

As Jesus gets closer to Jerusalem he spends more and more time with the twelve.
He is preparing them for their task.
When he is gone, they must follow in his ways.
And so Jesus explains that the one who would lead in his kingdom
must imitate him.

In a couple weeks Alan Strange is going to be reflecting on this
in our Men’s Leadership Seminar, “A Servant Is Not Greater than His Master.”
All Christians are called servants of Christ –
therefore it is the calling of every Christian to serve one another.
Every Christian man should aspire to being an elder –
the sort of man that other men in the church look up to as an example.
Every Christian woman should aspire to being one of those older women
whom Paul refers to in Titus 2 as a discipler of the younger women.

But if you would become such a person,
you must start now.
And you must start by denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Jesus.

1. Jesus Is Going to Die (10:32-34)

*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.*

There it is again – people are amazed at Jesus without any explanation given as to why!
But the reason is not entirely inexplicable.
Jesus has already said that he will be rejected by the chief priests and scribes (8:31),
and handed over to be put to death (9:31),
so the fact that he is now heading for Jerusalem –
walking ahead of them, eagerly pushing them forward –
strikes them as a bit odd.

Why is Jesus going to the most dangerous place on earth?
What he says to the twelve doesn’t help:

*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.”*

Jesus understands exactly what is coming.
He knows that he is going to his death.

But he also knows that he will be raised from the dead.

And while it is useful for us to know that Jesus knew this,
there is another reason why Mark includes this.

Jesus is not only teaching his disciples that *he* must die,
he is also preparing them for the fact that *they* must die.

Jesus is explaining to the disciples what they should have learned from OT history:
there is no route to glory that does not pass through death.

But the disciples don't understand this yet.

2. Jesus' Disciples Must Die (10:35-45)

a. The Request of James and John (35-37)

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."*

We tend to think of this in terms of seats of honor in the heavenly kingdom,
but James and John do not yet understand about the heavenly kingdom!

Insofar as they understand what Jesus is saying (which is not very far!),
they think that Jesus is going to be raised from the dead,
and *then* he will re-establish the Davidic kingdom.

So they think that they are referring to something that will happen within the next few years.
They think that Jesus' glory will be revealed as he sits upon David's throne in Jerusalem.
They are two of the three closest disciples,
so they think that they have a reasonable request!

b. Jesus' Baptism and Ours (38-40)

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?"*

What does this mean?

Jesus makes it clear that the "cup" and the "baptism" are about judgment.
If you look back through the OT this becomes clearer.
The OT often refers to a cup of judgment:

Psalm 75 speaks of how God will bring judgment upon the earth.

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

Likewise, Isaiah 51 speaks of how God will deliver his people from their enemies.

Jerusalem has already drunk the cup of God’s wrath,
but now God will bring judgment upon their enemies:
“Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem,
you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath,
who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.” (Is. 51:17)
But now “Thus says your Lord, the Lord, your God
who pleads the cause of his people:
“Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering;
the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more;
and I will put it into the hand of your tormentors.” (51:22-23)

Also in Jeremiah 25, the LORD says to the prophet,

“Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath,
and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.
They shall drink and stagger and be crazed
because of the sword that I am sending among them.” (25:15-16)
And so Jeremiah gives the cup to Jerusalem, and then to Egypt and the Philistines,
and Edom, Moab and Ammon, -- all the way to the king of Babylon.
And then God says,
“And if they refuse to accept the cup from your hand to drink,
then you shall say to them,
‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: You must drink!
For behold, I begin to work disaster at the city that is called by my name,
and shall you go unpunished?
You shall not go unpunished,
for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth,
declares the Lord of hosts.’” (25:28-29)

In other words, the OT scriptures were very clear what “the cup” means.

“The cup” refers to the judgment that Jerusalem must drink first,
and then the nations must drink after.
(Also see Ezekiel 23, Habakkuk 2, and Zechariah 12)

But what about baptism?

In the LXX the word “baptizo” is not used very often,
but the one relevant passage is Isaiah 21:4
where the LXX says that “lawlessness baptizes me”
in the context of God’s coming judgment against the nations.
But the image of a “baptism of judgment” is pretty easy to see in the OT:

the Flood, which washed away the wicked from the earth –
the Red Sea, which drowned the army of Pharaoh.

Indeed, John the Baptist had come baptizing in the wilderness
and preaching a baptism of repentance (Mark 1).

It is interesting that everyone seems to understand what John's baptism means:
No one asks, "what does your baptism mean?"

They ask in John 1:25

"why are you baptizing if you are neither the Christ,
nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

Everyone understood that baptism was a rite of cleansing –
a purification that was preparing for the coming kingdom.

And John says in all the gospel accounts,

"I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit"
(Mark 1:8) – others add "and fire"

Jesus has come to bring Spirit and fire baptism upon his people – and upon the nations.

But first, Jesus himself must endure that Spirit and fire baptism.

Why do I say "endure"?

Because Spirit and fire baptism is a baptism of judgment.

We are used to thinking of the cup as "the cup of blessing"
and baptism as a "means of grace."

But the only reason why we partake of the cup of blessing
is because Jesus partook of the cup of God's wrath!

And the only reason why Spirit and fire baptism cleanses us
is because Jesus endured the hell of that fiery baptism first.

But James and John do not understand the significance of all this,
and so they blithely say,

"yes Lord, we are able!"

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."*

Jesus will make further references to the cup in Mark's gospel.

Most famously he will say in the garden of Gethsemane,

"Abba, Father, all things are possible for you.

Remove this cup from me.

Yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14:36)

Jesus must drink the cup of God's wrath to its dregs.

But of course only a few verses before,

Jesus had taken a cup and gave thanks and said

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” (14:24)

And because Jesus drinks that cup and endures that baptism,

therefore we also may drink that cup and endure that baptism in him.

It is interesting that Jesus says that they will drink his cup and be baptized with his baptism.

Jesus is saying “you also will suffer.”

Paul will go so far as to say that he fills up in his flesh

what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ (Colossians 1:24).

What does he mean by this?

Paul understood what Jesus was saying here in Mark 10.

It is not as though there is something “lacking” in the atoning suffering of Christ.

Rather, what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ

is what we suffer in imitation of him.

Think of it this way,

if Jesus endures the cross for the salvation of sinners,

and then throughout the whole history of the church,

no one else ever suffers,

then the cross of Christ would be a mockery.

In that case, the cross is *not* the only way to glory!

Health and wealth and prosperity is yours – you don't need to suffer!

Don't be like Jesus! Enjoy life!

But that is the way of discipleship.

The disciple must be like his master.

You also will drink my cup.

You also will be baptized with my baptism.

And especially if you would claim to lead in my church –

especially if you would be “great” –

you must walk the way of the cross.

c. Leadership and Service (41-45)

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, [diakonos]

44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave [doulos] of all.

The church should not resemble the world.

Worldly authority is exercised through displays of power and might.
Kingdom authority is exercised through displays of humility and service.

As we have seen throughout Mark's gospel,
the Kingdom of Jesus is an upside-down kingdom.
Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.
The word here is *diakonos*.

In the Greek world the *diakonos* is the agent or emissary of the master.
A *diakonos* is not a household servant,
but is a term frequently used for one who acts on behalf of another.

This is why it is frequently translated "minister" –
because a minister is one who acts on behalf of another.
The "prime minister" in England is the "first minister" or "first servant" of the Crown.
Whoever would be great among you must be the minister of the group.
In other words, you cannot act on your own behalf –
but you must act on behalf of the community.

I am a minister (a *diakonos*) of Christ –
but I am also to be a minister (a *diakonos*) of this church.
What I say and do is supposed to serve the body – not my own personal agenda.

But then Jesus goes a step further.

The disciples would be nodding approval at the first part.
Yes, Lord, we are to be *diakonoi* –
for that is a noble thing to be the agent and ambassador
of the King and his community!

Jesus likes doing this!

He has them smiling and nodding – and then he goes a step further
and makes them gasp in amazement:
"and whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all."

This is not a *diakonos* –
this is a *doulos* – a menial slave –
one who can be ordered around like a dog.
You may not say, "that task is too menial for me!"
You may not say, "that is beneath me!"

If you would be first –
then you must humble yourself to the nth degree!

When the early Celtic Christians were debating over whether to submit to the Bishop of Rome,
they asked an old hermit what they should do.
His reply was that if the papal legate rose to meet them (a symbol of humility),
then they should submit to him as a brother in Christ,
but if he remained seated (a symbol of pride),
they should refuse to submit because he did not show the humility of Christ.

Needless to say, the legate remained seated
and the Celts refused to submit!

Ironically, that papal legate was sent by a man who had far more wisdom!
That papal legate was a man named Augustine –
and he had been sent to England by Pope Gregory I –
the author of the *Book of Pastoral Rule*.
Gregory had written that the bishop should always treat the laity who live well
as his equals.
If his emissary (his diakonos) had lived by the rule of his master,
the story of British and Celtic Christianity might have been very different!

If you do not learn humility, then you will never be ready to lead.

For a servant must be like his master.
*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.”*

Certainly there is a difference between the master and his servants.
Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many.
He is the atoning sacrifice that dealt once-for-all with sin and death.

We cannot do that!

But because we have been called into union with Christ –
because his atoning sacrifice has been efficacious for us –
therefore we are called to look like Jesus.

If his life is now at work in us,
if that resurrection life is now what motivates and energizes us,
then the pattern of our lives
will increasingly resemble the cruciform pattern of his life.

What does it mean to live a cruciform life?
A life conformed to the pattern of the cross?

It means a life of humility.
If you are a husband, it means that you lay down your life for your wife.
Rather than be selfish and do what you feel like doing,

you think first of how you can serve her and help her.
If you are a wife, it means that you respect your husband –
not necessarily because he's such a great guy!
But because of your reverence for Christ.
If you expect fulfillment from your spouse,
he or she will let you down.
But you are to think of yourself not merely as a diakonos –
not merely as an agent or emissary –
but even as a slave.
[PLEASE note, that nowhere does Jesus say that you should treat *each other* as slaves!
Humility calls you to think of yourself this way –
and only pride and arrogance could allow you to treat someone else this way.]

I once preached on this life of humility in Eritrea.
I told Eritrean men that Christ called them to lay down their lives for their wives –
and used the example that they should help their wives with the dishes.
Afterwards a wise missionary told me that I didn't realize
what a radical statement I had made.
In Eritrean culture men *do not* do dishes!

But that is precisely what Christ calls us to do.
He calls leaders to serve like slaves.

I would say that generally speaking the pastor should not *be* the janitor
(and I have been very impressed with the way in which you as a congregation,
and especially the elders,
have been very intent on making sure
that I am not loaded down with administrative responsibilities),
but if I ever act as though doing the dishes or taking out the trash is beneath me,
then you need to question my leadership!

You should not treat me like a slave by thinking “Oh, it's the pastor's job to do XYZ” –
but I should look for ways to humble myself and serve.

And that is true in any leadership position.
Whether you are a parent, an older sibling, an elder or deacon,
a manager, a magistrate – or a committee chairman –
your task is to be the agent or emissary of those whom you lead,
and indeed, to be their slave.
*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

The reason why we fail in leadership is because we fail to serve.

Our closing hymn will be “Go, Labor On.”

I should point out that while the winning of souls is the primary focus in stanzas 4-5, the first three stanzas make it clear that your toil – your labor – includes everything that you do.

And for that matter, the winning of souls includes the life of discipleship in the church. Jesus says in Matthew 18 that if you go to your brother and he sees his fault ‘you have *won* your brother.’

The labor that you are called to is the labor of loving God and neighbor
 (“your joy to do the Father’s will”)

The labor that you are to spend yourself is the call of discipleship
 (“it is the way the Master went”)
 deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.