

Mark 10:45

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to that passage we read in Mark's Gospel, Mark chapter 10, and especially verse 45. Mark chapter 10, 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. Verse 15.

When any of us might follow the example that Jesus gave. Well, that's the kind of question that arises in our mind because of a verse like this.

Indeed, there may be some confusion in your own mind as to, well, what exactly is the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ?

Because the Bible seems to lay great emphasis on it. More emphasis on it than perhaps the message that we get from Christendom at large at the present time seems to.

[1 : 33] There's much emphasis on the life of Jesus, the teachings of Jesus. Up and down the pulpits of our land today, these may be some of the main emphasis being made.

But the Bible seems to lay specific emphasis upon the death of Jesus. Even the very proportion of the Gospels that are devoted to the last week of his life seem, perhaps to us today, disproportionately.

After all, what autobiography or biography would devote about half of its length to the last week of the life of a person as John's Gospel does.

And it's not just in that kind of emphasis, but in the kind of things that are said. Now, maybe you this morning, maybe you're unsure as to whether you are a Christian or would call yourself a Christian, but you are attracted to the Lord Jesus Christ, you're attracted to Christianity, or even to other Christians.

But you're not clear as to what the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ is. And perhaps you sense that there is something lacking because you don't really understand that.

[2 : 51] And I would agree with you, because that's at the very heart of the Christian message. If you don't understand that, then you don't really understand the Christian message. Well, to carry on with my original question, was the death of Jesus an example to be followed, or an expiation?

Well, let's look at both of these and see what we can learn about it. Was the death of Christ an example? Well, from some of what is said here, it would appear so.

For instance, the first part of this verse says that the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve. But it's the word for that begins this text that links it into what's been going on before.

What has been going on before. Why does Jesus say this and go on to say something about giving his life? Well, the whole context is to do with the behavior of two of the disciples, and their request that they address to Jesus.

James and John came to him in verse 35, and they said they had something to ask him. They sound a little bit like naughty children who've got something in their minds that they don't want to come out with right away.

[4 : 14] They say, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. Now, it's always good not to agree to those kinds of terms, as Jesus, in fact, makes very clear here.

He says, what do you want me to do for you? Jesus is not prepared to give any false promises. And so they come out with it. Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.

Now, what kind of request was this? What did it portray about these two disciples? Well, first, it showed that they had faith.

They had faith in Jesus, and they had faith in the advancement of his kingdom. They believed that he was king, that he was Messiah, he was the Christ, and he was going to enter into his glory.

So, so far, so good. But it was their specific request with regard to this that shows that there was something sinful.

[5 : 20] And that is, they had this desire to have a very privileged position in the glory of Christ's kingdom. They wanted to sit one at the left and one at the right of Jesus.

The picture here is of Jesus on his throne, and one his right-hand man, the other his left-hand man. Now, this obviously betrays a considerable degree of ambition on the part of James and John. Now, there may be various reasons why they had this kind of ambition. We know Matthew's Gospel tells us that their mother played a part in this also.

She presented this request on behalf of her son. So, it seemed that they were all agreed about this. So, there was perhaps pressure coming from their mother.

And, you know, parents have got to be beware of putting wrong kinds of pressure on their children. Parents, we as parents, tend to be ambitious for our children.

[6 : 35] We want the best for them. But we ought to beware that we don't push them into wrong kinds of ambition. Perhaps by having unrealistic ambitions concerning them.

Or perhaps wanting them to achieve something that we never achieve. Or perhaps wanting them to achieve worldly advancement as more important than spiritual advancement.

We've got to beware of these things. But not only was there that. I believe there were other reasons why they had or might have tended to have this kind of ambitious attitude.

They held a privileged position within the group of the twelve. They were part of the closer group of three. Peter, James and John.

Who so often had a more intimate talk with the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, perhaps because of that privileged position, they felt well that they should have something of greater status when Jesus achieves his kingdom.

[7 : 40] There was the fact also that from their background, they had status. Sometimes we think of James and John simply as fishermen, and they certainly were fishermen.

But we read that their father had servants. And probably what we're to be thinking about is a fishing business that was being run there in Galilee.

And therefore, they weren't just the poor, ordinary folk. So James and John probably came from a position, a social position that was a little bit above perhaps the norm.

So again, they had the kind of attitude that, well, in Christ's kingdom, they too should be in a privileged position. And aren't there temptations and dangers in connection with that kind of thing? We think perhaps because we have a certain standing in the community, or in the family, or in society, that we ought to have a similar kind of standing and status within the church.

[8 : 49] And often that kind of thing has been disastrous. One of the reasons why there was a disruption of the church in Scotland that we'll be commemorating very shortly this year, one of the reasons was because so many people thought because they were lawyers, or they were landowners, or whatever, that they could hold a privileged position in the church of Christ.

They had forgotten the words of Andrew Melville to James VI, who said that in Christ's kingdom, he was not a hand, but a vassal.

In other words, he was just an ordinary member, the same as anybody else. Unless he was to be made an officer in the church according to Christ's commands, concerning what an officer in the church was, a minister or an elder, he held no more position than anybody else.

It's very easy for us to slip into those kind of things. But also, these men were probably relations of Jesus.

They were probably cousins of Jesus. If we follow what was said concerning their mother in the Gospels, we discover that she was a relation of Mary.

[10 : 09] And so, they were belonging to the same family. And again, they may be thought because they belonged after the flesh to the family of Jesus, therefore they should have privileges in his kingdom.

Again, doesn't that same kind of thing so often operate? And again, in the history of the church, hasn't it often been disastrous? That because somebody belonged to a certain family, they got advancement in the church.

Not because they had particular gifts, or were more gifted than anybody else, but simply because they belonged to the right family. We see the same thing in the Old Testament. We see the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas.

They didn't have the qualifications for the priesthood. Eli should have disqualified them because of their lifestyle. But he didn't.

Because of the privilege of family. So we see again how all these things are so dangerous. And the kind of attitude that seems to be portrayed here by James and John.

[11 : 14] That privilege in the kingdom of Christ would be an echo, a reflection of other kinds of worldly privilege.

And Jesus has to warn them later on about simply reflecting the attitudes of the world around them. He says in verse 42, This is the worldly pattern.

And the pattern of worldly ambition. Of people wanting to get on so that they can exercise power over other people. So that no longer will they be under authority, being told what to do, being a general dog's body, but being in authority, telling other people what to do.

You see, there's something in the very heart of our human pride that rejoices in that kind of thing. We don't want other people telling us what to do in the same way as we don't want God telling us what to do.

And the more we can be over other people, the better because it tunes in with our own sinful pride. So, ambition can be something destructive and something that is not at all for the advancement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

[12 : 43] What kind of ambitions do we have? We'll see in a moment that there is such a thing as right ambition. But are our ambitions right? Our ambitions for ourselves?

Our ambitions for our children? Is it merely in terms of the ambitions of this world to get power and advancement in this world?

Or are we really concerned about the furtherance of Christ's kingdom? And are we prepared to follow him? And to follow his instructions as to how we are to be ambitious?

And how we are to devote our lives to his service? That will tell a great deal about us and how we stand in relation to it. But notice also one of the consequences of this kind of ambitious attitude of James and John.

We read in verse 41, When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. And then Jesus had to call them all together and give them a talking to.

[13 : 48] It appears to me that the indignance, the anger of the other disciples wasn't really a kind of righteous indignation that they should so wrongfully try to pursue an ambitious policy within Christ's kingdom.

But rather, that they were doing so at the expense of the others. You know how this kind of wrong, ambitious attitude stirs up all kinds of feelings of envy and jealousy and anger and bitterness.

That's what we see in the world around us. Why did I get left over? Why wasn't I promoted? Why should he have been? Or why should she have been? She's no more gifted than I am and so on and so on.

You see, once that kind of attitude takes over, it's not only those who ambitiously seek to get to the top that are consumed by this kind of ambition, but those who envy them in that position.

And so much of the mass media at the present time is encouraging not only a covetousness in the sense of materialism, but an envy of those who have positions of influence or who have money or wealth to be able to indulge all their fantasies.

[15 : 14] That's the kind of society we're living in. And we see the same kind of thing happening there in the very exclusive band of the twelve disciples of Jesus.

Are we infected by these same kind of things, these same kind of wrong desires? Are we simply imitating the world around us and simply falling for these temptations that the devil is putting in our way, leading us away from the real ambition we ought to have as servants of Jesus Christ?

Well, what did Jesus have to say to them in the light of this? Well, first of all, he gave them a paradox. The paradox of Christian ambition.

So often Jesus' teaching was given as a kind of paradox. The first shall be last. Here he says, in verse 43, not so with you, not like the worldly ambition.

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. And whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. Now that was turning worldly thought totally on its head.

[16 : 30] And it turns it on its head still today. Today the person who wants to be first is going to get to the top no matter what. No matter who else who stands on on the way to get there.

But Jesus says, no, not at all. The person who's going to be first is the one who's going to be the very lowest. He uses the word here, the word slave.

He first of all uses the word servant, which has got a little bit of status for it. But then he uses the word slave. It's the very lowest, very lowest rung on the ladder of society in those days.

Someone who wasn't free. Someone who had to simply obey his master's wishes. He had to serve.

So Jesus turns it all around and he says, if you want to really get to the top spiritually, if you really want to get to the top in my kingdom, then you've got to begin at the very bottom.

And you've got to act with the attitude of a servant. Isn't it interesting that still today those who are called to office in the church, two of the titles at least, simply mean servant.

[17 : 49] The word deacon is one of these Greek words for servant. The word minister is simply another word for servant. And that is what people who hold office in the church ought to be and ought to see themselves as.

Servants of the Lord Jesus Christ and servants of the people of Christ. And the more that we would seek to do that, the better the church would become.

So Jesus here says, it's not at all wrong to have ambition. We must have ambition, spiritual ambition, for ourselves as individuals, that we may be all we can be for Jesus Christ, and spiritual ambition for the church, that the church should be all it ought to be for Christ.

But it's the way in which we go about these ambitions, the way in which we seek the advancement of Christ's kingdom, not by our lording it over others, and insisting on our ways, but rather by seeking to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who came as a servant.

He came, he said, not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. So not only does he speak here of the paradox of Christian ambition, but he speaks also of the pattern of his own servanthood.

[19 : 24] If we want to know how we are to live within the kingdom of Jesus Christ, if we want to advance that kingdom and be advanced ourselves spiritually, then we have to follow his pattern or his example.

And here we see quite certainly and clearly the Lord Jesus speaks of his death as a pattern or as an example. I think there is a tie in here to what he says earlier.

There is this rather mysterious thing he says in verse 38. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?

And we immediately think the answer we would expect to that is no, no, no. But that is not what Jesus is thinking of. They say yes we can. And then he says you will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with.

But to sit at my right or my left is not for me to grant. Now what is all that about? Well these expressions to drink the cup or to be baptized are being used not literally but are being used figuratively.

[20 : 44] and they are being used figuratively of suffering. So often to drink a cup means to suffer but it certainly means to identify with.

To drink the same cup of Jesus and to be baptized with his baptism it means to be identified with the Lord Jesus. And it is quite clear from the context in verses 32 to 34 of this chapter Jesus had been speaking about his suffering when he went up to Jerusalem.

And so he is saying to James and John you want to be close to me? You want to be so closely identified with me that you are on my right hand and my left?

Well you must identify with me in my suffering. And I think also there is something else. And that is they were appealing to Jesus for that place at his right hand and his left in his glory.

Now what exactly they envisaged here we can't perhaps be 100% sure about. Maybe they were thinking of an earthly glory.

[21 : 55] Jesus as Messiah setting up his kingdom there in Israel. But they were thinking at any rate of his victory and his glory over all his enemies.

But I think perhaps when Jesus speaks here of places prepared for him on his right and his left he was possibly thinking of something else. He was thinking of his glory which was very different in this world from the glory that James and John envisaged.

He was thinking of the glory of his cross. And there was one on his right and one on his left in that glory. But they were sitting not on thrones. They were on the same kind of throne as himself.

They were on crosses. And one of these mocked and cursed him even to his death. But the other by the grace of Jesus Christ came to recognize his own sinfulness and his need of the Savior who was dying there beside him.

You see the glory of Jesus Christ was expressed in a throne that was a cross and a crown that was a crown of thorns. And he was saying to James and John if you are going to identify with me if you want to be near me in my glory you must be near me in my suffering.

[23 : 21] And you see that is what he goes on to say here. The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

So Christ's death is most surely a pattern and an example of self-giving. We may not be called to martyrdom in that physical sense but we will be called to a spiritual martyrdom every day of our lives if we are to follow Jesus.

Every day of our lives we are called to make costly sacrifices if we are following the Lord Jesus Christ. To give up things that perhaps our sinful natures would desire to harm.

To give up things because we love the Lord Jesus Christ and want the advancement of his kingdom. To positively put ourselves out for other people irrespective of who they may be, irrespective of whether perhaps we have any kind of natural liking towards that type of personality or whatever but doing it because we love them because the Lord Jesus Christ has loved us.

You see to follow the Lord Jesus is a costly thing. It means a daily dying to self and dying to sin. So yes Jesus death is an example.

[24 : 52] But there is something more to Jesus death than that. And it would be so wrong as it is so wrong for many people today to simply leave it at that. And think of the great heroic example of Jesus in his love and that we have to follow that.

The problem arises when we ask the question how can we follow that when we ourselves are sinners and Jesus wasn't. Jesus perfectly loved.

Jesus perfectly poured out his life for other people. But we are so beset by sin and entangled by sin that even our very best efforts are so so poor and so tainted by sinful inclinations and motive.

And the answer to that is that the Lord Jesus Christ's death was something else as well. Yes it was also an expiation. It was also a price paid for something.

It was as it is expressed here a ransom for many. Now ransom is the price paid to set one free.

[26 : 07] It could be the price paid to set one free from slavery or it could be the price paid to set one free from the condemnation of the law.

In the Old Testament that was one of the special meanings of it. A man who had an ox or a bull that was known to be dangerous and that bull wasn't kept in and looked after properly and it gored somebody to death then the owner of that bull his life was perfect.

He was condemned to death under the law but there was provision that his life could be redeemed.

A ransom could be paid. A price paid to set him free from the condemnation of the law.

Similarly with slavery a price could be paid to set someone free from slavery the ransom price. And there were other uses of this same expression.

And it's this expression that is used of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. So there is something more than just an example. There is something more mysterious here and something more powerful than an example.

[27 : 27] There is something that really deals with our human condition. What is our human condition? It is that we are slaves to sin. Jesus said whoever commits sin is a slave to sin.

And that's why he uses here the language of redemption the language of ransom and he says I have come to give my life as a ransom for many.

I have come to pay the price of freedom from sin. The world is enslaved to sin. All these things we were thinking about earlier all the worldly ambitions.

You see ambition in itself is not a bad thing. To do good to advance things to better things in the world and to better people in the world.

All these things are good. But it's the way in which we go about it that's so perverted. We seek advancement for our own sake and for its own sake rather than for the sake of virtue, the sake of helping other people, the sake of God's kingdom.

[28 : 36] And so it goes on in every other thing we seek to attend. There's sin, there's self-centeredness, there's pride there in our hearts. And so the Lord Jesus Christ has provided the remedy for sin.

He has provided something that breaks the power of sin. And it breaks the power of sin because it sets us free from our condemnation under the law.

Remember that illustration used in the Old Testament? A man could be redeemed from his condemnation under the law. That is specifically the meaning of the word redemption as it is used spiritually.

We are condemned by God's law. Not just for neglect and so on like the man we're thinking about who owned the bull. But we are condemned by the law because we have broken God's law at every point.

we are under the wrath and curse of God because we have set ourselves up as laws to ourselves rather than sought to follow God's law.

[29 : 51] We are rebels against God and under his condemnation. That is our position by nature. And the work of Jesus Christ achieves a redemption from that condition.

How does it do it? How is this freedom provided? This freedom from condemnation? It is provided because he gave his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus' death is the ransom price. When it says here that he gave his life, it's speaking not we may say of his living life, although that's part of it, it's speaking of giving his life over to death.

And so it's the death of Jesus Christ that is the ransom price. Now this has two parts. The first part is that in offering up his life in death, he was giving a perfect fulfillment of the law.

The Lord Jesus Christ had lived a perfect life, had positively satisfied all the demands of God's law. God's law. And as he came now to die, his life was being offered up as a perfect life.

[31 : 08] Why? Because it was being given in the place of others. And similarly, he was giving up his life in death to satisfy the just demands of God's law.

What did God's law demand? It demanded condemnation of human beings. it demanded condemnation of the human race. But God in his mercy has decreed to deal with the human race not as individuals one, one, one, and one, but he has decreed that he will deal with the human race by representatives.

And there are only two. There's Adam and there's Caesar. And if we are in Adam, represented by Adam before God, we are condemned.

Because Adam has disobeyed and we have followed as his children of disobedience. But if we are in Christ, then there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Why? Because Jesus himself took the condemnation. He himself upon the cross endured that separation from God that was the just penalty for sin.

[32 : 26] sin. And so his death is spoken of as a ransom, a ransom price. Law is satisfied, satisfied on both counts.

The penalty is meted out and perfect obedience is given to the law. So there is no more condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. that.

But notice too this little word for. A ransom for many. And this word speaks of substitution.

There are many different words that are translated by our English word for in the New Testament. But this one has a very specific meaning. It is the Greek preposition ante, which means in price of, in place of, in the room and said of. You see, there are different ways in which we could use the word for. We might just say on behalf of or for the benefit of.

[33 : 28] And certainly what Christ did here is on behalf of us and for our benefit. But literally it is in the place of. In other words, the hymn is right when it says in my room condemned he stood.

In other words, in my place condemned he stood. His condemnation, his death, was the death that we ought to die. And yet he took it in our place.

He became our substitute. And all of that was illustrated in the Old Testament. Year after year, day after day, as the high priest laid his hand on the head of the lamb to be sacrificed in the place of the sinner.

That was pointing forward to the great lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. And notice too, it is freedom for many. Freedom for many.

Now Jesus doesn't mislead us. He doesn't say that it is a ransom for all. For not all are saved.

[34 : 41] But he says it is a ransom for many. And that is strictly accurate in line with all that the rest of the Bible says. If anyone is lost, he is lost because he rejects the salvation of Jesus Christ.

But those who are saved are saved because of what Jesus did by way of paying the ransom price. And it is for many. Sometimes you see we may look around us and we say well even though there

is quite a few here in church today think of the tens of thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of people around us in the city of Aberdeen and its environment.

What a small group of people here. What a small group of people gathered in all the churches in Aberdeen today. But you know one day there is going to be a multitude that no man can number gathered before the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Where have all these people come from? They have come to those who have been redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ throughout history, throughout all time and throughout the whole wide world. And there will be all different kinds of people there. There will be many, many different kinds of people, all different colors and backgrounds, all different intellectual capacities, from the smallest child to the oldest grandfather or grandmother.

[36 : 07] all different kinds of people, all different backgrounds, some who lived their lives in an exemplary fashion throughout the whole of their life, others who went through terrible times of bondage to sin, and yet God by his grace redeemed them.

Many people, many different kinds of people, ransomed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. So today it doesn't matter who you are, this word many reaches out to you, and it describes the fact that all different kinds of people are there within that group redeemed by Jesus Christ.

So today the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ is freely given to all who hear it. And this ransom price is paid on behalf of all those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

All who come to it, he will in no wise cast out. So then, do you know the meaning of Christ's death? This most essential thing in the Christian message, do you know its meaning?

Do you know that it is an example that you are called to follow? But an example that you can't even begin to follow unless you come to know the power that is in that death of Jesus Christ.

[37 : 37] It's not only a pattern, it's a power. And the power comes from the fact that it is a ransom. That it is the one thing that puts mankind right with God.

That today there's no other way in which you can begin on the Christian life but coming to the foot of the cross and trusting in his completed work. And once you do that, then you are called to follow that pattern.

An example of self-giving love that we will certainly not be able to follow perfectly in this life but we are to follow after it. Such a great and high example is given to us that it's difficult for us to follow and we can't pretend that we can even begin to show that kind of love in a meaningful way in our own strength.

But God in his grace begins to work with those whom he has redeemed in Jesus Christ and he begins to show in their lives that love more and more in a developing way.

So that is the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ. Do you know it for yourself? Do you trust in the Lord Jesus in that way? That's what you are called to in Christian faith. That's what you are called to in Christian living.

[38 : 56] The cross is central to both Christian faith and Christian life. Let us pray. Our gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we praise your name for your great grace to us in Christ Jesus.

O Lord, fill our hearts with these good things. Enable us to rejoice today because there is a Savior, a Savior freely offered to us in the gospel.

We thank you for every person here who has already accepted that offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. We thank you for every person who today acknowledges the Lord Jesus as Savior and Lord. We pray that you would enable them to go on day by day to show this love of Jesus Christ, to see that cross as an inspiration as to how we are to live in a self-sacrificial and self-giving way.

We pray for those who by this stage do not know you. We pray that even here today they may come to know that essential meaning of the cross of Jesus Christ for themselves and may have that assurance that sin is forgiven in Jesus Christ because sin is taken away and dealt with.

[40 : 21] The condemnation is past for those who are in Christ Jesus. And we pray that they may be enabled also to live such lives as the world around would see and take note of the fact that they have been with Jesus and that they wear his badge, that badge of love for one another and love for all men.

Now we ask these things in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Now we close by singing in Psalm 103 verses 1 to 5 the tune Istrakathra.

O thou my soul bless God the Lord and all that in me is be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless. Psalm 103 verses 1 to 5 to God's praise.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of you now and forever.
Amen. Amen.