

☒ LIFE OF JESUS

September 12, 2021 | *Jesus Predicts His Death; the Request of James and John*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

- List the top 3–5 ways in which Jesus exemplified how we as His followers are to live.
- Read Mark 10:32–45.
- Pray that this passage would convict you of any pride gripping your life and convince you to become a servant to everyone.

THIS WEEK

☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus expects His disciples to follow His example by serving others.

☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

Adopt a servant-to-all mindset.

☒ MEDITATE

“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 10:45).

GETTING STARTED

+Use this section to begin considering how you can adopt a servant-to-all mindset.

Q: *What is a servant?*

Q: *What are some of the best displays of service you have witnessed?*

A few years ago, I co-taught a week-long course on discipleship in Mumbai, India. One of the lessons examined the relationship between discipleship and Jesus's command for His disciples to love one another as He had loved them from John 13:34. At the end of the lesson, the headmaster of the school addressed the students. From the way he was speaking, I could tell he was leading up to something. At the conclusion of his address, the headmaster asked the students, "Who is the least important person in the room?" In unison, about forty Indian men stood up and said aloud "I am!" It was one of the most moving and unexpected moments of my life. I was completely caught off-guard, by both the question and the response. Later, I asked the headmaster what was behind the question and the full-bodied response. He told me a few months prior he had recognized a problem within many of the churches he visited. In various ways, many of the pastors were setting a poor example of servanthood within their churches. He recognized that this attitude was certain to filter down through the rest of the church, and he was determined to do something about it. He decided to teach a series of lessons on servanthood among believers and used John 13:34 as one of his key texts. He began and ended each session by asking the students "Who is the least important person in the room?" At first, the students did not understand, but as the series continued, they caught on and responded, "I am," with more boldness each time.

In this week's lesson, Jesus presents servanthood as the greatest role in His kingdom. The way up in His kingdom is actually down. If Jesus's disciples want to be the greatest in His kingdom, they must learn to serve the most. They had to learn to think of themselves as the least important person in every room they entered. The same is true for us today.

Q: *How is servanthood countercultural in our context?*

Q: *In what ways is God calling you to adopt a servant's heart?*

APPLICATION POINT – Are you willing to answer the question, “Who is the least important person in the room” in the same way as the Indian brothers? If you are like me and most other people I know, the first thing you do on entering a room is size everybody else up. Who is the smartest? Who is the most athletic? Who is the best looking? Who is the best dressed? Who could juggle the best? What a terribly judgmental attitude to have! The worst part about this mindset is that it views others as competitors rather than as people made in God’s image. This is even worse when it occurs within the context of the body of Christ. How different would your life become if upon entering a room you viewed everyone else as a person to serve? Start asking yourself, “who is the least important person in here” and immediately respond to yourself, “I am.” Doing so will change your church culture. By God’s grace, it may even begin to change your home, your workplace, and every other place you find yourself.

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+In this week’s passage, Jesus urged His disciples to be eager to serve others rather than seek their own prestige or position. In doing so, they would be following Jesus’s own example.

1. JESUS PREDICTED HIS SUFFERING, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION.

2. JAMES AND JOHN LOOKED AFTER THEIR OWN INTERESTS.

3. JESUS CALLS FOR SERVANTHOOD.

GOING DEEPER

+In Mark 10:32–45, Jesus was journeying toward Jerusalem and preparing His disciples for His suffering. The magnitude of what was about to happen continued to allude them. James and John used this occasion to attempt to secure their own interests in His kingdom. Their efforts drew the ire of the others, not because they understood the nature of Jesus’s kingdom but because they did not want to be outmaneuvered. They had all misunderstood what makes someone great in Jesus’s kingdom.

1. JESUS PREDICTED HIS SUFFERING, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION.

▣ **MARK 10:32–34**

Q: *How did Jesus's followers react to His journey toward Jerusalem?*

Q: *Why did they react this way?*

With the celebration of Passover approaching, Jesus started out for Jerusalem, joining thousands of other travelers making their way to the feast. By this point in His ministry, He had become quite an irritation for the Jewish elites, so much so that they were intent on killing Him. Evidently, their intentions were well known because Jesus's journey to Jerusalem drew reactions of awe and fear from those traveling with Him. Although His life would be in danger upon arrival, Jesus continued toward Jerusalem. He even walked ahead of the group He was traveling with. Despite the certain agony that lay ahead, Jesus remained resolute. Despite what others said or thought, nothing deterred Him from His mission.

Q: *Do you amaze others in the way you live for Jesus Christ?*

Q: *How can you live audaciously for Jesus?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus amazed those around Him with His resolve to carry out God's mission in His life. If we seek to be biblically faithful, mission-minded followers of Jesus, our lives will also draw the amazement of those around us. The Christian life is inherently countercultural. It entails exchanging the priorities of this world for God's priorities. Such a commitment will be evident to those around you, and they will find it strange. It will show up in the kind of car you buy, the kind of conversations you have, and the kind of activities you seek. If you appear completely normal to the non-believers around you, you should wonder how well you are living out your faith. It may be time for you to do something others would consider strange.

Q: *What title did Jesus use to refer to Himself?*

Q: *How would Jesus's prediction have challenged the disciples' conception of the Messiah?*

Jesus referred to Himself as “the Son of Man,” a messianic title stemming from Daniel 7:13. At the time of Jesus, the Jews were anticipating a coming king who would end the foreign occupation in Israel and inaugurate a new kingdom among God’s people. This kingdom would be the perfect expression of God’s rule on earth. By referring to Himself as “the Son of Man,” Jesus was claiming to be the Jewish Messiah, a claim that would have aroused certain expectations among His followers. They envisioned a king who would remove the foreign oppressors. But Jesus offered a radically different portrayal of the Messiah than they expected. Rather than leading the Jews to overthrow their foreign oppressors, Jesus said He, the Messiah, would be handed over to those foreign rulers by His own people. Then He would be beaten and abused before finally being executed. If this were not enough to shatter their expectations, He concluded with this strange bit about rising from the dead after three days. Nothing in Jesus’s portrayal of the Messiah lined up with His followers’ expectations. But this is the story of Israel’s Messiah told by the Old Testament (Isaiah 52:13–53:12).

Q: *How has Jesus challenged your expectations of what He would be like?*

Q: *Why was Jesus’s vision of the Messiah so different from His followers’ vision?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus did not meet their expectations because they had bought into a different vision of what the Messiah would be like and what He would do. They thought their biggest need was relief from foreign oppression. If this were the case, they had no use for a slain Messiah. But their greatest need was not relief from foreign oppression. Their greatest need was the same as all humanity’s. They needed to be forgiven of sin and welcomed into God’s family. When the diagnosis is wrong, the wrong treatment inevitably follows. Has Jesus failed to meet your expectations? The most likely explanation is that you have misunderstood your greatest need. If you think your greatest need is more self-confidence, a better financial portfolio, or more friends, you too will have little use for a slain Messiah. Rather than adopting the world’s understanding of your greatest needs, ask God to reshape how you see yourself and your needs with the gospel. If you are willing to do this, you will find Jesus is precisely the Messiah you need.

2. JAMES AND JOHN LOOKED AFTER THEIR OWN INTERESTS.

▣ **MARK 10:35–40**

Q: *How would you describe James and John's request?*

Q: *What were James and John envisioning?*

After Jesus revealed He would suffer and die in Jerusalem, two of His disciples, James and John, decided it was an opportune time to secure their positions within His kingdom. They asked to sit at Jesus's right and left hands, the positions closest to Jesus and of the greatest influence and honor. Their request was both misinformed and egotistical. It was misinformed because they were obviously still holding to a view of the Messiah shaped by their culture. Although Jesus had just announced His suffering and death, they still would not jettison such firmly entrenched beliefs. It was egotistical because they intended to set themselves over the rest of the disciples and everyone else in Jesus's kingdom.

Q: *How are you like James and John?*

Q: *How can you refuse to become involved in this type of behavior at your work?*

APPLICATION POINT – James and John's audacity is hard for us to imagine. How could two of Jesus's disciples be so ill-informed, both of His mission and the nature of His followers? The only explanation is that they were just caught up in the daily grind around them. When we are caught up in our daily grind, it is difficult to see the really important things. We also become callous toward our peers as we jockey for position with them. Although you are not asking Jesus for the first seat at the table in His kingdom, you very well may be caught up in the same type of behavior at work or school without ever noticing. We can see the same sinful intentions when children cut in front of one another trying to be first in line. This mindset is all around us, and if we do not consciously refuse to participate, we will also be caught up in it. Identify the rat-races consuming your life and determine how you can put the glory of Christ on display in their midst. You may not be able to completely remove yourself, but you can show everyone involved that you serve a different master.

Q: *What are the cup and the baptism that Jesus referred to here?*

Q: *How would James and John be linked to Jesus?*

Part of Jesus's response to James and John is easy to understand. He could not guarantee them a prominent position in His kingdom because He does not make those decisions. He did not say so, but we may infer that this honor is reserved for the Father. The Son walks in complete obedience to the Father and would not dare usurp the role reserved for Him. The second element of Jesus's response is more challenging. He asked if James and John were able to drink the cup He would drink and be baptized with the same baptism. They answered affirmatively, but, since they were misinformed about the kingdom, they were also misinformed about what they were agreeing to. But Jesus did affirm that they would follow His lead in this. James and John answered better than they knew.

But what are the cup and the baptism He was referring to? They are metaphorical ways of referring to God's wrath and Jesus's approaching death. The cup was widely recognized as a sign of God's judgment. The Old Testament prophets frequently depicted God's wrath as a cup to be drunk (Isaiah 51:17, 22; Jeremiah 25:15), and Revelation picks up on this same imagery (Revelation 14:10). To understand what Jesus meant by baptism, we have to consider the nature of baptism itself. At this time, baptism involved fully immersing someone in water, surrounded and completely overwhelmed by water. Thus, baptism may be a way of referring to being completely overwhelmed. Seen in conjunction with the cup, baptism in this sense connects most clearly to Jesus's death.

One final question from these verses needs to be answered. Jesus vicariously endured the wrath of God and died for the sins of others. Although Jesus affirmed that James and John would drink the cup He drank and be baptized with the baptism He endured, the Bible gives no indication their participation in these would be vicarious like Jesus's was. Instead, the cup and baptism should be taken to mean they would suffer for the sake of Jesus.

Q: *Are Christians in modernized societies protected from suffering because of their faith?*

Q: *Have you suffered because of your faith in Jesus Christ?*

APPLICATION POINT – This point serves as a counter to the previous point. Not only should we refuse to see our faith in Christ as a means of obtaining wealth and honor in this world, we should expect our faith to lead to our suffering, especially as communities become more hostile to the gospel. James and John seem to unknowingly invite suffering into their lives by agreeing to drink the cup of Jesus and follow in His “baptism.” We will not have the benefit of naivety. If we are committed to Christ, there will be times our faith will cause us to suffer. It will vary in form and degree, but suffering will come for the followers of Jesus. The only question that remains is whether we will be ready to endure the suffering caused by our faith. To prepare ourselves for suffering, we need to strengthen our resolve to follow Jesus now. This will take sacrifice on our part. What sacrifices do you need to make in order to strengthen your faith in Jesus? What spiritual projects, perhaps ones stemming from this study of Jesus’s life, have you put off? Or what projects have you started but given up on? If you are unwilling to make sacrifices for your faith when the imposition stems from yourself, you will be unlikely to be willing when the impetus comes from someone else. This week, revisit the commitments and convictions you have let fall by the wayside and ask whether God is leading you to pick them up again to strengthen your faith.

3. JESUS CALLS FOR SERVANTHOOD.

■ MARK 10:41–45

Q: *What example did Jesus use as a contrast to how His disciples should view authority and service?*

Q: *How is Jesus’s command counterintuitive?*

James and John’s attempt to secure their positions in Jesus’s kingdom did not stay hidden from the other disciples. They were predictably ticked-off these two tried to gain the upper hand on them. This kind of action would have been considered a betrayal of trust. The disciples’ reaction, however, revealed that their hearts

were not in the right place either. Their indignation shows that they held the same view of Jesus's kingdom. They believed His kingdom would look like the kingdoms of the world. Had they the correct understanding of Jesus's kingdom, they would have responded to James and John with pity.

Jesus, perhaps sensing the tensions among His disciples might boil over at any moment, intervened by revealing the right way to become great in His kingdom. He began by dispelling any notion that His kingdom would be modeled after the kingdoms of the world. He invited His disciples to consider how the gentiles misused authority as an excuse to exploit those beneath them. There were plenty of examples for them to consider. We are aware of several just from reading the Gospels. Such abuses of authority would not be found within Jesus's kingdom. In Jesus's kingdom, authority is not a license to put others down but a responsibility to serve them. This is one of the great reversals commonly found in God's kingdom. Greatness is measured by how well you serve others. The person at Jesus's right hand will seem like the lowest servant in His kingdom to the outside world.

Q: *How can you adopt this view of authority within your workplace?*

Q: *How could this perspective of authority revolutionize your home?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus's counterexample to His kingdom creates a missional mandate for His followers. The world views authority as a means to dominate others, but a follower of Jesus views authority as an opportunity to help others flourish. For Christians, the way you exercise the authority you have is a witness to the watching world. Your use of authority either confirms their misconceptions of what makes someone great or indicts their abuse of authority. Make a list of the relationships in which you have some authority, such as a parent-child relationship. For each one, write down one way you can use your authority to serve those under you. Servant-leadership does not, of course, demand you bend to the will of those over whom you have authority. That would be an abandonment of authority and a misunderstanding of what Jesus was saying. But you can use your God-given authority to seek the welfare of those you are responsible for. When you allow the gospel to dictate how you exercise authority, your authority will demonstrate the goodness of God's kingdom to everyone watching.

Q: *Who did Jesus put forth as an example of serving others?*

Q: *How far did Jesus go to serve others?*

The best example for the kind of service Jesus described is Jesus Himself. Jesus, again using the messianic title “Son of Man,” proclaimed that He came into the world to serve others. This is the second time in this passage that He turned upside down His followers’ expectations of the coming messianic king. Kings have servants who tend to their needs. The king who was to inaugurate a new age in world history and reestablish David’s throne among God’s people would certainly need others to serve Him, right? Jesus’s followers had the wrong idea about the Messiah and the nature of His kingdom, and nothing made that clearer than Jesus proclaiming the Messiah would be a servant to others. He shattered expectations even further by proclaiming that the Messiah would give His life for the sake of others. Jesus was alluding to His sacrificial death on behalf of others to provide forgiveness of sin, but His disciples could have only marveled at the idea that a king would die for His people. Jesus was changing all their expectations, from the nature of a servant to the nature of the Messiah.

Q: *How can you emulate Jesus’s willingness to serve others?*

Q: *What limits are there in how you can follow Jesus’s example?*

APPLICATION – Jesus offered Himself as an example for us to follow in serving others. We will never be able to serve others by dying for their sins like Jesus did, but we can and must follow His example in serving others, perhaps even to the point of dying for them. Just as Jesus’s demands upended His followers’ expectations of their coming messianic king, His demands diverge from the world’s expectations. Seek to serve someone who would never expect it this week. Doing so may be the only way to provide a window for them to peer into the gospel of Jesus Christ.

NEXT STEPS

This lesson focused on what kept the Jewish leaders from repenting. The Pharisees were consumed with external signs. The lawyers were caught in hypocrisy. These are not mutually exclusive categories. Which one creates the biggest struggle for you? Take some time to write down some resolutions to help you flee from these two corrupting influences.



PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

-Lord Jesus, you came to serve me and paid the ultimate price to do it. Thank you for the hope your service has given me.

-God, help me to challenge the expectations of a fallen world that refuses to serve.

-Father, strengthen my resolve in preparation for suffering for your kingdom.

-Jesus, help me to serve others like you did.

