

Mark 10:35-52 ~ Scripture Verses

The Request of James and John

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

³⁶ “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

³⁷ They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

³⁸ “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?”

³⁹ “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, ⁴⁰ 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.”

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² 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. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ 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.”

Blind Bartimaeus Receives His Sight

⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.”

⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

⁵² “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Mark 10:35-52 ~ Discussion Questions

1. What was the relationship between Jesus, James, and John? (Mark 3:17, 5:37, 9:2, 10:35)
2. What did James and John want from Jesus? What did it reflect about their character? (Matthew 19:28) What sort of unreasonable requests do you sometimes ask of God? In what ways do we vie for power and authority?
3. How did Jesus answer them? What figure of speech did he use? How did he explain the impossibility of granting what they requested? (Mark 10:38-40, Jeremiah 25:15, Habakkuk 2:16)
4. How did the other ten disciples react to James and John's request? Why do you suppose they reacted this way? (10:41)
5. What did Jesus warn his disciples about? What value did he place on serving? On status? On greatness? (10:42-45)
6. The final half-verse (10:45b) comprises Jesus' famous ransom saying and has given rise to intense debate. Why? What do you think it means? (Think about it: who is holding the many for a ransom payment?)
7. In very practical terms, how can you become a servant of (or to) others. Give two specific examples.
8. How did the blind man address Jesus and what did he ask for? (10:47-48)
9. How did the crowd treat the blind man when he was calling out to Jesus? (10:48) How did they treat him after Jesus spoke to him? (10:49) What can we learn from this?
10. In some sense, this miracle is an "acted parable." What's the meaning of it as a parable to us today?
11. What does it mean to be persistent in prayer?
12. What connection is there between your faith and whether (or how) God answers your prayers?

Mark 10:35-52 ~ Leader's Guide

1. What was the relationship between Jesus, James, and John? (Mark 3:17, 5:37, 9:2, 10:35)

James and John were each chosen by Jesus to be one of his 12 apostles, they were the sons of Zebedee (this is not the James that was Jesus' brother), and they, along with Peter, seemed to be favored by Jesus. He chose them to accompany him when he brought Jarius' daughter back to life (5:37) and to go up the mountain with him for the transfiguration (9:2). Thus, they obviously thought they were favored and could ask Jesus for a place of position and power.

2. What did James and John want from Jesus? What did it reflect about their character? (Matthew 19:28) What sort of unreasonable requests do you sometimes ask of God? In what ways do we vie for power and authority?

James and John wanted a position of power, authority, and glory. They weren't bad, probably just proud that Jesus had selected them at least twice to accompany him in special situations. Now they wanted something to show that they were special. Jesus had already told them what they would receive (Matthew 19:28), but they wanted a special position. Interestingly, according to Matthew's report, which is probably more accurate than Mark, it was James and John's mother who made the request to Jesus (Matt 20:20-21).

Matthew 19:28 – Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

3. How did Jesus answer them? What figure of speech did he use? How did he explain the impossibility of granting what they requested? (Mark 10:38-40, Jeremiah 25:15, Habakkuk 2:16)

Jesus' reply is at first a question, asking if they can share his cup and baptism. “Drink the cup I drink” is a Jewish expression that meant to share someone's fate. In the Old Testament, the cup of wine was a common metaphor for God's wrath against human sin and rebellion. (Jer 25:15, Habakkuk 2:16) The cup Jesus had to drink refers to his intense suffering and death. The verb ‘baptize’ can refer to being overwhelmed or flooded with catastrophes and is parallel to that of the cup.

James and John's first reply is “we can.” They perhaps have accepted suffering as simply a temporary prelude to more assured glory. Jesus tells them that suffering will indeed await them, but future position and glory is not, and cannot, be assured: it is a matter of God's grace. And Jesus would not usurp his Father's authority.

Jeremiah 25:15 – This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.”

Habakkuk 2:16 – You will be filled with shame instead of glory.

Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed!

The cup from the LORD’s right hand is coming around to you,
and disgrace will cover your glory.

4. How did the other ten disciples react to James and John’s request? Why do you suppose they reacted this way? (10:41)

We might charitably think the other disciples were more humble and happy to accept their place as one of 12 (Matt 19:28) but it may well be that they were jealous and indignant because they desired positions of prestige and power for themselves.

5. What did Jesus warn his disciples about? What value did he place on serving? On status? On greatness? (10:42-45)

As before, the motif of the disciples’ failure to understand leads on to further teaching by Jesus. Here it is on the significance of service. True greatness lies not in having a position of authority over others, but in being the slave of all, a theme that has dominated all Jesus’ teaching about discipleship in this section of the gospel. And as a final clinching argument, Jesus cites himself as an example in his role as Son of Man: the Son of Man himself came not to be served but to serve. By implication, any follower of the Son of Man can do no less.

6. The final half-verse (10:45b) comprises the famous ransom saying and has given rise to intense debate. Why? What do you think it means? (Think about it: who is holding the many for a ransom payment?)

Most simply, later interpretations say that *ransom* (in Greek, *lutron*) means the price paid for one’s release from slavery (or bondage) or the price to buy back a prisoner, i.e., Jesus gave his life to release us from bondage to sin and death.

The Oxford Bible Commentary (2001) says: It is one of the very few verses in the synoptics where Jesus gives any kind of interpretation of his death. Its authenticity is much disputed, as is the precise meaning of virtually every word in the saying. The saying is almost certainly pre-Markan: it assumes that Jesus’ death is unique, and yet Mark uses it in a context where Jesus sets himself up as an example to be imitated by others.

The background is often taken to be Isaiah 53, with Jesus here setting himself up as the suffering servant of this Servant Song, offering his life as a sin offering

for others. This is, however, unconvincing. The linguistic parallels between this verse and Isaiah 53 are virtually non-existent. Jesus is not here called ‘servant’; nor is the language of ‘ransom’ the same semantically as that of ‘sin offering’. The present verse does not even mention ‘sin’ as such. The word ‘ransom’ (Greek: *lutron*) is in fact used very widely, sometimes in relation to prices being paid, e.g. as the price paid to compensate for a crime, as the money equivalent to the sacrifice of the first-born child, as the money paid to buy back prisoners of war. Hence the idea in later Christian theology of Jesus’ death as some kind of price that is paid (e.g. for sin).

But the word is also used without any idea of a specific price paid: thus God’s deliverance of his people in the Exodus is frequently referred to as his ‘ransoming’ or ‘redeeming’ the people of God, with no idea of any price being paid. This may be the underlying idea here: Jesus’ death is presented as in some way the rescue, or redemption, of the new people of God. Why this needs a *death* is not spelt out.

Strictly speaking, the preposition translated in the NRSV as ‘for’ (Greek *anti*) means ‘instead of’: hence ideas of substitutionary atonement which have been read into, or out of, this verse. But this is by no means necessary. The word may simply mean ‘on behalf of’, ‘for the benefit of’ (like the Greek preposition *huper*, which is the most commonly used NT word in this context). Jesus’ saying here thus evokes the idea of a new people of God to be created and formed as a result of his life and death. Further, it is by virtue of his role as Son of Man, as the one who must suffer but who will then be vindicated, that this will be achieved. The saying coheres well with a number of other elements which are firmly embedded in the tradition (e.g. Jesus’ choice of exactly twelve disciples, perhaps symbolizing the new Israel), and hence may well be genuine.

7. In very practical terms, how can you become a servant of (or to) others. Give two specific examples.

8. How did the blind man address Jesus and what did he ask for? (10:47-48)

The blind man called Jesus “Son of David,” a messianic title (Isaiah 11:1-2, Jeremiah 23:5-6, Ezekiel 34:23-24). This is the only place in Mark where it is used to address Jesus.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 – ⁵“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. ⁶In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.

The blind man asked Jesus to “have mercy on me,” not for healing or sight until Jesus specifically asks him what he wants him to do (10:51) and then he says, “I want to see.” (See question 10 for further discussion of this.)

9. How did the crowd treat the blind man when he was calling out to Jesus? (10:48) How did they treat him after Jesus spoke to him? (10:49) What can we learn from this?

The crowd at first rebuked him and told him to be quiet. They were thinking that Jesus was an important man; he was on his way to Jerusalem on an important mission; he didn't have time to stop for this insignificant man.

But then Jesus said, "Call him."

The crowd was then more pleasant to the man, but still not respectful. "On your feet," they said, "He's calling you." Nevertheless, they recognized that the man, because he was called by Jesus, might have some small significance.

How often are we rude to or just ignore people we think are insignificant and unimportant? And then perhaps we're embarrassed to find out that the person is not as insignificant as we thought. Or, more likely, we continue to ignore someone who in God's sight may be favored. In Mark 10:32, Jesus said that many who are last (or insignificant) will be first (or be made significant) at the discretion of God. We must be careful not to exercise judgment based on earthly values.

10. In some sense, this miracle is an "acted parable." What's the meaning of it as a parable to us today?

The granting of physical sight to Bartimaeus symbolizes the true 'insight' which is necessary for any disciple of Jesus. Thus the consequence of the miracle is presented in language that is deliberately evocative: the miracle is due to Bartimaeus' 'faith' which is said to have 'saved' him, i.e. not only healed him physically but also brought a much deeper and more profound 'salvation;' and Bartimaeus then 'follows' Jesus 'on the way': this is the language of discipleship, and Mark's wording is almost certainly meant to suggest that Bartimaeus becomes a full disciple (not apostle), 'following' Jesus on the way which Jesus treads, i.e. the way of the cross.

Bartimaeus when blind addresses Jesus as Son of David. As such he is partly correct, and certainly shows a sufficient degree of faith to enable Jesus' miracle to take place. But the fuller sight—and the deeper insight into who Jesus really is—follows as a divine gift. Only then does Bartimaeus become a full disciple, 'following' Jesus 'on the way.'

11. What does it mean to be persistent in prayer?

12. What connection is there between your faith and whether (or how) God answers your prayers?

Mark 10:35-52 ~ Additional Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, explain what Jesus advised his disciples regarding greatness. How does this apply to your life today?
2. What did Jesus mean when he said he did not come to be served but to serve? Does this apply to you or only to Jesus?
3. Do you need to change your attitude or actions in light of Jesus' words about serving? How? Can you do it alone? Where can you turn for help?
4. *Ransom* was a Greek word most commonly used for the price paid to redeem a slave or release a prisoner. So Christ paid the price with his life to redeem us from what kind of slavery?
5. By the death of Jesus, salvation is available to "the many" (all people). But who actually receives it? Why do some people receive salvation and others do not?
6. How did the blind man react to criticism from the crowd? (10:48) What does this tell you? Are you a crowd follower when it comes to matters of faith?
7. When have you persistently prayed for one specific request? What happened?
8. The Bible tells us in several places that God answers persistent prayer. But what else does God look for in our prayers? Remember ACTS.
 - A. _____
 - C. _____
 - T. _____
 - S. _____
9. What is your worst habit? Have you prayed about it? Do you pray about it regularly?
10. In living your life, rank the following items in order of importance.

_____ Education	_____ Experience
_____ Circumstances	_____ Giftedness
_____ Attitude	_____ Appearance
_____ Upbringing	_____ Intelligence
_____ Friendships	_____ Other _____