

2026-03-22

Choosing Right Habits

Mark 10:35-52

Hopefully you have noticed that we have skipped to the end of Chapter 10. These are the last recorded events that Mark gives before Jesus enters Jerusalem on the Sunday we call Palm Sunday. We will return to the beginning of Mark 10 and deal with those teachings of Jesus after we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Our scripture reading began at verse 35 with, “*Then*” James and John came to Jesus. What happened just before these men made their ambitious request to Jesus? To fully grasp the self-centered attitude of these two disciples, we have to know what was going on. Jesus and the **disciples were making** the 80-mile walk to Jerusalem for Passover. The road was crowded with many other travelers making this same journey. “*Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed.*” Sometimes, Jesus walked among the disciples as they traveled. Sometimes Jesus walked by Himself in front of the disciples. Here, Jesus is walking before His disciples. And even this time was different. His pace was probably a little faster. His stride a little longer. He did not walk His normal slow, relaxed pace. This time Jesus walked with great determination, as though He was on a set course. And of course, He was. His courageous attitude “*amazed*” the disciples.

Jesus knew why He was going to Jerusalem. He knows what is going to happen to Him. Yet, He is walking right into it all. At times along this 80-mile journey Jesus intentionally stopped and pulled His disciples over, away from the crowds going to Jerusalem. Jesus wanted His disciples to know and hopefully be prepared for what was going to happen to Him during this week in Jerusalem. It would not be a pretty sight. Jesus told His disciples “*The Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again*” (Mark 10:33-34). On this trip Jesus gave more details of His suffering than before. Jesus wanted the disciples to get it in their minds what was really going to happen to Him this time in Jerusalem. He was trying to get them ready. Were they? What did the disciples have on their minds?

Well, at least James and John came to a different conclusion with what Jesus was talking about. In the gospel of Matthew, he has the mother of James and John begin this questioning. So, there were more than just the 12 disciples in this group. Some women were traveling with them. Here, Mark leaves out the mother of James and John. That is alright. More than likely, after their mother’s request, the two brothers made the same request to Jesus. They came to Jesus and said, “*Teacher, we want You*

to do for us whatever we ask" (10:35). Just like when someone comes to you and asks you to do them a favor. We would say, it all depends on what the favor is. Jesus was careful with these two disciples. There was a time that these two brothers wanted to destroy people by calling fire to come down on them from heaven because they rejected Jesus (Luke 9:54). This was not the right choice Jesus wanted them to make. He wanted them to have compassion. "*He said to them, 'What do you want Me to do for you?'*" (Mark 10:36). What was on their minds? "*They said to Him, 'Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory'*" (10:37). This was a huge request. This is not the first time the disciples were thinking about their future in the kingdom of God. Jesus had previously tried to get them to change their thinking. He wanted them to form a character of serving others. They were thinking more like Gentiles than children of God. Jesus was talking to the disciples about His suffering and dying, serving and glorifying God. Had these two disciples really changed their habits? No, they were thinking about themselves. They were not thinking about serving from these positions. They wanted to rule and reign over others in God's coming kingdom. These are two very different attitudes.

Verse 38 "*But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?'*" The positions that James and John were asking for were not going to be given to anyone just because they were friends or relatives of Jesus. Those positions had to be earned through obedience to the King. The people in those positions had to learn the lessons Jesus taught them. They had to change their attitude by forming the right habits through those lessons learned. I would also assume that all positions in the kingdom of God have to be earned that way. What was the cup and baptism Jesus was referring to? It was His suffering and death. Jesus was going to be obedient to His Father's will no matter how difficult it was going to be for Him. At one point Jesus will ask His Father to "*take this cup away from Me*" (Mark 14:36). It will seem more than He could bear. Yet, Jesus will conclude "*not what I will, but what You will.*" Later, the author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote, "*though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered*" (5:8). Would it be any different for the apostles? Should it be any different for us? Did these two disciples understand what would be required of them? They thought so.

Verses 39-40 "*They said to Him, 'We are able.'* So Jesus said to them, '*You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared.*'" Jesus would accept the disciples' naive confession. He then prophesied that James and John would suffer and die for their faith in Jesus as Messiah and Lord. James would be the first apostle to be killed (Acts

12:2). Because James was executed by the sword, he was probably accused by the Jews of leading people to follow a false god. Punishment for that behavior is death by the sword (Deuteronomy 13:12-15). John was the last apostle to die. He was imprisoned on the island of Patmos in his old age. But no one knows for sure how or where he died. Jesus did not promise any future positions in His kingdom to any of the apostles. The kingdom of God operates very differently than worldly kingdoms (John 18:36). Those positions and probably all positions in God's kingdom are given to those who have been prepared for them. They have been trained. They have learned. They chose and formed the right habits required by God.

Verse 41 “*And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John.*” If these ten disciples had the right attitude, they would have responded differently than they did. Instead, they were “*greatly displeased with James and John*” because they themselves wanted those positions. At times I am shocked by the attitude of the disciples. Jesus has been with them for about 3 years. He has taught them the character traits of a true disciple. Jesus has demonstrated those character traits every day. Jesus even sent these men out to practice them. But the disciples real concern was their future place in the kingdom of God. When Jesus could have benefited from some sympathy from His disciples, they were arguing over who was the greatest among them.

Verses 42-44 “*But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.’*” Jesus did not discourage the disciples from desiring to be great in His kingdom. He actually wants us to be great, but greatness in God's kingdom is measured differently than it is determined in the kingdoms of this world. Consider the rulers of the nations. How do they rule? They order people to do this or that. They expect their orders to be followed or you will get fired. In some nations, if you do not follow their rules, you will be killed. These are not the type of rulers Jesus wants in His kingdom. James and John would have killed people because they rejected Jesus. They needed to change their habits if they were going to be rulers in God's kingdom. To advance in the ways of the world people have to set aside what God has determined as important, such as humility, compassion, virtue, honesty, kindness, gentleness and trust in a sovereign God. In God's kingdom rulers must first learn and have the habit of serving others which will help build the characteristics God is looking for. Rulers in God's kingdom need to know the basic needs of the people and how best to help them through their needs. What is our basic need? It is life itself. How can we trust Jesus with our basic need of life? He has shown us.

Verse 45 *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”* Jesus had been setting the example for the disciples and everyone else who would pay attention, including us. He came to meet the needs of the people. The greatest need that everyone has in this world is not physical needs, though some are important. Yet our spiritual need to be reconciled with God is the most important need everyone has, whether they know it or not. Jesus came to serve people in this physical world so that they would hopefully accept the ransom price of His life for our lives. *“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life”* (Romans 5:10). His life spoken of here is not to be understood as His physical life in the flesh, but His current life in heaven. **We are reconciled by Christ humbled and crucified. We are saved by Christ resurrected and exalted.** Now that God *“has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ.”* He has also *“given us the ministry of reconciliation”* (2 Corinthians 5:18). We want others to know that they can have a right standing with God through faith in Jesus Christ. He calls us to change. Make that choice to follow God’s teaching in Jesus Christ.

So how did these disciples do after their lessons on the road to Jerusalem for the presentation of our Savior? They did horrible. Just outside of Jericho, with a great crowd of people around them, blind Bartimaeus sat begging. When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was coming, what did the people do? They told him to be quiet. What did he do? He got louder. As he got louder, the people became more insistent that he be silent. Was that what Jesus had taught them to do. Is that what He wanted them to do? No. Jesus stopped on the road and called for Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus got up quickly and went to Jesus. He asked Jesus to restore his sight. Jesus did, and Bartimaeus began following Jesus (Mark 10:46-52).

I have come to understand that none of us really struggle with doing the things we really want to do. We are consistent with them. Our real problem is that what we are consistent in, the habits we have are not the best habits to have as a child of God. We must learn and form new habits by consistently making better choices. Choose humility, not pride. Choose compassion, not hatred. Choose virtue, not immorality. Choose honesty, not lying. Choose kindness, not sin. Choose trusting Jesus, not self.

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