

Mark 10:32-45 | Drink the cup

Grab your Bibles and open them up to Mark 10. We continue in this gospel: the story of Jesus' life. We are in the middle of a section where Jesus is preparing His disciples for ministry after He leaves. He is giving lessons to His disciples to make sure that they are ready for the work of building the church that they will be part of.

Over the last two weeks, we have seen Jesus focus on three of the fleshly desires that get in the way of faithful discipleship. Jesus addresses these in a roundabout way, but He has given us three desires that plague faithful living. They are the same three idols that cause the downfall of many Christian leaders today: sex, money, and power. Jesus has described these in a way that gives His disciples a way to avoid the pitfalls. Let me show you what I mean:

1. Sex (marriage)

Jesus didn't speak about the Christian sexual ethic, in the same way that He didn't talk specifically about divorce when asked about it. What He does instead was give us a picture of the one flesh relationship that God designed marriage to be. He wants them to understand what the good is, what the ideal is, so that everything else is measured in relation to how God created us to fulfill the call to 'be fruitful and multiply to fill the earth and subdue it.' We can tell what is wrong by knowing what is right: everything that does not reflect God's order for marriage is a distortion, and will lead to destruction.

2. Money

Jesus told us that money is the means to many things, but it makes a very poor god. Money can buy you security, money can buy you momentary happiness, money can buy you bigger, better, and faster; money **can't** buy you salvation. Money has no means to bring you into relationship with God. Money is actually a hindrance because it gives you false assurance in your ability to provide what you need.

3. Power (reward)

In the story of the rich, young ruler, Jesus also revealed how our standards of value do not work in the world of grace. Working for a better place, trying to secure position or fighting for favor will not pay out. Instead, He said, the last will be first and the first will be last. **The way that the last will be first, and the first last is through gratitude.** Seeing what we deserve and what we have and the wide gap between the two instills in us humility and with it the joy of belonging to God. We don't want to be rewarded in a fair way, we want mercy; we have a God who describes Himself as:

"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness | Exodus 34.6

The appreciation of God is the reward we receive in this life. It is a reward that comes with a promise of future riches: we will receive a hundredfold of anything we give up in worship to God. We don't act for the reward, but the reward is a reminder that this world is temporary, including all recognition.

Today, we finish this section by Jesus expounding on the idol of: POWER. Jesus will show us that not only are we blessed, and not only will we receive in the future, but that belonging to God allows us to freely give our lives to the service of others. The gospel allows us to clear out the idols of sex, money, and power and replace them with a new HOPE. Placing our hope in Jesus converts us from being consumers (those looking for meaning in the things of this world) into co-laborers with God to bring goodness into the world. Jesus is going to show us how this transformation takes place, Mark 10: starting in v.35:

BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE

[35] And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." [36] And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" [37] And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." [38] Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" [39] And they said to him, "We are able."

I always wonder how close together some of the events in the gospels happen. We don't always have a complete timeline, so this could have been hours or weeks since the last story. It is jarring that one of the last things that Jesus said before this story is Jesus saying to them:

[31] But many who are first will be last, and the last first." | Mark 10:31

The response is for them to pull Jesus aside to tell Him: we want to be first. Even more, it starts with them saying: teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you? That is pretty forward. Most people do think this way. Every human being wants other people to do for them and be what they want. Most people don't say that. Imagine saying that to your spouse: I want you to do whatever I ask of you...what do you think?

Jesus doesn't say no right from the jump. He asks them what they want Him to do for them. Their answer is: we want the seats of importance in glory. We want to sit on your right and left when you rule over creation. This is an interesting request; **it is a selfish request, but it is a believer's request.** In order to ask this you have to believe that Jesus is going to be on the throne; that He is the Messiah. For them to ask this of Jesus flows from the fact that they trust in His divinity and that he will show His authority over all. *Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.* While they have heard that message loud and clear, JESUS WILL BE KING, they still don't understand what the path to glory is going to look like. Even though Jesus has been trying to make it clear, they are still thinking of victory through the lens of earthly power. They are fighting for positions in the Kingdom.

Jesus' response is not to flat out rebuke and tell them off. While He does get frustrated by their continual inability to understand, He also uses this as an opportunity to reveal the depth of what it truly means to have position in the Kingdom of God. He answers them with a question: *Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?*

This question (are you able to drink the cup?) is about the price that must be paid for glory. When Jesus says 'this cup' He is referring to the work that must be done to redeem the world from the curse of sin. He uses this same phrase in Luke 22, in the Garden of Gethsemane, just before He is arrested and killed, He cries out:

"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." 42

The cup is the wrath of God. The weight of sin that Jesus puts on Himself to rescue His people. Jesus is basically asking the brothers: do you really think that you are able to take on the burden of being the Savior? It isn't just the act of dying, it is the weight of being responsible. As we see Jesus in the garden we see how heavy this was. He asked for it to be removed, if possible. He sweat blood. He felt the separation from God that was coming. BUT He also went through with it...why? He had to. He was the only one who was a worthy sacrifice. He was the only option for a broken world. He was the only one who could drink the cup.

Jesus had just gotten done telling them this. We started in verse 35, but in verses 32-34 Jesus had prophesied His own death for them yet again. Every time He does this, He adds a little more detail, a little more weight to what He has coming. This is what He said, v.32:

THE FICKLENESS OF EARTHLY POWER

[32] And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, [33] saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. [34] And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

This is Jesus describing to His disciples what He must go through in order to secure salvation for His people. The cup of Jesus is to experience pain and rejection of being turned on fully by His creation:

1. He will be condemned by those guilty of sin.
2. He will be handed over to the tortured by those He upholds by His sovereign power.
3. He will be murdered by those He came to serve.

He does all of this so that the punishment of sin is paid. In verse 45, He makes it clear that His purpose is to free people:

the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

This term ransom is a slavery term. To give the ransom for someone was to pay what they owed so that they could be released from bondage. In this case, Jesus is taking on sin, to receive God's punishment for sin, so that His people do not have to. They are freed from punishment and death.

Earlier in the sermon, I talked about the overwhelming grace of God, but that grace is met equally with perfect justice. In that description of Himself God gave to Moses (the one we read earlier) we left off the second half. The whole description is this:

“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, [7] keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” | Exodus 34.6-7

He will by no means clear the guilty; God will not just look the other way. His justice is perfect. Each and every sin must be paid for. We are left with this paradox: loving, merciful God who also promises that every sin will be punished. How can God assure that the restitution for sin is made, while also making sure that His people receive grace? **Only by paying it Himself.** In this, Jesus represents both the firm judgments of God on sin AND the loving, merciful action of God to assume responsibility for sin that was a rejection of Him in the first place. Jesus suffers twice, first when we sin against Him, and then again as He pays for it. He drinks the cup of responsibility, He takes on the wrath of God, in order to lift the burden from His people.

Let’s take all of this back to the original question from Jesus to James and John: *Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?* **Obviously not; they can’t.** Yet they answer: *We are able.* I love the confident foolishness; it reminds me of the rich, young ruler: *I have kept the law perfectly.* It shows a total lack of understanding of what Jesus has to do (Jesus tells them as much before they answer: *You do not know what you are asking*). **As ignorant as their answer is, it is also devout...**they really do want to serve, they want to follow, they want to be part of what Jesus is doing. Jesus redirects their passion to what they can actually, v.39:

BECOMING A SLAVE OF ALL

And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, [40] but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” [41] And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. [42] And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. [43] But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, [44] and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. [45] For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus is the only one who can be the Savior. He is the only one who can do the work of atoning for sin. As He saves His people, He invites them into His plan of redemption. As we are reconciled to God, we become ambassadors of reconciliation. Our identity goes from being sin to being freed from sin to push back against it. This is what Jesus means when He says: *the cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.* This includes suffering and responsibility; it

includes purpose. He is telling the disciples that their lives have changed. They, and we, get to be part of the eternal God's plan to bring His creation back to fullness. In the grand scheme of things, sitting at His right or left pales in comparison with the fact that you get to sit with Him at all. He pushes their request aside, so that he can describe to them what their part in His plan of redemption will be; what it looks like to take on an authoritative role in the Kingdom of God.

He starts by describing leadership as we know it (regularly experience it in this world):

You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

We have all seen this. Power corrupts. Many who have power and authority use it for their own gain. They fight for the best seat. Jesus flips this around:

It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, [27] and whoever would be first among you must be your slave.

The picture of ideal leadership is service; to lead is to be the best servant. Jesus modeled this in His life. As we have seen, His whole purpose for being on earth was to give His life up in order to take the burden from others. He stepped down from His throne as the only one capable of doing what needed to be done for mankind. While we can in no way repeat that act, what we can do is live out our redemption by using the power we have for the good of others. This is why God is necessary for healthy leadership, servant-leadership...ONLY someone who recognizes what this King has done for them, can begin to see others as worthy of service.

Should we be ambitious and pursue leadership and take on responsibility and do good work? YES. Good work in the Kingdom of God is not measured in how well you excel; it is measured in how you use the things given to you to serve the Kingdom of God, by serving those around you.

Let's define what we mean by service; it is easy to see: do good things without really having any focus on what that looks like. What is it we are called to? What is it to serve? If we look at the example of Jesus we get a good idea:

SEE OTHERS | one of the traits of Jesus that we see most clearly is that He was always present. He cared for people and when He was with them, His attention was focused. Whether it was the Samaritan woman at the well He wasn't supposed to talk to or the tax collector that everyone hated, or His own disciples, Jesus was there with them.

What this looks like for us is that we can serve others by caring enough to be present. This could simply mean showing up when no one else can: to be the shoulder to cry on, the other end of the couch when someone is moving, or the person who brings dinner after a family tragedy. They say that 80 percent of life is just showing up, but when it comes to relationships it may be more than that. Because before you

ever show you have to think of someone, schedule it, turn down other things...showing up is actually a lot of work.

But if 80 percent is showing up, what is the other 20? I think it is serving people through listening. We all know we need to be better listeners, but listening is actually a way to practice service, by caring for what someone else has to say. Caring that they care about something you don't. Caring that they struggle with things you don't. Caring by recognizing where they have bought into lies and those lies are feeding their anxiety and shame. This world is filled with lonely people. Because despite the fact that we are hardly ever alone; we all often feel forgotten. One aspect of serving is to help people feel the value that they are given by God.

WANT THE BEST FOR OTHERS | we live in a world of competition, and the fight for power is the most competitive of all. The gospel takes away our need to fight others, by attaching us to the source of all good. There is no limit to the resources of God, whether wealth or power, and so we can desire success for others without feeling like this somehow takes away from us. **Philippians 2.3-4** reminds us that working from the gospel allows us to serve others by hoping for their best:

[3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

This is a verse that everyone would agree with on principle, but that is very difficult to live out. While it is easy to cheer others on, the reality is that things are limited on this earth: resources, time, energy...we only have so much. What Paul is calling us to here is not just to get happy for others, but to let our desire for their interests to drive how we set our schedule. Looking to the interests of others should not just be an exercise of recognition, but one of value. Wanting the best for others means allowing our plans to be broken by someone else's need.

SHARING THE POWER OF YOUR POSITION | most of us don't think of ourselves as holding powerful position, but many of us have social capital, bank accounts, homes, talents, training...all of which are resources that are connected with where you find yourself in life. You have a position of strength to share. The question is whether or not you see it that way. Godly leaders, those who follow the example of Christ, recognize that there are opportunities in their lives that they are better suited to take on than anyone else, and they look for these. They see other people, they show up, they take on responsibility, they work for the sake of others interests, and they use what they have to serve.

This is what it means to share the cup with Jesus. You join in His work, take on His cause, and you get to share in the glory. The glory we share is not about who we are or what position we hold, but the fact that we get to be a part of God's Kingdom. The glimpses we get of heaven, no one is arguing about who is the greatest...they are falling down and worshipping. They are declaring in unity: holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God almighty. Let's live toward that vision of glory. An acknowledgment of what Jesus has done, that he drank the cup that we could not drink, so that we could be welcomed into His family to share in His glorious work.

Every week when we get together we reflect on this by taking Communion together. Today, as you come forward to the table. come to both celebrate that Jesus has done what you could not, and to commit yourself to living a life that reflects Him.