

Magarey Lectures 2016

Bible Studies by Greg Elsdon

Jesus and his Disciples at Cross Purposes

STUDY FOUR: Mark 10:32-52

Will they ever understand?



Mark 10:32-52

10:32 They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, 33 saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; 34 they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again." 35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" 39 They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40 but 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." 41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

46 They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." 50 So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." 52 Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

As the journey 'up to Jerusalem' continues Mark portrays Jesus moving with determination towards his destiny. He is not wandering aimlessly, unaware of the consequences of his way of life. He knew full well that the way he had chosen to live as 'Son of God' would eventuate in death at the hands of those who opposed him in

Jerusalem. Mark comments that Jesus' resolute determination amazed "those who followed" and filled them with fear. The gap between Jesus' resolute action and the disciples' expectations was growing ever wider – **but they were still following!**

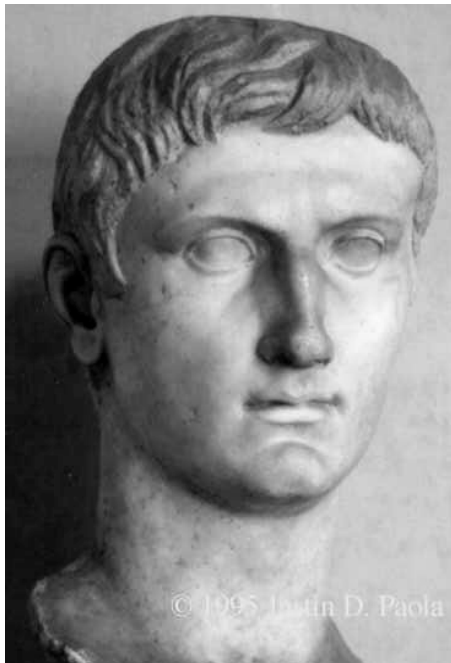
Although the disciples may have consistently demonstrated their resistance to Jesus' teaching about walking the way of the cross, it appears that they had a fair idea of where Jesus was headed and what awaited him there. Little wonder they were fearful! And if there was any lingering uncertainty it soon evaporated when Jesus took the disciples aside and told them **yet again** what awaited him as the suffering Son of Man. In this third and final 'passion prediction' the disciples are told in even greater detail of the events that are about to unfold in Jerusalem.

Mk 8:31	Mk 9:31	Mk 10:33-34
31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.	31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again."	33 "See, we are going up to Jerusalem , and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; 34 they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

Despite Jesus' repeated warnings to his disciples about what awaited him in Jerusalem they continue to resist what he has to say and demonstrate that they are determined to impose their own needs and expectations upon Jesus' messiahship.

Jesus had hardly finished describing in considerable detail what would happen to him in Jerusalem when two of those who had been following him from the beginning (1:19-20) came up and asked him to grant them **"whatever we ask of you"**. Jesus responds to this request for a 'blank cheque' with a genuine inquiry ; **"What is it you want me to do for you?"** Their response demonstrates that they are still operating in the mind-set Jesus had earlier identified as that of 'Satan' (8:33) when rebuking Peter . While Jesus was preparing to pay the ultimate price for his willingness to serve others, James and John were manoeuvring for positions of power and authority. **"Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."** Jesus politely informs them that they have absolutely no idea what it is they are asking for and questions them about their ability to cope with the consequences of participating with him in the Kingdom of God. Undeterred by this 'reality therapy' James and John insist they are adequate to the task, thus revealing that their campaign for power was no momentary flirtation. They, just like the rich man (10:17-22) were committed to the acquisition of power. Jesus informs them that they will indeed feel the full force of allegiance to the Kingdom of God, but that even he has no authority to grant their request.

The rest of the disciples are understandably angry at James and John. Were they offended by their display of naked ambition, or were they simply resentful that they had been beaten to the punch? Jesus does not give up on his recalcitrant followers. He continues to instruct them patiently in the way of discipleship. He doesn't berate them or even give commands. He gently encourages them to see things with new eyes. He invites them. He calls them.



Structures of authority and systems of power which characterise 'the world' are declared by Jesus to be illegitimate in the community of his followers (it is not so among you). Greatness among the followers of Jesus is characterized as service. After all, Jesus says, even **"the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."** The term translated here as 'ransom' is 'lytron'. It refers to the price required for the release of a captive or the emancipation of a slave. In Jewish history immediately prior to the time of Jesus it had begun to be used in reference to the liberating impact of the death of Jewish martyrs. The death of a martyr was spoken of as in some way 'paying for' the sins of the nation. A related word (apolutrosis) is used by Paul as one way of describing the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection (Rom 3:24; 1 Cor 1:30).

As Jesus and his entourage leave Jericho, the last stop before Jerusalem, they encounter a blind beggar named Bartimaeus sitting 'beside the way.'— Bartimaeus was one of many unfortunates who lined the streets and lanes of ancient cities begging for the charity, upon which they were totally dependent, from the passing crowds. When this 'blind beggar' heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing-by he began to cry out **"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"** (readers of Mark's Gospel soon discover that the evangelist considered 'Son of David' an inadequate title for Jesus). Many of those who were with Jesus (including the disciples?) were annoyed at Bartimaeus' behaviour and 'rebuked' him, demanding that he be silent! Undeterred by the attempts to silence him, Bartimaeus cries out all the more, **"Son of David, have mercy on me!"** Hearing the blind man's cry for mercy, Jesus stops and asks 'them' to call him. Bartimaeus responds by leaping to his feet and casting aside his beggar's cloak and coming to Jesus. Jesus asks the man **"What do you want me to do for you?"**, and he replies, **"My teacher, let me see again."** With no further ado Jesus commands Bartimaeus to **"Go!"**, informing him that **"your faith has made you well."** Mark concludes this story, and this central section of the Gospel, with the note that the blind beggar immediately received his sight. In response to Jesus' healing words of grace 'the once-blind-now-seeing' Bartimaeus does what the disciples have thus far resisted - he follows Jesus **on the way**. In this story Mark presents the blind beggar named Bartimaeus in unmistakable contrast with both the acquisitive rich man (10:17-22) and the power-seeking sons of Zebedee (10:35-45). The rich man wanted to know what he had to do to 'inherit' (acquire) the Kingdom of God— he wanted a slice of the action! Bartimaeus comes to Jesus acknowledging his need and knowing his only hope is in the healing touch of Jesus. When Jesus asks James and John, "What is it you want me to do for you?", they resist

all that Jesus had taught them about discipleship as the way of costly service and asked unashamedly for positions of power. When Bartimaeus was asked the very same question he asks only that he might see again.

“Unlike the rich man, Bartimaeus is landless and disabled; he is a victim of the system, not its beneficiary. Unlike the disciples, he dares not approach Jesus directly with his request. He inquires not after the mysteries of eternal life or the top posts in the new administration, but after mercy, despite those who would silence him (10:47ff). While the rich man walked away from the call to discipleship, Bartimaeus gives up what little he has (the cloak he casts off represents the tool of his panhandler’s trade; 10:50). And Mark intentionally parallels his petition with that of the disciples... Jesus cannot answer the rich man’s question because he will not make reparation. Jesus cannot grant the disciples’ request because it is based on delusions of grandiosity. But Jesus can help the beggar because Bartimaeus knows he is blind.

At the beginning of Mark’s discipleship catechism Peter calls Jesus by the ‘correct’ name but resists the Way of the cross (8:29ff). At the end Bartimaeus ‘followed Jesus on the Way’ (10:52) even though he called him by the wrong name (10:47f; the title ‘Son of David’ will be repudiated by Jesus in 12:35-37). The first have become last, and the last first. The moral of the catechism: Only faith-as-discipleship ‘makes us well’.”
(Ched Myers)

“It is difficult to open the eyes of the blind (Mark 8:22-26), but once the grace and power of God have permeated the deepest recesses of our being, we cannot but joyfully follow him on the way to Jerusalem, even though we know that it is the way of rejection and suffering, of death and resurrection (10:46-52). Discipleship is costly grace. It is grace, but it is costly for it leads to Jerusalem. It is costly, but it is grace for it is the result of the continuing work of God in our lives.” **(Athol Gill)**

The disciples’ journey to Jerusalem was more than a geographical journey. They were on a journey of discovery about the identity of Jesus and the nature of life in God’s Kingdom. Although they could see that Jesus was someone of importance with something important to say, they were unable, or unwilling, to see clearly what Jesus was unveiling before them. As Christian readers of these ancient stories we are challenged to make our own responses to this revelation of the identity and mission of Jesus. Having seen what we have seen, how will we live our lives?