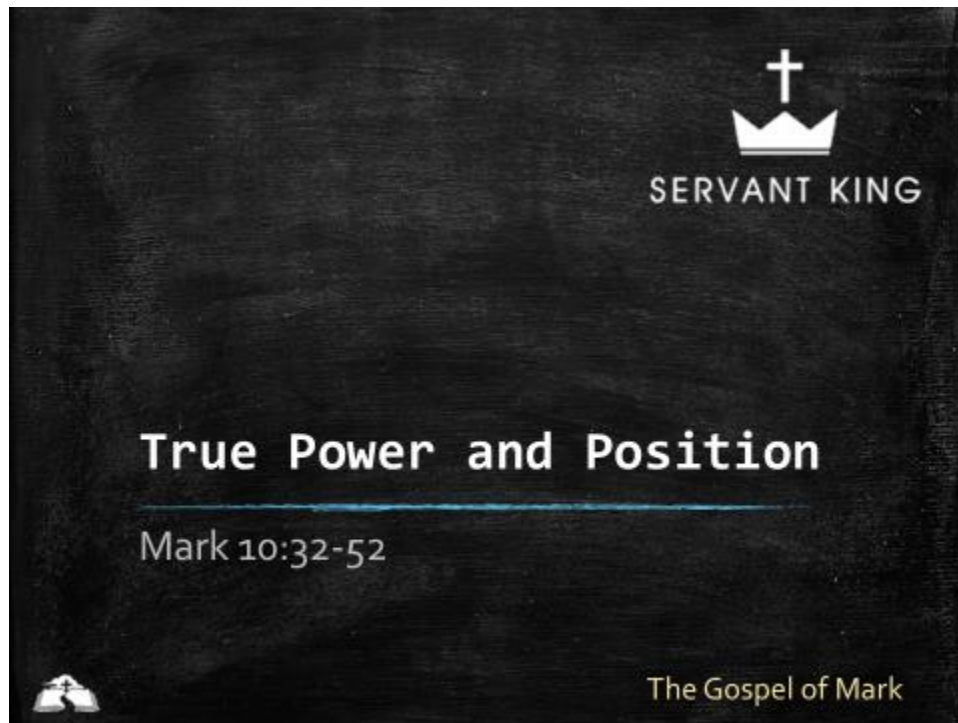


True Power and Position

Mark 10:32-52

Feb. 14, 2016 AM

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Fear is an interesting emotion. It can helpfully motivate us to take action that might save us from danger. And yet, it can also paralyze us and keep us from moving to safety. Like most of you, intense fear is not something I have had to encounter often in my life. I do remember a moment of foolishness as a teenager when a friend of mine talked me into climbing up the face of rock wall in a park near where I grew up. The climb was only 30 to 40 feet up and there were plenty of places to put your hands and feet. I watched as my friend started up the rock face and prepared to follow him. From the bottom, it didn't look all that scary or dangerous.

It didn't look scary that is, until I was about half way up. Suddenly, I found myself in a tough spot where I could neither go up nor go back down. Have you ever had something like that happen to you? And the problem was that the more I thought about my predicament, the more I became paralyzed with fear. My friend who by now was nearly at the top, found my situation rather funny and didn't offer much help or encouragement. Feeling all alone for what seemed like hours I tried to talk myself into going up or down. This wasn't what I expected. What seemed fun just moments before was now terrifying. Somehow I managed to inch my way forward and finally forced my way to the top.

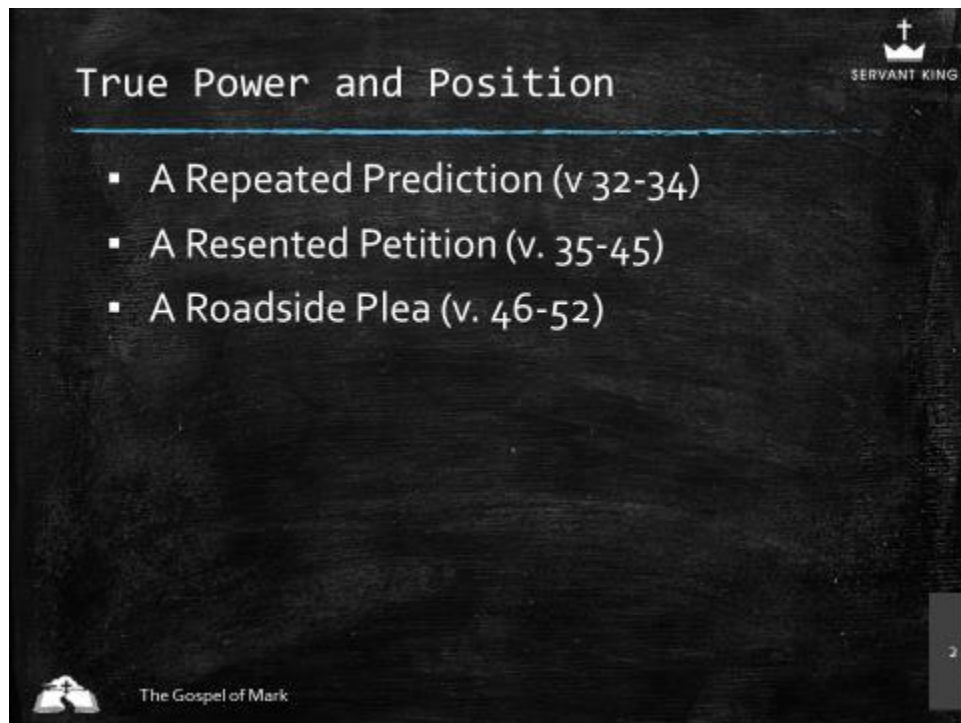
I wonder if that isn't a little of what it was like for those who were following Jesus. Think about it. A Jewish teacher whom they had never met before calls them to follow him. At the beginning it's filled with excitement, miracles, and attention as they journey through Capernaum. It was interesting, stimulating and maybe even fun at times. But the journey is beginning to change. Jesus is headed to Jerusalem and he keeps talking about dying. And recently, everything they are

learning about the Messiah's kingdom is backwards from what they have been taught. It's not what they expected. It doesn't make sense. And it's certainly not what they signed up for. And perhaps, fear begins to take hold.

Our passage this morning brings to a close a large section of Mark that started in Chapter 8 verse 31. There Mark began to focus his text on Jesus' preparation for the cross. As the ministry moves toward Jerusalem, the conflicts intensify and His mission is made more clear. There is less of an emphasis on the miracles and works of Christ and a greater focus on teaching the disciples what the Kingdom of God is like and what it is not like. In these accounts, Mark has provided several contrasts that are meant to help us understand that the kingdom of the Servant King is to be filled with those who would be like Him.

The imagery of children, servants, those who wait on tables, those who sacrifice and suffer, and those the world looks down on, conveys the idea that those who are the least in this world will be great in the economy of God's kingdom. Despite all this instruction the disciples continue to be slow on the uptake. Their preconceived notions of gaining power and position in the coming kingdom are fed by their closeness to the Messiah. And unfortunately, it is blinding them to the reasons behind Jesus' journey to the cross.

[opening prayer]



Please turn in your bibles to Mark Chapter 10 verse 32. Mark starts this section with a third account of Jesus foretelling of His coming suffering. It is not only a repeated prediction of his death, it is the last one and it is the most detailed one. Follow along as I read God's word to us beginning in verse 32.

“And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.””

Mark begins here by reminding us that Jesus is on the road and on His way to Jerusalem. Implied in this is that Jesus is also on His way to the cross. But look how Mark describes their going. Jesus is walking ahead of them and leading the way. He willingly sets out on this journey to suffering and death as the sacrificial lamb goes to the slaughter. And it's not as if Jesus has been outwitted by His enemies. He heads directly into their stronghold leading His followers to Jerusalem.

If there is any wonder about how Jesus' followers feel, Mark now makes it clear. First, they were astonished He would go there. And second, they were afraid for themselves. Whether or not they fully understood Jesus previous predictions about His death, they understood that it was not safe for them to go directly into the city where the Jewish leaders who wanted Jesus dead were. Based on Mark's accounts we can easily imagine what some of them were thinking. “We left everything to follow this guy and now he's going to throw it all away!” Or maybe even worse, “He's going to get us all killed if we're not careful.” You see the cost to following Jesus is about to be measured. Who among them would be willing to walk the road to the cross with Jesus.

Jesus must sense their fear and anxiety. “Yes”, He says. “We are going up to Jerusalem.” And for the third time in this middle section of Mark, Jesus tells them that the Messiah must suffer. He tells them that He is to be delivered to the Jewish leaders to be condemned to death and that he will be handed over to the Gentiles; meaning the Roman authorities. In fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies he is to be mocked, scorned, and beaten. He is to die. But Jesus offers this one hope amid an otherwise dark and sobering prediction. He will rise again in three days.

If they were afraid before, they most certainly are now. To follow Jesus meant they could be caught up in the events surrounding Jesus' death. To follow Jesus might mean that His death could be their own. What about us? What would it take for any of us to stop following Jesus? Are we willing to follow Christ to our own Jerusalem? Will we give up everything and follow Him even if it means giving up our lives for the sake of His kingdom? Much like Mark's Roman readers, these are the questions we must ask ourselves.

Let's pick up again in verse 35. It is interesting to note that each of Jesus' three predictions about His coming death are followed by an awkward account of the disciples demonstrating they don't get it. After the first prediction in Chapter 8, verse 31, Peter rebukes Jesus. Ouch. After the second prediction in Chapter 9, verse 31, the disciples argue about who would be the greatest in the Messiah's kingdom. Awkward, right?

But it gets worse. Here in verses 35 to 45 we see the same pattern as two of the disciples make a resented petition. The audacity and arrogance of this request serves to highlight the blindness of the disciples to what Jesus has been trying to get them to understand. Perhaps out of ignorance and fear they fixate on their hopes and aspirations of the coming Messiah. They do

not understand what is going to happen in Jerusalem. But before it does, James and John want to secure their position in the Messiah's kingdom. Follow along again as I read verses 35 to 45.

“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And they said to him, “We are able.” And 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, 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.” And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.””

In contrast to the humble and self-sacrificing example of Jesus, look at the nature of James and John's request. “We want you to do for us **whatever** we ask of you.” Have any of you had one of your children make a request like this? It usually goes something like this. “Dad, I want you to promise to do something for me, but I'm not going to tell you what it is until you agree to do it.” The fact that a question is even asked this way tells you that you are probably not going to like what they are going to ask you to do.

Jesus sidesteps their question as any good parent would do when faced with such an obvious try to go around someone's authority. In essence Jesus says, “Let's just get to the point. What do you want me to do for you?” James and John response reveals their hearts as they ask to sit at the right and left of Jesus in the glory of His coming Kingdom. At this moment, the Kingdom for them is about power and position. What a sad irony that they would be seeking their own glory rather than the glory of the Messiah.

Little do they really know about what they are asking for. You can almost hear Jesus gently asking them, “Really. Are you able to drink from the cup I will drink? Are you ready to be baptized in the waters in which I am about to be baptized?” In ignorance they affirm their willingness and ability to follow Christ. But they do not understand the bitter water the cup will hold. They do not realize the deep waters of suffering which Jesus will be immersed in. Oh how quick they are to accept the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom not understanding they are blind to what following Jesus will cost them. How easily they follow after their own self-interest rather than the example of self-sacrifice Jesus will soon show them.

When the other disciples hear of James and John's request they are indignant that they would try to secure a position over them. When someone resents something you get or ask for, what does it usually mean about that person? Probably that they wanted it too. In their response, all the disciples are indicted with the same self-satisfying interests of power and position in the Messiah's kingdom. Like James and John, they are all missing the point that in the economy of

God's kingdom, power and position belong not to those who seek their own glory, but to those who humbly seek the glory of God. That they believe Jesus is the Messiah is not in question here. But in their minds, the closeness and personal relationship they had with Jesus implied an important position of power in the His kingdom. What Mark calls into question here, is their understanding of what true power and position is in the Messiah's kingdom.

Well, despite their failure, Jesus uses the opportunity to teach; just as He has done in each failure before. We see in these verses that Jesus brings them together to teach them by pointing them to the leadership of the Gentile rulers who exploited their positions of power. The idea here is that of using one's authority over others for personal advantage. The comparison to the Gentile leaders whom the Jews hated would have been clearly understood by the disciples. Given the heavy-handed rule over the Jews, it contrasts with well the inverted priorities of serving others in God's kingdom. "But not so with you," Jesus says. Power and position is found in caring for others, not in serving yourself. He teaches them that the kind of leaders who are great in God's kingdom are those who serve and sacrifice.

Here Jesus stands as the chief example of One who came, not to be served as was His right, but to give His life for the sake of many. This instruction on the type of leaders the disciples were to be would have once again turned their views upside down. Not to mention that it runs against the grain of human nature. It is a voluntary self-sacrifice for the very least of others that is the greatest expression of love and serving. And it is a spiritual truth that is worth pressing close to our hearts.

Who are the least of these that we are unwilling to love? What does it take to keep us from serving them? Do we excuse ourselves when it is inconvenient? Do we ignore those who are not like us? What if it would cost us something we hold dear? Brothers and sisters, Jesus did not suffer and die on the cross to keep **us** from having to suffer and sacrifice. Rather he went to the cross so that our sufferings **might be like His**; for the glory of God.

In the last section of verses, Mark takes us to Jericho, just 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem. In this final scene we are given a last illustration of what true discipleship looks like. The arrogance of the disciple's petition for power and position, is now contrasted with the humble roadside plea of a blind man. Let's begin by reading starting in verse 46 to the end of the chapter.

"And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way."

As Jesus leaves Jericho he is followed by a great crowd. Alongside the road sits Bartimaeus, who is blind and is left to beg from others to survive. He overhears that Jesus the Nazarene coming

up the road and will soon pass by him. Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus. But notice the name he uses. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." The phrase "Son of David" shows a recognition of Jesus as the Messiah. The Old Testament reference to the Messiah implied the title of victorious king and one who would reunite the kingdom. Though he is blind, Bartimaeus understands who is calling out to. James Edwards in his commentary on Mark says this. "What Bartimaeus lacks in eyesight he makes up for in insight."

As Bartimaeus calls out, there are those in the crowd who admonish him and tell him to be quiet. They do not value this lowly beggar nor do they welcome his intrusion into their journey. But Bartimaeus is desperate. And desperate men can be hard to stop. So he calls out even louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me." Unlike the crowd, Jesus stops when he hears the repeated pleas for mercy. Unlike the crowd, Jesus has compassion on Bartimaeus. And so Jesus calls out to the poor and pitiful roadside beggar. The crowd passes on the message and tell Bartimaeus to take heart. "Get up", they say. "He is calling you". And Mark tells us the Bartimaeus jumps up and makes his way to Jesus.

Do you wonder what is going through Bartimaeus' mind as he makes his way to Jesus? His desperate cries for mercy have been heard. His faith in Jesus has not been in vain. The Messiah is calling out to him to come. The crowd who had just called for **his** silence now watch quietly as they he makes his way to Jesus. And as Bartimaeus stands before Jesus, Jesus asks him this question. "What do you want me to do for you."

I hope some of you are thinking, didn't we just hear that question asked? Yes, you did. Look back to verse 36. This is the same question Jesus asked of James and John. But oh how the circumstances are different. James and John ask not out of a need, but out of their desire to be great. Bartimaeus asks out his need with a humble desire to be healed. James and John are not blind, but they do not see the true nature of Jesus and His kingdom. Bartimaeus is blind, and yet he sees the Messiah. In faith and humility, Bartimaeus asks not for power and position in the kingdom. "Teacher, let me see," is all he asks.

And in that moment of faith, Bartimaeus is healed. Immediately he receives his sight. The irony here is that though blind, Bartimaeus had spiritual eyes of faith to see. And in trusting in Jesus, his physical eyes were healed. Jesus stopped and stepped into the life of a blind beggar. But Bartimaeus has not just been healed; he has been changed. We are to see the contrast here between the disciples who desired power and position yet were blind to Jesus' mission and a blind beggar who had no power and position, yet sees and becomes a true disciple of the Messiah.

Note the last half of the last sentence in this passage. Bartimaeus does not go as Jesus instructs him. Instead, he stays to follow Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. Once a blind man without position and an outsider to his culture, he now has position as a follower of the Messiah. Once a beggar sitting **alongside the road**, he now walks with Jesus **on the road** as a true disciple. His position has been forever changed. His faith has made him a follower of Jesus. Even if it means following Jesus up the hard road from Jericho to Jerusalem and to a cross.

Reflect and Respond

- Do we live like true disciples?
- Are you moved by the story of Bartimaeus?
- Are you still sitting alongside the road?

The Gospel of Mark

SERVANT KING

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As we close this morning, I would like us to reflect on what it means to be a true disciple. The contrast between the responses of the disciples and Bartimaeus could not be more clear. Are we like the disciples following Jesus but blind to what He asks of us? Do our requests of Him center more around what we can get rather than what we can give? Are we more concerned with being served than serving others? Do we view power and position as a tool to get what we desire or think we deserve? Does our status as “disciples” cause us to feel better or superior to others? Do we look at others and think we are too good to associate with them or that they are not good enough to be a follower of Christ? Let us be very careful not to judge others by our own modern measures of worldly or spiritual status. Let us be more like Jesus who stopped to give mercy and help to a poor blind beggar.

Are you moved by the story of Bartimaeus? Do you see the beauty and power of the Gospel played out along the road out of Jericho? The story of Bartimaeus is my story. Brothers and sisters, the story of Bartimaeus is your story. We sat alongside the road to redemption, blind in our sin. Desperate and unable to save ourselves. And along the road came Jesus. And with a faith not of our own doing, there was something about Him that drew us to call out for mercy and salvation. And Jesus said “Come!” and we jumped up to meet him. Then in faith we received sight and He saved us so that we could place our trust in Jesus; following Him as Lord and King. May our hearts sing and glorify God as we reflect on the Gospel story of Bartimaeus.

Maybe this morning you are like Bartimaeus, but still sitting alongside the road. Like Bartimaeus, you are desperate for salvation and healing. You’ve had enough of trying to blindly live life on your own. Instead of sitting alongside the road, you want to walk on the road and be a follower of Jesus. And your heart calls out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Scripture tells us that those who humble themselves like Bartimaeus and come without regard to their position in this world to trust in Jesus will be saved. Are you willing to walk on the same road as Jesus? Will

you give your life and all that you are for the sake of Christ? If so, trust and turn to Jesus. He will have mercy and save you.

[closing prayer]

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