

Mark 10:35-52 - What do you want me to do for you?

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[0 : 00] Mark chapter 10 and Mona is going to come and read for us. Good morning church. Okay so we're reading Mark 10 and we're going from verse 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. What do you want me to do for you? He asked. They replied, let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory. 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? 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. 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. When the 10 heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, you know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles, Lord, is over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave for 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. Then they came to Jericho as Jesus and his disciples together with a large crowd were leaving the city. A blind man, Barthelomew, which means son of

Timaeus was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, son of David, have mercy on me. Jesus stopped and said, call him. So they called to the blind man, cheer up on your feet, he's calling you. Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. What do you want me to do for you? Jesus asked him. The blind man said, Rabbi, I want to see. Go, said Jesus. Your faith has healed you. Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. Amen. Well, good morning. It's great to be back. Thanks for having me back. It's a great joy to be able to come and open up God's words with you this morning. So shall we pray? Let's pray and let's ask that God would speak this morning. Father, thank you for these precious words, this extraordinary gospel of Mark and all it shows us about Jesus. And we ask this morning that you'd help us to have hearts that are set on Jesus, that our minds would understand, that our eyes would see him more clearly, and that we might be transformed by his beautiful power.

Father, and we ask it in his name. Amen. I think that was a longer reading than perhaps we normally used to. I think often we just look at one little part of the Bible or one little part of the gospel.

[4 : 00] But what I want to do this morning is take these two accounts, which Mark has put next to each other, and try and think, why do they go together? Why do these two things happen next to each other?

And what I want to show you is what an extraordinary teacher Jesus is. I think even if you're not really sure what you believe about Jesus, even if you're here and you're not a Christian, I still think it isn't hard to see that he is an extraordinary teacher who has turned our world upside down. And the brilliant thing about Jesus is that he's so simple in what he teaches, and yet so profound. He doesn't need kind of high-faluting philosophy. He doesn't need clever and complex doctrine. He uses the simplest of words to completely expose our hearts. In fact, Jesus uses one question, one question, which I think completely shows up what's happening inside each of us. The question came up twice in the reading that we've just had. I don't know if you noticed it. Here is the question. What do you want me to do for you?

Jesus asks that question twice. And as he asks it, he shows up what is really going on in the human heart. So we're going to think about this one question, and we're going to think about the two answers that Jesus gets, and we're going to try and understand what that shows us about our own hearts and about the magnificence of Jesus. But let's think about the question, first of all, what do you want me to do for you? That's the question Jesus asks. He asks it to James and John, his disciples. Then he asks it to this blind man, Bartimaeus, what do you want me to do for you? I think that's a strange question. And the reason I think it's a strange question and might puzzle us is because it's a servant's question. That's what a servant asks. What do you want me to do for you?

The person who asks that question is not the person in power, but the person who is being, who has to serve, whose job it is to do something. And so we might expect Jesus to come along and say, this is what I want you to do for me. But instead he comes and says, what do you want me to do for you?

That's surprising. It's surprising because I think we often imagine that being a Christian is about me serving Jesus. He's the great King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And my job is to serve him. Well, what you need to understand is before you can ever serve Jesus, he first needs to serve you.

[7 : 04] that's where it starts. And that's what he says in the middle of this passage. So just look with me, verse 45. It's one of the key verses in the whole of Mark's gospel. Here it is. Jesus says, even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

We have to understand that Jesus came to serve. It's strange because he uses this phrase son of man.

When he talks about son of man, he's referring to himself, but it's a loaded term. It's like a code name, son of man. When I was younger, I was in a gang, well, they're not a, I mean, there's only two of us. Um, it was me and my friend, Steven Gower. We weren't really a gang, but we thought we were, we were, we thought we were pretty cool. And we had, we had code names because we thought that it's quite embarrassing admitting it out. But anyway, we had code names. And the idea was that the code name told you something about what we thought we were. My code name in our gang was falcon fighter. I don't think it accurately described me, but I think it described what I aspired to be. Well, this name son of man is like a code name. It tells you something about Jesus.

But in order to understand what son of man means, you need to go back, go back to where this term has been used earlier in the Bible. In particular, back to a prophet called Daniel.

An extraordinary story of Daniel in the Old Testament. Daniel, a man who lived at a very hard time when God's people were taken in exile, that he was living in Babylon, he was living far from home. He'd been there for 70 years, spent all his life away as an exile.

[9 : 28] And while Daniel was there in exile, he had a vision, an extraordinary vision. He saw the ancient of days, God himself on a throne. And it was like a courtroom and the books were opened up, a scene of magnificent power. Can you picture it?

The ancient of days. His hair was white like wool. He was blazing with glory. And Daniel is there looking at this great vision. And then into this throne room comes someone else.

One who looks like a son of man. That is one who has a human appearance. One walking in as a human being walks into this courtroom. A son of man.

And in Daniel's vision, what happens is that as the son of man comes into the courtroom, the son of man is given all glory and sovereign power and all the nations of the world worship him.

Wow. You don't need to know much about the Bible to know that there is only one that you worship. Only one.

[10 : 59] You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not worship any other god, God says. Which means that this son of man who all the nations are going to worship, this son of man approaching the ancient of days must be God.

Because you only worship God. So here's this scene that's unfolding. You've got to imagine Daniel, right? Imagine Daniel. He's there in exile and he sees this thing unfolding.

Do you not imagine his heart beating faster? It's like, who is that? Who is this figure who can walk into the presence of the ancient of days and receive worship?

Who could that possibly be? Daniel's like on tiptoe trying to see who is it? Who is it? And Daniel never fully gets the answer in his lifetime.

Because it would be another nearly 500 years. But for a man walking by the sea of Galilee says, the son of man is me.

[12 : 13] Jesus, when he takes the phrase son of man, is using that name, which means he is the man who is God to be worshipped.

So do you not feel, right? Come on, we've got to get into this, right? Do you not feel the crunch when it says, the son of man, that son of man of all glory, wisdom, and sovereign power, that son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life.

Right? There is the crunch. You've got to feel, right? That's the, that is the great paradox at the very heart of what we believe as Christians, that the great son of man gave his life on a cross.

That the Messiah was crucified. And so when Jesus asks the question, what do you want me to do for you?

It's an extraordinary question, because it tells you that this son of man came to serve. And look at the extent to which he came to serve. Even to give his life as a ransom for men.

[13 : 35] Humanity is in a desperate, desperate plight. In a place of deep, deep darkness and slavery. And Jesus came in order to pay the price, to bring us out of darkness and slavery to sin, in order that we might be rescued, that we might be taken from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, from the kingdom of shame to the kingdom of freedom, from the kingdom of slavery, to the kingdom of being children of God.

He gave his life as a ransom. And so Jesus is rightly called the servant king.

He comes to serve. So this question, what do you want me to do for you? It shows you something. It takes you to the very heart of the identity of Jesus.

He is the servant who comes to serve. Even lost sinners like us. So there's the question. But what is our response?

When Jesus says to us, what do you want me to do for you? How do you respond? Because what you think you want Jesus to do for you will show you what's going on in your heart.

[14 : 56] So let's see what happened. Let's look at these two occasions when Jesus asked the servant's question. And just as a spoiler, one group get it very wrong.

The other one gets it very right. So let's look at it. Let's go back to the start of our reading. And we read about James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They come to Jesus.

Teacher, they said, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. Wowzers. I mean, what a question. What a thing to say.

Wow. Jesus, remember, is the eternal son of man who is going to be worshipped by all the nations.

And these two little disciples come and say, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. Do you not think Jesus would have every right to turn around and say, how dare you? Who do you think you are?

[15 : 54] But he doesn't. He's gracious. He's kind. He wants to teach them. He wants to show them what's in their hearts. And so he asks them the servant's question. What do you want me to do for you?

They're very clear. They've got this worked out. They've already thought this through. They reply, let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory. Here is essentially their answer.

We want to be first. We want the highest place. Now, let's give them their G. They have understood that Jesus is about to receive a lot of glory.

They have understood that there's something of a kingdom going on. They've seen his miracles. Perhaps they've worked out that he is the Messiah. He is the king of Israel, whose God has promised forever and ever. And they're like, we want in on that, Jesus.

We want to be in the highest place. We want to be in the highest place. But their hearts are desperately, desperately wrong. And you can feel the kind of, the pain in Jesus' answer.

[17 : 04] He says, in verse 38, you don't know what you're asking. You don't know what you're asking. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I'm baptized with?

Now, I love this. Right, so Jesus comes out with this. Can you be baptized with the baptism I'm baptized with? And James and John, perhaps they take a brief moment, they look at each other and they go, yeah, we can do that.

They haven't got the first idea what Jesus is talking about. They don't know what he's referring to. Presumably, they think, when Jesus talks about the cup he's going to drink, they think, well, that must be a cup of glory.

Yeah, we could drink that, Jesus. We'll drink a cup of glory. Baptism, yeah, we'll be baptized. We'll be submerged and immersed in your glory and your power. Yes, Jesus, we can do that. No problem.

They have not understood the kingdom of Jesus. They've not understood who he is and what he's come to do. Because the cup Jesus is talking about is the cup of suffering that he will drink at the cross.

[18 : 20] It's the cup of God's wrath that he will drink. It's the cup of agonizing pain. That he will drink as he dies to save the world.

And the baptism he talks about is the baptism of going under the judgment of God. It's the suffering of this world, being immersed in death, going to death itself.

They think it's about glory. It's all about suffering. And so Jesus said to them, you will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I'm baptized with.

He says, actually, you are going to suffer. And obviously, they're not going to drink the cup of God's wrath. That's what Jesus will do. But they are going to follow him.

Just like he said, take up my cross. They are going to die. They are going to suffer. But verse 40, to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant.

[19 : 24] These places belong to those for whom they've prepared. He says, James and John, your hearts are all wrong. You think it's about grabbing for glory.

Actually, it is about embracing suffering and service. The 10 hear about this. They become indignant. They're pretty annoyed with James and John.

I don't think it's kind of, oh, James and John, how could you be so selfish? I think it is, James and John, how dare you try and get ahead of us? And so Jesus calls them together.

Stop squabbling, children. Come here. Let me teach you. You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them.

You know, right, how the world works. People pushing forward, grabbing for glory. You know how it works. And then Jesus says these words, not so with you. It must not be that way.

[20 : 24] Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. This is remarkable.

This one question cracks open what is going on in the proud human heart. Because I think James and John are very like me and perhaps they're very like you.

I want to be first. I want to be noticed. I want to be seen. I want to be appreciated. I want applause. There's something that loves to be first.

It's a bit like, you know when you go to a supermarket and it's busy and you're queuing. And you have to make that awful decision as you approach the busy checkouts.

Which one is going to be my checkout of choice? And you're trying to judge, right? You're trying to assess. It's not just about the longest queue because it might be they've only got a few items.

[21 : 34] You might have a very, one person but a very big trolley load of stuff. So you're trying to assess which one's going to go first, which is going to go first. You're trying to look at the checkout system. How fast are they going to be?

They look efficient. And you start and you choose your queue and you stand in your queue and then what you do is you line up with someone next to you. So as long as I beat them, then I'm happy. I've chosen a good queue.

Anyone else do this or it's just me? And you're moving forwards and suddenly this queue is going faster than you and it's awful. You find yourself getting very stressed and then someone spills all their little coins all over the thing.

It's like, come on! And then someone opens a till over here and the people behind you whip round and get in before you and it's like so frustrating and you find your blood pressure rising and you find your stress levels increasing.

There is a way in that situation to make all of your stress go away. All you need to do is turn to the person behind you and say, would you like to go in front of me?

[22 : 38] And the moment you do that, you don't care anymore because you've chosen to serve. Rather than this obsession with making sure that I get what I want and I'm noticed and I get, I don't miss out and I don't lose out.

Instead, you choose to serve. If queuing in a supermarket doesn't work for you, perhaps driving in a traffic jam, apply it to wherever you have your little stresses.

And if that doesn't apply to you, then think about all the ways in our hearts that we just try to make sure that we get what we think we deserve. As long as I'm seen and we will use whatever we can in order to make sure that I get what I want.

it might be in the workplace, it might be in my family, that I make sure that I'm sorted out and I'm looked after.

Happens in churches. Where as long as my preferences are met and my choices and my opinions are accepted, then I'm happy.

[23 : 58] but I feel like I'm being pushed to the back. If I feel like other people are going ahead of me, then we can become very stressed. It happens in terms of our gifting. Sometimes, you know, you have a particular gift.

Perhaps you're all brilliant and I'm picking, I don't know this church, I'm picking things at random, right? Perhaps you're very gifted as a flower arranger or as a I used to be in an orchestra.

I used to play clarinet in an orchestra and I was first clarinet. Like, I was the most, I was the best in the orchestra. It was very exciting and I would sit and I'd play my clarinet and feel very smug and proud and then one day, a girl walked into the orchestra hall and she was carrying a box that looked suspiciously like a clarinet.

And she was third clarinet but she was clearly much better than me. And it didn't take long for the conductor to eventually say, John T, would you mind switch it?

Would you mind switching? Would you mind if Carola was first clarinet? I can still remember the seething rage that she'd come in and taken my place.

[25 : 19] I kind of wanted bad things to happen like her fingers to drop off or something so that she could no longer play clarinet. Isn't it sad we can be like that in church?

Rather than rejoice in someone else, we feel threatened. We feel angry because it threatens our sense of identity and we're like, no, this is my role, this is what I do.

Rather than saying, no, we come to serve. And Jesus, as he asks this question, what do you want me to do for you? Perhaps the deepest, honest answer of our hearts is, Jesus, I want glory.

I want you to make me great. I want you to fix all my problems. I want you to sort my life out. I want you to make sure that I get what I want. Do you know, when Jesus, if you are someone who finds yourself wanting to push to the front of the queue, what Jesus comes to you, he says, gently, he says to you, you need to learn to go to the back.

Go to the back of the queue. Go to the back of the queue and learn to serve. And here's the weird thing, right?

[26 : 38] The weird thing is that the back of the queue is where freedom is found. Everybody thinks that to be at the front of the queue is freedom. I just want to be at the front. I want to be at the front. I want to be at the front. The front of the queue is not freedom.

The front of the queue is slavery because you are stressed all the time that one day Carola is going to walk into your life and is going to take your place. The front of the queue is the place where you feel alone because you've had to push everyone out of your way to get to the front.

The front of the queue is a slavery that you have to keep working to maintain your position and to not lose who you are. I want glory. I want glory. I want glory. And you'll never get to the front.

The great irony that Jesus knows and what he shows us through his gospel is that freedom is found at the back when you go to the back and you serve others and you say, what do you want me to do for you?

Jesus is the most free human being who's ever lived because he was not interested in getting to the front. He constantly went to the back to serve.

[27 : 39] He was so free. This is freedom. But it may be that some of you sitting here are thinking, huh, I just feel rubbish.

I gave up trying to be the front of the queue a long time ago. I feel like I've got nothing. I feel like I'm useless. I feel like I'm I've got nothing to offer. Well, here's why Mark puts this story next.

Because look what happens next. Just after we've had this discussion around greatness and pushing to the front and trying to get to the front, look what happens next. They come to Derrick Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples together with a large crowd were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus, which means son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging.

It would be hard to imagine someone more at the back of the queue than Bartimaeus. James and John, we want to be at the front. Here is Bartimaeus who's at the back.

He's begging. He's sitting by the roadside. He's got nothing. He's utterly, utterly dependent on others. He's got nothing to offer. He's just begging from others. Now he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was coming by.

[29 : 03] Maybe he'd heard some rumors about Jesus and something within him welled up and he began to think, what if, what if this Jesus might help me? And so he begins to cry out.

Can you picture him like just crying out? He doesn't know. He's blind. He can't see where Jesus is. He's crying out. Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. What did the crowd say?

I'd say, shut up, Bartimaeus. You're the back of the queue. There are a lot of people ahead of you. There are a lot of people who have more demand on Jesus than you do. Bartimaeus, you need to be quiet.

But he just keeps shouting, I love it. Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. He's crying for mercy.

He's not asking for glory. He is a blind beggar who is desperately in need of mercy. And then come my two favorite words in the whole of Mark's gospel.

[30 : 13] My two favorite words. Look at the first two words of verse 49. Jesus, stop.

Remember, Jesus is on his way to die on a cross to save the universe. The eternal son of God, the son of man, who's worthy of all worship and all honor and all glory.

He's going to a cross to die, then he'll rise again, he'll return to glory. What could possibly be important enough to make Jesus stop on his great eternal divine mission? What could possibly make him stop?

I mean, it must be something incredibly important. It must be something incredibly significant. What is it? It's a blind beggar called Bartimaeus.

Do you not see? Jesus stops for blind beggars. That's our Jesus.

[31 : 18] That's his heart. That's how he loves. He's not interested in the powerful and the rich and the influencers and the celebrity.

He stops for blind beggars who've got nothing to offer him. And he says, call him. So they call to the blind man, cheer up.

On your feet, he's calling you. Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and he came to Jesus. And then we get our question. What do you want me to do for you?

I mean, it's strange, right? Because Bartimaeus is blind. It's obvious what Jesus needs to do for him.

But Jesus treats him with such dignity and respect. He doesn't go, oh, you're blind, fine, I'll heal you and off he goes. Instead, he treats him with such respect. He says, what do you want me to do for you? What is the cry of your heart?

[32 : 22] And this blind man simply says, Rabbi, I want to see. It's a cry of desperate need.

It's a cry for mercy. And Jesus says, go, your faith has healed you. And immediately the man follows Jesus along the road.

You see, if the people who want to be at the front of the queue, Jesus says, you need to learn to go to the back. What does people say, what does Jesus say to the people at the back of the queue?

He says to them, come to the front. Come to the front and let me show you mercy. Come to the front and let me heal you.

Come to the front and let me restore you. And so if you're sitting here in church this morning and you can identify with blind Bartimaeus, you feel like you're someone who has nothing to offer.

[33 : 29] You feel like you've made a complete disaster of your life. You're not impressive. No one notices you. No one seems to be bothered about you.

No one really cares. You have things in your life that you feel ashamed of in the past. Things that you know you've done. Things that you think disqualify you. Things that keep you away.

Is that you? Because if you find yourself sitting at the back of the queue, I want you to know this morning that Jesus stops for people like you.

And he comes to you in your desperate need and in your weakness and in your frailty and in your sin. And he says, what do you want me to do for you? And if you can cry to him, Lord, please show me mercy.

I want to see you. With the biggest smile and the widest arms, Jesus will say, yes.

[34 : 34] Yes. Come. Come. Come to the front and receive mercy from Jesus. Come. Come. Come. Come. That is the beautiful gospel of Jesus.

Jesus. And so here is Jesus. And this morning, he says, what do you want me to do for you? If the honest cry of your heart is, Jesus, I want to be first, he says, go to the back of the queue.

But if this morning, the honest cry of your heart is, Jesus, I've got nothing, he says, come to me. Come to the front. Do you know what I've experienced as I've lived the Christian life?

What I find is there are times when I'm proud and he says, go to the back and he humbles me and I'm humbled and then I feel rubbish and I feel broken.

He said, and I cry to him for mercy. He says, yeah, come to the front. And then I begin to get proud. He says, go to the back again. And the Christian life is a sort of experience of learning to live in this reality.

[35 : 46] Fighting pride by going to the back and serving and then receiving mercy as you come to Jesus at the front and then it's that. So here is Jesus.

I think he's spectacular. I think he's magnificent. I think he's worthy of worship this morning. Because he says, what do you want me to do for you?

Let's just take a moment as we finish. Just take a moment of quiet. Let's just think. As Jesus asks that question, what do you want me to do for you? Do you feel him saying, you need to be humbled, you need to go to the back and serve others rather than being about yourself?

Or perhaps you hear him saying, let me show you mercy, let me restore you, let me forgive you, let me heal you this morning. Take a moment just to pray.

Lord Jesus, we worship you.

[37 : 13] We worship you as the son of man in magnificent glory who came to serve. We went not just to the back of the queue, but to the very lowest of places at the cross.

And we ask today that we would hear your voice. We ask today that you would help us to learn to serve. That we would not seek our own honor and glory or comfort, but that we learn to serve one another.

I really pray that this church family would be a church full of people who want to serve each other. Lord, I pray that this merger with Redeemer Queens Park, Lord, that's going to take a lot of serving one another.

And we pray for that heart. We pray for that attitude of Jesus. And Lord, for those of us who just feel broken, for those of us who just feel worthless and like we have nothing to offer, pray this morning we would hear the great beautiful invitation of Jesus to come and receive mercy.

Lord, we pray to you. Amen.