Freed by His death

Text: Mark 10:32-45

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**Scriptures:** Psalm 22:1-8; Mark 10:32-45

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 145, 176, Grace, 116b, 218, 523

**Series:** The Gospel of Mark (#35)

**Occasion:** Infant Baptism

**Theme:** After Jesus predicts his coming execution a third time, James and John ask for the highest positions of honour in Christ’s kingdom to which Jesus explains that greatness is suffering service, the calling that He Himself has come to fulfil in His death.

**Proposition:** Serve Jesus as He first served you.

**Introduction**

What do you think of when you hear the word ‘baptism’? Of water? We also likely think of a ceremonial washing. Using the words of the baptism form we heard earlier ‘*Baptism with water signifies and seals that we are cleansed from sin by the shed blood of Christ, through the work of his Spirit*’.

When Jesus went down to the Jordan to be baptised John ‘*would have prevented him, saying* “*I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?*”’ (Matt 3:14). Jesus was baptised by John, as Mark records (1:9-11) and yet, speaking of the events which would soon unfold in Jerusalem, Jesus asked James and John ‘*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?*’ (Mark 10:38). What is the cup that Jesus refers to here? Could it be a reference to the sacrament of Lord’s Supper perhaps? What about the baptism Jesus mentions. Is that going to be another water baptism like the one he experienced in the Jordan? Then Jesus explains that the cup that he will drink they will also drink and that the baptism he is yet to experience, they will also be baptised with.

What are we to make of all this? and how does it apply to us today? As we look closely at God’s Word this morning, guided by the Holy Spirit we will see the glorious work of Christ to set people like you and me, who are naturally held captive to sin and death, set free. Let’s focus now on Mark 10:32-45 under three headings:

1. The cup and baptism of Christ
2. The service and greatness of Christ
3. The disciples’ sharing in Christ.
4. **The cup and baptism of Christ**

In our text, Jesus and his disciples were walking towards Jerusalem. It was a common custom then for Rabbi to walk ahead of his followers; like a shepherd leading his sheep. Jesus is clearly an awe-inspiring figure as we see from Mark’s comments that the disciples ‘*were amazed and those who followed were afraid*’ (v32). Taking his twelve disciples aside, Jesus then ‘*began to tell them what was going to happen to him*’ (v32). This is the third prediction of His death that Mark records Jesus making in his gospel. The first is at the end of chapter 8 and the second in chapter 9.

This third prediction includes details not present in the earlier two: that Jesus will be delivered over to the Gentiles (non-Jews) and that ‘*they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him*’ (v34). This violent brutality was standard Roman practice for executions, but more significantly, was prophesied in Psalm 22: “*But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads*” (Psalm 22:6-7).

After Jesus predicts his shameful, violent death at the hands of Gentiles, James and John express great interest, not in what Jesus is about to endure, but in what He can do for them. Self-centred, insensitive, and callous are not strong enough words here (assuming that their request follows on directly from Jesus’ prediction of his death). They say ‘*Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you*”. Today we might say that they ‘wanted him to sign a blank cheque’. Graciously Jesus replies ‘*what do you want me to do for you?*’ To which they replied, ‘*Grant us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory*’. They wanted places of the highest honour when Jesus rose from the dead and received His kingdom. It is likely that they were thinking of high status positions at the Messianic banquet, and/or for positions of eminence and high authority.

There was so much that these disciples did not understand about Jesus and the Kingdom of God. ‘*You do not know what you are asking*’ Christ says to them. “*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?*" (v38). Now we can understand what the cup refers to. It is not a direct reference to Lord’s Supper itself, but is an Old Testament symbol for suffering and especially for God’s wrath: “*For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs*” (Ps 75:8). *Thus says your Lord, the LORD, your God who pleads the cause of his people: “Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more”* (Isa 51:22). “To drink the cup” is a Jewish phrase meaning “to share the fate”.

Jesus would drink the cup of God’s wrath against the sins of His people down to the dregs – until every last sin was paid for. In the vocabulary of the common Greek dialect baptism was used to speak of being overwhelmed by disaster or danger, like sinking under water. The ‘baptism’ Jesus was yet to experience on the cross outside the city of Jerusalem refers to His death under the righteous wrath of God.

Our baptism is different, it points to the union between believers and Christ, as the Apostle Paul puts it in Romans 6:3-4: “*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life*”.

[Baby name’s] baptism today does not mean that [she/he] is already united to Christ in His death and resurrection, but points to the need for [her/him] to come to saving faith in Him. As a child born into a Christian home, [she/he] is privileged to be able; both to regularly hear about the life we receive in Christ by faith through His death and resurrection, and also to see how this is lived out by her parents and others in this community of faith. [She/he] is also blessed to be able to grow in understanding of the service and greatness of Christ, which brings us to our second point.

1. **The service and greatness of Christ**

At times young children can get annoyed at others who seem to have possession of better toys or privileges. It is childish behaviour that is sadly seen at times also with youth and adults. Mark records that when the other ten disciples heard that John and James had been asking Jesus for places of high honour, they began to be indignant at these sons of Zebedee (v41). The Greek word translated ‘indignant’ means ‘to be oppressed in mind, to be grieved, to be resentful’. Mark doesn’t say it directly, but the implication is that the other ten disciples were annoyed at James and John because they wanted the high-ranking positions for themselves!

Masterfully, instead of rebuking them, Jesus captures this ‘teachable moment’ by calling them to Himself and explaining: “*You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all*” (v42-44). Later, in the upper room, before His death, Jesus would give the disciples a graphic interactive experience and illustration of the greatness of servants in His Kingdom when He washed their feet and called them to lowly service (John 13:12-17).

Jesus Himself is first among everyone in the Kingdom of Heaven because He is the ‘slave of all’. This He explains in the final verse of our text: “*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (v45). As the Son of Man who would, in the words of Daniel 7:14, be given ‘dominion and glory and a kingdom’ yet Jesus came to this earth not to rule, but to serve. Paul would later write these words to the Philippian church: “*Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*”. The greatness of Christ, the glory of Christ, is seen first and foremost in His service at the cross where he gave His life as a ‘*ransom for many*’. Precious words of such profound significance. A ransom here is ‘*a price paid to free the guilty from a sentence (Ex 21:30), or debtors from their debt’* (Ex 30:2).

We find a powerful illustration of ransoming in the Old Testament. The prophet Hosea’s wife Gomer had been unfaithful and became as a slave. She had no money, no reputation, likely no clothes and no escape from her bondage. Hosea obeyed the Lord and bought back his own wife for 15 shekels of silver and 1.5 homers of barley. Picture a scene from many a movie where prison of war is exchanged for another at the border. One life buys back freedom for another.

“*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (v45). These words express the voluntary self-sacrifice of Jesus who obediently offered up Himself in submission to the will of God the Father. The word ‘ransom’ captures the purpose for which Jesus gave His life – delivering others to freedom by making the necessary payment on their behalf. The words ‘as a ransom for many’ reveal the substitution of the life of Christ in the place of many people. In His death, under the cup of God’s wrath, Jesus gives life to many as was prophesied by Isaiah long before the blood of Jesus was shed: “*He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed*” (v5). “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all*” (v6). “*He poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors*” (v12).

In the lyrics of the hymn ‘Grace’ by CityAlight: “*The prince of life, without a stain was traded for a sinner*”, “*By grace I am redeemed. By grace I am restored*”.

How do you know if **you** are one of the many for whom Jesus came, not to be served, but to serve? How do you know if He gave His life for **you**? How do you know if He has paid to free **you** from the guilt and debt of sin with the precious currency of His life blood? Come to Him, accepting that you have a debt with God that you cannot pay and that He drank the cup of God’s righteous wrath that you deserve and was ‘baptised’ unto death on the cross for you.

As [baby name] grows up in [Parents names] home, together with [her/his] [Sibling name(s)] (and any other children that the Lord may bless this family with), [she/he] will hear about the service and greatness of Christ. We pray that [baby name] may early in [her/his] life come to saving faith in Christ as [Parents names] lead [her/him] by their instruction and example. [She/he], like them and like many of us here, may then share in Christ, which brings us to our third point.

1. **The glory of Christ’s suffering shared**

When Jesus was hanging on the cross at Calvary, John, the gospel author whom we understand to be John, the son of Zebedee, was watching. Even as He was dying, Jesus fulfilled His duty as a faithful son by entrusting the care of his mother Mary to John (John 19:26). John was there near the cross, but He did not endure the wrath of God, or give his life as a ransom for any. So what did Jesus mean when he said to James and John, “*The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptised, you will be baptised*” (v39)?

Clearly the meaning of the cup and baptism metaphors for the sons of Zebedee was different to the meaning for Christ in His death. Yet the close association of these images for both Christ and these disciples pointed to the future reality that these brothers would participate in the sufferings of Jesus. James and John wanted to share in Christ glory by sitting in places of high honour at his right and left hands (v37), but Jesus reveals that the way to participate in His glory is to share in His suffering.

We know that James was killed with the sword when Herod laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church (Acts 12:1-2). John was exiled to Patmos likely in the mid-90s of the first century AD from where he wrote the book of Revelation (1:9). We have no evidence that he died a violent death, but the implication from John 21:23 is that he lived to an old age; consistent with his relatively late authorship of the book of Revelation.

So what can we say about the ‘cup’ and ‘baptism’ metaphors applied by Christ to James and John. This clearly did not mean literally dying on a cross as He did, nor does it necessarily mean martyrdom, although it did for James. These metaphors extend to all disciples of Christ who share in His ‘cup’ and ‘baptism’ of suffering servanthood. The Apostle Peter wrote of this fellowship in Christ in 1 Peter 4:13 “*Rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings*”. Brothers and sisters, we share in the ‘cup’, the ‘baptism’ of Christ’s suffering when we experience injustice, mistreatment, and persecution because we identify with Jesus, being united to Him both in His death and resurrection.

Similarly Paul enigmatically writes to the Colossians: “*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church*” (Col 1:24). Paul is most certainly **not** suggesting any insufficiency in the completed work of Christ on the cross, as the context in Colossians 1:15-23, together with Romans 3:21-26 and 2 Cor 5:17-21 clearly reveal. Paul is writing here of the sufferings of Christ’s disciples in the period of time after His resurrection and before His second coming (Rom 13:11-14; 1 Cor 7:29). In this age, the church of Christ is called to suffer for her Lord (e.g. 2 Cor 4:7-12; 1 Thes 3:2-4), a privilege that Paul rejoiced in.

So coming back to our text, Jesus assures James and John that they will share in His cup and baptism, but then He says: “*To sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared*”. It is God the Father who determines the positions of honour in the Kingdom of His Son, these rankings will be determined according to the principle given by Jesus in v43-44: “*Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all*”.

To those here who have been baptised with water and drunk from a cup at Lord’s Supper, these signs and seals point to the cup of God’s wrath that afflicted Jesus to the point of death on the cross. By faith, we who have repented and believed in Jesus are joined in union with Christ in His death and resurrection. We also have the privilege, the responsibility and the joy in sharing in the sufferings of Christ as we willingly serve others. The greater our service, the greater our sharing in the sufferings of Christ, the greater our sharing in the glory of Christ.

As we close, some questions for each of us to ask ourselves are: How am I serving the Lord, His people and others? Am I the lowly servant of all, of all kinds of people, both inside the church and outside? Am I willing and ready to suffer because I am united to Christ in both His death and His resurrection? Remember that “*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (v45).

AMEN.