

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

Leadership In The Kingdom Of God

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Mark 10:35-45

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Mark 10:35; that’s on page 846 in your pew Bibles. Many of your Bibles will give this story that we are about to read the heading “The Request Of James And John” but in order to really understand why their request was so inappropriate you actually need to read the three verses that come before this story. So let me do that – let me read verses 32-34. Your Bible probably gives this little introduction the title: “Jesus Foretells His Death For A Third Time”. Let’s hear about that.

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.” (Mark 10:32–34 ESV)

So again – for a third time – Jesus predicts that he will be betrayed, condemned, mocked, spit on and killed and the disciples respond to that by asking him for position and privilege in the Kingdom of God.

Seriously.

That actually happened.

The disciples seem incapable of hearing these predictions in any kind of literal or straight forward way. They assume that Jesus is speaking figuratively or allegorically – or maybe he is just being Jesus. Sometimes Jesus says weird stuff. Nobody knows what it means! And you just get on with your life. You get on with what matters and what matters to the disciples is position, preferment and status.

And so James and John come to Jesus with perhaps the most ridiculous request in all the Bible. And in responding to their request Jesus provides some extraordinary teaching on leadership in the Kingdom of God.

Now remember this entire section is about the radically different values of the Kingdom of God. We do marriage differently, Jesus said in Mark 10:1-12; we do children differently, he said in Mark 10:13-16; we do money differently, he said in Mark 10:17-31 and now here Jesus says, “we do LEADERSHIP differently in the Kingdom of God.” We don’t just blindly follow the pattern of the culture. We don’t just take our cues from Fortune 500 CEO’s. We do it different because we follow Jesus. And Jesus was a very different kind of leader.

Thanks be to God!

That’s what this story is about; hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 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.” 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.” (Mark 10:35–45 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

This is a very practical text so we will spend most of our time on the matter of application.

However in order to apply this teaching correctly we do have to be careful to make sure that we understand, precisely, what Jesus is and is not saying.

What Is He Not Saying?

The first thing we probably need to point out is that Jesus is not saying here that there is no such thing as authoritative leadership.

1. He is not saying that there is no such thing as authoritative leadership

Some of us are inclined to hear Jesus saying here that leadership is bad and authority is bad but that's not what he is saying at all. He is not saying that authority and leadership are bad he is saying that the world does those things wrong. Authority in the world is corrupted. Leadership in the world is abusive - but there is a right way to exercise authority and there is a way of being a leader that is a gift and a blessing to other people.

Jesus was not opposed to authority – in fact Jesus EXUDED authority and that fact was often remarked upon. Early on in Mark's Gospel we read:

And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. (Mark 1:22 ESV)

Jesus was an authoritative leader! He said: "This is the right way to do it and that is the wrong way to do it. This is true and that is false. This way leads to life, that way leads to death." Jesus had authority!

And he gave authority to the church – in fact he gave the church far more authority than we like to talk about. In that famous passage about church discipline he ends that teaching by saying:

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18 ESV)

Jesus told his disciples to make authoritative decisions and to assume that those decisions will be ratified in the heavenly councils – that's serious authority. So to put it plainly, Jesus does not

outlaw authoritative leadership in this passage – he just completely redefines it.

The second thing we probably need to point is that Jesus does not say in this passage that there is nothing that we can learn from secular leaders.

2. He is not saying that there is nothing for us to learn from secular leaders

He doesn't quite say that. He says that we must not imitate secular leaders because their values, ambitions and motivations are essentially incompatible with the Kingdom of God. But of course that doesn't mean that we can't learn anything about methods or techniques or best practices. Of course we can and of course we should! Jesus speaks about a wise estate manager who rewards diligent servants – he speaks about a wealthy land owner who pays his workers on time at the end of the day – there is always something to learn from competent leaders even if we deploy that learning in pursuit of very different aims.

For example when I took this job I had never really led grown ups before – I had been a youth pastor and had done lots of children's ministry and camp stuff but I had never managed a staff of adults or conducted annual reviews for employees; so I read a book called "The First Time Manager" and it told me how to do all that stuff and it was very helpful; I am very thankful for that entirely secular book. Our staff is very thankful for that secular book – I'm sure! But I don't look to business leaders, or political leaders or heaven forbid, entertainment leaders for the essence and the soul of my leadership. Those folks might be able to help us at the margins – except for the entertainment people - but at the heart – at the centre – when it comes to the essence of leadership – when it comes to ministry and service - we do it different – we do it the Kingdom way.

So, Jesus is not saying that there is no such thing as authoritative leadership and he is not saying that there is nothing that we can learn from secular leaders – I think that's important to point out.

So what is he is saying? What is he saying about the Kingdom way?

So What Is He Saying?

Well, I think the first thing is probably the most important. He is saying that:

1. The essence of Christian leadership is humble service

That's the heart of what Jesus is trying to communicate. To be a leader in the Kingdom of God is to be a SERVANT. It is not about position, or dominance or control – it is about serving God by serving other people. Now of course we serve each other according to the gifts and calling that we have. So some will serve by teaching, some will provide oversight and guidance, some will steward our resources, some will serve by changing diapers in the nursery, some will serve by mentoring teenagers in the portable, some will serve by visiting seniors, some will serve by going to South Africa to equip pastors and to look after orphans and some will serve by staying here in Orillia and reaching out in love and support to single moms in this community.

We each do according to our gifts and calling – but the heart of what we do is serving others. That is the essence of Christian leadership.

The second thing he says is that, in the Kingdom of God:

2. The lower you go the more honoured you will be

The disciples wanted to climb the ladder – Jesus turns them around and points them back in the other direction. He said:

But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. (Mark 10:43–44 ESV)

'Do you want to be great in the Kingdom of God', Jesus asks. Then don't climb up, come down. Get off your high horse and SERVE. More than that – more than SERVE – become a slave of all. In that society, slaves were the lowest of the low – a slave aspired to be a servant. But Jesus is telling his disciples, who aspire to be princes, to come down off their pretensions, to leave off their ambitions and to make themselves as slaves of all.

That's a whole different way of thinking. That is counter cultural in the extreme. No one had ever

said anything like this before and no one had ever SEEN anything like this before. R.T. France is right when he says that what Jesus is calling for here is:

“a genuinely alternative society”.¹

That’s what the church is supposed to be! We’re supposed to be different! We’re supposed to be SALTY! And if salt loses its saltiness it becomes worthless and is thrown out and trampled under foot – this is why we have to be SO careful when we try to learn things from the world about leadership. We might just be giving away the game. Because we are supposed to be different. Radically different. Remarkably different. While the world is pursuing power we are becoming slaves of all.

That’s what Jesus says.

The third thing we see here is that:

3. Christian leadership inevitably involves suffering

Jesus says that too. James and John come to him asking for positions and preferment and Jesus talks to them about cups and baptism – what’s that about? William Lane says helpfully here:

“To share someone’s cup was a recognized expression for sharing his fate... The image of baptism is parallel to that of the cup. In popular Greek usage the vocabulary of baptism was used to speak of being overwhelmed by disaster or danger, and a similar metaphorical use of submersion is present in Scripture.”²

So Jesus is telling these two brothers, James and John, that they cannot drink his cup precisely – only Jesus can die for the sins of the world – but they will drink a cup – they will share his destiny, in a sense – and they will undergo a baptism – they will be overwhelmed by danger and disaster – that’s the price you pay for leadership in the Kingdom of God.

And of course, that is exactly what happened. James was the first of the disciples to be martyred for his faith. We read about that in Acts 12.

¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel Of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 415.

² William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 379-380.

About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. 2 He killed James the brother of John with the sword (Acts 12:1–2 ESV)

James drank the cup and his brother John was overwhelmed. Church history records that the Apostle John was arrested by the Romans and plunged alive in boiling oil³ – but he didn't die and the Romans were amazed and even a little frightened and so rather than trying to kill him a different way they sent him into exile on the Isle of Patmos, from where it is said, he wrote The Book of Revelation.

Have you ever thought of that? The Book of Revelation was written by an old man in a cave who had miraculously survived being submerged in boiling oil. Can you imagine what that does to a person? What is life like after being plunged in boiling oil? What does that do to your eyes? To your skin? To your lips? To your hands? I have no idea but I am certain that it was OVERWHELMING.

Can you drink that cup John? Can you be baptized with the baptism I will be baptized with John? Because if you follow me, one way or another you will. So be careful what you ask for.

The fourth thing we see here is that:

4. Jesus is the ultimate example of Christian leadership

Now of course, I already mentioned that not everything Jesus did can be repeated by his disciples. Jesus said that he has come:

not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45 ESV)

Well to state the obvious, we can repeat the first half of that but not the second half. Only Jesus can give his life as a ransom for many. That is the heart of the Gospel. The heart of the Gospel is that Jesus lived for us and died for us. His life can be the life that we owe God and his death can be the death that we owe God. Therefore if we lay down our life and take Christ as our Lord and Saviour – and put our sins on his body on the cross through confession and faith – and take up his

³ Tertullian, *The Prescription of Heretics*.

robe of righteousness offered freely to all people irrespective of race or gender – then we can be as Jesus Christ before God. We can be JOINT HEIRS with Jesus. Everything God gives to Jesus will be shared with us. If we are in Christ through faith – that is the Gospel.

But that isn't actually what Jesus is telling the disciples to DO in this passage. They can't 'DO the Gospel', they must receive the Gospel just like everybody else. What Jesus is telling them to DO in this passage is to follow his example with respect to servant leadership.

And that takes us finally to the issue of our response.

Response: Lead Like Jesus

What should we do after hearing a teaching like this? I think the answer is obvious: We should endeavor, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to lead like Jesus. Jesus doesn't just give us principles he gives us a pattern. He doesn't just say: "Believe in me" he says "Follow me". Right? So to do that we need to remember who Jesus was AS A LEADER.

The first thing we remember, I think is this:

1. He was humble

The disciples are trying to scramble up the ladder of success in order to attain to higher positions and greater dignity – Jesus is going in the exact opposite direction! He's coming down! He is laying aside dignity. He is surrendering position in order to serve and sacrifice for many. Paul says:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5–8 ESV)

Be like Jesus, Paul says. Think like Jesus! He wasn't going up he was coming down! He was humbling himself and giving up power and position in order to love and serve others. If you want to follow Jesus then you've got to be doing that.

2. He was compassionate

Jesus had a plan but he was marvelously attentive to PEOPLE. You see that early on in Mark's Gospel. In Mark 1 just after Jesus had said that he needed to get back to the plan and get back to preaching, we are told that a leper ran up to him and knelt down and implored him and said, 'if you will you can make me clean.' The text says:

Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." 42 And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. (Mark 1:41–42 ESV)

A good leader has a plan, but a great leader will flex on that plan in order to respond to people. Listen friends, leave some margin in your life so that you can respond to people! Leave some margin in terms of time and some margin in terms of money. Have your plan – but see your people – that's what it means to lead like Jesus.

3. He was patient

I mentioned that this is the third time that Jesus predicted his arrest, condemnation and crucifixion – and STILL the disciples are not getting it. Still they are consumed with culturally located concepts of glory, power and dominion. These men are SLOW TO UNDERSTAND. In street level English we'd say these men are as dumb as a bag of hammers and YET Jesus continues to work with them. He continues to teach them and he doesn't give up on them.

If you want to lead like Jesus then you have to take the long view. You have to go through that one step forward two steps back AGONY that is associated with all great human endeavours. You have to be patient. You can't be a good leader as a parent if you aren't patient. You can't be a good leader in reCOVER if you aren't patient. And don't go into Youth Ministry if you aren't patient. And stay away from Family Circle if you aren't patient. We are in the patient business, because we are in the Jesus business.

Fourthly, we remember that:

4. He was prayerful

And that is perhaps the most surprising thing of all. If any leader might reasonably forgo prayer it would be Jesus – he was after all God in the flesh – and yet in Mark’s Gospel we often see him praying.

rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. (Mark 1:35 ESV)

I think the point is fairly obvious. If he wouldn’t lead without prayer then you shouldn’t lead without prayer. Leading and serving human beings is an impossible business therefore the entire process from start to finish should be bathed in persistent prayer.

Fifthly, we see that:

5. He was resolute

The Gospel of Luke does a great job of bringing this quality of Jesus’ to the surface. It is there certainly in Mark but Luke makes sure that we don’t miss it. In Luke 9:51 he says:

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51 ESV)

Jesus understood what lay ahead. He saw the cross – he spoke about the cross – he knew what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem and he knew that it was necessary so he SET HIS FACE to go to Jerusalem. He was resolved. He was resolute. He would not be deterred.

A great leader does what is necessary. A great leader counts the cost and pays the price.

Dennis Nineham says here:

“There is no short cut to God’s favour; for disciples as for the master, the path to glory is through suffering”.⁴

Jesus didn’t look for a short cut. He saw Jerusalem. He saw the cross and he went right through

⁴ Dennis Nineham, *Saint Mark*, The Penguin New Testament Commentaries. (London: Penguin Group, 1992), 280.

it. He was resolute and undeterred.

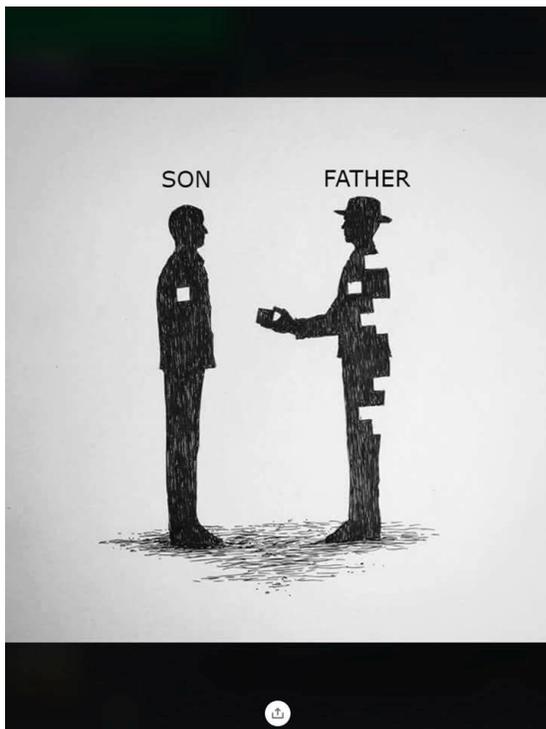
And so must we be. Leaders don't take short cuts. Leaders pay the necessary price.

Sixthly, we see that:

6. He was sacrificial

Jesus came to GIVE his life as a ransom for many. All leadership in the Kingdom of God is about giving. You give your time, your attention, your money, your emotions, your space, your safety, your future, your family – you give it all in order to serve God by serving others. You give until it hurts – and then to be perfectly honest, you keep on giving – past the point where it hurts – you keep giving until you have absolutely nothing left. That's what it means to pour out your life as an offering. Its about totality. Its about wholeness. Its about sacrifice.

That's what leadership is! I saw this picture the other day on Facebook – probably the most useful thing I've ever seen on Facebook:



Leadership is giving yourself away to build up other people! The Apostle John obviously learned that lesson really well. He wrote later in life:

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:16 ESV)

Jesus gave himself to build us up therefore we give ourselves in order to build others up! Its not rocket science! Its just the Jesus Way. Its how you parent. Its how you pastor. Its how you do Youth Ministry. Its how you serve in the nursery. Its how you mentor a single mom. Is it exhausting? Yes! It is by definition EXHAUSTING. You pour out your life to the dregs. That is the Jesus way.

The seventh thing we remember is that:

7. He was pioneering

A good leader pays the price – that’s what we mean by sacrificial – and a good leader goes first – that’s what we mean by pioneering. Jesus went first. He showed us the path to glory. He humbled himself – even to the point of death on a cross – and then God highly exalted him. That’s the path! The Bible says that Jesus laid down a course for us to follow and that we are to walk in that path:

looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2 NRSV)

Jesus went first! He was the pioneer! He showed us the way! That’s what a good leader does. A good leader doesn’t ask people to do anything he or she won’t do first. A good leader doesn’t send soldiers over the wall, a good leader LEADS soldiers over the wall. A good leader doesn’t scatter theories to the wind – a good leader teaches and leads himself and then says to those in his charge – follow me. Follow me as I follow Christ. Parents say that, pastors say that, mentors say that and nursery workers say that. We follow Jesus because he paved the way.

And then lastly, we see that:

8. He was empowering

One of the last things Jesus said to his disciples before ascending into heaven is recorded in Acts 1:8. He said:

“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8 ESV)

Jesus equips that which he commands.

That is so important for us to hear because you can't do any of this on your own – I can't do any of this on my own. We need to receive from Jesus before we attempt to do anything for Jesus. You need to be carried by Christ before you can lead anyone to Christ - and Jesus understands that! He understands that you can't tell people to do stuff and then not give them the necessary resources and help to accomplish the task. A good leader commands but he also equips and Jesus does that. He gives his people what they need in order to do that which he has called them to do.

He's a good leader; and he's our leader, thanks be to God. Let's go to him now in prayer.