

Why Christmas? Ransom
Mark 10:35-45
ABC 12/3/23

Today is the 1st Sunday of Advent which means Christmas is coming. The word *advent* means *arrival, appearing, or coming into place*. We speak of Christ's *1st advent* & *2nd advent*, that is, His 1st & 2nd comings to earth. His 1st advent was His incarnation & coming at what we call *Christmas*. We're eagerly awaiting His 2nd advent as well. Advent is about the coming of Jesus into the world.

- It's about the Son of God, who existed eternally with the Father as **the radiance of His glory & the exact representation of His nature**, taking on human nature & becoming a man (Heb 1:3).
- It's about the birth of a Man by a virgin conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit so that He is the Son of God in an utterly unique way (Lk 1:35).
- It's about the coming of a Man named Jesus in whom **all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form** (Col 2:9).
- It's about the coming of the **fullness of time** that had been prophesied by the prophets that...
 - a Ruler would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2);
 - a Child would be born called **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace** (Is 9:6);
 - a Messiah, an anointed One, a shoot from the stem of Jesse, a son of David, a King would come (Is 11:1-4; Zech 9:9);
 - &, according to our text today, Christmas is about the coming of the Son of Man who **did not come to be served, but to serve, & to give His life a ransom for many** (Mk 10:45).

Over the 4 Sundays of Advent we're going to be looking at why Jesus came. The fact that Jesus came is important but not as important as why He came. Let's read our text, **Mk 10:32-45**.

How does one become great? There have been any number of celebrities who've been considered great. What's Wayne Gretzky's nickname? *The Great One*. Today people are called the *GOAT*, an acronym for *Greatest of All Time*. But what does it mean to be great in God's eyes? You'd think by this time the disciples would have understood how to be great in Christ's kingdom. They should have known His kingdom was upside down to the world's system. They should have grasped by the reason why Jesus had come & the reason He was going to suffer & die. After all, He'd told them enough times, & Mark says **He spoke plainly about this** (8:32). But our text makes it clear that this isn't the case. Jesus' disciples were hearing for at least the 3rd time about His impending & necessary death. We looked at this last week in vs 32-34. How do the disciples respond to this?

1. Request 35-36

Jesus tells them again about His coming suffering, death, & resurrection. How do the disciples respond? As they've done before: *What's in it for me?* James & John are 2 of the inner 3 disciples. The nickname Jesus gave them, **sons of thunder** (3:17), may indicate fiery or forceful personalities, & it could be that these attributes prompt them to act. Jesus has told them they're heading to Jerusalem where He will suffer & die. What's their 1st thought? *If He's going to Jerusalem He must be going to set up His kingdom. Who better than us to be His chief advisors when He assumes His throne.* James & John seize the opportunity & ask Jesus to grant **whatever we ask**. They're hoping to get a blanket approval from Jesus before He hears what they want. Jesus doesn't fall for it & asks, **what do you want Me to do for you?** They get right to it. **37**

James & John get one thing right & most everything else wrong. They're right when they say that Jesus is destined for **glory**. Unfortunately, everything else they got wrong. According to Matthew's account, James & John were accompanied by their mother when they approached Jesus. Without getting into it, their mom was probably Jesus' mother's sister. This would make her Jesus' aunt & James & John were His cousins.¹ James & John were playing the family card by bringing their mother with them (Mt 20:20). Their request reflects the common practice of rulers to promote family members to places of honor. In essence they say, *When You take power, we'd like the top 2 places in Your cabinet.* They're making a play to squeeze Peter & the others out. They're even saying they want to be placed above all past & future believers. In one sense, their request is commendable in that it shows they believe Jesus is the Messiah & that He'll prove victorious in His role. At the same time, the request is appalling because Jesus has been repeatedly teaching them the humble servant role of true disciples & that to be 1st they must become last (9:33–36). James & John have obviously not learned this lesson. Besides that, He's just predicted His own suffering & death for the 3rd time. They must not have been listening. They continue to be spiritually dull & don't understand Jesus' messianic role (4:13, 40; 6:52; 7:18; 8:17–18, 21, 32; 9:5–6, 19, 32). Jesus responds with patience & grace that their request is misguided. They don't understand either the nature or the gravity of Jesus' messianic role.

¹ See John MacArthur, *Mark 9–16*, p 105

2. Responses A. Jesus 38

Are you able to drink ...? is a rhetorical question, meaning, *You can't drink the cup ...*, though they'll take it as a real question & will answer shortly.² Jesus compares His suffering to come with 2 parallel images, a cup & a baptism or immersion. Both are metaphors for His suffering & death. Jesus will use the cup metaphor again in Gethsemane (14:36; cf Jn 18:11). There Jesus pleaded with His Father, if there was another way besides His death on the cross, could He please take that way. Here's what He prayed: **Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will** (Mk 14:36). The cup was the death He was about to endure & implies He'll experience the wrath of God as a vicarious sacrifice for sins. The use of **baptism** in the sense of suffering is more obscure. Suffering is sometimes described as an overwhelming deluge of water (Ps 42:7; 69:1–2; Is 43:2), & *baptize* can carry this sense of being overwhelmed or deluged. Here it refers to Jesus being swept away in death by the events that will shortly unfold in Jerusalem (Lk 12:50).

B. James & John Notice their response. 39a

Displaying the same overconfidence that Peter would when he insisted he wouldn't deny Jesus, James & John claim, **We are able**. They believe they can endure a little hardship if Jesus will give them what they want: seats of power & corner offices. Their answer revealed they didn't understand the ramifications of what they were asking. When the moment of crisis came, their overconfidence was exposed, & they fled along with the rest of the apostles (Mt 26:56).³ They didn't know they'd abandon Him at the 1st sign of trouble & leave Him to drink the cup & undergo the baptism utterly alone.⁴ Though their request for the best seats was wrong, showing their pride & not humility, they show some courage in their willingness to answer Jesus' call to give up their lives for Him & His cause (9:34–35).

C. Jesus responds by confirming the cost of their commitment. 39b-40

² Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, pp 454–455

³ John MacArthur, *Mark 9–16*, p 107

⁴ R. C. Sproul, *Mark*, p 267

Though they can't drink Jesus' cup, they will indeed suffer. They will drink the cup & be submerged in suffering. As we know, James was killed by Herod Agrippa I in the early 40s (Acts 12:2). While John outlived the other apostles (Rev 1:9-11), he would suffer greatly as well & died in captivity. Jesus then states that granting such places of honor isn't His right, **but it is for those for whom it has been prepared** (40). **It has been prepared** indicates the decision belongs to God alone. Matthew makes this explicit by adding that it is **prepared by My Father** (20:23). Who are those **for whom it has been prepared**? The text doesn't say & perhaps that's the point: only God determines such things. Think of the irony that in Mark's gospel the only people to have places on His right & left are the 2 criminals crucified beside Him, **one on His right & one on His left** (15:27).

3. Reaction 41

The scheme of James & John hasn't gone unnoticed by the other disciples, who now become **indignant** toward them. They're angry because James & John beat them to the punch & may now have an edge over them for the power slots. Their selfish competitiveness continued even at the Last Supper where **there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest** (Lk 22:24). Jesus then calls the 12 to Himself & calmly reproveth & admonishes them.⁵

4. Restatement 42-44

Again Jesus calls the disciples together for private instruction. They've consistently failed to respond to His teaching & there's a sense of redundancy as He summons them again for another lesson on servant leadership. This will serve as the climax of His teaching on the suffering role of the Messiah & cross-bearing discipleship (8:31-38; 9:31-50; 10:32-45). He begins by contrasting leadership in the world with leadership in God's kingdom using 2 pairs of sayings in synonymous parallel:

The world's way: **you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; their great men exercise authority over them.**

The Kingdom way: **it is not this way among you, Whoever wishes to be great ... shall be your servant
Whoever wishes to be first ... shall be slave of all.**

⁵ William Hendriksen & Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, p 413

You know introduces what was common knowledge through everyday experience. One didn't need to look far to see the heavy-handed rule of the Romans & the Herodian dynasty. The world's rulers govern by power & coercion. **Lord it over** & **exercise authority** emphasize a negative sense of power & oppression. While this is the world's way of leadership, Jesus' disciples are to operate under a different set of values. Jesus doesn't so much command what they must do, but simply states the way things are: **It is not this way among My disciples**. This isn't an admonition to behave in a certain way but a description of the way things actually are in the kingdom of God.⁶ Jesus is driving home what He's already said in 9:35, **If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all & servant of all**. Though **servant** & **slave** can be used synonymously, **slave** is the lowlier term, indicating complete ownership by another to whom total allegiance is given. Servants did a job for you. Slaves were completely owned & controlled. Jesus' point is that His disciples are to consider everyone their master & themselves slaves to serve all.⁷ Disciples of Jesus are to be radically other-centered, focused on meeting the needs of others rather than controlling others to meet their own needs. The values of the kingdom turn the world's system upside down.

5. Reason Jesus then gives an example of what He means & tells us the *WHY* of Christmas. Jesus has told His disciples that He must die, but this is the only passage in Mark that tells us *why* He must die, the reason He must die: He does so **to give His life a ransom for many**.⁸ **45**

The climax of Jesus' teaching comes as He applies this paradox to Himself. The ultimate act of servant leadership is the Son of Man's sacrificial death as a ransom payment for the sins of the world. No one expected the Messiah, who was destined to receive eternal glory, worship, honor, & rule, to come as a lowly servant. Still less would they expect Him **to give His life as a ransom for many**. But this is why He came. This is the *WHY* of Christmas. In English we don't use **ransom** except in relation to kidnapping. But the word means the price paid for redeeming captives or slaves, loosing them from their bonds and setting them at liberty.⁹ The ransomer would make a

⁶ James Edwards, *Mark*, p 325

⁷ MacArthur, p 109

⁸ David E. Garland, *Mark*, The NIV Application Commentary, p 413

⁹ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, Logos edition

payment in order to buy their freedom. **Ransom** is commonly used in the LXX of God's deliverance of the nation Israel from slavery in Egypt (Ex 6:6; 15:13; Dt 7:8; 9:26, 13:6; etc). Though the noun *ransom* appears in the NT only here & in Matthew's parallel (20:28), other forms are common in the NT to describe the redemption accomplished through the sacrificial death of Christ. Eph 1:7 says that in Christ **we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.** The sense here is that Jesus' death will pay the price to set His people free. The reason we need a ransom to be paid for us is that we're slaves to sin & are alienated from a holy God. When Jesus gave His life as a ransom, our slave-masters, sin & death & the devil, had to give up their claim on us. & the result was that we could be adopted into the family of God. Paul put it like this in Gal 4:4–5, **when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.** The redemption or the ransom paid frees us to be a part of God's family. We have been slaves to sin but Jesus pays a ransom & redeems us out of slavery into God's family. To do that, God's Son had to become a human so He could suffer & die in our place to pay the ransom. That's why Jesus came. Heb 2:14 puts it like this, **since the children share in flesh & blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.** The reason Jesus took on human flesh was so He could die & in dying pay a ransom & free us from the power of death.

Jesus didn't come to be served. He wasn't like other kings. It's hard to imagine just how low Jesus Christ went for us. Eternal, sinless God, in pure, joyful oneness left perfection to enter sinful, corrupt, fallen planet Earth & be born as a baby, live here, serve here, & then accept & endure God's holy wrath for our sin upon Himself. Jesus Himself is the ransom, our substitute. He dies a vicarious, substitutionary death on behalf of sinners. He gave His life to pay the price in full. The Son of Man gives His own life to provide our redemption or release. To whom was the ransom paid? Some have claimed it was paid to Satan.¹⁰ That's wrong. Jesus didn't pay a ransom to Satan. He

¹⁰ Origen, *Comm. Mt* 16:8; Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism*, pp 21–23

crushed Satan's head. It was paid to the holy & just God. The price of sin had to be paid to God to satisfy His divine justice. The price that Jesus paid satisfied God. His death propitiated God's anger against sin. His death settled God's justice. Jesus gave Himself to satisfy the demands of God's justice, so He purchased our freedom from the just wrath of God. This is why Paul declares, **You were bought at a price** (1 Cor 7:23). Sinners, who were hopelessly in debt to God, aren't required to pay if they receive the gift that the debt has been paid for us by the Suffering Servant of Israel.¹¹ What is the price? Jesus gave His life as a ransom, He had to die. In Acts 20:28 it says, **the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood**. Let it sink in that this act of giving His life as a ransom was intentional. He came to do it. Jesus didn't come to earth for other reasons & then get caught up in a plot that resulted in His death. No, He came to die. Jesus is knowingly walking into the jaws of suffering & death. Jesus sees His death as a ransom to release others from bondage. He is paying what they cannot pay so that they may go free. He is substituting Himself for them. At the cost of His life, they get freedom. This ransom is a substitution. Jesus in the place of the many. The qualification that He does this **for many** doesn't mean for some, but not all. Instead, it contrasts the *one* who died with the *many* who are redeemed. The effects of Jesus' sacrifice extend to all who will accept it. But the emphasis falls on the many who need ransoming & on the action of the One who offers His life as that ransom. A single life is given for the ransom of many others. This almost certainly has as its background Is 53:11-12, where the suffering Servant will justify many & bear their iniquities. We are slaves of sin & we need to be ransomed from its power (Jn 8:34). Paul says, **The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Rom 6:23). There are 2 destinies: eternal life, & eternal death (Mt 25:46). Eternal death is what we need to be saved from because of our sin. How does Jesus ransom us? Jesus says, **The Son of Man came ... to give His life a ransom for many**. The ransom price is His life. This is why the Bible says again & again that Jesus died to save us. **While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us** (Rom 5:8). We were **justified by His blood** (Rom 5:9). **We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son** (Rom 5:10). **He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross** (1 Pt 2:24). **Christ also died**

¹¹ Sproul, p 269

for sins once for all, *the just for the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God (1 Pt 3:18). The heart of the gospel, the why of Christmas, is that Christ came to give His life a ransom for us. That is, to save us from our sin & from its guilt & power & penalty in eternal punishment. That's what Christmas is all about. That's what Mk 10:45 is all about. Jesus doesn't merely come as another teacher or philosopher or politician or mystic. He comes to do 2 things. One: to give His life as a ransom for many. & 2^{ndly}, to serve His disciples, to serve all those who will stop trying to earn His approval by serving Him, & will humble themselves like little children & let Him serve them. This is the help we need & the power we need. He is our Redeemer from guilt & death & hell. He is our Helper day in & day out as He serves us by the power of His Spirit. The Christian life is a life of serving others in the strength that He supplies as our Servant. It's loving others with the love He gives us as our Servant. The disciples want a Messiah who is beyond suffering & death & who will give them all of their heart's desires. But you can never understand who Jesus is without understanding the necessity of His final destiny of suffering & death.¹² His own willingness to humble Himself to the point of giving His life as a ransom for many must be reflected in all His followers. Every follower of Jesus must, by God's grace, show Christ's love & service to others.¹³ True discipleship is other-centered, not self-centered. Paul says it best in Phil 2:3–4: **Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.** This is the servant's heart that focuses on encouraging & helping others to be all God has called them to be. In His vicarious, substitutionary death on behalf of sinners, Jesus gave His life to pay to God in full the price of sin for all the people who would ever be saved throughout history. Christ's death propitiated God's wrath & fulfilled the demands of His justice for the redeemed. The one sacrifice of the Son of Man paid the ransom for the **many** who believe (Rom 5:12–21; 1 Tim 2:6; 1 Pt 2:24).¹⁴ Paul identifies Jesus' death on the cross as a sacrifice of atonement that accomplishes our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins (Rom 3:24–25; 5:9; Eph 1:7, 14; Col

¹² Garland, p 414

¹³ Hendriksen, p 416

¹⁴ MacArthur, p 109

1:14). For the writer to the Hebrews, Jesus' death represents His once-for-all entrance into the Most Holy Place to achieve eternal redemption (Heb 7:27; 9:11–12, 28; 10:11–14). For John, Jesus is **the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*** (1 Jn 2:2). Peter says we weren't redeemed with perishable things like silver & gold, **but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ*** (1 Pt 1:18–19). & in Rev, Jesus is the Lamb who was slain, who deserves all glory, honor, & power because with His blood He purchased people from every tribe, language, people, & nation (Rev 5:9–11; 7:14; 12:11; 13:8). This is the *WHY* of Christmas. Have you received the gift of salvation that Jesus died to provide for you? If so, are you a servant & slave of all? PRAY

Communion -- Jesus' death wasn't a tragic accident or a courageous martyrdom. It was a supreme act of sacrifice for us. It comes as a gift from God. Jesus has paid with His life the infinite debt you owed. There's a cup that Jesus did drink. He took our place & become our substitute & sin-bearer. He took our sin, defilement, & guilt upon Himself, & the holy justice of God's righteous character was poured on Him. The only way that Jesus could redeem us was to give His life as a ransom. Jesus came as a Baby so that He might live a sinless, righteous life & then die as a ransom for us. This is the part of the Christmas story that we too often forget: Those cute little hands, fashioned by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb, were made so that nails might be driven through them into a cross. Those chubby baby feet, pink & unable to walk, would one day walk up a dusty hill to be lifted up on a cross. That sweet infant's head with sparkling eyes & eager mouth was formed so that someday Roman soldiers might force a crown of thorns onto it. That tender body, warm & soft, wrapped in swaddling clothes, would one day be ripped open by a spear. The blood flushing those rosy cheeks was made so that it might be shed on our behalf. That little, smiling mouth was made so that it might shout triumphantly, **It is finished!** Jesus was born to die as our ransom. PASS

When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, & the apostles with Him. & He said to them, *I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God* & when He had taken some bread & given thanks, He broke it & gave it to them, saying, *This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me* (Lk 22:14-16, 19).

Jesus was born, He came so that He could give His life as a ransom for you. He died so that you might have new life, joyful life, eternal life with Him. Let's eat the bread remembering the ransom He paid for us.

As Jesus passed the cup to His disciples He said, **This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood** (Lk 22:20). Jesus established a new covenant between God & man, one in which He became the sacrificial ransom & in which He gives us His righteousness. We drink of the cup remembering the ransom price our Savior paid for us, thanking Him with great joy for redeeming us from our slavery to sin.