

## **Mark 10:32-52 The Trek of the Befuddled**

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Earlier in Mark 8:31 and 9:31, Jesus had taught the disciples about the necessity of the upcoming Passion Week when he would be arrested, crucified, and then resurrected. The first time, Peter argued with Him and Jesus sharply rebuked him. The second time we read that “they did not understand this statement but they were afraid to ask”. Naturally they did not want to lose their leader whom they dearly loved and depended on. Peter even asked in 10:28 what they were going to get out of leaving their family and business to follow Jesus, assuming that if Jesus died there would be nothing. Now in Mark 10:32-34, Jesus tells them a third time as they walk toward Jerusalem, but this time we see the fear the disciples have of going there. The last three times they were there the religious leaders tried to kill them, and the disciples know that this time they would be successful. In Mark 10:32, we can see their reluctance since Jesus is walking way ahead of them. They are practically moon walking in an attempt to slow down the inevitable. Therefore Jesus “took the twelve aside” to tell them what was going to happen. Jesus gave many more details this time that make it sound even worse such as betrayal to the priests, condemned to death by the priests, then handed over to the Gentiles who will mock Him, spit on Him, scourge, and kill Him. Three days later He would rise again. Even more perplexing to us is that Jesus knows all this, so He is directing His own destiny. The disciples (and us) are not used to people purposefully walking into torture and a death sentence. In fact, as Jesus draws nearer to His destiny the disciples go farther away from understanding.

Liberal theologians and historians claim that Jesus was a Hebrew philosopher and revolutionary who inadvertently walked into a trap in Jerusalem and randomly was killed. Others think Jesus entertained delusions of grandeur, but miscalculated the opposition. Baloney, Jesus being omniscient knew exactly what was going to happen, and He willfully gave Himself up to accomplish God’s plan of redemption for mankind. That Jesus knowing all these details further reveals His deity. The law of compounded probability (I made that up) says that for any prediction of the future, specific multiple details make it infinitely impossible to predict. For instance, to say you were going to die on this trip might have a 50% probability. But if you add details like who is going to arrest you, who they will deliver you to (Chief priests), that you will be mocked, scourged and killed by Gentiles, then three days later rise again, that has almost an infinite probability against it. The disciples totally did not get with the program of the cross as evidenced by the action of James and John in v.35.

### Mark 10:35-45, Selfish Ambition

While Jesus is teaching on the suffering of the Passion Week, the disciples demonstrate their lack of understanding of the necessity of the crucifixion. They are not expecting the death and resurrection, but they are expecting the imminent setting up of the Kingdom of God. Jesus has already promised them they will reign and rule with Him in the Kingdom, so let’s get this show on the road. We see periodically in the four Gospel accounts the arguing among them about who will be the greatest in the Kingdom (Mark 9:34), and they were no doubt jockeying for position like ruthless executives in a Fortune 500 corporation. Naturally we are shocked, and expected the very chosen disciples of Christ to be better than that, but human nature is complex. These wonderful faithful disciples were acting like brazen fortune hunters as if this were a competition. Even at the Last Supper, right before Jesus’ arrest, they were still arguing over who was the greatest and who deserved the highest position in the Kingdom of God (Luke 22:24). John and James now come to Jesus to ask the favor that in the Kingdom they will sit in the places of highest honor and authority. In Matthew 20:20’s parallel of the same story, they pull out all the stops by bringing their mother in to lobby Jesus. It doesn’t get any more devious than to pull out the “kind old mother card”.

Jesus’ response in Mark 10:38 was that they had no idea what they were asking because they do not understand what true greatness is in God’s view. They misinterpret what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah. They understand the significance of the Passover lamb, and the shedding of innocent blood to cover sin, but they do not comprehend that Jesus is the ultimate Passover lamb of God who came to cover all the sin of all who believe through one ultimate sacrifice of infinite value. They think that the Kingdom of God is like any worldly kingdom with its pork barrel politics and nepotism. They want the perks and not the sacrifice, and they want people to serve them-not vice versa. Their fantasy differs little from that of the Roman tyrants they hate. Should they replace the self-serving power structure of the Romans with their own self-serving power structure? Jesus used two metaphors to try to explain to them the persecution and suffering that He was facing and they also would face later. Jesus asked, “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” The cup signifies the suffering and death that is approaching, and the word baptism was used as signifying an identification with His suffering and death. John and James answered very quickly and easily “We are able.” This was classic human overconfidence and naivety. They had no idea what they were saying or the degree of suffering they had coming. They say “we are able” thinking it will be a little hardship or maybe a fight as a means to a selfish end. The irony is that Jesus can’t promise them places of honor, but He can promise them suffering and martyrdom. In fact, James was the first to be martyred

(Acts 12:2), and John was the last.

Jesus asked them if they were able to drink the cup of suffering and death that awaited Him. What was the nature of Christ's suffering? First, those whom He loved would be disloyal, and one would betray Him, but all would flee. Second, He was rejected by His own country, Israel. Then He was falsely accused, falsely arrested, suffered a series of illegal trials, and convicted even though everyone knew He was innocent. He was ridiculed, mocked, slapped, and spit on. He was beaten at least 6 times, the last a scourging by the Roman soldiers that stripped all the flesh off His back. Finally, He had to die the worst kind of painful death, and worst of all He had to carry the burden of the sins of the whole world on His shoulders.

### Jesus Contrasts the World's View of Leadership with His

In Mark 10:42-43, Jesus then gathered all His disciples for a teaching moment about what leadership and greatness was all about in the Kingdom of God. The other disciples were angry at James and John because they think the brothers beat them to the punch and may have a competitive advantage. Therefore Jesus reveals what leadership in the Kingdom is about. In the world, leaders are arrogant, aggressive, domineering, and competitive self-promoters. I saw a quote from the great conqueror King Genghis Khan, "True greatness is to break your enemies, to take from them all the things that are theirs, to hear them weeping over all that they cherished, to take their horses and lie with their women." True greatness to Jesus is to be a servant, and whoever wishes to be first shall be the slave of all. What does it mean to have a servant for a Lord? The Lord Jesus is the ultimate servant leader, and is the perfect example of true greatness. Jesus voluntarily gave up His glory in heaven and took on the flesh of a servant. The climax of which was His death freely given "as a ransom for many". Jesus' lifelong purpose is given here in Mark 10:45, "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many".

### Conclusion

While Jesus was telling the disciples about all that He was about to give, the disciples came with a shopping list of all that they want to get. The absurdity of this scene brings the necessity of the cross into focus. Because of our selfish ambitions and our constant maneuvering for position, money, and power---Christ had to die on the cross to save us from ourselves. Jesus' life and teaching turns the worldly understanding of greatness upside down. Self-giving service is the only greatness recognized by God.

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