



Jesus Christ our Ransom

Series: The Gospel of Mark · 36 of 36

2/14/2021 (SUN)

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And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, "Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire." And he said unto them, "What would ye that I should do for you?" They said unto him, "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory." But Jesus said unto them, "Ye know not what ye ask. Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" And they said unto him, "We can." And Jesus said unto them, "Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized. But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared."

And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you; but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister, and whosoever of you will be the chiefest shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

We left the story last week with Jesus telling the disciples again about the suffering and death he was heading towards.

Considering how graphic his description was, we're taken aback to find some of his disciples still thinking about their own ambitions. James and John were brothers. They'd been fisherman until Jesus called them into the ministry. And among the twelve, they'd been privileged. Jesus had allowed them to witness things he denied other disciples—his transfiguration, for one.

Here, they're asking Jesus for special positions of authority in his kingdom. Perhaps they assumed because they'd been honoured by Jesus in the way they had, they wanted to ensure this status was recognised in these places of honour beside Jesus.

Asking this now is clearly inappropriate. And it shows their continued lack of understanding about the nature of this new kingdom. I said last week this had been the third of Jesus's predictions about his death, each one special in its own way. But let's think about the reactions to each of the three:

- In chapter 8, Peter takes Jesus to one side and tells him to stop talking about dying
- In chapter 9, there's an argument about who's the greatest
- And here in chapter 10, all their thoughts are about getting a piece of the power in the kingdom.

We should be careful before we hastily criticise the disciples. We have the benefit of hindsight. We know what happens in the story. We have a complete record, not only of all Jesus's words and actions, but also all the doctrine about it, in the New Testament. We have 2000 years of teaching and book writing and numerous other helps that have brought us to the place we're in now. I know we're often exasperated by the behaviour of the disciples, but we shouldn't assume we'd have acted any differently.

If we can bring anything positive out of the request of this pair, we could say they displayed faith that Jesus would be glorified, and they acknowledged he had authority to make such appointments as they'd asked for.

Jesus's response seems quite gentle. He firstly tells them they don't fully understand what they're asking. He goes on to see if they understand they must suffer if they're to be in the company of the king when he comes into his kingdom. In any case, he says, it's not his job to make such appointments.

What about the reaction of the other disciples? I can't tell whether this was righteous indignation, or they had ambitions of their own and didn't want to be left behind! Whatever the case, Jesus calls them to gather round for a chat.

What he means to teach them here is something he's already taught them. It's the "first shall be last" principle. Again, the disciples are not so different from us. Think about how we've had to be taught something several times before it's sunk in.

So he explains again but uses a slightly different approach. He tells them to look at the leaders of this world. More often than not, the power that comes with these great positions corrupt those who hold them. And nothing's changed. From the corruption of the ancient kings, to the cruelty of the Herodians, to the abuse of power by British kings and queens, to the widespread slaughters of the 20th century, all the way up to the present day, where people are constantly trying to combat the addictions of leaders who want to exercise greater and greater control.

Jesus reminds them they belong to a different society. It works with completely different values. The hierarchies of this world are reversed in God's kingdom. *The first shall be last*. In our setup, we recognise those of higher rank, whether they're there by birth or ambition. They're happy to be served. Not so in the kingdom of God. Here, its leaders are to minister to everyone else.

I'd like us today to think about Jesus's reference to his sufferings and look at his role as the ransom for the sins of his people.

He drank the cup of God's wrath

You'll be aware that the cup is used a lot in scripture. It symbolises different things. Generally, the scriptures use it in both positive and negative ways. It's used positively to describes the blessings we receive as God's children as being like drinking from a cup full of those blessings. **But the most common use of the cup is to talk about drinking in God's wrath.** And this is the sense in which it's used here. It's about **suffering**.

John 18:11 - Then said Jesus unto Peter, "Put up thy sword into the sheath. The cup which my Father hath given me: shall I not drink it?"

Peter wanted to protect Jesus from being taken by the authorities. But can you imagine if he'd been successful? If he'd have stopped the Calvary event? *There would be no salvation for him or anyone else in history.* The last time he tried to interfere with Jesus's mission, thinking he knew best, he got one of the sternest rebukes Jesus gave to anyone. *Get behind me, Satan,* he said.

God the Father had given the Son, as it were, a cup full of his wrath to drink. And Jesus fully intended to drink it. And this of course refers to his suffering at Calvary. It's as if his father had taken all the punishment for all the sins of all the people that he intended to save, condensed it into a poisonous concoction and handed it to his own son—knowing the painful death it would cause. That, my friends, is what the God of heaven was prepared to do for you.

Jesus, being fully conversant with scripture, would of course be aware his coming suffering was in fulfilment of that great prophecy of Isaiah 53:

Isaiah 53:11–12 - He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied. By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he hath poured out his soul unto death. And he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Jesus bore the sins of *many*. Not just one or two. Not just the disciples. And not merely all the saints in the New Testament church. He died too for all those who lived through the days of the Old Testament—those who *believed the gospel*. They trusted in a coming redeemer. They didn't have the benefit we have, to know how the atonement would be carried out, or where or even when. But they believed in him who they had not seen, just as we do.

Jesus Christ drank the wine of the fury of God the Father. Drank it all. After his first taste of the pain of an eternal hell, he could have stopped. He could have summoned legions of angels to destroy his enemies, bring him down from the cross and minister to him. He could have stopped the pain and lived a peaceful life afterwards.

But he continued to drink. And it may well be a mistake for me to even try to describe what he felt on the cross, but my guess is he wondered if it would never end. Had he stopped;

had he bore all your sins but one, **you would be lost**. He made sure he stayed there and took the punishment for every last sin you and I have ever committed.

He was overwhelmed with suffering

The second way he describes his demise is as a baptism. Christians often think when they see this word it refers to people being baptised with water. Bible students should know the baptism they received with water is merely a representation of what happened to them *spiritually*.

The word translated “baptism” means to be immersed or overwhelmed with water. The real point is not the contact with the liquid but the *change that it brings about*. And so God uses this word to describe how the convert to Christ is changed—fundamentally.

Here though, the fundamental change for Jesus is from his being alive and well to being in pain and dying. We can see another use of water in Psalms 69:

Psalm 69:1–2 - Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.

It’s a personal lament of David, and he describes his desperate situation as being like “drowning” in troubles. And in Psalm 18, we see an example of how being delivered by God is like being *rescued from drowning*:

Psalm 18:16 - He sent from above. He took me. He drew me out of many waters.

And so it is we see Jesus overwhelmed by the waves of the anger of God. He was being drowned, as it were, by his own father. A person who’d done nothing wrong.

But unlike David, there was to be no deliverance here. The thrice holy God had determined to go through with this. He meant to see it through to the end. And the son of God, being so overwhelmed by this experience, even shouts out to his father in heaven, *Why have you abandoned me?*

Yet even now, his father would not stop. The punishment would continue until the very end. The sea billows would crash upon the son—cover him—and would only end when Jesus said, *It’s done. It’s finished*. And he died.

He became the ransom for his people

We thought about the use of the cup and baptism to describe what Jesus endured. Now we come to this word “ransom”. If you think for a minute, you maybe recall some other examples of this “commercial language” in the scripture. One example is redemption. If someone’s short of money, they can deposit some jewellery in a pawn shop. And a bit later on, when they’re better off, they can take the “redeem ticket” back to the pawn shop, pay a certain amount of money and get back the piece of jewellery—buy it back.

When we think of the term *ransom*, it might make us think of someone being kidnapped! The baddies will ask for a sum of money, and if it’s paid, they’ll hand the person back over to

their family. But it's not just about kidnappings. We can see an example in the Old Testament, in Exodus:

Exodus 21:30 - If there be laid on him a sum of money, then he shall give for the ransom of his life whatsoever is laid upon him.

In this example, it was the law that a man be put to death. However, if the family of his victim chose to, they could ask of the man a sum of money in exchange for his life. It's described there as a ransom, and this is how it's described in the passage were looking at today.

We all came into this world sinning. And no matter how many or how few; no matter how serious or how trivial in our own eyes; every one of our sins is an offence against God. And he has a right to insist on punishment for those crimes. The huge problem for the human race is **the breaking of God's law carries the death penalty**. We MUST be put to death. Not just a painless, quick end to our existence. That's not punishment. This death penalty is like being put to death continually—forever.

Had God decided to consign the whole of the human race to the prison of punishment, he'd remain a just and holy God. But it was his desire to save some of them. And in his infinitely brilliant mind, he drew up the plan of redemption. He made a way so that people would escape punishment and instead receive eternal life. And so it was that he supplied his own son to take our punishment instead of us, releasing us forever.

This was a ransom like no other. The price that needed to be paid was not monetary. **It was a very life of the son of God**. This ransom price was paid in full. AND THIS HAVING BEEN PAID, THE FATHER WAS GLADLY CONSTRAINED to issue you and I with royal pardons.

So, friends, we're to forever show our appreciation for what God did for us. In eternity, we'll never grow tired of saying *Thank you* to God. Every moment will be a wonderful gift, and we'll praise God for it.

But we're to honour God now too of course.

1Cor. 6:20 - For ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your bod, and in your spirit, which are God's.

There's that money language being used again. It's as if we were in the slave market, waiting to be sold to the highest bidder. Then God comes and buys us all, and we enter joyfully into his service.

I'd like to briefly mention this phrase "ransom for *many*". Christendom is divided into two opinions on this point. Most believe Jesus died for every member of the human race, while others believe he died only for his elect people. I'm sure you know where I stand on this matter. I find it preposterous to suggest Jesus redeemed everybody while intending to afterward consign most of them to the Lake of Fire.

God's election, when he drew up the list of all those who he would save, was limited to a certain number. And the forgiveness of sins and gift of eternal life is only given to those of

that number. Yet we're told at Calvary Jesus carried out a universal act of salvation. Brothers and sisters, JESUS WENT TO CALVARY TO PAY THE RANSOM FOR HIS ELECT ALONE. **And his mission was 100-percent successful.** Not one person who he died for will be lost. Every single one either has been or shall be ushered into his kingdom and will enjoy his presence forever.

The disciples had this question put to them.

- Were they, too, willing to suffer like their master?
- Were they willing to be overwhelmed, if necessary, for the sake of Christ?
- Were they prepared, if it came to it, to be IMMERSED in trials, to the point of despair?
- And were they prepared to drown under it—to *die* if necessary?

I think the two disciples' responses were a little too quick. Without any thought, they immediately answer Jesus. *Yes, they say; We're prepared to do all that.* It was a right answer, but I don't think they understood the seriousness of what they were confessing.

In the service of the Captain of our Salvation, we must be prepared to suffer and make sacrifices. We are, to a degree, glorified right now if we are in Christ. But there's a greater glory to come. And the path to it has many obstacles, diversions and traps.

If only the disciples had known what we know. We get to read these accounts of what happened to Jesus in the end. The disciples looked forward to a coming takeover. And whatever form it took, they wanted to be in those positions of authority. One on the right hand of Jesus the King, and the other on the left, the most exalted positions.

But we see Calvary. We see Jesus, not sitting on a majestic throne, but hanging on a cheap cross. We see Jesus, not surrounded by adulating subjects, but by a mocking crowd.

Calvary WAS A VICTORY; there's no doubt about that. **But the scene was one of humiliation, torture and death.** The son of God would there have to experience being flanked by *criminals* before enjoying his glorification where he would be flanked by his fellow heirs of salvation.

It's interesting that Jesus accepts the confession of the two disciples. He says to them, *You're right; you **will** drink this cup, and you **will** go through this baptism.* Now we know it wasn't in the same way as Jesus suffered, and their sufferings would not contribute in any way to their salvation. But he acknowledges they will suffer. And this was borne out in history. We read in the Book of Acts that James was martyred by Herod. John, we think, lived to be an old man, but he still suffered persecution and was banished to the Isle of Patmos.

In applying these things to ourselves, we should take note of a subtle point Jesus makes. Look at verses 43 and 44. *Whoever will be great among you shall be your minister, and whoever wants to be the chiefest shall be the servant of everyone.* The word "minister"

in verse 43 comes from the Greek word *diakonos*, meaning “servant”. It’s where we get our word “deacon” from, of course. But in verse 44, the equivalent word—servant—comes from the Greek word *doulos*, meaning “slave”. Jesus is bringing in more intense language to get across this idea of what it means to be a follower of his. **If you want to be a proper functioning believer on Jesus Christ, you must be prepared to become ENSLAVED to your brethren.**

That’s the level of service he wants from you. Our beautiful saviour and king was prepared to become a suffering servant for our sakes. He asks us to do far less for him. How can we refuse?

Suffering service. That’s our lot in this world. But even when our service involves suffering, we know that God’s in it. He will not allow it to go any further than what he’s determined. What’s more, he’ll deliver you out of your suffering one way or the other, and you have that gift of eternal life waiting for you, a gift that is yours by the promise of God himself.

So friends, this suffering service is not something to be endured, but as far as is possible, *enjoyed!* So embrace the service of Christ with joy, knowing that even our trials are meant for our good and for the good of the Lord’s people.

Amen.