

**GSM 20<sup>th</sup> Jan 2013**

**Mark 10:35-45**

**Disciples of Christ....see that true greatness in the Kingdom of God is in serving others**

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." 36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. 37 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." 38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" 39 "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 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." 41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 42 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. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 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."

Morning all, I trust you've all had a good weekend so far and that you're all ready to learn more about being a disciple of Christ! We're currently in a series of sermons based on what this means. In the past two weeks, Vincent has spoken to us about what discipleship entails and what it means to deny self and take up our cross to follow Jesus. The Bible shows us that discipleship involves the inevitability of both obedience and suffering – the grace we receive is not cheap, but is costly. Today, we'll see that discipleship also involves humility and service. Following Christ does not mean worldly power, it means servanthood. And servanthood involves serving; being active. We can't come to church every week and just listen and then continue as normal. That's being safe. That's burying the treasure in the ground and hiding it away. As we've seen in the past two weeks, Jesus called his disciples to himself, and then he sent them out to spread the Gospel. Part of that is in serving others, and we're going to look at how not to serve, what serving looks like, why we serve and how we can serve others.

Let's read our passage for today then, Mark 10:35-45. This can be found on p959 in the Bibles behind your chairs.

Read – Get someone to do this!

This passage can be split into two – firstly the disciples start to push for their status in heaven, based on worldly greatness; secondly Jesus explains the true meaning of being great in God's kingdom. So firstly we'll look at worldly greatness and how not to serve others. At this point in the book of Mark, Jesus and his disciples are on the way to Jerusalem. Jesus has been teaching his followers about the kingdom of God in the previous verses, and has also just predicted his death for the third time. His disciples have been amazed by some of the things he has said – in Mark 10 alone, it says that they are amazed in v24, v26, and they were astonished in v32. Maybe the disciples were beginning to realise who Jesus truly was. The commentaries are unclear on v37 where James and John ask to sit next to Jesus in his glory – there are two main possibilities. James and John may be

thinking that Jesus will have a triumphal entry into Jerusalem and that they will reign with Jesus after his conquest over the Romans. Or, they may be asking for a place at Jesus' side at the banquet table in heaven; in God's kingdom. Whatever their thinking, it stems from the knowledge that Jesus' mission is nearly finished and it is time to put themselves forward for the positions that may be available when the time comes. In Mark chapter 9, Jesus took Peter, James and John up a mountain, where Moses and Elijah appeared and had a conversation with Jesus. Having just seen this, a glimpse of the glory and power Jesus has, they have prompted themselves to push for their own promotion. That's the way of the world isn't it? Always pushing forward, aiming to get higher, earn more money; have more power. What's your 5 year career plan? The media is full of news about who's going to be the next prime minister, the next head of RBS, the next Chelsea manager. Who's next in that position of power? What power or greatness are you searching for in your lives? Is it to have power over a spouse, having the best school for your children, having the newest gadgets, having the ideal life – a big house, posh car and electric window blinds? This was the case for James and John, who were asking themselves 'How can we be in the most important place possible when Jesus has finished what he's come to do?' And the other disciples seem slightly annoyed with James and John in v41. And they would have been indignant, not because they were being righteous and disapproving of what James and John had requested, but because James and John had managed to get in before them! This is backed up in v42 when Jesus calls all of them together to rebuke them, not just James and John. So, we can see that all of the disciples were pre-occupied with how they could get positions of honour in Jesus' kingdom more than the things Jesus had just taught them earlier in Mark 10. The world's view of personal gain and prosperity is evident here. This is our contrast for this morning; the world's view of greatness and prosperity. How not to serve others. Keep this in mind as we look towards the servanthood that Jesus calls us to follow.

So, now we have the contrast, we can start to look at the servanthood that Jesus calls us to as his followers. This is in the rebuke that Jesus has for his twelve disciples in v42-45. Here, Jesus brings his disciples together and knocks their heads together. They all know how their society works with the Gentile rulers 'lording' it over their subjects. The rulers of the time ruled by oppression and heavy taxation. And the disciples, at this moment, are thinking in the same way. They are acting as if they will become rulers in the Gentile society. In Mark chapter 8, in Mark chapter 9 and just before today's passage in Mark chapter 10, Jesus has told the disciples that anyone who wants to be first, must be last and must be a servant to all. It must have felt like he was banging his head against a brick wall! Here's what Jesus tells us is the way to true greatness, to what serving others looks like, in v43-45: "Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 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 answer to true greatness therefore, is servant-heartedness and humility. This has been explained as altruism, and in some ways, that is true. Altruism is defined as selflessness motivated by a moral duty or obligation in society. Being servant-hearted is certainly selfless, but instead of moral obligation being the motivation behind it, it is done as a response to a command Jesus has given us. Servant-heartedness is very easy to interpret as giving a bit of money to Pudsey every year, or maybe to let someone else go through a door before you. Those things, in of themselves, aren't wrong. But they often come with a sense of moral duty and they can sometimes seem to be as part of a give and take deal. I'll give a bit of money to charity, I'll do some volunteering, and things should go my way when I need them to. It's karma, or maybe

something just to make yourself feel better or to be seen as a “good” Christian. It’s the prosperity gospel. The more you put in, the more you get out of it. Wrong! As Christians, as disciples of Christ, we have already received more than we can ever comprehend. In v45, Jesus explains that he is to give his life as a ransom for many. Not because of what people had done to earn that redemption, but despite it. The Son of Man made himself nothing, took the form of a mortal human being, became a servant and humbled himself to give up his life to death on a cross. That’s real servanthood! So, all that we do, as disciples of Christ, is in response to the salvation that we have.

But there’s no way that by serving others, we can accomplish what Jesus did on the cross. So why serve others? Jesus tells us, in response to the salvation that we have been given, to serve others. We must become servants and slaves to all. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, we are told to imitate Christ, just as Paul imitates Christ. Therefore, we also need to be prepared to give our lives in the service of others. So what does this service look like? As we’ve seen, whatever it is, it’s not done for personal gain. We serve first, and foremost, God. The Westminster Shorter Catechism is a collection of questions and statements explaining key doctrinal standards in the church. The very first question is “what is the chief end of man?” The answer given is this: “the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever”. So in serving others, we are serving God, and in doing that, we are glorifying God. So maybe take a step back, think about your financial giving, the time you give to volunteering, the things you do for others that make you feel good. Do you do these things to glorify God?

Now, I’m not saying that serving others isn’t enjoyable; the enjoyment we get when serving others is from knowing that we are serving God. Our enjoyment shouldn’t be the first thing that we look for when we serve others. The first question we should ask ourselves when serving others is whether God is enabling us to glorify Him through that particular service.

So we have now covered how not to serve others, why we should serve others and what serving others looks like; time for the practicality of how we should serve others. From the passage today, we are told to become servants and slaves to all. So do we now go and employ ourselves as a footman in a place like Downton Abbey or go and find work in a sweat shop? Surprisingly, I’m not going to advocate either of those today. A few examples can be found in Matthew 25:35-40 (p941) *“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”* *“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’* *“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’* In this passage, Jesus is talking about what it will be like on the day of judgement when he returns again, and how his people will be separated from those who will be sent to hell. Now I’m not going to talk about the day of judgement, but I’m using this passage to give an example of what Jesus calls us, as disciples of Christ, to do in response to the salvation that he’s given to us. In this parable in Matthew, Jesus is talking to a group of disciples who are being judged on the day of judgement, so these aren’t the 12 apostles we see called by Jesus in the gospels. They are representative of any disciple of Christ, in other words, they represent you and I. And as we can see, these disciples feed and give drink to those who need it. They welcome in strangers, clothe and tend the naked and sick and visited those in prison. Now, as a church,

here are a few select examples that fulfil the above. GSM has work with vulnerable men and women who get fed physically and spiritually. Strangers are welcomed every week at the night shelter, but also at the Sunday services. Clothes are handed out at Teen Challenge, and there are plenty of medical professionals here who could help out if there were a medical emergency! So, for those who are involved in these areas, that's great! Keep it up, but keep checking that the work being done is in God's service, for His glory and not done out of a sense of altruism or give and take or just to make yourself feel better. Now here's the real challenge. How about serving others on an individual level?

First of all, I won't be giving specific things that must be done; everyone is in a different situation and comes into contact with lots of different people. So let's go back to the passage in Matthew. Here, the disciples know what the needs of the needy people are. They see that someone is thirsty and so they provide drink. So, we should do the same. That doesn't necessarily mean going out and looking for thirsty people. What it means is that there are people we know, personally, who need serving. And since we know them personally, that gives us the opportunity to find out what their needs are. It could be an arm round the shoulder at a tough time, visiting someone for a cup of tea, maybe some babysitting, or breakfast in bed (Alyce?) These are just some examples of countless things that can be done in the service of others. The main thing to remember here though, is the motivation behind serving others. True greatness in the kingdom of God is becoming a servant to all. That means putting aside our own desires and wants and placing those of others above them. Not just for our own enjoyment, but firstly for the glory of God.

Before I finish, I want to give you two words of caution. Firstly, as Vincent has taught us in the past couple of weeks, disciples of Jesus are called and then sent out. But before someone embarks on a new endeavour, it's usually a good idea to get an idea of what the new venture will entail. So, when searching for a house, you tend to look round it first before buying; most people read a job description before applying for a job; you try a small jar of Marmite before buying a year's supply of it! In Mark 10, James and John have realised the end game – that Jesus is going to have lots of glory and they want to hop on the bandwagon without knowing the route that it's taking. So, when James and John ask to be seated either side of Jesus, they don't have a full understanding of what this means, and Jesus points this out to them in v38. We find out what this cup is when Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14 – "Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Yes, James and John will drink from the same cup and have the same baptism as Jesus – that is, they will suffer and be persecuted for being disciples of Jesus. In Acts 12, James is executed by Herod Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great, who was king of the Jews when Jesus was born. James' brother, John, dies a peaceful death in his old age, but not before being exiled to hard labour in the stone quarries on the island of Patmos. This reinforces what Vincent has taught us in the past two weeks – that being a disciple of Jesus involves suffering. Secondly, when we take the gospel to others, as it tells us in 1 Peter 3:15, we need to always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that we have. When we serve others, the aim is to show them Christ through our words and actions. So, when others do see Christ working in us and ask us why, as Christians, we act differently, we need to be able to explain the gospel to them. So, do we fully understand the gospel that we have? Could we have a better understanding if we studied God's word a bit more regularly? If we understand the gospel more fully, would we be able to present it to others in a way they would

understand more clearly? Would it also enable us to serve others better? This will better prepare us if we come up against persecution or obstacles when we serve others. Serving others, sharing the gospel and potential suffering all go hand in hand.

To end, we know that serving others will not always be appreciated by others. That doesn't matter. The reason we serve others is because we want to glorify God in response to the ultimate service Jesus did for us on the cross. Nothing about serving others, as disciples of Christ, is for personal earthly gain. Let's not go down the path of trying to be seen as great in the world, this doesn't last and it doesn't lead to greatness in the kingdom of God. So, imitate Christ, be a servant to all, and make sure that your ultimate aim, in all of this, is to glorify God.

### Small Group Questions

Some of these are lengthy questions, so if discussions are long, please focus on Qs 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8 as these are the main challenging questions for key application. Please do provide feedback on the sermon and small group studies so the preaching team can get a clearer idea of topics and challenges that could be addressed in the future.

1. Do we know how to identify the characteristics of worldly greatness? (Look at v37 and v42)
2. Do we ever define our lives by the standards of this world's greatness or by those of God? Why is it so easy to slip into judging ourselves, and others, by the world's standards of greatness?
3. What power were James and John searching for? Why? What power or greatness are you searching for or wanting in your lives?
4. According to Jesus, in v42-45, why is it better to seek greatness in God's kingdom rather than in this world?
5. Do you serve others to glorify God or do you primarily do it because you enjoy them?
6. Does that mean we shouldn't enjoy serving others? (No!) Why not?
7. Are you prepared for the potential suffering and to explain the gospel to those who respond to being served? How can you be better prepared?
8. How can you get to know, and respond to, the needs of those around you? Challenge yourselves to identify one person (friend, spouse, relative etc) who you can serve better. [Don't do it to be noticed!]