

Mark 10:35-45 “Not to Be Served”

Prayer for Illumination

O God of our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of Glory, grant us Your Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, so that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened, that we may know what is the hope to which You have called us, what are the riches of Your glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of Your power towards us who believe, according to the working of Your great might that You worked in Christ when You raised Him from the dead and seated Him at Your right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. Open Your Word to us, and open us to Your Word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Do you recall the Scripture reference for the verse that says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Sam Walton”? Or, what about the verse that says, “Imitate me, as I also imitate Steve Jobs”? One of our favorites goes something like this, “He has given to us everything necessary for most of life, except, of course, for discerning the will of God, navigating personal relationships, knowing how to worship, and governing the church, for which your wise men will produce an endless litany of how-to manuals and self-help books based on the latest trends and social analysis.” Then there is that verse that we just read, where Jesus says something like, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But you must study the ones who are most successful and have the greatest influence, and follow suit, because if it works it must be right.” Ok, enough! Enough, already! You’re probably cringing at this point wondering when Josh is going to stop misquoting Jesus and His Word. I’m sorry to offend your love for God’s Word, but I did that to illustrate what the American Church has been doing increasingly since the Second Great Awakening in the 19th century. The American Church has given lip service to the Bible, while looking to the

world for models of government and leadership. The result is churches that are run like accounting firms, theme parks, resorts, coffee houses, and an array of other businesses and models of business, as well as leaders that ape the leadership styles that seem to get the job done, whether or not that “style” is God-honoring, Christ-exalting, healthy for the church and the nurture of disciples of Christ. The justification for all of this is illustrated by what I read in one book on church government in which the author quotes a New Testament scholar to the effect that the Bible does not give us enough information to say that there is any one “biblical” church government. We just have to apply some general principles to the system that works best in each culture or generation. The same is implied with regard to leadership. We have a few principles, but primarily look to the world for effective leadership models. This has been a blight on the Church and has been devastating to many Christians as it has led to mental, emotional, physical, and sometimes sexual abuse, by overly-controlling clergy, on the one hand, and immoral liberty among Church members, by permissive leaders, on the other hand. Worldly leadership in the Church has left too many Christians bewildered, reeling from sins committed against them by trusted leaders. But is it the case that God has not spoken clearly to the issues of Church government and leadership? Did God intend for us to look within or to look to the world for models of leadership? James and John, along with the rest of the twelve disciples, might have thought so at one time. But in our text Jesus says quite the opposite. In fact, Jesus says that if we seek to lead according to the models and values of the world we will be at odds with His love for His ransomed people. James and John were not alone in their visions of grandeur. But they would learn that the true glory of leadership is not found by imitating the world. Rather, **the true glory of leadership is found in conformity to the Servant of the Lord.**

Beware of the allure of worldly glory. The allure of worldly glory, or what R. T. France called our natural aspirations, can be so compelling that they make us deaf to the Word of Christ. Never become so confident in your altruism that you deceive yourself into believing that

you are above falling into this trap. The disciples had just been told, as we read in verses 32-34, by the Lord Himself, that He is going to Jerusalem to be betrayed, condemned to death, and delivered over to the Gentiles. “They will mock Him and spit on Him, and flog Him and kill Him. And after three days He will rise.” Jesus’ resolute purpose to go to Jerusalem has them full of anxiety, as we read in verse 32, “they were amazed and afraid.” This is actually the third time that Jesus has paused on their journey to Jerusalem to explain that He was going there to suffer and die. But it seems that James and John had either forgotten what Jesus said, or *inwardly thought* what Peter had said *out loud*, “Not you, Lord. This will never happen to You.” That was on the first announcement of Christ’s passion. After the second prediction of Jesus’ suffering and death the disciples seem oblivious and begin to argue about which of them was the greatest. Jesus taught them a lesson on humility and service at that time, putting a child in their midst. After this third prediction, James and John see Jesus’ glorious capital on the horizon, and almost as if to squelch Jesus’ sorrowful prediction of the cross, and seize an opportunity for position in the new administration, they corner Him and make a request to sit one at His right hand and one at His left, in His glory. Their self-aggrandizement raised the ire of the other disciples who begin to quarrel with James and John. And based on their previous behavior they were not indignant because of the brothers’ misplaced values, but because they had beaten them to the punch. Jesus sees their hearts through their squabbling; so, He schools them about true leadership and godly authority, and He warns them about the danger of worldly glory and godless leadership. “You know,” He says, “that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.” You have seen the way sinful people wield authority. “It shall not be so among you.”

If the disciples, who walked with Jesus for three years, sitting under His teaching and observing His life of service and compassion and hearing His prayers—if they could be so easily drawn after worldly glory—then we must be on guard over our own hearts. When we get to this third

prediction of Christ’s passion followed by the response of His disciples, we begin to realize a pattern. The disciples do not have their minds set on the things of God. So they respond each time with conversations or plots betraying their desire for worldly glory. So, brothers, beware of the allure of worldly glory.

What Jesus shows us is that the world’s authority is ultimately meant to serve the self, and, if necessary, at the expense of others. Worldly glory is all about being served. What each man considers desirable varies. But the common thread of worldly glory and exercise of authority is that it is self-serving. Knowing you men, and having the whole Session examining your character, and having the church’s unanimous election of you to your respective offices, I am confident that you have not sought position in the church in order to serve yourself. But I can almost promise you that you will face the temptation. It may be a matter of working against the session to achieve your preferences. You may find yourself at odds with a budgetary decision of the deacons and get a sour spirit about your service. You may be tempted to use your position to thwart a policy unilaterally. You may come into possession of confidential knowledge that could be used to advance yourself or work to the advantage of something you desire, but it would require you to break that confidence and sin against a brother or sister. A bit of gossip may be strategically shared with someone in order to bring them into your confidence, flattering them, so as to gain an ally for your agenda. I’m not suggesting that you will plot and plan with premeditated malice to become the boss of Cross Creek Pres. I’m warning you that the allure of worldly glory and authority is powerful, and will present itself in subtle and not-so-subtle ways in your service. So, brothers, beware of the allure of worldly glory. Now the only way that you will be able to identify worldly glory is to see what true glory is. What does true glory and godly authority look like?

Behold the true glory of Christ, who is both Son of Man and Servant of the Lord. In verse 45 Jesus says something truly remarkable, that is easy for us to miss. He brings together two Messianic motifs from the

Old Testament and says that they both find their fulfillment in Him: the Suffering Messianic Servant of the Lord and the Royal Messianic Son of Man. The Suffering Messiah is promised and pictured throughout the Old Testament, but is perhaps most well-known from Isaiah's Servant Songs in Isaiah 42-61. The most striking of these prophecies is found in chapter 53, which speaks in very explicit terms of the Messiah's rejection by His own people, suffering under the judgment of God, and dying to redeem His people for God. The Servant of the Lord becomes the lowest of the low in His humiliation in order to serve the people of the LORD. The promise of the Royal Messiah is also found throughout the Old Testament. It is Daniel, who sees this King of kings and Lord of Lords as "one like a Son of Man" who comes to the Ancient of Days to receive from Him dominion over all the kingdoms of the earth. Here the Messiah is seen in all His glory, a warrior-king, who leads His people forth in victory over their enemies, so that "The kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him" (Dan. 7:27). Jewish tradition struggled to understand these two contrasting portraits of the Messiah. The Talmud records traditions in which Rabbis distinguished two separate Messiah's in order to explain the Suffering Messianic prophecies and the Royal Messianic prophecies. The Messiah ben Joseph was a prophetic figure who would bring revival to God's people, meeting great resistance from apostate Israel, and who would eventually die while leading a holy remnant in battle against the anti-Christ forces of the nations. The Messiah ben Judah, then, was a kingly figure, who would follow the suffering messiah as a great military leader, crushing the enemies who had killed his predecessor and elevating Jerusalem above the nations of the earth. According to this view, the Suffering Servant of the Lord and the Royal Son of Man were two different individuals with very different offices and vastly different ends. But in verse 45 Jesus says, "For even the Son of Man (the Royal Messianic Son of Man who receives dominion over all kingdoms so that all shall serve and obey Him—even He) came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. The

Suffering Servant and the Royal Son of Man are not two, but one Messiah, one Lord Jesus Christ.

What does true glory and godly authority look like? Behold the true glory of Christ, "who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped (used for His own comfort), but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6-8).

Now you might be saying to yourself, "Yes, Jesus was the Servant of the Lord, who humbled Himself, but now He is exalted, no longer a Servant, but a King." But this is to separate what Christ brings together. The Son of Man comes to serve. He could have said, "The Servant of the Lord did not come to be served but to serve." But He didn't say that. He said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." This is the remarkable truth we must see. It was as the King, the Master, the Lord, God over all, that Jesus stooped to touch lepers, lift the lame, make mud with spittle to anoint and heal blinded eyes, to loose the tongue of the mute, to wash the disciples' feet, to give His brow for piercing, His face for blows, His back for stripes. It was as the Son of Man that He gave His hands and feet to be nailed to the cross. It was the Son of Man who was exposed to the cruelest mockery, whose precious Name and dearest title, the Son of God, was ridiculed. That great skeptic of truth, Pontius Pilate, spoke the truth when He had the charge nailed over Jesus' head on the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews." When the chief priests complained, "Do not write, "The King of the Jews," but rather, "This man said, I am King of the Jews," Pilate retorted, "What I have written I have written." This man is the King. That bleeding thing expiring on the cross is your king. That mangled mass of tissue hanging just there is your king. You delivered Him up to me; and together we crucified your king. Jesus said, "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." And, just as Jesus did not cease to

be the king when He suffered, so He did not cease to serve when He entered His glory. Indeed, Jesus gives us this to look forward to, “Blessed are those servants whom the Master finds awake when He comes. Truly, I say to you, He will dress Himself for service and have them recline at table, and He will come and serve them” (Luke 12:37).

Behold Him, my brothers, for to this you are called. Jesus doesn’t just tell us about His Messianic ministry here. He says, “For even . . .” Why does He say, “For even”? Because He is giving us an example along with His instruction: “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.”

Now, we understand that just as Jesus is first of all “The Servant of the Lord,” and out of that relationship with God the Father He is then the servant of God’s people, we also are first and foremost God’s servants. At the end of the day, we will stand before the Chief Shepherd to be judged for what we have done or left undone and for the attitude of our hearts in our service. He bought us with His blood, so we belong to Him. We are not our own. Our marching orders come from Him. But let us never use that as an excuse to run rough shod over people. I have actually heard church leaders use their calling as servants of God as an excuse to make unilateral decisions, to work their will for the direction of the church, or to justify disregard of other leaders in the church. Granted that we must always take a stand for righteousness against sin, and never exchange the Bible for another playbook, we must also be wary of allowing our preferences and personal agendas to become the be all and end all for the church. We are to serve God and His people. Verse 43 says “your servant” and “slave of all.” In other words, we must understand our servant-hood in relation both to God and to God’s people.

Of course, our imitation of Jesus is not exact. Only His life provides the ransom for God’s people. We cannot atone for their sins. However, we are to lay down our lives for the people of God as servants of their perseverance and sanctification. God has ordained these offices for the

equipping of the saints and the building up of the body of Christ. This will require having a servant’s mindset regarding your time, your energy, your sleep, your family, your recreation, your whole life. Now your fellow elders and deacons will be careful not to unjustly overburden you to your detriment or to your family’s detriment. But if you think that you can assume this office without it costing you something—if you think you can serve Christ in this capacity without some sacrifice—you are in for a rude awakening. I once had an associate pastor who told me that he could not substitute for me in a ministry so that I could be with one of our church members during a difficult time because he had to tuck his children in every night. That was something he and his wife determined they wanted for their family—that dad would tuck the kids in every night. Mom was tired at the end of the day, and the kids needed their father’s presence. It was all very nice. But I remember thinking, “I sure hope that when he finds himself in need of others’ service that he doesn’t find them as unbending in their inflexibility as he is.” I try to guard my family’s time. And I think that leaders in the church must be careful to that. But Renae and the children are in this with me. We have agreed together that we will make some sacrifices for the sake of the gospel, for the good of the church, for the love of God and neighbor. It is not just what leaders are called to. It is the service that all Christians are called to. Leaders are to set the example.

Now the Church’s leaders are not just servants who run around looking for little tasks to do around God’s house. We are stewards. In other words, we are servants who have been entrusted with the care of the Master’s house. This means that we will make decisions for the household that will not always be popular. Earlier I mentioned that we must not abuse our position to work our will in the church. But we must, as good stewards, exercise our authority to see that God’s will is done in the church. Sometimes this will meet with resistance. As God’s servants for the good of the church, we must not follow the path of least resistance. We must be willing to be unpopular, if that is what it takes to preserve the purity and peace of the church.

To really see what this looks like in practice, study to know the Lord Jesus Christ. Behold the true glory of Christ, who is both Son of Man and Servant of the Lord. Here is your encouragement: by beholding you will become. By beholding the true glory of Christ, you will be little by little, day by day, conformed to that glory.

Rejoice in the grace of God that transforms us from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). James and John did not know what they were asking for when they asked to sit one at Jesus right hand and one at His left. They didn't realize that in about a week the men on Jesus' left and right would be criminals dying on their own crosses. When Jesus asked them if they could drink the cup that He would drink and be baptized with the baptism with which He was baptized, they had no idea that the trials He referred to would be so painful and humiliating. When the hour came, James and John fled with the other disciples. They weren't as ready to take their place in the Kingdom as they thought they were. Jesus knew this, and told them, "You do not know what you are asking?" And yet, graciously Jesus continued, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized." You aren't there yet, but you will be conformed to My sufferings and share in My death. You will be crucified with Me. You will rise with Me. He could even say, "You will be seated with Me in glory." Jesus did not promise them the seats of highest honor, but Paul said that we are seated with Christ in heavenly places far above all rule and authority. The book of Revelation says that all the saints reign with Christ as Kings and Priests to God. But the pathway of glory is the same for the saints as it is for the Lord. Our glory is in serving. Our glory is in dying. And, even now, the Holy Spirit is at work in us to conform us to the image of Christ. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." So, brothers, rejoice in the grace of God that transforms us from glory to glory, as we behold the true glory of Christ, who is the Son of Man and Servant of the Lord. Thus shall we be delivered from the allure of worldly glory.

Now, beloved Church, the charge to you on this special occasion also comes from this text. See here that **the true blessing of such leadership is experienced in submission to Christ through His appointed servants**. Do you want to know the blessings of God in His kingdom, His house? Listen to how the Holy Spirit counsels you in Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

So, first, **beware of the allure of worldly glory**. We live in an anti-authority society. Parental authority is undermined in our culture. Specialist authority is not appreciated in the age of the blogosphere, where people can make unfounded assertions that become dogma, without any research or evidence. Some politicians have worked hard to ruin the credibility of our governing authorities. We have become so egalitarian that society must be flattened so that no one has any distinction in relation to others. We are not taught to respect others. We are taught, rather, to respect ourselves, and to merely tolerate others. This mentality has come full force into the American Church in more ways than we have time to discuss tonight. But I just want to plead with you not to disregard the leaders of the church because you have imbibed the spirit of the world. The modern anti-authority spirit is nothing new. Rebellion and autonomy have been present in humanity since the fall of Adam.

Some have treated Jesus words here as a total rejection of authority. This is not correct. When Jesus describes the nature of Gentile rule he uses common words for authority, but adds a prefix to them to transform them from positive words for leadership to harsh, ominous words that denote exploitation and oppression. For a vivid picture of what Jesus means when He says not merely κυριεύουσιν and ἐξουσιάζουσιν, but κατακυριεύουσιν and κατεξουσιάζουσιν, we can turn to Acts 19 where a demon possessed man pounces on the Jewish exorcists and "masters" them: "But the evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus

I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?’ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.” That is what Jesus condemns; not all authority, but an abusive, self-aggrandizing authority, that pounces on the sheep, leaving them fleeced and wounded.

So, what is the antidote for this anti-authoritarian spirit of the world?

Behold the true glory of Christ, who as your Lord and God gave His life as a ransom for you. Jesus has the name that is above every name, and at that name every knee will bow and tongue confess that He is Lord. Jesus is the Master of the House. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus is “my Lord and my God.” He is “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.” The Father has given Him a rod with which to rule the nations. The scepter shall never depart from between His feet. In other words, Jesus is not anti-authority; He is the ultimate authority. And yet, He serves! Do you want to see what authority is, what it is meant to be? Look at Christ?

Now, not one of us elders or deacons measures up to Christ. But His exercise of authority is the model for ours. His leadership is the model we are pursuing by His grace. Furthermore, consider that it is He, the Chief Shepherd, who appoints shepherds for His flock. Jesus doesn’t give you elders and deacons to harm you or hold you back. Quite the opposite, the officers of the church are given to equip you and build you up in Christ. We are servants of your sanctification and perseverance in the faith.

So, I ask you, please pray for us. Ask God to guard our hearts from pride. Ask God to keep us from temptation, from bringing reproach on His name and from hurting His people by misconduct. Ask God to mature us in wisdom, humility, and holiness. Ask God to make us examples to the flock. And, let me add, without wanting to sound self-congratulatory or puffed up about myself, do this with thanksgiving. If

you have godly leaders, thank God for them. Many, many churches do not have this. Many people are cursed with crooked leaders. Thank God for Christ-like leaders.

Finally, rejoice in the grace of God that transforms us from glory to glory. When we have leaders who are being conformed more and more to the Lord Jesus, then we see in their lives of service glimpses of the Lord. These servants labor, not to be seen by men, but in order that Christ might be seen by all through them. And they labor for our maturity. They work for our sanctification. They love us through to the end, as Jesus, having loved His own who were in the world, loved them to the end. In the hands of Jesus, your leaders, the elders and the deacons, are instruments of His grace for your glorious transformation from one degree of glory to another.

Our gracious God, as You have sent forth Your Word this night, may it not return void, but produce in our hearts that purpose for which you have sent it. May it yield in us a harvest of righteousness for Your holy Name’s sake. Through Christ we pray. Amen.