

Cross Before Crown **Mark 10:32-45**

In God's good timing we're a week out from Easter and here in the Gospel of Mark Jesus is talking about what will happen to him on the cross. James and John, ignoring Jesus, are calling dibs on what they would like to see happen in the kingdom. Just like everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die, the disciples still want to be the greatest without being the servants of all (cf. 9:33-37). This is not a spiritual truth that applies only to our individual devotional lives. Jesus is talking about changing the world in the way God intends, the way he did on Good Friday, and the way the apostles eventually imitated and so turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). The cross comes before the crown for all of us.

Jesus' Cross

The disciples are amazed and the people afraid at Jesus' direction toward Jerusalem (v32). Lest anyone mistake his mission for a religiopolitical campaign or coup, he spells out seven things that will happen to the Son of Man, planting seeds that will bloom later in Mark. He will be: handed over to chief priests and scribes (14:53), condemned to death (14:55-64), handed over to the Gentiles (15:1), mocked and spit upon (15:16-20), flogged (15:15), killed (15:24, 37), and three days later rise from the dead (16:1ff). Jesus faced two literal trials, condemnation by his people and the Romans, beating and scourging, and an excruciating death, and yet he set his face like flint for Jerusalem (Is. 50:7). He loved us and trusted the Father which enabled him to endure the cross in hope (v34).

Our Cross

Jesus just said the disciples would be rewarded a hundredfold for their sacrifices (v30), so James and John want to be first in line (v35). Calvin said this narrative contains a bright mirror of human vanity, showing that proper and holy zeal is often accompanied by ungodly ambition. They want the right and left hand seats in Jesus' coming kingdom (v37; cf. Ps. 110:1). The rich young ruler wanted to cart his possession into the kingdom; these disciples would carry their power. But he won't allow it and tells them what they must do. To "drink from the cup" is to undergo an experience, whether good (Ps. 16:5, 23:5, 116:13; Jer. 16:7) or bad (Ps. 11:6, 75:8; Isa. 51:17). Jesus' cup is the one he asks the Father to take from him (Lk. 22:42). To be baptized is to be initiated, admitted, and adopted into something (Rom. 6:3; Col. 2:12). Israel was baptized into Moses in the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:2). When Jesus was baptized, he died, but death couldn't hold him. James and John would be baptized, but those who would be at Jesus right and left—the two thieves—were not there by his choice (15:28). Mark's humor is lovingly dark at the clueless audacity of the apostles. To be baptized is to take up your cross and follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24). To drink the cup is to swallow the affliction that God appoints for every Christian. "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered" (Rom. 8:36). If you are becoming like Jesus, you are doing so by suffering like he did. There's no shortcut to the crown.

The Crown

The other apostles don't like what the two did (v41). They were just arguing who is the greatest (9:33-34), but apparently going to Jesus to secure a spot isn't kosher! Jesus corrects all the apostles not just James and John. He isn't abolishing the thrones but telling them how to sit on one. The rulers of the Gentiles lord their authority over others but Christians should *never* act this way (vv42-3). If you want to become great, be a servant; to be the greatest, become a slave of all (v44). Everyone under your authority—children, spouse, employees, mailman, barista, pizza guy—should appreciate the way you act toward them. Who doesn't want to work for a caring, appreciative and generous boss? The great Son of Man came to serve us and die on the cross to ransom us from slavery and death. He freed us so we can imitate him in loving others.

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Mark 10:39-45

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."

1. To be baptized means you are identified with Jesus. You follow him. How did Jesus suffer? If you follow him, how might you suffer?
2. In the world, people with power and authority use it to be unkind and bossy to others. How does Jesus say Christians should use their power (verse 43)?
3. What opportunity do you have to serve or bless someone with something you have?
4. What did Jesus come to do (verse 45)?
5. Draw a picture of Jesus washing his disciples' feet.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. --Mark 10:45