

Seeing True Glory

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it's really good to be with you this morning, and thank you for your welcome. I do feel that there's a lot of affinity between this church and the church that I come from, Greenview Church.

Lots of similarities, so thank you for making me feel very at home. Now, if you can keep your finger in Mark 10, the passage we're going to focus on, that would be good.

I also want to read a brief passage which will supplement what we're going to say. And if you've got a Bible, you might want to turn to Philippians 2, so keep your finger in Mark 10.

But if you can, let's briefly read a well-known section in Philippians 2. It's page 1179 in the church Bible. We're reading from verse 3.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others.

[1 : 0 6] In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his advantage.

Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God, the Father. You might want to flip back now to Mark 10.

Many of us in the summer are taking road trips to various places. We're taking long car journeys. We just went down to London last week and some of you are probably doing similar things.

[2 : 3 1] And this morning, we follow Jesus and his disciples on a road trip. They're traveling to the city of Jerusalem.

Jesus is leading the way and his followers are coming behind. And as they travel along, the tension is rising.

It wouldn't be a road trip, would it, if there wasn't a bit of tension and stress on the journey. At least that's the case in our family in the car. And there's this stress, there's this tension as they travel.

Now, the interesting thing is that this tension has come from Jesus himself. Because Jesus has made a number of startling predictions.

Jesus has been predicting upcoming sufferings which have jangled the nerves of the disciples. This march to Jerusalem feels more like a death march than a march to glory.

[3 : 39] And yet, even so, these disciples can't quite get visions of glory out of their heads. In fact, the first part of our passage could be titled, The Glory Hunters.

The Glory Hunters, from verses 32 to 39. Jesus is heading for death, but his disciples are hunting for glory.

And there's a jarring contrast between those two things. The Savior who's going to death and the disciples who are pursuing glory.

Now, Jesus had recently taken his disciples aside for a private little meeting. And he had outlined to them, for the third time in fact, The suffering and death awaited him in Jerusalem.

Jesus could not be any clearer. Note with me in Mark 10 here, the level of detail in his prediction. This detail which emphasizes the sufferings to come.

[4 : 52] Jesus, in this little part here, he mentions seven negative predictions and just one positive prediction. Negatively, the Son of Man will be delivered to the Jewish leadership.

He will be condemned to death. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. Those guys will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him.

Seven negative predictions followed by one mysterious reference. That he will rise again. Whatever that means.

And so that is the gloomy backdrop against which comes this grab for glory. It seems totally out of place to talk about glory when someone's just been talking about suffering and death, doesn't it?

I don't know if you've ever been in a situation where someone says something that seems totally inappropriate and untimely. Maybe you're at a funeral or something.

[6 : 05] Maybe you're at a funeral or something. And in a very sober context, someone makes a comment and you think, not now. This is not the time or the place. Right at the moment when Jesus makes the sober prediction, James and John reach out their greedy hands.

They grab for position. Teacher, they say. We want you to do for us whatever we ask. To which Jesus replies, verse 36, what do you want me to do for you?

Now that question there, just take a note of it in your mind and lodge it away in your mind. What do you want me to do for you? Because later on in our passage, that question is going to come around again.

And it's going to be very important in understanding what this passage is telling us. What do you want me to do for you? Well, glad you asked Jesus. When you come in all of your glory, we would quite like the best seats in the house, if you don't mind.

We're thinking right and left, weren't we, John? Right and left. The left and the right seats were the places of highest honor, the places of prestige, power.

[7 : 33] Think of a wedding which has a top table. The really important people at the wedding are at the top table, aren't they? Flanking the groom and the bride.

That's where we want to be. When you come in your glory, we want the top places, Jesus. Now, the problem is not that the disciples have got it wrong and that Jesus is not going to come in glory because Jesus certainly will come in glory.

The trouble is rather their blindness to what precedes the glory and also their selfishness and lack of humility.

Now, Jesus is going to address both of these things, their blindness and their selfishness and pride. He begins by addressing their blindness. These disciples don't see.

That's the issue. They don't see that before glory, they're suffering. You don't know what you're asking, Jesus says.

[8 : 52] You don't know what you're asking. There's an ignorance and a cluelessness which marks these disciples. And what is it that they don't know?

Here's what they don't know. They don't seem to grasp that before the crown and the feast comes a cup and a baptism.

Now, these images that Jesus uses are a bit unfamiliar to us. The image of the cup and the baptism, they come from the Old Testament. The cup was an Old Testament picture of God's wrath.

The cup of wrath. The cup of wrath that the justice-deserving sinner would be made to drink to the dregs. A bitter and horrible cup.

A cup that you would dread to drink. Yet now Jesus is saying that he will drink this cup.

[9 : 59] He will drink it on our behalf. And he will be overwhelmed by the waters of God's judgment.

That's what baptism's about. Baptism in this imagery is not like the water baptism you saw last week. But baptism here speaks of an overwhelming flood of wrath and judgment.

That deluges you and drowns you. Jesus says, not only will I drink the cup of wrath, but I will be completely consumed by a tsunami of judgment.

Isn't it? Aren't you thankful this morning that Jesus drank that cup and endured that baptism so that you and I would never have to experience those two things?

I love Jesus' question in verse 38. Can you drink the cup I drink? Can you go through my baptism?

[11 : 12] Their answer should have been no. Of course we can't. But in their pride they reply yes. Cup?

Baptism? We're good to go. I wonder if there are times when in our own hubris and maybe momentary passion we sometimes promise God things beyond what we can deliver or what we do end up delivering.

I've certainly done that in my life. We're good for the cup and the baptism. But here's the surprise. Jesus says to them, okay, okay.

I'll tell you what. You will share in the cup and you will share my baptism. Now what does Jesus mean here when he says you will share my cup and you will share my baptism?

There are two options as to what he means. On the one hand he might be saying something simply like you will share with me in the general sufferings of being my follower.

[12 : 25] Not the sufferings of redemption and salvation but just the suffering of persecution, of following Jesus in a world that's hostile to him. That may be what he means.

You need to drink that cup of suffering. You need to endure that kind of baptism of people giving you the cold shoulder and worse. But there's another way of understanding this.

A deeper way. It might be that what Jesus is saying when he says that you'll share my cup and you'll share my baptism, he might be saying, you're going to share in the sufferings of my redemption.

You see, when Jesus died on the cross, when he drank the cup and he endured the baptism, the Bible tells us that in a mysterious way, somehow we who believe in him were with him in that death, in that drinking and in that enduring so that his death on the cross becomes our death.

Whichever of these is right, it's the sacrifice on the cross that Jesus wants his disciples to be fixed on. Not on the glory of their own prestige but on the glory of his and of his cross.

[13 : 48] Jesus wants them and us to see this morning the ransom paid in all of his glory. That's verses 40 to 45. The ransom paid.

Jesus knocks back his disciples' request. He disappoints their grab for glory and he focuses them on the suffering that precedes glory.

He tells them, verse 40, that he can give them no guarantees of future glory such as they're expecting. At the marriage supper of the lamb, it's the father who decides the seating plan.

And so the grab for glory fails and then even worse, the word then gets out among the other disciples that James and John have been lobbying Jesus for the top spots.

And the 10, the other 10 guys, they are raging mad at this. Presumably because they wanted the best seats for themselves.

[14 : 50] You see, pride and selfish ambition are not subcategories of sin that only some believers struggle with.

All 12 of them had this issue. And it's true of us, isn't it? From the newbie Christian to the most mature believer, pride and selfishness are sins we battle all the way to glory.

We live in an entitlement culture. It's interesting, isn't it, though, that people often talk about that as if it's a new thing. There's an entitlement culture now.

Sinful human beings have always been entitled in their sinfulness. Always been selfish, put themselves first. Always have been proud in relation to God and other people.

There's an entitlement culture because there's an entitlement nature in our hearts. And we see it in ourselves, don't we? We see it in our unwillingness to do, at times, the small jobs.

[16 : 08] We hold back, hoping that someone else will volunteer before us to do that really unpleasant and unseen job. We see that pride within us that wants to be well thought of, that wants to please people in order to get the praise, that gets annoyed when we don't get the plaudits.

Even in church, even as we worship a selfless saviour, we can be far too concerned with what we receive than with what we're giving.

The rulers of that day, the Gentiles, were known for their selfish ambition and how they lorded it over everyone else. But Jesus wants his disciples to be different.

Not to strive to be first, but to strive to be the servant of all. Jesus wants men and women and young people and children whose ambition will be to serve other people.

In Jesus' kingdom, the race is to the bottom, not the top. Imagine, those of you that like football, imagine a Premier League where the last place team, the bottom team, won the league title.

[17 : 40] Right? I mean, last year, that would have been Norwich. Norwich would have been awarded the Premier League because they finished last. It would have been good for them. In Jesus' kingdom, the last place is the first place.

The slave is great because we follow a great servant. Mark 10, verse 45, is the best known verse in Mark's Gospel.

For even the Son of Man didn't come to be served, but to serve. The Son of Man. In the Old Testament, the Son of Man is this magnificent figure of great magnitude.

An unparalleled human being with unrivalled authority who rules all people and all nations forever. Daniel 7, you can read all about him there. But even the Son of Man, that's the emphasis here.

Even someone this great who rules over all things, even he came to serve. and he served us by paying the price for the many.

[19 : 02] In books like Exodus and Leviticus, we are introduced to this idea of ransom in the Bible. We see in those books lambs being slain and their blood being shed as a kind of ransom payment that buys Israel's forgiveness and purchases their freedom.

The Son of Man will give his life as a ransom for many. His life, when it's laid down, will be the payment for sin. It will leave sinners debt-free before God, owing him nothing in terms of judgment.

Yes, Jesus is our role model, but he's more than a model servant. He's the purchaser of our salvation.

Imagine going out for a meal at a really high-class restaurant and the food is delicious, but the prices are extortionate and the bill comes at the end of the meal and when you take a look at the bill, there's more numbers on that bill than you have in your bank account and maybe you're even the sort of person who's really proud and you always want to pay, but man, you can't pay and you're so thankful because the person who invited you for the meal is an extremely wealthy person.

They suggested the restaurant and at the end when they offer to pay, not just you but all of the guests let out a collective sigh of relief.

[20 : 51] Stick it on my account, they say. I'll pay it all. You see, this, this is what matters in life.

This is what really is glorious. Not the stuff that the world is pursuing with all of its raging ambition, but that a price has been paid and that by mercy we've been freed.

The question is, do we see the world in that way this morning? Or are we blind to the glory that really matters? The glory of Christ and his cross?

See, it's no accident that after all of the blindness of the disciples in this passage and all that Jesus is trying to teach them, it's no accident that what then happens, what then follows is a story of a man who was blind and who now comes to see.

It's almost a kind of parable of what we've been learning. So let's finish with this, from the glory hunters to the ransom pair and finally we turn to the blind visionary, the blind visionary, the blind man who was able to see in verses 46 to 52.

[22 : 14] Jerusalem is creeping even closer. Jesus comes to the last stop before it, Jericho and Jesus is leaving the city, he's coming out of Jericho when in the clamour of the crowd, this voice, this crying voice is heard over everyone else.

It's the voice of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar on the streets who had lived his life in poverty and darkness.

Now, Bartimaeus couldn't see Jesus physically. But what we see in this passage is that Bartimaeus sees in other ways.

He sees in his soul. He sees that Jesus, verse 47, is the son of David. That's exactly who Jesus is.

That's actually what Mark tells us through the whole of this gospel, from the very opening verse, that Jesus isn't just a teacher or a prophet, but he is the son of David.

[23 : 26] He's the Messiah. He's the long-promised king. And the remarkable thing is that this man gets this, and the remarkable thing is presumably that he had very little evidence even to go on.

He had seen no miracles. As far as we know, he had heard no sermons. He must have heard about Jesus through the reports and the words of others.

It's a little reminder, isn't it, of the importance for us of speaking to those who are blind, and I'm meaning here spiritually blind, which is every unbeliever in our relational circle, isn't it?

They are as blind to Jesus as Bartimaeus was blind to him physically. They cannot see him unless we speak to them and they hear about him.

I wonder if we're doing a good job of that. I wonder if post-pandemic that's a priority on our to-do list.

[24 : 35] I wonder if we're helping people to hear about Jesus or I wonder if we're hindering people from coming to Jesus because although some people must have told this man about Jesus, there's people here in this text who are actually holding him back.

Holding him back. Jesus isn't going to want to speak to you. Jesus isn't going to want to be talking to a man like you. And yet this man shouted all the more he was determined to meet Jesus.

Maybe you're here this morning and maybe you're not a Christian. Maybe you've been exploring the Christian faith or maybe you're watching online and you're investigating Christianity.

It's a wonderful thing isn't it that God pursues us by his spirit but it's also important isn't it that we pursue him. there comes that moment where you need to make that step where you need to move towards Jesus and that's what this man does.

He doesn't give up. He doesn't even listen to the naysayers but he's determined and of course as we would expect Jesus graciously responds.

[25 : 55] And so Bartimaeus is brought to Jesus but look at verse 51 when he's brought Jesus asked him a question and what's the question he asked him? What do you want me to do for you?

It's the same question that he asked James and John just a few moments earlier. What do you want me to do for you? How did James and John answer that question?

We want the best seats in the kingdom. We want personal glory. We're meant to see a direct contrast here.

Because here's this man and his answer is Rabbi, I want to see. All I want is to see you.

All I want is to be healed of my blindness and to see you. Nothing else. This man wanted mercy not glory.

[27 : 06] He didn't want half the kingdom. He didn't want the top position. He just wanted to be saved. In fact, this word that Mark uses here for healing in the language the New Testament was written in, the language of Greek, that the word here for healed could be translated saved.

It's the same word. He saves this man from his blindness as Bartimaeus puts his faith in Jesus.

Have you been saved from your blindness? Have you been healed from your sin? What happens next? Jesus tells the man to go, but he's so thrilled with Jesus and the mercy he's been shown that he doesn't go home and he simply follows Jesus along the road.

Isn't that beautiful? The man who wanted mercy and nothing else now follows Jesus simply, gratefully, obediently, wherever he leads.

Whether that following leads to immediate suffering or to glory, whether it leads to height or depth, he follows along the road.

[28 : 32] He's not devoted, he's not entitled, but he is devoted. What about us this morning? Who are we like this morning?

What are our eyes fixed on today? Are we like James and John?

Just consumed with our own personal ambitions in life, even maybe as Christians? Functionally, that's where our focus is at the moment. Or is our focus on Christ and his glory and on the mercy that he offers us and on the mercy that he wants to offer others through us?

Let's be sure that the entitlement culture of our society is not just baptized and made to look a bit more Christian. God God for us.

The cup and the flood that we were entitled to were taken by Jesus so that we might live and serve him in joy and in freedom.

[29 : 47] Let's pray. our father in heaven, we see before us the stark contrast between a heart of pride and selfishness and a heart of repentance and humility.

Father, so often we have the first kind of heart, but we thank you that by your grace and by your spirit and the power of your words that you do enable us to have the second type.

And we pray today that we would be filled with that fresh sense that what we really want and what we really need is mercy, the glory of the cross, not the glory of our own ambitions.

May we be truly grateful and thankful as we see all that Jesus is and all that he's done for us. in setting aside the glory of his kingship in order to serve us.

May we be those that declare that to others and that show his humility and his service in the way we live. We ask it in his name.

[31 : 02] Amen.