

Jason Upchurch - The Good News Calls Us to Serve

This morning we come to the concept of servant leadership in the Gospel of Mark as Jesus is walking to his death, which is only weeks away.

Servant leadership is the idea that in Jesus's Kingdom those who would be greatest would serve the most. It's just the opposite of the world. If you pick up any book on leadership in a store usually it's written by someone who has advanced really far in business or sports or technology. They'll tell you all about themselves, how they did it and how you can too by implementing these 15 principles.

Well, Jesus also has a leadership model. His model is based on death. His own death. And it's completely contrary to anything we see in the world. Those who want to be the greatest in this life are last in the Kingdom. If you want to be greatest in the Kingdom, you'll be the greatest servant. Because that's what Jesus does.

This whole section is the pinnacle of Jesus's upside down Kingdom. There last will be first, the least greatest.

And we learn that principle in the midst of this really cringy story about James and John. This is arguably the cringiest story in the gospel of Mark. And for once, it's not about Peter! It's about James and John. Peter is probably the source for most of Mark's gospel. If you remember people often refer to this as the gospel of Peter because Mark likely relied on Peter for much of his content.

And so after eating crow chapter after chapter, we finally get to someone else who eats crow. Two people, in fact: James and John the sons of Zebedee.

And this section really is painful. It's like watching some really bad reality TV episode where you can't not watch.

Here's Jesus headed toward Jerusalem. This is the last week or two of his life and he's headed into Jerusalem. And while he's walking he's telling the crowd exactly what's going to happen to him. He's going to suffer and die at the hands of the religious leaders.

And two of the disciples, James and John, come up to him and say "Yeah, yeah, that's nice. Hey, when you're in your glory can you make sure we're sitting in the highest seats of power right next to you? We want the best seats in the house so that'd be great."

Jesus again has been talking about his death and again they completely miss it. Absolutely zero self-awareness. And Jesus has about 2 more weeks with these guys and then he's gone. The Kingdom is not looking really good at this point.

The disciples often don't know how to react to Jesus's suffering and death. The first time Peter rebuked him - that didn't go well. After the transfiguration Peter, James and John decided to just not talk about it. Then later when Jesus mentioned it they were confused about it and afraid. And here they simply ignore it.

Which should really surprise us. The suffering death of Jesus - and his resurrection 3 days later - is really the focal point of all of history. All of creation until Christ looks forward to the suffering death of Jesus. And all of history looks back on that event.

Even in glory Christ is depicted as the lamb who was slain. The song the saints sing is that by the blood of Jesus - by his death - he has ransomed people from every tribe and tongue and nation and people. Every week we celebrate visually the death of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. We never look beyond that.

And here it's Jesus's sacrificial death that not only ransoms us from sin, but is the model for who we are to serve and lead in his Kingdom.

1. The Determination of Jesus to Suffer. **Read 32-34**

For a couple of chapters now Jesus has set his sights on Jerusalem. Just two chapters ago he was at the northern most part of Israel in Caesarea Philippi. And he has marched quickly south toward Jerusalem. He is a man on a mission.

At the beginning of almost every section - every pericope - it says that Jesus is going toward Jerusalem. He's always on the move. Here he's going up to Jerusalem.

In the Bible you always go up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the exalted city, not just in elevation but in importance. It is the holy city, God's holy hill. So they are somewhere in the region where the Dead Sea connects to the Jordan River. And they are making their way up - steeply to Jerusalem. It's a hard steep climb and in it we see the determination of Jesus.

And the determination is not just to go to the city. He's not looking to just observe the Passover or just confront the religious leaders. He's determined to suffer and die.

This is something that we always have to keep in mind when we're considering the suffering and death of Jesus. This was not an accident of history or a hiccup in God's plan.

The plan from eternity past was for Jesus to suffer. And Jesus embraced that role.

Turn to Heb. 12 for a minute. Something we need to understand about Jesus is that he embraced suffering as part of his mission. It wasn't something to complain about or be avoided. It was something to endure to the glory of God.

And listen, we are called to embrace that mission as well. We're going to look at a couple of passages here and they all commend suffering to us. And we have the choice of embracing that suffering and suffer well like Jesus suffered well. Or we can complain and moan about suffering.

One gives God glory, one takes away from the glory of God. Hebrews 11 was the Hall of Faith. All the great saints of the OT who were commended for their faith and their deeds of faith. The first half of the chapter is how the conquered kingdoms, enforced justice and received promises. The second half is how faithful saints were imprisoned, suffered, sawn in half, mocked and wandered about in mountains because they were banished from their homes.

Both groups were faithful but not everyone had an easy ride. What about Jesus? Well he's the captain of faithfulness, how did it turn out for him? **Read 12:1-2**

So we are called to run the race that is set before us. Whatever the path is that we are called to be on, we run. And we run it hard. We take off every weight, every sin - anything that would hinder us from following Jesus. And we endure.

Endurance, by definition, means overcoming difficulty over a period of time.

When I was in high school I ran cross country. I don't know why, it was the worst. I hate running. But I did it. And every weekend we'd go to different places for a meet. And we'd walk the 3.1 mile course before running it. Different courses offered different difficulties. And we'd talk through running strategy. How can we turn this hill into an advantage. How can we use this long narrow straightaway for advantage? There's a blind corner? Run as fast as you can for 30 steps after the corner to play mind games with your opponent.

We couldn't change the course no matter how hard or easy it was. We had to complete it. And not just that but we were running to win. So we could complain or whine bellyache - but that didn't get us across the line. Or we could run the race that is set before us with our eye on the prize.

That's what Jesus did. He knew the cross was coming. He knew suffering and agony were the purpose of his coming into the world. And he endured flogging and torture and betrayal and abandonment with what emotion? Joy.

And despised the shame. The idea is disregarded the shame. It didn't even weigh on his mind that everyone would hate him, that he would be falsely accused, completely misrepresented and cursed by God, naked on a tree.

That didn't matter to him. Why? Because of what was on the other side of that suffering. He endured everything that was set before him because he had an eternal perspective.

"But that was Jesus - I don't have his perspective." What does the author say? "Look to Jesus!" We are called to have the same perspective as Jesus in the midst of our own difficulty. We look to the joy set before - the eternal glory - so that we can face any situation or trial with joyful obedience.

So Jesus does not shy away from suffering. We have a Savior who embraced his suffering for the glory of God. **Back in Mark 10.**

2. The Description of Jesus's Suffering

Now, we just talked about the determination of Jesus to suffer. And how we should be determined to suffer as well, for the glory of God. But what we need to understand is that Jesus's suffering wasn't some vague, nebulous suffering. He knew exactly what he was getting in to.

And because we are very familiar with the suffering and death of Jesus, we might be tempted to read over this section very quickly. We know what happens to Jesus.

But if we just stop and think about it for a minute, it's pretty elaborate and pretty specific. It names the order of events, it names the parties involved, it names the specific ways in which Jesus will be treated, that he will die, and he specifies exactly how much time will go by when he rises. Jesus is going into his Passion week eyes wide open.

Now, before we look at each of these descriptions, I think it's worth asking: how does Jesus know all these things? How does he know the specifics of his death and resurrection?

I think 2 ways. First, there may be some of what Jesus is about to go through that was supernaturally revealed to him. If you remember when Jesus was baptized we noted that there were things that apparently God had revealed to both John and Jesus independently that are not recorded in the Scripture. There could be some of that here too. There may be aspects of the suffering of Jesus that the Father revealed specifically to Jesus that are not found in the Bible.

But the second way - through the Scripture - actually provides quite a bit of insight into the death of the Messiah.

First of all he would die in Jerusalem. Jesus himself says in **Matt 23:37** that Jerusalem is the city that kills the prophets. **Luke 13:33** Jesus says it can't be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem. This is a little ironic: How do you know a prophet is legit? Because he's killed in Jerusalem by the leaders of Israel. Zechariah, Uriah, Jeremiah were all killed in Jerusalem.

It's like a club. That's the spiritual legacy of Jerusalem.

Los Angeles is the city of angels, New York is the city that never sleeps, Seattle is the Emerald city. Jerusalem is the city that slaughters God's prophets.

Jerusalem makes sense for another reason: where were the sacrifices to God required to be offered? In the Temple in Jerusalem. Any proper sacrifice was to be offered in Jerusalem. Jesus knew he would be a sacrifice.

He's also the Son of Man. He refers to himself as the Son of Man to highlight his role as Messiah. He could have said Son of God to emphasize his divine nature. But his favorite description of himself is Son of Man - because that points more to what he came to accomplish as Messiah, as the Christ.

This would all happen at the hands of the religious leaders. This is where it gets intricate. It had to be the religious leaders who would indict Jesus because the Romans didn't really care about the religious squabbles. And while Jesus's enemies throughout the gospel have been Pharisees, the Pharisees don't have much power in Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the religious power is in the hands of the priests who run the Temple. Specifically the chief priests. Now, in Jesus's day the priesthood operated something like the mafia. Priestly duties were often bought and sold and there was a huge element of politics that were often at play. Added to that the class of people called the Scribes were usually aristocracy too. They were also part of the upper crust of Judaism in Jerusalem, very well educated because they literally transcribed the Law day in and day out. They were ancient lawyers.

And so for Jesus to be condemned he would have to be condemned by the religious leaders. Now, I want to show something really cool.

For his whole ministry, the religious leaders are looking for opportunities to kill Jesus. And they can't do it. Then Jesus is marching toward Jerusalem and says he's going to be killed. But look at the plan of the leaders. **Turn to Mark 14:1-2 Read**

Isn't this amazing? The throughout the whole ministry of Jesus they want to kill Jesus. He finally marches into town and they're like "No, let's wait." And Jesus is like, "No, now's the time." Even from a planning perspective Jesus is in control of this whole thing.

But here's the rub, the Jews can't actually kill Jesus. They don't have that authority. Remember, Israel in Jesus's day was basically an client state of Rome. Rome ruled. And as brutal as Rome was, there were only a few ways that Rome would put someone to death: the main one was treason. Trying to take over the government.

So what the chief priests and scribes have to do is indict Jesus on a charge of treason. That's why when they're asking him questions during that sham trial they ask: tell us plainly: Are you the Christ? If he answers that he is the Christ, then they've got him on treason because the Christ was prophesied to rule over all nations.

So they ask: Are you the Christ? Are you going to rule? Are you going to be treasonous? That's why they ask that question.

Now, if it were us on trial we'd politely say: I wish to exercise my 5th amendment privilege to not testify against myself. We'd make them prove their case.

But not Jesus. He knows he has to die. The Jews can't kill him, only Rome can do that. And Rome can only do that if it's treason. So he testifies that he is the Christ and that he will be seated on the right hand of the majesty of power. He implicates himself to the Jewish leaders.

That's why he's handed over to Pilate to be crucified. The Jews needed to have a charge that was on the level of treason. Jesus gave them what they wanted.

And so he's handed over to Pilate. And Jesus read the Scriptures:

Isa 50:6: I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.

Isa 53:5: He would be pierced, crushed, chastised and wounded and ultimately killed.

Jesus knew all of this because he read his Bible. He knew what he was facing. And he faced it boldly and with joy! He wasn't ignorant of what was to come, he knew it and embraced it.

I've heard people over the years say something like, "I just wish I knew what the next 10 years looked like for my life." No, you don't! Are you kidding me? I don't want to know what the next 10 years look like. Think about

all the stuff that's happened to you over the last 10 years. Would you really want to know all that was going to happen ten years ago? Most of us would say no. I know I wouldn't want to know.

No, it's God's grace that we don't know what's coming. We have just enough light ahead of us to be faithful for the coming days.

Now, despite all of that the disciples completely ignore that. What they want is their own glory in spite of Jesus's suffering.

3) Notice the Patience of Jesus. Read 35-41

This section is basically a train wreck for the disciples. On the heels of the brutal suffering that Jesus has just told them he is going to endure, the disciples are clamoring over themselves to get a top spot in the Kingdom. They're not thinking of the suffering of Jesus, they're thinking of the power Jesus might give them.

I mean think about it: they're with the Messiah! Everyone knows Jesus is the one. They've been with him for years now and they know. Peter, James and John especially know this because they are in the inner circle. These 3 have been the tightest with Jesus so even though this is an absolutely audacious request, it's not all that out of line from what they've experienced in the last few years.

And how they formulate the question is just as ridiculous as the question itself: **Read**

I mean, come on. That's how a 4 year old would ask a question. "Dad, will you say yes to what I'm about to ask?" No, son, the answer is no.

Now, Jesus in his patience, actually entertains the question: What is it that you want?

And what they want is the highest seats in the Kingdom. They want to be Jesus's proverbial right hand and left hand men. What they want is power. They're lowly fishermen who've only ever known a boat and nets. And they live in a Roman occupied Israel and here they're with Messiah.

The one who will rule all nations with a rod of iron. The one to whom all nations will flow.

The one whom the increase of the government and of peace there will be no end. He will reign on the throne of David over his Kingdom from this time and forevermore. **Isa 9:6-7**

They want power and riches and glory with Jesus! They want to be high on the totem pole in the Kingdom.

And Jesus says they have no idea what they are asking for. What they think they are asking for is to be elevated. But Jesus knows that his Kingdom isn't like earthly Kingdoms. In his Kingdom the way to be elevated is to be humbled. But he tests them to see if they've caught on to anything of what he's taught them so far.

Read 38-39a

What does that mean? Cup they'll drink and the baptism? What is he talking about? These are 2 ways of saying the same thing. Are you able to go through the difficulty I'm about to go through?

Are you able to drink the cup. What is that? Throughout the Bible the cup that someone drinks - in a metaphorical sense - is the cup of God's wrath.

Psalms 75:8: For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup of foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs.

God makes this cup of wine. It looks tasty and tempting, but it's actually filled with wrath. And God is going to make his enemies choke down every last drop. The dregs of a drink are all the little bits and pieces at the bottom. He's last drop of his wrath.

Hab. 2:16: You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself and show your uncircumcision! The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory.

When people are drinking cups in the OT it is often the cup of wrath they are drinking. The cup of shame and sorrow and death. Jesus says are you ready to drink that?

And he also asks them about the baptism. Can you be baptized with my baptism? Same idea. Jesus is going to die are they ready to die?

"Oh yeah, Jesus! We're ready to go." That's their response. "Absolutely, we'll do whatever it takes." This shows they have no idea what they're talking about. They have no idea Jesus is talking about suffering and death, not glory.

And in one of the most subtle prophetic words, Jesus says, "well, you're right. You will drink and be baptized."

Read 39

Oh yeah, you'll drink the same cup. In **Acts 12:1-5** James is killed by Herod. And if you remember in **Rev. 1:9-11 John ended his life exiled on the island of Patmos**. The apostles did not live a glory filled life. There was no throne, no kingdom that they reigned over. That's why Jesus says they will drink the same cup - the same kind of cup. And they will be baptized with the same kind of baptism.

But the arrangement of the Kingdom isn't up to Jesus. **Read 40-41**

God the Father arranges the Kingdom and who sits where. The Kingdom of Jesus is not a power play. It's a mercy from God.

Whether you're in the Kingdom or not, is from God. And your role in the Kingdom is from God. And where you're seated in the Kingdom is from God.

Ironically, the other disciples are irritated that James and John even asked the question. It might be because of the absolute arrogance of such a question. Or it could just be that they beat them to the punch. Either way James and John have stirred up division among the apostles.

4) Here's the Kingdom Directive: Read 42-45

If you want to be great in the Kingdom, you have to be willing to serve.

The Gentiles - the unbelievers - boast about their authority. They "lord it over them." That means those who are in charge make a show of their power. They let everyone know who's boss. And the ones in charge of them? They do the same thing. Everyone knows where everyone fits in the Roman political system. And no one lets you forget it.

But that's not how Jesus's Kingdom works. If you want to be great in the Kingdom, you will serve. That's how it works in Jesus's upside down Kingdom. The greatest in the Kingdom are the greatest at serving.

Think about people you are willing to serve. And think about who you don't want to serve. Maybe it's your family or friends. Maybe it's the crazy neighbor or co worker. It's not just who we like and get along with that we're called to serve, it's everyone.

And Jesus's own life and death is the example. **Read 44-45**

We like the term "servant leadership." But Jesus uses the term slave. That's pretty low.

How far did Jesus serve? All the way to his death. And here we have this beautiful picture of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus. He gave his life as a ransom for many. A ransom is a specific price paid to release someone from bondage.

If you wanted to buy someone's freedom you paid the ransom for their life. You sacrificed so they could go free. You gave money or property. Well, Jesus doesn't give money or property he gives his life.

That's what Jesus does on the cross. We are trapped in sin, dead in our sin, we can't pay for our own release and the destiny is hell.

And Jesus's death on the cross is the price of our freedom. He dies a death in our place so we can go free. He takes upon himself the cup - the full wrath of God - so that those who trust in him don't have to.

And the people he dies for don't deserve it. They're rebels, enemies of God. Foolish, proud. People like these disciples who think Jesus is all about doling out power. People like you and me, who still have rebellion in our hearts.

He ransoms himself for us. And he calls us to do the same. Not for the sins of others, of course. But to love them and serve them. You ever served someone and then they betrayed you and you thought "never again?"

How many times have we betrayed Jesus even after we're saved? Every time we sin. And he still serves us and still loves us. And his blood still covers us.

And he says go and serve in the same way.

Pray