

The Servant King

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[0 : 00] Well, as you know, it is the Queen's Platinum Jubilee this weekend over these past four days or so, and so much has been said about the Queen in the newspapers, on the news media, about her leadership over these past 70 years.

And so the question is, well, what makes a good leader? What does it mean to have great leadership? Or what kind of leaders inspire others to follow and to do things?

Well, it clearly isn't leaders who think that the rules that govern others don't apply to them. They kind of do as I say, not as I do style of leadership.

That doesn't impress anyone. And I think we've seen that recently, haven't we, with the Partygate scandal and the Beergate scandal. The general public response is one of anger, disillusionment at leaders who fail to keep the very standards that they expect of other people.

Listen to what the Sue Gray report says. It says, Many will be dismayed that behaviour of this kind took place on this scale at the heart of government. The public have a right to expect the very highest standards of behaviour in such places.

[1 : 13] And clearly what happened fell well short of this. It's one kind of leadership, isn't it? But contrast this with the leadership of the Ukrainian president, Vladimir Zelensky.

During the Russian invasion of his country, he's inspired his people through what is sometimes called servant leadership. And it was seen most clearly when he refused to flee Kiev.

As the violence crept closer to the capital of Ukraine, Zelensky's life was under threat. And so the US government had offered to evacuate him from Ukraine.

And Zelensky, rejecting the offer, responded with the line, I need ammunition, not a ride. Because he stayed part of his country's resistance to the Russians who were attacking.

And he was essentially asking his citizens to do nothing less than he was prepared to do himself. And he stood alongside the people. One, to reassure them.

[2 : 16] Two, not just to do so with words, but to do so in action. To lead from the front, but to lead by serving his people. And it has inspired the people of Ukraine.

And it's inspired the world, I think. Why? Because it's been a great example of leadership.

Leadership that serves others. And this is really what we see as we continue our series in the Gospel of Mark.

We've called the series Jesus the King. Because what we discover in the whole of the Gospel, but here in our Bible reading, and in the section surrounding it, is just what kind of King Jesus is.

He is the King, but what does his leadership look like? What kind of King is he? What we see is that he is the servant King. He is the King who came to serve.

And so in the section we're looking at today, what we see is the disciples don't get why Jesus came and what Jesus would do. They don't understand the nature of Jesus' kingship.

[3 : 21] They want greatness. So what Jesus does is he teaches them about sacrificial service. And he makes this explicit by pointing to himself.

And we see this in the very last verse of our Bible reading where Jesus says, So the way of Jesus is the way of self-sacrificing service.

Which means if anybody, any of us is going to follow Jesus, then his way will also need to be our way too. The way of self-sacrificing service.

And so what we're going to see today, three things in this passage, three points that are up on the screen. The self-sacrificing prediction of Jesus' death. The self-sacrificing pattern of Jesus' death.

And the self-sacrificing purpose of Jesus' death. And if that's too much to keep in your mind, just think of prediction and pattern and purpose of Jesus' death.

[4 : 28] So first of all, we see the self-sacrificing prediction of Jesus' death. So Jesus makes it clear that he came to die. In fact, this is the third time that Jesus predicts his death and his resurrection in the Gospel of Mark.

Firstly, it's in chapter 8, verse 31 to 32. Then again in chapter 9, chapter 9, verse 30 to 31. And here again, for the third time in chapter 10, Jesus predicts he will die and he will rise again.

So let's look at those verses 32. They were on their way up to Jerusalem with Jesus leading the way. And the disciples were astonished while those who followed were afraid.

Again, he took the twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. We are going up to Jerusalem, he said. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law.

They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later, he will rise.

[5 : 36] So the repetition by Jesus about his death tells us how central the death of Jesus is in his mission, why he came.

If you're at school and your teacher repeats something three times, you know it's time to listen. Because what they're saying is important. If you're a child and your mom or your dad says something three times, you know it's important.

And so here with Jesus. And what he does is he shares the details of how he is going to die. So he says that he is going to die in Jerusalem. And that's where he was leading his disciples.

And so if you're new to Christianity or you've never really looked at the Bible before or know little about the life of Jesus, then please don't think that the death of Jesus was some kind of accident.

Or that Jesus was somehow caught out by his arrest and his trial and his death. Jesus knew exactly what was going on and exactly what would happen to him.

[6 : 39] It's clear from all of these repeated predictions about his death that Jesus wasn't some kind of poor, helpless victim. Jesus came to die and he knew he would die.

And so here we find him deliberately walking towards Jerusalem. What would happen in Jerusalem? Jerusalem is where he would be hung on a cross. And so Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man.

That's a title from the Old Testament part of the Bible because he's identifying himself with this glorious figure of the Son of Man, a figure with supreme power and authority. And Jesus is saying, that's me.

And yet, he's saying, the Son of Man, this powerful figure, would be killed. And so Jesus is also identifying himself with another figure in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 53, the figure of the suffering servant.

So he's saying, yes, I'm the king, but I'm the king who came to die. And Jesus knew exactly how all of this would play out. He says, in Jerusalem, he'd be handed over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law.

[7 : 49] They'd condemn him to death. They'd then hand him over to the Gentiles, because the Gentiles, that is the Roman authorities, could carry out the crucifixion, the death sentence.

And then he says, that's going to happen. Now, crucifixion was one of the most brutal forms of torture ever existed, ever created.

And it was this kind of long and drawn-out process of abuse and humiliation until the victim eventually died on a cross. And that's why Jesus said they would mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him.

In fact, the flogging was so severe that it could rip chunks of flesh out of the back of the victim. And so Jesus is under no illusions here as to what is going to happen to him when he gets to Jerusalem. His journey, in fact, his life's journey, would end in horrendous suffering and death. And yet Jesus is saying, that is why I came.

[8 : 52] He was willing to come and to sacrifice himself by dying on a cross. Now, that's not the end of the story, because Jesus wasn't just moving towards his suffering and death.

Because in each of the three predictions Jesus gives, he clearly states what is going to happen after his death, namely that he will rise again three days later. And guess what?

It all happened just as Jesus predicted. So just imagine this in your mind. Imagine predicting years and years ago that Ukraine would beat Scotland in a World Cup qualifier.

Not only imagining that Ukraine would win, but knowing that they would win 3-1 against Scotland, knowing who would score each of the goals, and knowing in which minutes those goals were being scored.

I guess if you were a betting man, then you'd make a lot of money if you could predict that kind of outcome. But it's impossible, isn't it? Nobody could possibly predict with that kind of accuracy.

[10:01] And yet, here is Jesus predicting not only his death with absolute accuracy, but walking towards it, knowing what's going to happen.

And so that's the first thing we see. We see the self-sacrificing prediction of Jesus' death. The second thing is the self-sacrificing pattern of Jesus' death. So, second point.

Because what happens in this wider section in the Gospel of Mark, not only predicts that Jesus would die, but it sets the pattern for his death for all who follow him, for all his disciples.

Because if the way of Jesus is self-sacrificing service, then that's got to be the way of everybody who is a follower of Jesus. And this is what we see in this request that's made by James and John. So if you look down to verse 35, we read, Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. Teacher, they said, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.

[11:07] What do you want me to do for you? He asked. They replied, let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory. So, Jesus has spoken of his death, not just once, not just twice, but three times, making his self-sacrificing service clear.

But then along come James and John, his disciples, and in stark contrast to what Jesus has just said, they make their self-seeking desire for status really clear to Jesus.

And the irony is that they address Jesus as teacher. And yet they fail to pay attention to what Jesus has just said. And even look at the way they approach Jesus.

They call him teacher, but they're the ones who tell Jesus what they want Jesus to do for them. And yet Jesus, I guess it's like sitting next to the queen when she's on her throne.

If you see the queen on her throne and you look at who is next to her, you know that the people next to her are kind of important. They're significant or they wouldn't be there to her right or to her left.

[12:19] And that's the kind of status that James and John want from Jesus. They sense that Jesus is important and so they want to be important too. And yet they had no idea about what had to take place.

Because we read in verse 38, Jesus said, you don't know what you're asking. Jesus said, can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?

So what's Jesus talking about here? Well, he's describing his suffering and his death as a cup to drink and a baptism to undergo.

Now, in the Old Testament part of the Bible, the cup was a symbol for God's judgment, God's anger, God's wrath. So Jesus is saying something astonishing here.

He's saying he is going to drink the cup of God's anger by facing God's judgment on the cross. He'd face God's anger as the sin and evil of the world was heaped upon him.

[13:25] That's the cup that he must drink. And a baptism is also a reference to his suffering and his death. Because when Jesus was baptized at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, it was a sign that he came to identify with humanity, to identify with us, so that he could save us from our sins.

And so when Jesus speaks of baptism here, he's referring to the suffering that he would experience, where the baptism imagery has the sense of being overwhelmed or immersed in the water of God's judgment, as if the water of God's judgment, like a flood, would overflow him, immerse him as he hung on the cross.

So Jesus is saying this is what he would experience. This is how it would be. And yet for James and John, their answer to Jesus just proves how little they really understand, because they say, we can. Jesus said to them, you will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 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. So they're saying, Jesus, we're able. We can take this. We can do this.

[14:47] Not a problem. And yet Jesus is patient and gentle in the way that he responds, because he makes it clear that they would suffer for him, and they did suffer for him.

But even though they would follow Jesus along this road of suffering and death, Jesus can't give them the seats they're after. It's not up to them to decide, and it's not up to Jesus even to decide.

And so when the other disciples hear about this, they are raging. When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Indignant in the sense that, not just because of what James and John were asking, but they were annoyed because they didn't get in there first. Because it's clear from Jesus' response that they also had this self-seeking desire for status and for greatness. Because we read, 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.

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

[16:01] And so here are these disciples who still hadn't grasped what Jesus' death meant. And so Jesus explains how this self-sacrificing death sets the pattern for their life, and also for ours.

So following Jesus means going Jesus' way. Not the way of this world, by living out the values of this world, that's why Jesus says, not so with you.

Because the way of the world is a way of self-seeking status, isn't it? And that's why Jesus says, not so with you. The world is self-seeking status and power, whereas the way of Jesus is self-sacrificing service.

The world thinks greatness comes by exercising power over other people. But Jesus is saying, not so in my kingdom.

In my kingdom, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant. Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. So following Jesus means dancing to a different tune, to the tune of this world.

[17:13] Jesus is underlying for us a principle that James and John and the other disciples still had to grasp. Because following Jesus means forgetting about this world's notions of greatness and power and glory.

And yet the instinct that seeks to be great is within us all, isn't it? If we look into our hearts, we know that we quite like looking good, being great, having power.

And like James and John, I guess we're all hungry for status and honor to one degree or another.

That's how we measure our lives. Well, that's even how we measure up other people, isn't it?

According to the power that they've got. Status, power, achievement, success. And it's everywhere in society, in politics, in sport, in business, academia, in the classroom, social media, and it's even in the church as well.

It's everywhere. Because our default position as human beings is that we want to be served. We like status. We like to be acknowledged rather than self-sacrifice and service of others.

[18:31] And even if we don't say it out loud, isn't there a desire in our hearts to have power, to be great, to be first. But Jesus is saying, that's not my way.

Because following Jesus means being like Jesus. It means going the way of humility. It means serving others. It means modeling our life on Jesus and his example.

And so while James and John wanted a crown, Jesus outlines the way of the cross. They wanted glory, but Jesus took suffering. They want to take power, but Jesus gave up power.

They want honor, but Jesus showed humility. They seek status, but Jesus sacrificially served. And so if you or I are going to follow Jesus Christ, then his self-sacrificing pattern has got to be our own, hasn't it?

And so what will it look like for you or for me to live this self-sacrificing way of Jesus? What will it look like for me individually? What will it look like for you and your family?

[19:46] What will it look like for you out in the workplace to apply this principle that Jesus sets for us? Okay, that's the second point, the self-sacrificing pattern, the prediction of Jesus' death, the pattern of Jesus' death, and then finally, the self-sacrificing purpose of Jesus' death.

Jesus tells us the purpose of his death here. It's there in verse 45. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.

Now, this is the first time that Jesus explicitly declares the purpose of his death. That's why this verse is seen as a key verse in Mark's Gospel.

Even one of the key verses, in fact, that helps us understand the whole of the Bible story, where Jesus speaks of his death as the ultimate in self-sacrificing service.

He's the Son of Man, the one with ultimate power and authority, yet he's the suffering servant, the one who voluntarily gave up his life and died.

[20 : 54] He came to give his life as a ransom for many. What does that mean? Because we don't use the word ransom very much these days, do we? Unless, of course, it's about kidnapping.

For example, I heard last week in the news that the head of the Methodist church in Nigeria was kidnapped, and so what happened was a huge ransom was paid to his kidnappers to secure his release.

And that's what the word ransom means here, is to pay a price to free someone who's enslaved. And Jesus says it's what he came to do.

He came to serve. He came to give up his life by dying on a cross to pay the ransom for many. And so what's the ransom for?

Well, it's because we are held captive by our sins that we need to be set free. Whether we realize it or not, we're all in slavery to sin and we can do nothing about it.

[21 : 53] We can't offer the payment needed to set ourselves free. Only Jesus can. And so the ransom price is nothing less than Jesus' own life.

Jesus paid the ransom for sin when he died on the cross. And he did this for many, not for all, which means not everyone will receive the benefit of Jesus' death.

So when Jesus said he would give his life as a ransom for many, the word for means instead of, or on behalf of, or in the place of.

And so Jesus is saying he would die as a substitute for many. And so some people might wonder, well, why can't God just forgive everybody?

Why did Jesus have to die? Can't God just accept us as we are without Jesus having to give his life? And yeah, that's not how justice works, is it?

[22 : 51] Because whenever somebody has been wronged, a price has to be paid if justice is to be done. And that's why we don't let criminals off with their crimes, do we?

Nobody ever says to the judge, I know what they've done, but can't we just let them off with it? No, a price has to be paid, the judge has to pass sentence on the guilty, doesn't he?

And we're all guilty before God. We've all failed to worship God as we should, so our sin has accumulated this massive debt that we can't pay ourselves.

And so God's justice, if it's going to be satisfied, then payment must be made for our sin against him. And that's why Jesus came, because only Jesus' self-sacrificing death on the cross can pay the price for our sin.

I don't know if you've ever read the story of A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens, because there's a great story of self-sacrificing death in it. If you don't know it, the story is set in the French Revolution.

[23 : 57] Christian, Charles Darnay, and Sidney Carton, they look very much alike. They're both in love with the same woman, Lucy Manette. So Lucy chooses and marries Charles, and they have a child.

And Charles, who's a French aristocrat, he's arrested, he's imprisoned, he's sentenced to die by guillotine. And so then at the end of the novel, Sidney, who's English, visits Charles, remember they look the same, visits Charles the night before he's due to die, and he offers to exchange places with him.

Charles refuses, so Sidney has him drugged, smuggles him away into a waiting carriage, and then Sidney takes Charles' place and is executed. And afterwards, Charles and his family escape to England.

Charles is saved because Sidney gave his life in place of Charles by taking his punishment. And it's a really moving story of self-sacrificing service.

And it helps illustrate, just in a really small way, the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Which, of course, is infinitely greater because Jesus came to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

[25 : 15] And so we receive what Jesus has done by turning away from our sin and placing our faith in him. And when we do, it changes our life forever.

And it changes how we live right now. And so as we close, Jesus not only came to serve by giving his life, he also sets the pattern for how we ought to serve others.

And so when we discover that Jesus not only had to die for us, but Jesus was glad to die for us, then we'll be ready to serve other people. Only when I know that Jesus served me by sacrificing his life for my sin will I have the desire to sacrificially serve other people.

So just think, ask yourself, who in my sphere can I serve? Because isn't that the implication of Jesus' teaching? Because when we follow the servant king, we don't need to worry about our status in this world.

The way to greatness and glory isn't through self-seeking status. It's through a life of self-sacrificing service patterned on Jesus' own.