

Following the Leader

Mark 10:32-45

10/11/15

PD Mayfield

Good morning. My name is PD Mayfield. I mainly applied for the position because it's PDC. It fits really nicely, smooths over really well with my initials. It is great to be here. As Wayne mentioned at the very beginning with a formal, powerful, well-known passage as Isaiah, we tend to forget because it's so well-known. And just likewise, when you worship week after week, sometimes you don't realize the water that you're swimming in, and it takes someone outside—maybe a visitor for the first time. Even as myself visiting for the first time—other visitors, you're not asked to come speak for the first time like I am. But you get to experience how a local body worships the living God. And that is a joy. It's a joy to share in that. It's a joy to be here. On behalf of my wife Kelly and I, we have loved the weekend. We have been warmly welcomed. To the session and to the search committee and to the congregation, thank you so very much.

Please turn with me, if you have your Bibles, to Mark chapter 10. We're going to be looking at verses 32 through 45 this morning. It's on the screen as well to follow along. As you're turning, as you're getting acclimated to where we are in the passage, here is a question: what do you want Jesus to do for you? Have you ever thought of even asking the question? Some people may be afraid to ask the question—it's taboo or sacrilegious or off-limits. And others may have a very, very long list of things that you're very ready for Jesus to do something for you. But what would you like Jesus to do for you?

This morning, here we are at the end of chapter 10, and this fits very beautifully into a larger section of the Gospel of Mark, where we see in between two healings—two blind men receive their sight. And on the one end, in the middle of chapter 8, very soon after that we see the transfiguration—James and John and Peter get to witness that. And here we are at the end of chapter 10, and right at the beginning of chapter 11, there is another healing of a blind man. And then we see what is commonly known as the triumphal entry. And so we have this picture in between these two bookends—three cycles of Jesus predicting his death, three cycles of the disciples misunderstanding Jesus' role and his purpose, and three opportunities for Jesus to correct that misunderstanding by showing truly what is discipleship and truly what is the cost of following him.

So this morning as we look at the text, where do we misunderstand Jesus? What do we expect from him? I'm going to read the passage. Follow along. And then we'll pray before we get started and ask God to help us.

They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.

"We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and 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."

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."

“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

“We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 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. 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.”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of God stands forever. It’s a little taste of how we read the Word in the church I’ve served in, in Richmond. For this is God’s Word, and it is good. It is challenging. There is an older song—it was first sung in 1999. I actually thought it was much older than it really is. I like country okay. It’s not my favorite. But this song is from Kenny Rogers. Don’t worry—I’m not going to sing it. But the first verse says:

Little boy in a baseball hat stands in the field with his ball and bat
Says, “I am the greatest player of them all”
Puts his bat in his shoulder and he tosses up his ball.
And the ball goes up and the ball comes down,
Swings his bat all the way around
The world so still you can hear the sound, the baseball falls to the ground.

Now the little boy doesn’t say a word, picks up his ball he is undeterred.
Says, “I am the greatest that there has ever been”
And he grits his teeth and he tries again. And the ball goes up and the ball comes down,
Swings his bat all the way around
The world so still you can hear the sound, the baseball falls to the ground

What do you picture, hearing those two verses? Do you see yourself watching the boy holding his bat and the ball? Or do you picture yourself as the little boy holding the bat and the ball? Maybe you’re more humble than I am, but I imagine myself as the little boy holding the bat and the ball, putting myself as the little kid many, many times in that picture and that opportunity to win the winning game single-handedly. That ambition for glory—whether that’s of my own doing or a very insatiable desire to be right next to the person who has won the game, wanting very close association, and sharing in that victory.

And the passage today speaks into how we want glory. But the way we seek it, the way we want to obtain it, the way we want to experience it, steward it, manage it, dole it out as a currency, is contrary to the way Jesus intends. And so we see Jesus defining a path for us—this path of glory. And it’s a path of discipleship. It’s a path of following him. So we’re going to look very briefly, for a pastor who is semi out of practice, it’s hard to give him a time limit—because you know how pastors practice. They just go longer. I’m going to save and spare you that. But we’re just going to look at this passage very briefly. There’s so much more we could say here. But just wanting to unpack this path of discipleship in these two ways. And they’re really held in tension by a path of following where Jesus leads, and a path of glory of leading how Jesus serves. And they fold in on each other. It’s chicken-egg in some ways. They have to be held together.

So we're going to look briefly first at how following where Jesus leads. And we get this very much from the context in verse 32, right out of the bat. We see that they are walking to Jerusalem. Now, Jesus and the twelve, they have been making their way south. They have come from Capernaum in the north of Galilee, and they're heading south to Jerusalem, which is in Judea. And they are on a quest. And everybody has their opinions about what's going to happen. Everybody has their assumptions. Everybody has their own hopes and dreams of what Jesus is about to do. But they know something is about to happen. Something's about to go down. And we see the Gospel of Mark telling us three different times, just as the disciples did not get it clearly each time. But we, the reader, get three pictures of Jesus talking about this discipleship.

And we see the importance of the journey in verses 33 and 34, where, in this third time, he explicitly mentions what happens—what is going to happen. He's self-aware. He knows intentionally what's about to happen. And in this particular prediction, it's more graphic, and it's more descriptive than the prior two. But he says, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and 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." He is laying out before them—contrary to whatever their opinions might be—he's laying out, I'm going to be executed. And then in verse 45 at the end of this passage, we get a further, fuller meaning of the importance of what that execution brings about—to give his life as a ransom for many.

We have seen this throughout the worship service this morning, from Scripture being read, hymns being sung—of the beauty of the work of Jesus. And what does it mean for him to be a ransom? To be a ransom is to be a price of release. It is something that we're maybe more familiar with, maybe, someone—maybe a kidnapping—someone or something, that's something that's current in our context, in our technological age of even data being held hostage, and those kidnappers requiring a ransom for that exchange. A price paid for the exchange of the person's life, or whatever is being held.

But in this first century context, there's more of a nuance to this word. It really is the means for payment, delivering a slave from bondage, the price of that slave's freedom. That is what Jesus is referencing here. He is the ransom of bringing someone out of bondage. He's clearly connecting his death as an act of substitution. We see that in the phrase "for many." It kind of gets lost in translation, but the original language really does have this picture of "on behalf of," "instead of," "in place of" the many. And that's just a comparative word meaning a large number of people. He knows that his one, single life is going to be the ransom price for multitudes. That's self-awareness of what is about to happen.

And so how do we follow where Jesus leads? Well, briefly, some of us will be killed. I don't know who. I don't know how. I don't know when. We know that there are brothers and sisters in the world who are experiencing that reality very much in our present. This is not something that's in the past. There are reports that this is something as near as Oregon—the shooting that took place. And this is elsewhere in the world as well. So that very well may be some of your calling. To follow where Jesus leads is to Jerusalem to die.

To follow in the footsteps of Jesus is to bear witness to him—him as the second person of the Trinity, the King, the Savior, and our Redeemer. And just as he was handed over, so might some of us. I don't know when. I don't know who. And I don't presume to know. But I do know that that's a calling that is not calling us to run towards suffering. He's not asking us to run toward—in a sadistic, egotistical way, in a way that proves our devotion to this cult-leader that wants us to sacrifice for him. No. He has gone before us, and he has sacrificed himself for us. But for most of us, the opportunity is to take up our cross daily, in the day-by-day, moment-by-moment, everyday mundane of our life.

What does it mean to die to yourself? That is what Jesus is getting at. Following him where he leads is a path to glory, to be sure—and we're going to get to that in a minute—but it is a path that requires letting go of you holding onto your life, and letting that go for the sake of others. And if you've

read anything by Paul Miller, he loves to paint this picture—the shape of the gospel of Jesus. He calls it the J curve, this path of humiliation, of being humbled, of experiencing pain and suffering, being subjugated to circumstances around us in a way that is following Jesus, experiencing his rest, his calm, his hand on our lives, and that he is present with us, and that this brings us to exaltation—this brings us to the end of the story, when all things are made right. And there's pictures of that even now, but we await for it at the end of the story. So much of the story yet to come.

And in this J curve, it's not something that we do to merit his favor, his devotion to us, his love for us. Actually, it's nothing we can do to earn anything. And yet, we see that Jesus has gone before us. He's gone ahead of us. And he rose. He rose from the grave. He's even predicting that part—that death is not even the final part of the story. He rose just as he said he would. He has defeated death by going through death. And that is how we can let go of our anxieties and our worries. It's how we can wrestle with our fears and our shames, because we actually stand no longer condemned in Christ.

For those who have repented and believed and are looking to Jesus—you are forgiven. You are adopted as a child of the King, the Savior and Redeemer of the world. Your sins are forgiven, and he has overcome the grave. And he sits on the right-hand of God the Father. He is, indeed, ruling and reigning on his throne of glory. And it's hinted in all parts of the Scriptures, but no one really saw it coming, especially the disciples. And so we see Jesus embodying his own teaching for what it means to be great. He switches places. He becomes the slave, so that the slave can become free. So he calls us to join him and follow him in that path.

And secondly, this passage is looking at this path of glory that Jesus outlines—leading how Jesus serves. How did he serve? Well, the gospel writers tell us an endless story. He made the deaf hear. He made the blind see. He drew near to women who were discarded by society. He healed people of debilitating diseases. He came near to them and freed them from the oppression of evil forces. He pushed back the curse. That is the Messianic promises to come. So long ago, even King Josiah, a wonderful king of Israel who was not perfect—even he awaited this Messiah to sit on the throne of David.

Jesus called to his disciples, and he gives this contrasting picture of leadership. He paints this picture of the Gentiles, referencing the Romans occupying Israel, lording it over them—they also being subjected to the authorities over them, and the Roman structures of governance. There is a competency, there is a garnering power and influence and leverage, and using that against someone in order to put forth an agenda—that is the anti-example that Jesus is painting. He's painting a very different example than he himself walks.

And this fits also in the context of James' and John's request. If you remember from the transfiguration, who was with Jesus and Elijah and Moses? It was James, John, and Peter. Here we are not too far later—we have James and John. So a very beautiful mercy and a goodness of God in giving James, John, and Peter this glimpse of his glory. Not that much later, we have two of the three wanting to get a little bit closer—wanting to wrap their arm around Jesus and whisper to him, “Hey, can we get a little closer to you? Can we be on your right and your left in your glory on your throne?”

And in their mindset, that idea of “in your glory on your throne” really is an anticipation that things are about to go down. The Messiah is here. The Romans are getting kicked out. All will be right in Israel. We can now live in that covenant relationship with God. He is our Redeemer that not only brought us out of Egypt, but he has now kicked out the Romans, and our Messiah reigns on the throne. And guess what? We're part of the King's entourage. We get all the glory that comes with that. We get the scraps, but those scraps are awesome. This is James and John clamoring for bits and pieces of glory. But they don't get what Jesus is saying.

Dan Allender in his book, *Leading with a Limp*, writes this about power and control: “Power and control are a high-flying trapeze that takes a leader farther and farther above the ground with each swing. The greater his achievements, the harder it is to let go.” But a leader gains true confidence only if he

forces himself to let go, and confidence in God is what a leader really needs, much more than he needs any false sense of control. But a leader will trust in the goodness of God only to the degree that he has a history of brokenness and surrender. This J curve—to experience glory is to go through this path of suffering and brokenness. And Allender goes on to later write, “A broken leader is no longer driven by the need to impress people or to secure their approval.” That is freedom—to be your own man or woman, to be in the spheres of influence that you have in your life, whether that is a top position in a company or a child in a family. We are all called to lead, and we’re all called to lead in the way Jesus has lined it out.

Coming from Richmond, I more saw the Pope’s visit from the news. Maybe people in Maryland saw it closer. But a recent article about his visit from CNN—there was a rioter who wrote, basically asking the question, why does Pope Francis get respect—even love—in the hearts of millions, including so many non-Catholics? And the article was like a top ten reasons why he thinks people love Pope Francis, and why his examples—how he leads—is a wonderful example and a moral challenge to each of us. And what I found interesting about the article—yeah, the article was okay—but what I found more interesting was what one commenter said:

It’s pretty simple. I’m not a Catholic. I’m also not a fan of organized religion in general. But the Pope is actually talking about doing the very fundamental things that all religion is based on. He is talking about people taking care of people. He’s talking about lifting each other up instead of tearing others down. He wants us to care about the earth and to love each other. He is hopeful and joyful and peaceful. He walks the walk. He is the most impressive religious leader I’ve ever heard. He gives me faith.

High praise, and I would say only partially right. There is something that is an indictment for sure—that he hears a man witnessing something in this religious leader’s life—that I think there are many good things to commend about. But even this nonreligious commenter doesn’t recognize his own cultural presuppositions that have been influenced by Christianity. Because the disciples had it right. The Messiah was supposed to kick out the Romans. That was his power. That was his authority. That was his right, to be reigning on the throne. And yet his right to reign—he chose a different path by choice. He chose to give that up.

So I’m just beginning to meet many of you, and as the Lord leads, I hope to know many, many more of you well. And so this is really something that we unpack in our lives over years and decades and lifetimes. And as people pass away, a new generation comes to know the Lord. This path of discipleship is what the church has been walking for thousands of years. It’s not going to be eloquently spoken about and explained in—a little bit longer than what I was given. This is life, and this has to be lived in community—the community of the body of Christ, worshipping him. There is a forward direction for sure.

So notice this, too. This is a small, subtle difference. This would be much more to unpack, but I want to leave it with you. Jesus is walking to Jerusalem knowing he’s going to be executed, while his disciples are following him not knowing what he’s about to do, even though he’s telling them what’s going to happen. And he is patient. And he doesn’t stop. He doesn’t stop and say, “Okay, I’ll put that off until later.” While he’s walking to Jerusalem to die as a ransom for many, he turns and he patiently instructs. He teaches. Discipleship is about humility. There’s an inward direction of our discipleship that can only be fostered as we walk with the Lord, being shaped by the power of the Spirit, being challenged and encouraged and cared for by each other as a community.

So this is to be worked out in your community groups. This is to be worked out in your families. This is to be worked out in your marriages. This is to be worked out as we think about, what does it look like for CPC to not only worship Christ, but to be a witness to the watching world here in Columbia, here in the region, and participating in what God is doing in the world? That is glorious. There’s always more to say. The end of the song says this:

He makes no excuses he shows no fear
He just closes his eyes and listens to the cheers.
Little boy he adjusts his hat, picks up his ball, stares at his bat
Says "I am the greatest when the game is on the line"
And he gives his all one last time.
And the ball goes up and the moon so bright
Swings his bat with all his might
The world's as still as still can be, the baseball falls
And that's strike three.
Now it's supertime and his momma calls,
Little boy starts home with his bat and ball.
Says, "I am the greatest, that is a fact,
But even I didn't know I could pitch like that!"

How you saw the song says something about your definitions of glory and grandeur and honor and esteem. Jesus gives us a very different path, that flips our presuppositions, our definitions of what that looks like, on their heads. And he says, "I am King. I have a right to rule on the throne—and I am. But first, I have to go to the cross." And this cross bids us to come and die, so that we might find that we actually, truly live. That is the beauty of the good news of the gospel—that this paradox accomplishes ransom.

Following Jesus is rarely how you imagine it to be, but it is always better than you hoped. You might think surrendering control and dying to yourself is the surest way to ruin, because it's scary. And maybe many of you are suffering and have been ruined, or are experiencing ruin right now. But the good news for you is that Jesus says—this path that he outlines is the only way to joy. Do you trust him? Are you walking with him? Are you following after where he leads? Are you seeking to lead how he serves? May we do that with God's help. Let's pray.

Father, we are grateful for today, thankful for worshipping you in song, thankful for your story of redemption from the very, very beginning, and how there is wisdom in how you reveal it over time. With great patience and steadfastness and faithfulness, you have brought forth the means of ransom—the payment on the cross, the curse on the tree in my place. Your righteousness mine. Nothing I can do. All of your grace. All of your mercy. We give you praise for those things. In Jesus' name. Amen.