

**THE REAL JESUS**  
**A Series on the Book of Mark**  
**“The Ransom”**  
**Mark 10:32-52**  
**New City Church of LA**  
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**I. Introduction**

Series called THE REAL JESUS. Looking at the Book of Mark.

What is the essence of Christianity?

I think for many people, Christianity is about following all the laws of the Bible, doing all the dos and not doing any of the don'ts. For many years, I thought of Christianity mainly as doing the right thing, becoming moral righteous. In fact, if you were to invite people to become a Christian, most of them will automatically assume that you are inviting them to live by the moral laws of the Bible. Christianity has been reduced to the moral laws. No wonder people have a hostile reaction to Christianity. Let me ask you something: If this is Christianity, how is it different from Islam or other religions (or are they not different)?

Some people think of Christianity (or religion in general) as self-discovery. This is what I call Orphraism. You have to discover for yourself what is right. There is no such a thing as absolute truth. Truth is what you discovery for yourself. What's true for you may be true for you but it's not true for me. BUT, there is a clear logical fallacy here. If you are saying that there is no absolute truth, the claim that there is no absolute truth can't be absolutely true either. You can't create an exemption for your view. If you do that, that just happens to be your religion, and it's not anything new. It's called pantheism.

However, Christianity is not about following the moral laws (remember we talked about that last Sunday).

And, Christianity is not self-discovery—figuring out what's right for yourself.

What is the essence of Christianity? It's the gospel of the cross. The cross is at the center of Christianity. Isn't the center of Christianity the teachings of Jesus? No. It's not. It is his death. Much of the rest of the Book of Mark is about the death of Jesus and much of the rest of the New Testament focuses on the reason for his death. Paul said: we

preach Christ crucified. Why is there such a focus on the crucifixion of Jesus Christ? What was the meaning of his death? Why did he die? Of course, all of us heard that Jesus died for our sins. But, why? Why did he have to die? Why couldn't God just forgive us of our sins? Why the messy blood and all?

Well, that's what Jesus answers for us today.

### **Read Mark 10:13-31**

**This passage tells us: (1) Why Jesus Died; and (2) How that Should Change Us Into Servants.**

## **II. First, Why Jesus Died**

The death of Jesus Christ was not something unfortunate that happened to him. Jesus knew about and foretold his death and resurrection.

This is the third time Jesus told his disciples about his death and resurrection.

Verse 32 says they are now on their way to Jerusalem with Jesus leading the way. The disciples were astonished and other followers were afraid. This is a major turning point in the story. They are headed to Jerusalem. The climax of the story is at Jerusalem. The disciples know that Jesus is the Messiah but are probably confused about when the Kingdom of God will be fulfilled. But, one thing they know: something is going to happen in Jerusalem. They are thinking that maybe he will be crowned as the new King and Messiah. But, they have this sense that it's going to be dangerous. So, they are afraid.

Jesus didn't help their nerves: Jesus told them in greater details what was going to happen to him (betrayed to the chief priest, condemned to death, handed over to the Gentiles (Romans), that he will be mocked, spat up, flogged, and killed. He also knew that he will rise in 3 days.

Then (this is very important), Jesus told his disciples exactly **why** he was going to suffer and die: In verse 45, Jesus says: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

- The purpose of Jesus' life is not primarily to teach us how to live, to give us a moral lesson. As good as his teachings are, they are not the primary reason Jesus came.
- The purpose of Jesus' life is not to inspire us to find ourselves and our truth. As inspiring as he is, it was not the primary reason he came.
- The purpose of Jesus' life was to give his life as a ransom. Ransom!

Ransom now is used in kidnapping situation. But, at the time Mark wrote this, ransom meant a payment to free someone who is in bondage: mostly often in slavery. In those days, there was no bankruptcy system. If you had too much debt, you either went to jail or sold yourself as a slave. Let's say you owed \$1,000,000 debt that you couldn't pay. And you were at a market trying to sell yourself as a slave. If someone very nice came to you and asked you how much you owed, he would ask you, how much is your ransom? What is the price to free you from your bondage of debt? If he paid your ransom to set you free, he was called a redeemer, and the process of paying your ransom to free you was called redemption. Jesus came to redeem us from our bondage by paying our ransom.

Now, let's look into this in more detail.

**A. This means that we are in bondage, and we need freedom.** We couldn't free ourselves from the bondage; so, Jesus came to free us. What kind of things are we in bondage?

(1) Jesus came to free us from our bondage to sin. There are sins in our lives that get a hold of us. Alcoholism. Drug addiction. Sexual addiction. Inconsiderateness. Lack of gentleness. Our sins are so deep, so dark. We are deeply sinful. Here's the bottom line: we can't fix ourselves. We are in bondage. The powers of the principalities of evil have gotten a hold of us. Even though we want to be free, we can't no matter how hard we try. It is extremely important that we understand that we are powerless—that we are out of control because of the bondage to sin. It is only through Jesus that we can be saved.

(2) Jesus also came to save us from our bondage to the law. Trying to gain righteousness by the law, but not being able to do it. Then, we feel guilty and condemned

by God. We get depressed and feel like we'll never be able to live up. We'll never be able to be acceptable to God. Or, we reduce the law to external rules of dos and don'ts to something we can manage, so that we can feel like we are righteous, but what it actually does is to make us feel like we are more righteous than others. We either get trapped in the sin of pride or the piteousness of guilt. Living by the law is a trap.

(3) Jesus also came to save us from our bondage to idols. Idols often are good things that we over-desire. In fact, one of the ways idols are described is this word: *epithumia*, which literally means super-desire or over-desire.

- We can desire money, but if we over-desire money, it becomes our idol. It becomes our god.
- We can desire sex, but if we over-desire sex, it becomes our idol.
- We can desire a successful career, but if we over-desire it, it becomes our idol.
- We can desire marriage, but if we over-desire it, it becomes our idol.

Idols are often good things that we over-desire, desire more than God in our lives, that we seek to save us, rather than seeking to be saved by God. When we over-desire these things, we tend to think, whether we know it or not, that only if we can win the lottery, all my problems would be solved. Only if I get married, all my problems will be solved. Only if I can get into that school, all my problems will be solved. And as we live for these over-desires of our heart, we find that we become bonded by these things. And Jesus came to save us from our over-desires, our idols.

(4) Jesus also came to save us from our bondage to ourselves. We are deeply selfish. We are deeply self-focused. Everything is about ourselves. Even the good we do, we often do because it makes us feel better. Or it makes us feel like we are better than those liars. Our lives are about our own comfort, our own success, our own respect, our own dignity, our own everything. In fact, we justify our selfish existence now by saying that it is the survival of the fittest. If we are so addicted to ourselves, how are we going to be a servant like Jesus said we should be? We're stuck. We're in bondage.

All of these things lead us to a sense of emptiness in our lives. We feel like we are turning our wheels but not getting anywhere. These things lead us to a sense of guilt, to a sense of depression, a sense of helplessness, and most dangerous of all, a sense of

superiority thinking that we are better than others just because we are living by some rules. It is because our lives are in bondage.

Now, how do we get freed from this bondage? We need a savior. We can't save ourselves. Why can't we save ourselves? When we are in bondage, when we are in the pit, when we are stuck, we are powerless. We can't save ourselves. You might think you can save yourself, but sooner you come to the realization that you can't save yourself, the better it is. We need a savior! We need a redeemer.

Ok, you say. I need a savior. I want God to save me from this bondage, **but what is this about redemption and paying a ransom? Why can't he just come and rescue me and forgive me? Why did he have to die on the cross to pay a ransom for my freedom?**

Let me try to answer that theologically and experientially.

First, theologically.

The Bible tells us that God loves us. I think when you love someone, you want a relationship with that person. I don't think it is possible to love someone and not want to have a relationship with that person. In the same way, God wants to have a relationship with you.

But, the Bible also says that God is just. He is not just a loving God. He is a just God! If we do evil, there has to be a punishment. If there is no punishment, God is not just. Even Hitler would have gotten away with his evil. And let's say that the greatest punishment is to be separated from God because the greatest award is to be in the presence of God and in a relationship with God. So, if there is sin in our lives, the scripture says that we are separated from God as a punishment. That's what hell is.

And our problem is that we've screwed up. We decided to do our own thing. We decided to walk away from God and seek our own savior, seek after the idols we've created, to do whatever we want to do. We are trapped in bondage because we are separated from God because of his justice.

God also has a problem. He loves us and he wants to have a relationship with us, but our sins have separated us from him. He can't just forgive us without ceasing to be just. If God says: I'll just forgive you because I love you, where is his justice?

Let me give you an illustration. Let's say you are a judge who is both loving and just. Someone you love stands before your court. He has committed a capital crime to which he has pled guilty. But, you love this person with all of your heart. How will you be both just and loving at the same time? If you say, I love you; so, I am going to let you off, where is justice? If you say, I am going to give you the punishment mandated by the law, where is love? How can he be loving and just at the same time?

How can God be both loving and just to us?

God became a man, and lived a perfect sinless life, and gave himself the punishment I deserve. In an astonishing contrast to other religion, Jesus himself became the sacrifice for our sins. That is the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ.

To go back to the illustration of the judge, he gave the verdict of death and came off the bench and went to the electric chair on his behalf. This is exactly what God has done. Jesus is not some whipping boy, a third party, who's getting punished here. It is God himself, the standard bearer of justice, who came down in the person of Jesus Christ, and took the punishment I deserve to take.

This is what Jesus meant when he said, I came to serve, to give my life as a ransom for many. That's the theological explanation.

Now, let me explain more experientially.

What Jesus did is called substitutionary sacrifice. He said he came to give his life as a ransom for many. When you pay a ransom to redeem someone from slavery, it costs you. Instead of that the slave paying for his debts with his life of bondage, you are going to be a substitute sacrifice. You will sacrifice yourself, at least your money, for that person.

In fact, if you look at our experience, all life changing love is substitutionary sacrifice.

Parenting: If you don't sacrifice your life, time, and money for your child, he or she is going to pay for it later in his or her life. If you don't suffer for them, they will suffer.

Forgiveness: Our natural tendency is to get the other person to pay. You want them to suffer from the wrong they have done you. The problem with this is that you

become like them in the process. There is no way to redeem a person through attacking that person. It will create a perpetuation of vengeance. When you don't forgive, you become a part of what makes this world a terrible place. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: "forgiveness is always a form of suffering." Why? Because you are absorbing the debt. You are suffering instead of that person. It's substitutionary sacrifice. If you do that, there is a chance for transformation and life change in the other person.

All life changing love is substitutionary sacrifice.

Here's what was going on. The world was diseased. The world that we experience is not the world God created. It has been hijacked by evil. Paul says: creation has been subject to frustration, in bondage to decay, and groaning. That's the reality of the world now.

I have three kids, a seven year old girl--Kaetlyn and 4 year old twins, Bennett and Eliana. Let's say Kaetlyn developed a cancer and was dying. But, if somehow, I could put my hands on her and take her cancer away and transfer it to me, I would do it in a snap even if it meant suffering and eventual death for me. Now, if all three of our kids had cancer and I would do the same for all of them even if it multiplied my pain and suffering threefold.

Now, the perfectly loving God, in the person of Jesus Christ, took the cancer of the whole world, and the excruciating pain of suffering multiplied by 6 billion people upon himself and suffered and died and experienced hell so that we might be healed.

That's what Prophet Isaiah meant when he said this in Isaiah 53:4-5:

"4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

### **III. Second, How the Cross Frees Us to Serve?**

(1) The cross brings us humility. It shows us that we were in bondage. We were powerless over our sins.

- We were captivated by the power of sin, the vicious cycle of sin.

- We were captivated by the law, the power of the law to produce hypocrisy. We thought we deserve to be accepted by God because we are good, or we were mired in guilt and feeling of worthlessness.
- We were captivated by our idols. Good things in our lives that we over-desired and made them our self-salvation projects, stuff in our lives that we lived for. We either became enslaved by them or we found out how empty they are.

The cross shows us that we are all messed up one way or another. We are all broken. We are all in bondage in need of God's intervention. If we don't acknowledge this, the power of the cross will not manifest in your life. The power of God comes in humility and weakness.

(2) the cross also tells us that God loves us unconditionally, and therefore gives us confidence. He loved us so much that He gave up his glory above and came down here, not as someone up there in society, but as a servant, to give his life as a ransom for us, to die for us, to suffer for us, to be tortured for us, to be flogged for us, to be crucified for us. The reason that the cross of Jesus Christ is at the center of our faith is because it shows us his love. He reconciled us into a relationship with him, and gave us the Holy Spirit.

When we understand our powerlessness, our sins, and our pit on the one hand, and God's unconditional love that sent him down to die for us, on the other hand, and at the same time, these twin realities change us.

It makes us humble, yet confident. It changes us from our hearts.

**And that is the way to be a servant.**

If the foundation of our servanthood is not the gospel humility and gospel confidence, then things can get really messed up.

You can treat servanthood as another law to live up to. Sometimes, we feel like we are serving and we want others to notice that we are serving. In that way, servanthood become another way to save yourself. Another way to get value and self-affirmation. You feel like a good person when you serve others. You feel like God is closer to you when you serve others. You feel like God will bless you more when you serve others.

We serve because we have no rights to demand service from others.

We serve because we are not better than anyone else.

We serve because we are as messed up as anyone else.

We serve because God has unconditionally accepted us into his presence through his service. So, we serve by unconditionally accepting others into our lives and loving them and giving life to them.

We serve because the Holy Spirit came into our hearts and out of the overflow of the spirit we want to serve.

We serve because we don't need power other than the one Jesus gave us through his service to us. We can stay low and serve because Jesus gave us the acceptance we needed. He gave us affirmation we needed. He gave us forgiveness we needed. He gave us the confidence we needed.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

If you are here and the power of the gospel of Jesus is not sinking into your heart, it does not move your heart, I want you to consider the prayer of Bartimaeus. He was blind and he wanted to see. He did everything he can to get to Jesus. I want to invite you to do everything you can to get to Jesus.