

# Explore the Bible: Serves

April 10, 2019

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for April 28 focuses on Mark 10:35-45.*

Generally speaking, we live in a “more is better” culture. Consider our options if you want to grab something to please your pallet: 31 flavors of ice cream, more than 168,000 drink combinations and over 150 food choices at the buffet. What’s not better about that, right?

The mantra applies to other areas of life as well. The more status or the higher the position one achieves, the better it is, because it brings more money, more recognition, more accolades, more influence and so forth. Would any of us honestly deny that more of those things is not better?

We are certainly not the first people in the history of the world to operate by this principle. In fact, even a cursory glance through history demonstrates that this mentality has marked humanity from the beginning. When we come to this pivotal passage in Mark, then, perhaps more than in any other story in the Gospel, we see ourselves. What we also see is a countercultural narrative that challenges *us* as much as it did the disciples. Prepare yourself to be confronted by a new mantra.

## The Request (Mark 10:35-39a)

Mark’s placement of this story is as provocative as it is purposeful. The encounter of the rich young man (10:17-22) led the disciples into a mind-blowing conversation with Jesus (10:23-27). This conversation culminated with Jesus’ promise of reward to those who had given up anything to follow him (10:28-31). The request of James and John would have sprung naturally from Jesus’ promise. If Jesus was talking about rewards in both the present age and the age to come, why not attempt to get themselves set up for the

future right then? The two places of prominence in the coming kingdom would foot the bill nicely (More is better, after all.). Ask and it shall be given to you, right?

Mark, however, positioned an important discussion in between Jesus' teaching on rewards and the request of James and John. Jesus told the disciples once again (8:31) that their destination of Jerusalem would bring not glory and a throne, but betrayal, conspiracy, mockery, beatings and death. This was surely not what John and James had in mind. This was precisely what Jesus had in mind, though, when he questioned them about their ability to drink the cup and be baptized in his baptism. They would discover that suffering would precede glory.

*The path of suffering that Jesus walked was unique in kind and purpose. As Jesus indicated to James and John, the general path of suffering would not be unique for his followers. As Jesus went, so would go his followers. Are you willing to pay the price of his suffering to enjoy the fruits of his glory?*

## **The Reaction (Mark 10:39b-41)**

Jesus' response to the brothers' request pulled no punches. They would indeed walk the road of suffering. How could Jesus be so sure? As mentioned above, when one follows Jesus, one will walk the path he walked. His path was that of suffering. The reward for following was not Jesus' primary concern, and it should not have been theirs either.

The response of the other disciples to the brothers' request proved not to be as high-minded as Jesus'. Mark says, "they became indignant" with them (10:41). Mark does not indicate explicitly why they were so upset. Jesus' subsequent discussion would seem to suggest that their indignation stemmed from their own desires to be granted the favored positions in the kingdom. James and John beat them to the punch.

*The disciples look awfully foolish in their competition for prominence (see also 9:33-37). As the saying goes, however, “Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones.” We are cut from the same mold as they; we have the same inclinations. Consider the last time you felt some indignation toward a fellow Christ-follower. Does the example reveal that you also would have been among ‘the ten’?*

## **The Ransom (Mark 10:42-45)**

“The Gentiles” made for easy and compelling foils in the first-century world of Jesus. The disciples would have immediately pictured their Roman occupiers at Jesus’ mention of the “rulers” and “high officials” of the gentiles (10:42). If Jesus were giving the same illustration in our time, he might utilize the rulers or high officials of the “liberals” or “Communists” to evoke the same feeling in us the disciples would have felt. The disciples surely would have felt shame for exemplifying the characteristics of the Romans. Those people sought, used and abused power, status and authority over others. They epitomized those living the mantra, “More is better.”

Jesus’ countercultural narrative emerges like a rock in the middle of a fast-flowing river: “Not so with you” (10:43). In a radical departure from the practices of Roman society and humanity in general, Jesus demonstrated that the more-is-better principle looked differently in his kingdom. The way up was the way down. The greatest was the servant. Instead of “More is better,” we see a new mantra, “More of less is better.”

One of the compelling features of Christianity is that it centers around not a body of beliefs and practices, but a person. We find no more compelling an illustration of that than in this text. Jesus did not just teach a radical inversion of norms; he embodied it. The basis for his charge to serve to be great came from his own example. No one was greater than he, and no one stooped lower than he to serve. In fact, his service to others extended as far

as it could possibly go: the giving away of his life (10:45).

*If you have not committed Mark 10:45 to memory, make that your goal this week. Rather than a list of dos and don'ts to apply to one's life, this passage presents for us a living guide of the way of the kingdom. His example will challenge our motivations, our pursuits, our aims, our priorities and our measure of success. The way of Jesus is the way of the servant, and he says to us, "Follow me." Will you?*

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