

READ Mark 8:22-26

I've highlighted many times that Mark's writing of his Gospel account needs to be recognized as being so much more than a simple retelling of Jesus's ministry on earth. Yes, I believe it to be historically accurate, but I also believe there is a purposeful way in which this account has been structured and laid out so the reader has the greatest chance of coming to faith in Jesus as the Son of God. This Gospel can be divided up into three sections that each build upon the other as this edition of the story of Jesus unfolds.

- I. Evidences For Jesus As The Messiah **(1:1-8:21)**
- II. What It Means For Jesus To Be The Messiah **(8:22-10:52)**
- III. The Messiah As The Glorified Suffering Servant **(11:1-16:20)**

Mark begins by giving evidence after evidenced that is meant to lead the reader to the conclusion of Jesus being this great Messiah promised by God. So many details are given that would allow the person who is familiar with the Old Testament prophecies to recognize Jesus as having fulfilled so many of the things that were said of the promised Messiah. Mark then begins to detail what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, and the Gospel account concludes by Jesus fulfilling His role as not just the Messiah but also the Suffering Servant. But let's get back to the middle section of this Gospel because we will actually be concluding our studies in this section with our study today.

This section of Mark's Gospel is pretty easy to identify because it is bookended by two healings of blind men **(8:22-26 & 10:46-52)**, and even the way they unfold plays into the structure of Mark's Gospel. The first blind man is healed in stages, and this seems to represent the way the Apostles and others will see Jesus throughout this middle section. He acknowledges that He indeed is the Messiah, but the Apostles aren't willing to acknowledge the ramifications of this truth as Jesus speaks about His future death as such. This leads Jesus to speak strongly about the cost of discipleship. Jesus is then transfigured into a glorified form which ought to have shed more light on exactly who He was, but still the Apostles are fuzzy in their understanding. He is going to go on to stress the need for greater faith, humility, holiness, commitment, and trust in God in an effort to truly impress upon these men and others what it means to acknowledge Him as the Messiah. This section is now going to conclude with strong teachings from God's great Servant on the need for service from those who follow Him, and the immediate healing of a blind man which ought to be understood as symbolizing the ability for the Apostles to recognize not just who Jesus is but what it ought to mean to them in their lives.

Mark 10:32-52

A. Jesus predicts His death for a 3rd time. (10:32-34)

1. We last left off with Jesus and his disciples somewhere in the northeastern region of Judean or even across the Jordan into the area of Perea, but He and those traveling with Him now have their eyes set on Jerusalem. They are heading westward moving ever so steadily up in elevation, and Jesus is leading the way out in front of this great mass of travelers. This aspect of the journey noted by Mark as being both astonishing to His disciples and terrifying to the rest. Why is this the case? This seems to be so because everyone is aware that Jesus is marching straight into the lion's den. Even knowing where He is heading, Jesus is out in front leading the way into Jerusalem where the staunchest of enemies, the Jewish religious leaders, will surely meet Him head on.
2. Yet, let's notice what Jesus takes the opportunity to do in this moment. He allows for His Apostles to see Him out front and leading, and He reminds them for the third time that He truly is going to be killed. There has been a progression in these predictions of His impending death. His first prediction simply states that He will be rejected by the religious leaders, killed,

and then raised after three days (**8:31**). The second prediction adds that this will be done because of a betrayal that will take place (**9:31**). This third prediction adds even more detail as He states that this death will take place as the hands of the Gentiles in Jerusalem (**10:33,34**).

3. What is His point in telling them all of this in such great detail? Let me suggest this is the case because He wants His closest companions to know that He is well aware of what is awaiting Him in Jerusalem. He knows His enemies are waiting on Him, and He knows they will be sure He dies. Yet, He is still willingly going to Jerusalem because it is what must take place. The Apostles might not comprehend why He would still do such a thing, but Mark includes this third prediction here at this point in his story to set up the strong teachings of Jesus concerning the great lengths He is willing to go to serve the needs of others. Those reading this particular section of Mark's Gospel surely cannot help but have the Suffering Servant text of **Isaiah 52:13-53:12** at the forefront of their minds.

B. James & John make a request of Jesus. (10:35-40)

1. Yet, it is in this context of Jesus being this great Suffering Servant that James and John are going to step forward and make a very brash request of Jesus. They first want to make sure that Jesus will grant them whatever it is they request of Him, which He is willing to do because He already knows what they are going to ask, and He is going to use this request to continue to teach and emphasize the value in serving others. Their request is for each of them to be given a seat, one on the right and the other on the left, next to Jesus when He sits on His own throne in glory. This might seem completely out of nowhere, but we need to recall that the timeline of Matthew's account of this scene (**Matthew 20:20,21**), which included the men's mother, has just recorded Jesus telling the disciples that they would be also be sitting on thrones judging Israel as He set on His own throne (**Matthew 19:28**).
2. This further insight from Matthew's Gospel doesn't excuse what these men and their mother say, but it does help us to see where they are coming from. Even so, Jesus begins to question them concerning whether or not they even understand what they are asking for. He speaks of the cup He is to drink and the baptism He will endure. Jesus will later ask His Father to take this cup away from Him if it was according to His will (**14:36**), and Luke records Jesus referring to His trials and death as a baptism in **Luke 12:50**. Whether or not these two men knew exactly what Jesus was referring to, I cannot say for sure. However, they both say they are willing to endure such, and they have no idea that this is exactly what they will endure.
3. Jesus affirms they will drink the same cup and be baptized in the same way, which is what we will end up seeing later on in the story of the Acts of the Apostles as James becomes the first Apostle to be martyred (**Acts 12:1,2**), and John will suffer through some of the most intense persecution. Jesus sees their present shortsightedness, but He knows of the long-term service they will offer up to God and His Kingdom in the future. This issue of serving even in the face of persecution will be something we will see again later on in this Gospel in **13:3-13** when James and John accompanied by Peter and Andrew privately ask Jesus concerning the future.

C. Jesus emphasizes the value of serving others. (10:41-45)

1. However, the Apostles are not presently willing to think about persecution or serving because they are all focused on simply being the greatest. We can judge this as being their mentality because the other ten Apostles become "*indignant*" with James and John because of what they asked Jesus to do for them. We have just recently seen Jesus Himself become indignant towards His Apostles for the way they hindered parents from bringing their children to Jesus for a blessing, but this indignation towards James and John on the part of the Apostles was nowhere near warranted! They were simply mad because James and John beat them to the punch and reserved their own seats of greatness!

2. We sadly recognize that the issues of pride and self-centeredness are once again rearing their ugly heads among this group of men, and Jesus is once again going to strongly rebuke them for it. Not a one of these men would say they appreciate the way their Gentile rulers lord their authority over them by acting as tyrants, but that is exactly who these men are behaving like. They are constantly fighting, bickering, and jockeying for position to gain power and authority, but such behavior makes them just like those they despised. Jesus says that such behavior should not be present among them. They were to be different.
3. Just how different were they to be? Jesus says they were to be like servants and slaves. They were to serve the needs of others and do so while assuming a mindset of not thinking of themselves as being anything. Servants were under the authority of another and slaves were seen as nothing. This is to be the mindset followers of Jesus are to assume, a mindset with no pride or personal ambition. They are to submit themselves under the authority of Jesus and in doing so deny themselves as if they are nothing. Let's be honest...that doesn't sound enjoyable! It doesn't sound like a fun life to constantly be caring for the needs of others and putting them before ourselves...but that is exactly what Jesus demands, and that is even what He Himself was willing to do!
4. As if His simple command and teaching didn't carry enough power, Jesus is going to add greater weight to this demand for selfless service to others by say this is even what the Son of Man had come to do. This Son of Man (Jesus's most common title for Himself), who was known to be the greatest of all men who would eventually Himself sit at the right hand of God in heavens, came to this earth not to be served, but to serve, and to do so by giving His own life to ransom others. This is the greatest form of service that a person can offer to another person, but here we have someone so much greater than just a simple person being willing to pay the price, His life, to set those captive to sin free! This is precisely why Jesus was so willing to not just go to Jerusalem, but even to lead the way. His example was monumental. There is no level of greatness that can be achieved that rises above this! If the Son of Man in all of His unmatched greatness was willing to serve then they must all be willing to do the same, and in turn we ourselves would be seen as great in Jesus's eyes. What a strong message Jesus was sending in this moment, not only in words but in action, too!

D. Jesus heals Bartimaeus of blindness. (10:46-52)

1. Following this strong admonishment, Jesus and the traveling crowds arrive and depart from Jericho. This might seem like a super random detail for Mark to include, but the mentioning of this particular city, or at least the rebuild version of it, ought to signify to us that God is just about ready to conquer just as Jericho was the initial victory in the conquest of Canaan. Yet, this conquering wasn't going to be done by brute strength and power as even the Apostles had just previously been searching for. No, this conquest was going to happen through serving the needs of others, and Jesus going to show them here right now just how seriously He took His own teachings of serving others.
2. As they are still about eighteen miles away from Jerusalem, this large traveling caravan passes by a blind beggar named Bartimaeus who hears that Jesus of Nazareth is passing before him. He begins to cry out, "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*" Think about this incredible confession! Here are the Apostles, who have been around Jesus through His ministry, continuing to struggle to see Jesus for who He truly is, but here we have a blind man who has no doubt at all that Jesus is the promised Messiah of God coming to reign and rule on David's throne over God's people! Such an incredible confession should have been applauded from the masses, but they instead try to silence him. Yet, Bartimaeus will not be silenced as he cries out all the more, "*Have mercy on me, Son of David!*"

3. Many might expect for the determined Jesus to not waste His time dealing with such an insignificant person, but Jesus stops. The Son of Man stops for a blind man, and calls for him to come to Him. The blind man throws off his coat, jumps up, and hurriedly comes to Jesus where he is asked, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* We recognize we have already heard this question asked by Jesus to James and John, yet the responses are completely dissimilar. They wanted Jesus to confer power, authority, and greatness upon them, but this man simply acknowledges Jesus as *Rabboni* which is to acknowledge Him as the true Lord and Master with all power, authority and greatness. He simply wants to be made well so as to see, and Jesus graciously tells this man that his faith has made him well. He is immediately healed, and he begins his new journey following Jesus on the road.

This immediate miraculous healing of a blind man, the last miraculous healing in Mark’s Gospel, puts the finishing bookend on this section of Mark’s story of Jesus. We began this section with a healing of a blind man, who doesn’t acknowledge Jesus at all, in stages. He first only sees things with blurry vision, but Jesus will then heal him fully to where his sight is sharp and clear. We close this section with a blind man who is immediately healed and fully acknowledging of who Jesus is. I do not believe this is coincidence at all, but I believe it to be representative of the Apostles and those following this story. Though they are told who Jesus is, they are not fully comprehending what it means and requires, but Jesus is going to lead them to a full knowledge of these things in this section. If they want to follow the Messiah, Son of Man, and Son of David then they must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him. They must be willing to grow in their faiths. They must embrace humility, commitment, and trust. They must even be willing to serve others in the same way Jesus Himself is seeking to serve others by willingly going to Jerusalem to give His life. They had no clue that such a confession at the end of chapter eight would be so all-encompassing, but surely by this point the picture has become so much clearer. What about us? Are we seeing the clear picture of what it means to serve like God’s great servant came to serve?

Application Questions

A. Are we willing to serve those who are not able to repay our service?

1. So often people are only willing to “serve” if it means they get something out of it. Surely the wisdom of Jesus is seen in using the “service” of secular rulers of men to be contrasted with the way followers of Jesus are to serve. Far too many leaders only “serve” so as to exercise their power and authority over others. There are not enough who are willing to truly lead through serving those around them simply because it is the loving and proper thing to do.
2. Such certainly isn’t the case for those who are seeking to serve in the footsteps of Jesus. We must be willing to serve others simply because it is the loving and right thing to do and expect to not receive any sort of payment in return. Anything less is only self-serving and falls woefully short of the example of Jesus that we will dig deeper into in just a moment.

B. Are we willing to serve those who don’t “deserve” to be served?

1. Secondly, are we willing to serve all people or other those we deem as deserving our service? Are we willing to serve those who have wronged us in the past or who have not served us first? It is easy for us to be kind in serving those we like and who have been good to us in the past. It is a completely other thing to be willing to give of ourselves by being kind and serving those who might have even been mean or hateful to us in the past!
2. Yet, as we consider the example of Jesus, we recognize that Jesus has been totally willing to serve those who can truly give nothing in return and who have done Him wrong previously. No text makes this more abundantly clear than what can be found in **Romans 5:6-11**. Paul shows beyond a shadow of a doubt just how unmatched Jesus is as a Servant to mankind.

While we were undeserving in our sin and rebellion, Christ died for us in order that we might be reconciled back to Him and His Father. He did so not that we might be able to repay Him, since we can't do such in any way shape or form, but He did so that we might rejoice in God through Christ for His gracious mercy upon those whom He created and loved. This is the message that has been sounding forth since the days of Isaiah (**Isaiah 52:12-53:13**). Friends, Jesus's greatness is seen most especially in the way He served others, and this is the only way in which we can be seen as great, as well.

Main Point/Conclusion: *Being great in the eyes of Jesus only comes through following His example of servitude.*

This section of Mark's Gospel is without a doubt one of the most powerful portions of Scripture that can be found. Not only is Jesus's true identity established, but we are led through beautiful storytelling to know just what such a truth demands of us. It demands faith, humility, trust, and a willingness to serve our Lord through serving those around us. So many people think greatness comes through absolute power and authority, but we are shown the better way by Jesus. We are shown that even the great Servant of God came to serve men, and may we embrace this as our own way of life, as well.