

God is *the* Suffering Servant (Mk. 10.45)

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⁴² 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. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk. 10.42-45).

Introduction

It is truly a point worth noting that Mark 10.45 gives the first occasion on record in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus explains the meaning of His death (likewise Mat. 20.28 in Matthew's Gospel). Before this, there are only pieces of an incomplete puzzle or stones in an arch with no capstone. We can infer the meaning of His death from His teaching in general, but the capstone that solidifies the arch and makes everything clear is the word that His death is a ransom. Thus, this capstone teaching, within the context of Mark's narrative as a whole, brings us to the astounding fact that God the Son is *the* suffering servant, not just *a* suffering servant, but also *the* suffering servant *par excellence*. Therefore, the title for this message is "God is the Suffering Servant." In the outline, we will cover two things: Jesus is *the* servant *par excellence* and Jesus is the *suffering* servant *par excellence*. These two main points will guide our communion-fellowship with the Lord, and with one another.

1A. Jesus is *the* servant *par excellence*

Mark's concern is with the *gospel*: **The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mk.1.1)**. In his Gospel, he presents the Son of God as an active servant by emphasizing the deeds of Christ that follow one another "immediately" (this word and words similar to it run throughout the book as a hallmark of the narration). Already, in chapter one, the active, unhesitating, even immediate obedience of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is evident (consider 1.10, 12, 20, 21, 23 [things happen immediately and He is ready], 29, and in 35 He rises early for another day's work. Thus, the gospel concerns the Son of God who came to serve. Therefore, although "serving" in Mark 10.45 has squabbling over greatness as its immediate context; the larger context of the book is in view because Jesus speaks of the purpose of His coming (the Son of Man *came*...to serve, v. 45). This is His coming in fulfillment of the pre-time covenant of redemption (for in His serving He submits to the Father's will, Mat. 10.23 with Mk. 10.40).

Therefore, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, came into this world to serve. He is the servant *par excellence*. There is no other servant like Him that stands so high in majesty, glory, position, and honor, but that stoops so low to serve people, sinful people, in need due to their rebellion against Him. We have to stop and think about what we are saying in order to take it all in: God the Son is our servant. God came to serve us. We must proclaim it from the housetops: Jesus Christ is the servant of all servants, the servant *par excellence*.

2A. Jesus is the *suffering* servant *par excellence*

Notably, Mark gives us a final view of this servant: on the cross in this self-sacrifice for sinners. That is the last view we have of Christ in the story line, which ends at 16.8 (the remaining verses have very weak text critical support). On the cross, Jesus pays the ransom price to deliver captives in sin; this is why He came.

Moreover, He came to serve *many* as their ransom. Therefore, we know that the sacrifice of God's suffering servant is efficacious for the people for whom He poured out His soul. This is so because of what a ransom is (an exchange of His life for the lives of many; He takes the death of many and those ransomed receive life), because the exchange is a substitution as the

preposition indicates (for or in the place of). Further, it is efficacious because the ransom for many is an offering to the Lord (Ex. 30.12-14), which leads us to conclude that this ransom for many is the efficacious offering of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53.

Isaiah anticipates the Lord's teaching that He came to give His life, His soul, as a sacrificial substitute (a ransom *offering*) for many. Isaiah says, God "laid on him the iniquity of us all...he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people..." (vs. 6, 8). Clearly, His substitution is efficacious because "he shall see his offspring...he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities" (vs. 10-11). In other words, the many are His offspring, the people of God. He will bear their sins as their intercessor, and not only make them righteous, but He will divide the spoils of His victory with the many. Jesus is teaching us that in His reference to the ransom for many (Mk. 10.45), He is referring to the efficacy of His saving death as the suffering servant. He is fulfilling the *pactum salutis* and making the actual exchange to give life to the many by the actual substitution of His life for theirs.

For a final reflection, we should meditate on the fact that when Jesus first explains the meaning of His death, He does so in such a way as to direct our thoughts to the suffering servant of Isaiah. Let us reflect further on this text.

1) As suffering servant par excellence, Jesus serves by submitting Himself to the most repulsive ugliness (1-3).

Who has believed what they heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

2) He did this for us (vs. 4, 5, 8, 10 [offering], 11 [bearing the iniquities of the many]).

⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? ⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

3) In this context, what made His service so excellent and extraordinary? It is the fact that in this offering, in this ransom payment of His own life, Jesus satisfied the justice of God for it was God who crushed Him for our iniquities (v. 5); it pleased the Lord to crush him and put Him to grief as an offering for our sin (v. 10). Jesus is such a servant to us, for us, in our place, that He poured out His soul to death to bear the sin of many. No wonder His death is efficacious. It is no wonder that Jesus will save each person for whom He died. He died as the intercessor for His offspring that God gave Him in the eternal covenant (v. 10; Mk. 10.40; Jn. 17. 1-3). He will divide the spoils of His victory with all for whom He died as He continues to intercede for them now from the right hand of the majesty on high (Rom. 8.31-34)

To Him be all glory both now and forevermore, amen.

What then shall we say to these things regarding Jesus Christ?

What shall we say about the fact that He is the sacrifice *par excellence*; that He is the servant *par excellence*. In Him, we know that God is the suffering servant for us: God is our suffering servant! We have to wonder at the idea of even speaking these words about God being our servant, our suffering servant. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high and I cannot attain unto it!

However, we cannot remain silent. We must reply and one way we reply is in our participation in the sacrament. Eating and drinking the bread and the wine, we say some things symbolically, things we ought to be saying from the depths of our hearts. We say at least three things.

1) I need Him

I need the body and blood represented in the bread and wine. I need the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I need the ransom offering in which the Father crushed Him for the sins of His people. I am a sinner. I acknowledge my need of the suffering servant of Isaiah! O Lord Jesus, I need you.

2) I own Him as my Lord, God, king, and suffering servant

This is a step beyond the acknowledgment of need. Here you appropriate His work as exactly what you need. In taking the bread and wine, you are saying, "I own the body and blood of Christ pictured in the bread and wine. I own the Lord Jesus and all He represents as God who came to serve by giving His life a ransom for many. I own Him as my ransom payment. O Lord Jesus, I own you as my prophet, priest, and king. I cling to you as my intercessor and ladder from earth to heaven. Teach me your word, and enable me to walk carefully along the pathway of your commandments."

3) I own His family as my family

He is the servant *par excellence*... for me, in my place and on my behalf

How can I do anything less than my best to honor Him by serving as He commands, by serving His family? After all, He said that to be great in His kingdom, you must be the servant of all, and He called us to follow His outstanding example of self-sacrificing service.

We need to work at this and keep trying to figure out how we can serve one another better. We need to strive to do this immediately, actively, practically following our Lord's marvelous example. O Lord Jesus, bless us with family love for your honor and glory. Amen.