



Lenten studies 2018 - Mark: Crown and Cross

Study 5 - The Mercy of the King - Mark 10:32-52

Read Mark 10:32-52, then watch Pete's talk: <https://youtu.be/IjZiyhTRtPA>

1. Share a time in your life when your expectation of something was not met by the reality.
2. What's the problem with the disciples' expectations regarding the Messiah?

Setting the scene - vv32-35

At this point in the gospel, we see Jesus at his most popular. Jesus is (v32), leading the way up to Jerusalem.

3. This is now the third time Jesus explained what would happen when they got up to Jerusalem. Why didn't the disciples understand any of what Jesus was explaining? (See Luke 9:44-45 and Luke 18:31-34.)
4. What does the question James and John ask, reveal about their understanding of what would happen in Jerusalem? What does their question reveal about their desires for themselves?

The challenge - vv36-45

5. From what Biblical concept does our dignity and worth as human beings arise? How can this understanding help us when we are dealing with people with low self-esteem?
6. What would you say to the person who believes Jesus is the answer to business success or personal prosperity?
7. How do people living on the Sunshine Coast typically understand personal greatness? How do they consider greatness is achieved?
8. What did Jesus mean when he said that he came to 'give his life as a ransom for many'? Discuss the way in which this overturns the world's view of greatness.

The answer - vv46-52

9. What is the significance of blind Bartimaeus calling on Jesus as "Son of David"?
- Jesus asks James and John, *and* the blind man the same question; "What do you want me to do for you"?
10. What does question reveal about how people see Jesus and what he came to do?
 11. From this passage, what are the two possible ways people will answer that question?
 12. Pete said: "*True greatness is found when we abandon the search for it, and instead choose to live as a servant of Jesus and all. Then we find greatness – not our own – but derived – greatness given to us, by the only great one. The one who gave his life as a ransom for many.*" Discuss the implications for us.

Personal reflection: What do you want Jesus to do for *you*?

Share if there's anything in particular which struck you from this talk/study. Pray for one another.

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Introduction

I wonder if you can remember a time, where you have been so looking forward to something. It's been a long time coming, you've planned, you've saved, you've prayed. And you just can't wait. Expectation is a very powerful thing.

I can remember a few years ago taking my eldest daughter Suzannah – who is now 10 - off to a toy store. Suzannah's birthday is December 26 – so it's a long time between presents for her in a year – so we look for a reason to give her something around the middle of the year. And so off we headed to our local Westfield. Now the deal was I'd put in \$10, and if she wanted anything beyond that she could put in her own money. She had \$1.40, so we were looking at \$11.40.

And the power of expectation kicked in. And not just in the car on the way there, but for days before last Saturday morning. 'Dad are we going to the toy store?' 'Dad what time are we going to the toy store?' 'Dad, are my sisters coming with us to the toy store.' In the end I said to her – 'If I hear one more thing about this toy and toy store, we're not going. Ok? Suzannah? Do you understand?' 'Yep.' 'Dad?' 'Yes Suzannah?' 'What are you doing on Saturday morning first thing?'

And in the car, on the way there, she was beside herself. The power of expectation was on full display. And I knew that it was only going to end in one way – disappointment. Because there was no toy on earth that could possibly live up the expectation Suzannah had put on this small piece of plastic that she was going to go home with.

Ministers who prepare people for marriage often see a similar thing. We see these young people, who often have a view of marriage that is not realistic, nor possible. No-one puts it like this, but essentially, very often people think – I'll get married to my one true love – and life will become easier. Those insecurities I've always had will disappear overnight; my beloved and I will find bliss and peace and happiness that we just know we're destined for. And ministers often try to explain – often to glazed eyes – that 'happily ever after' might look a little different from movies and TV's and books that we read. Disney doesn't eventuate for anyone – because you don't marry a cartoon.

You marry a person. And there'll be times in your marriage when you feel like you've fallen out of love; or that it's not working like you thought it might; or that you're just so different. And that is really where marriage begins. Where the expectation and the reality face off to each other in the cold light of day.

And when we get expectations wrong – we can become crushed. I never knew it would be like this. Why didn't someone tell me? Where did I go wrong? And it's at that point we have a couple of options. We can either walk away; deflated and defeated; or, we can start again, and rebuild our expectations in a new, informed and wiser way.

Now, why the extended introduction tonight? Because today we see – not for the first, not for the second, but for the third time, the clearest and the most blatant time – Jesus' disciples getting their expectations about Jesus all wrong.

So today in Mark's Gospel, in chapter 10, we find three stories that are linked together by this idea of expectation. In fact, the idea of wrong expectation. The first story sets the scene for us; the second story shows us the challenge, and the third story will reveal to us the answer. The scene, the challenge, the answer.

Story One: Setting The Scene

So let's set the scene. Where we are up to in Mark 10 and 11, is that we see Jesus as popular as he gets during his earthly ministry. The academics of the day want to debate Jesus, parents want their children blessed by Him, people in the street are running up to Jesus seeking his wisdom and insight, crowds of people want to pay homage to Him.

It's a picture of 'Jesus for all'. This is Jesus - the one you want to be seen with. This is Jesus who can bless you, guide you, instruct you and give you the good life. And into this context, Jesus says the following words. Have a look at verse 33.

"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the 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."

Despite the fanfare of the celebrity that has surrounded Jesus; Jesus knows where he is going. Jesus is in full control. Jesus is leading the crowds, not the other way around. That is what verse 32 tells us 'they were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way'. He's going on a journey.

Everyone loves a journey, right? And so in verse 33 he explains it to his disciples. I am going to Jerusalem. And I am going to be betrayed, condemned, mocked, spat on, flogged and killed. Then I will rise.

Who's with me! Who's in? Who wouldn't want a trip like that! A personal tour of the Holy city Jerusalem with Jesus himself as your guide. He'll even throw in the mocking and the mucus and the murder.

No – anyone seeing clearly, would know that is not the trip you want to be a part of. This is not the journey you want.

Let's see how clearly the disciples are seeing things. Have a look at verse 35.

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."

Story Two: The Challenge

Now does that seem a little strange to you? And here we move to the challenge in the second story.

Jesus is talking about the darkest of roads, the bleakest of journeys before him – and two disciples James and John – say to him 'yeah, yeah, yeah – we know that you're going to be tortured and to die, but *'we want you to do for us whatever we ask'*. Seem a bit strange? A little insensitive? A lack of understanding of the gravity of Jesus mission?

This seems really hard to understand. But again, this ties in with what we've seen again and again already. There is a huge gulf between the Messiah who did turn up, and the Messiah people were expecting to turn up. And Jesus disciples still don't get it! This is the third time Jesus has told them why he has come – but they have not heard. They are not seeing. They are blind.

Just in case you hadn't seen this yet in Mark's Gospel, at this time, every Jew was waiting for a particular King – a Messiah – the Christ – to come and rescue them. He would be a King like their best ever King – a King like David – who ruled 1000 years earlier. A King they referred to as 'The Son of David'.

And this brilliant King – this 'Son of David' – would come into the Royal City – Jerusalem, and he would come to restore the glory of David's throne. That's who all the Jews were waiting for. And so James and John hear Jesus speaking about going to Jerusalem, and being raised in Glory – and they think... here we go. Show time! We knew this guy was special. That's why we followed him. We bet everything on Him! Payday! And so in verse 37, they say to Jesus 'Look – when you are the King of the world – we'd like to be at your left and right hand' – that is – give us the positions of honour and authority.

And it's almost exactly as if they have heard the first and last part of Jesus message, and missed out on the middle.

We're going up to Jerusalem...

...Three days later I will rise

Now, it's easy to sit back and think to ourselves – idiots. But you know what – the other 10 disciples make the same mistake. Have a look at verse 41: 'When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.' You see, they are no better than James and John. And they don't want James and John to be better than them. Perhaps they're annoyed they didn't get in first.

What is going on here? Here is the issue, and it is all about *expectation*. You see Jesus asks them a very important question. In verse 36 Jesus asks James and John 'What do you want me to do for you?' Have no doubt – that is a question of *expectation*. What do you want from me? What do you *expect* me to do for you?

And they answer – 'when you come in glory – that is when you are crowned King in Jerusalem – we want to be chief of staff and prime minister. We want glory too. We want honour too. We want status too. We want dignity too!' They are looking to Jesus to *see who he will make them*. And the giveaway is in the question they ask him '*we want you to do for us whatever we ask*'.

You know, the human desire for dignity and status, is well-founded. We all long to be honoured and respected and that is absolutely right. Most of us know and feel, that as people we are worthy of dignity. We all know – we feel – that being human brings with it a special and inherent value. That is why, when you have a two year old and a dog, and the dog tries to lick your toddlers face, you don't say to your toddler, 'sweetheart, don't let your dirty face go near our beloved dogs clean mouth', we say to our child, 'don't let the dog lick you on the face', 'bad dog, get away'. Status lies with the child. We know, we feel, most believe that the child has a status and honour that is above animals. And that impulse is correct.

Because at the very beginning of the bible we are told that people, and people alone are made in the image of God. That is why we are worthy of honour and status. Because God himself allows something of his honour and status to be imprinted upon, to be stitched within to be, to be reflected by human beings. Made in God's image. And the abolition of slavery was built upon this understanding; the modern concepts of human rights – equality and liberty – fall out of this idea that humans are inherently valuable.

But here is the thing. To be made in the image of God, means that our dignity and worth is derived. We're not valuable because I feel valuable. We are valuable because God has made us like him – of enormous worth. And where people get in trouble, where people get this wrong, is when they run with the idea that we are valuable – which is true, but do so with no reference to the one who has made us valuable – which is sin.

So James and John's impulse is correct – they deserve dignity. They have been made in the image of God. The mistake they make is seen in the question '*we want you to do for us whatever we ask*'. They have forgotten that their value is derived from God; and they are after a dignity apart from God. Yes, at Jesus'

right and left hand – but Jesus has become to them a tool to make them feel valuable, and make them better than others. He is no longer the object of their affection and worship.

Essentially, they are now thinking of Jesus in terms of what they can get out of him, and how he can help them get ahead of others. Their expectation is all wrong.

I was speaking to someone the other day who was talking to me about a large church in my area in Sydney who had got together all their self-employed people who ran small businesses, and they were talking and praying about how God might give them all the ‘God idea’ that would set their business up to be a financial success over and above any other similar business.

So - they were being taught - God wanted them to be wealthy and successful, and so ask Him to give you that ‘God idea’ to get there. Which raises the very same question – what is your expectation of Jesus? Who do you think he is? What sort of King is he? What has he come to do?

As people who have predominantly grown up in the individualistic and materialistic secular west, it is very easy to start to think that Jesus has come for me, and for my prosperity – because that is the air we have breathed our whole lives. Jesus makes life ‘better’.

Don’t miss the deep irony in that way of thinking. Jesus died because of the claims he made. Tradition has it that almost all the disciples and apostles died for trusting in Jesus. The NT shows us that to be a Christian in the first century was essentially to be a persecuted minority. Secular history tells us that Emperor Nero lit his garden parties with the burning bodies of Christian’s.

The closer in time to Jesus that Christians lived – the more likely it was to be killed for your trust in Him. ‘Take up your cross and follow me’ actually meant that you might. But today it almost seems like it has come full circle. Where Jesus is presented as a solution to any problem someone might have.

Some of you might have seen this quote before, but this is how the American Christian Psychologist David Powlison sees what is going on. This is what he has said about this modern ‘Christianity’:

“In this new gospel, the great "evils" to be redressed do not call for any fundamental change of direction in the human heart. Instead, the problem lies in my sense of rejection from others; in my corrosive experience of life’s vanity; in my nervous sense of self-condemnation and diffidence; in the imminent threat of boredom if my music is turned off; in my fussy complaints when a long, hard road lies ahead. These are today’s significant felt needs that the gospel is bent to serve. Jesus and the church exist to make you feel loved, significant, validated, entertained, and charged up. This gospel alleviates distressing symptoms. It makes you feel better. The logic of this therapeutic gospel is a Jesus-for-Me who meets individual desires and [alleviates] psychic aches.”

Beware the impulse that lies in all our hearts of wanting greatness and honour in this life apart from Jesus. And beware the 'Christian' version in our area – and ironically in many parts of Africa – that Jesus wants to make us great – as the world understand greatness. It is a lie - but we buy it, and so do the disciples. But even in this section Jesus reminds his disciples and us why he came, what real greatness is, and what sort of King he is – see verses 43?

'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.'

Jesus reminds his disciples here of the upside down nature of the Gospel. Do you want to be great? Then become a slave. True greatness finds you, when you have given up the search for it. And then Jesus, in a key verse, describes why he came.

'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.' God himself, the Messiah, the son of David, the long awaited King – didn't come to be served, but to serve. And to give his life as a ransom for many.

That line there means that Jesus knows he has come to be a *substitutionary sacrifice*. The word 'ransom' there in the original language is a word used to describe the purchasing of the freedom of a slave or prisoner. The word 'for' there in the original language for is the word which means *instead of, or in the place of*.

Do you see what Jesus is saying? Do you see what Jesus believed his Kingship was all about? He came to purchase or pay the price for slaves and prisoners – instead of them, or in their place - so they could go free. To give his life as a ransom for many. No wonder the disciples didn't get it. No-one in the history of the world had ever lived like this.

And my brothers and sisters, watch out for any teaching of any church here or near that appeals to status - the very thing Jesus himself here says – 'don't go there'. That is not what this I'm about. Don't be so blind, don't be blinded by glory, by power, by status.

That key question - '*what do you want me to do for you?*' – reveals so much of James and John's expectation. But that identical question of Jesus comes up again. And it is what ties our stories together.

Story three: The answer

So in verse 46, we now have Jesus heading into Jericho, and we meet a man by the road – Bartimaeus – who is blind and begging. This is an amazing little section. And Mark absolutely wants us to see this section as the answer to the previous.

Another man who requests something from Jesus. And the first thing to notice is what he calls Jesus. Did you see that? He says 'Jesus - Son of David'. This is the only time in Mark's Gospel someone uses this title for Jesus, but we are being shown a man who also expects Jesus to be the long-awaited king. This blind man believes Jesus to be the Messiah who is coming into Jerusalem - just like the disciples believed. But this blind man sees things differently.

And here is his request - verse 47 - 'Jesus - Son of David - have mercy on me'. So both James and John, and the blind man here recognise Jesus to be this long awaited King. And both ask something of him. James and John - who can see - ask him for status.

Bartimaeus - who is blind - asks him for mercy. And Jesus puts the identical question to them both - *what do you want me to do for you?* James and John - who can see - ask for glory, honour and power! Bartimaeus - who is blind - asks for vision.

Now notice a couple of things. Really significant. Bartimaeus is a blind beggar. He has nothing. He is a picture of desperate destitution. And we're told - see that in verse 50 - 'throwing his cloak aside'. It's a wonderful tiny addition which adds heaps. This man leaves all he has. His coat. The one thing this blind man has to keep him warm, to protect from the elements - perhaps it's even his security blanket - he throws it aside. Compared to Jesus - it's worthless.

And this blind man, who comes to Jesus - finds sight. But do you know what the point is? This man already had sight. He got Jesus identity right - he knew that the Son of David brought mercy, not status. And he knew that coming to Jesus meant leaving every worldly entrapment behind. The point of the whole story? This blind man can see, and the seeing disciples are blind. Coming to Jesus is not about status and power and 'God ideas', and what I can get out of it... it is about seeking mercy from God, and leaving all behind to follow and serve Jesus.

Conclusion

There is a very important question Jesus asks twice in this passage - and both times it diagnoses the hearts of those Jesus asks. *What do you want me to do for you?* And Jesus asks you. *What do you want me to do for you?* And that question cuts straight to the heart of your expectation. It is a question that actually diagnose your heart.

What is your answer to Jesus when he says 'what do you want me to do for you?' If your answer has anything to do with 'God ideas', or the success of your business, or status, power, dignity or honour - be prepared for a great and personal crushing. Our wrong expectation can only lead to being disillusioned and crushed.

I never knew it would be like this. Why didn't someone tell me? Where did I go wrong? And it's at that point we have a couple of options. We can either walk away; deflated and defeated; or, we can start again, and rebuild our expectations in a new, informed and wiser way.

And my brothers and sisters here today – here is the wiser way. It comes from Jesus himself – 'Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.' True greatness is found when we abandon the search for it, and instead choose to live as a servant of Jesus and all. Then we find greatness – not our own – but derived – greatness given to us, by the only great one. The one who gave his life as a ransom for many. Then we see Jesus like blind Bartimaeus – as the Son of David – the King of Israel – who came to bring mercy to the broken. I trust you know him.