithetical to the way the world lives. "You only go around one time so go for all the gusto you can get." You won't get to the top by being a doormat. One of the worst things to be called today is a yes-man. Look out for number one! This is how the world works. The Gentiles lord it over you. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. I'm not sure of its corrupting power. It seem as though the corruption is already there, and power allows its expression. Whereas at the bottom there are all kind of checks against you sinning, when you rule there will be far less retribution that comes your way - because you hold the power! In our postmodern age, the rule of tyrants and heavy-handed dictators seems to be on the decline. But surely this is only because the new power is that of popularity. In this post-Machiavelli world, all that matters is that you appear to care.

But this is not how it is in the kingdom of God! You live that way now and you will be last for eternity! If you want to be great, learn to be a servant of all. This does not mean feigning humility, but actually being humble. Receive this knowledge from God and do not suppress it.

(8) If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **35** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. **36** For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? **37** For what can a man give in return for his soul? **38** For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

(9) If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." **36** And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, **37** "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

[T]he one who is not against us is for us. **41** For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

(10) Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. **15** Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, **30** who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. **31** But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

“You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **43** But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, **44** and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. **45** For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Dear Christian, will you receive this knowledge from your Lord or will you suppress the truth like the disciples have thus far done?

"This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased."⁴