**The King who Came to Serve**
**Mark 10:32-52**

We're looking at Mark's gospel, and we're in the part where Jesus is taking the road to Jerusalem. And as he does, Mark is wanting us to consider, what does it mean to walk with him? What does it mean to be a follower of Christ?

And over the past two Sundays we've seen what it means for how you see the most intimate of relationships - marriage; what it means for the way you treat children and those society looks down on, and how you handle money.

But in today's passage what you see is it will also transform the way you see success and ambition and how you handle power.

**What Do You Want?**
Now imagine that you became good friends with Jeff Bezos. And one day he turned to you and said, What can I do for you? I've got the money, I've got the connections, what do you want and I'll do it for you?

What would you reply? It's like a modern day Aladdin and the Golden Lamp, rub the lamp and the genie appears: 'your wish is my command.' What would you wish for?

Now imagine that your rich and powerful friend didn't just have the power to fix your finances, or buy you stuff, or work his connections to land you that job, but also had the power to heal your hurts, and mend your broken relationships. Would that change what you asked for?

I don't know if you noticed it, but here Jesus asks the same question twice. First to the sons of Zebedee, James and John: v36, 'And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?"

But then he asks exactly the same question to Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, v51, 'And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?"'

What would you answer? Because what you answer says something - obviously - about what you most want, doesn't it? Because here's a man who can give you anything. And so what you ask for tells you something about what you think is most important in life, or what you think you need for life to be right, or for you to be happy, or successful in life.

And yet, Jesus doesn't ask that question of James and John out of the blue. He's on his way to Jerusalem, and he knows what awaits him there: v33, "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." But if that's what Jesus is anticipating, James and John are anticipating something so slightly different.

They separate themselves from the others, come up to Jesus on the road and say, v34, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." Now, when a child comes to you and says, 'I've got something to tell you', and you go, 'sure, talk away', and they say, 'I'll only tell you if you promise not to punish me' what are you supposed to reply? 'Err, I'm afraid it doesn't work like that.'

And that's how Jesus could have responded. 'You want me to agree up front to do anything you want before telling me what you want? It doesn't quite work like that.' But he doesn't. Instead to draw out what's going on in their hearts, he asks them the question, v36 again, "What do you want me to do for you?"

And Jesus has been talking about suffering and death, and they're thinking position and prestige. Verse 37, 'And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

And so it's not just the question Jesus asks them that the two brothers have in common with Bartimaeus. It's that all three of them understand something of who Jesus is. James and John understand that he's the Messiah, the king, who's going to be enthroned in glory. And Bartimaeus, when he hears that Jesus is passing by, v47, 'began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"'

So, he may not have been able to physically see Jesus cleanse lepers and raise the dead, but he'd heard. And he understood, that this Jesus of Nazareth must be the longed for heir to the throne of David, the Messiah, the great king whose coming would put everything right.

All three know he's the king, where they differ is what they want the king to do for them. Because Bartimaeus understands he deserves nothing and cries out for mercy.

But what James and John want is power. They want fame and influence and to be raised up above everyone else. They want prominence. But when Jesus asks Bartimaeus "what do you want me to do for you?" he replies , v51, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." He just wants to see. While James and John want to be seen.

And they're willing to sacrifice friendship to get it. You see, with Peter these two made up Jesus' inner circle. But they make no mention of Peter here, do they? Because when it comes to the push, when it comes to prominence, or prestige, or power, the less people you have to share it with the better. And so in their ambition they're willing to discard their friend.

But of course, what's striking is not jus their request but how the other disciples respond when they hear about it. Verse 41, 'And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.'

Why indignant?

Well, firstly, maybe they wanted those seats for themselves. Maybe they've also been thinking about the future, but what they've been imagining is their names in lights, not James or John.

Or maybe the brothers' ambition, and the thought that one or both of them might be promoted over the rest had stirred the others' pride and insecurity: 'I'm not having that!'

I don't know if you've seen the videos of the goings on around the pool sides of various greek hotels. But in the mornings, when the doors to the pool area are opened there's this mad rush as the English and Germans push past each other, each determined to beat everyone else to the best sun beds.

And that's what's going on here. It's the desire for the best seat, the top spot, and the competition to make sure no one else beats you to it.

But it's also what goes on in our own hearts. You see, think how you respond on the inside when someone gets the praise or the prize or the position or the publications ahead of you. Are you genuinely happy for them, or is there something inside that resents it; that thinks that should have been you?

Or what about the inverse - and someone fails, is there a part of you that's glad, because it cements your position ahead of them?

Or how do you respond when someone treats you like a servant? Do you find yourself thinking, 'you can't treat *me* like that?'

Or what about your prayers? Do they ever give a hint that God should use his power to make you look good, or come out on top, or that he might have *almost* all the glory?

You see, those things tell us something about how we value position, or recognition, or the desire to be first.

The question is, what's driving that desire?

**Why Do You Want It?**
Look at how Jesus responds to the disciples' indignation: v42, '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."'

"You know…" How do they know? How do they know that rulers lord it over others and the great tell others what to do? Because that's the way the world is. Whether it's the world of the first century Roman Empire or the 21st century west. Success is about rising above others; of having more, or earning more, or publishing more than the next guy. That it's coming out on top and beating others to the best seats, of being able to tell others what to do, not the other way round.

And Jesus says, you know that, because it's the culture you swim in every day. And it shapes you and tutors you and conditions you to think that this is what life, and making it in life, look like.

Adam Lockwood has tens of thousands of followers on line - even though you may never have heard of him. But he's got them for free climbing scarily tall buildings, like London's The Shard, which he climbed for the second time last week, just weeks after the injunction banning him from doing so ran out. But at his first trial the judge accused him of having a 'greed for celebrity'. But if so, he's just a child of the age, isn't he? And in his defence his barrister said, 'YouTube pays.' And not just financially. Money, likes, promotions, publications, they all pay. They all give us a high, as they tell us, this is what it means to make it, this is what's great. More possessions, more power, or more prestige than the next guy.

Now, you might reply, 'well to be honest, I'm not motivated by any of those.' Ok, but what about personal freedom? The freedom to do whatever you want to do. Or be whatever you want to be. To

not have others telling you what can or can't do. You see, we still want power. We still want to be king, even if it's over a kingdom where we're the only subject.

But look what Jesus says in v43, "But it shall not be so among you."

**There is a Better Way**
Look at v43-44, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all." Now, by definition, a servant serves someone else. And a slave isn't just told what to do by others, they're owned by others. And if you were constructing a scale, a ladder of greatness, no-one, then or now, would put a servant, let alone a slave, at the top. That is as ludicrous as a camel going through the eye of a needle.

But Jesus does. 'This is what true greatness looks like', he says. Because greatness is measured by service, not the size of your platform; by the people you serve, not who serves you. And life consists not in promoting yourself but sacrificing yourself, and not for your dreams and ambitions but for others. And to be first, you've got be last. And to rise to the top you must go to the bottom. And to be great you must be the least. And to lead you must serve.

That's what it means to follow Christ.

Now, of course, if you read books on leadership, the idea of a servant leader has popular traction today, even in the world of business, even in an age of self-actualisation and 'being true to yourself.'. Arthur C Brooks, Professor of Leadership at Harvard Business School and author of the New York Times best seller, *From Strength to Strength*, gives serving others as one of the crucial ingredients to happiness in later life. Following the death of the Queen, Tim Cook, CEO of Apple wrote this week that 'there is nothing more noble than to devote your life to the service of others.'

The problem is, the reason they and others give for serving has you at the centre. It will make you a happier, more noble person, a more effective leader, or your company more profitable. None of which are wrong. Except, they're about you. You're serving for the gains or glory you get. Which means, ultimately, it's self-serving.

So we need a better motive than that, and only Christ can give it.

Verse 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." And when Jesus calls himself the Son of Man, he's quoting Daniel 7 where Daniel sees one like a son of man approach God's throne and be given all power and authority, so that, v14, 'All peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.' So the Son of Man is the one in the top seat, the one to whom everyone else must bow.

And Jesus is saying 'I'm that Son of Man'. And James and John and Blind Bartimaeus are right, he is the greatest of all kings. And yet 'I came to serve,' Jesus says, 'not to be served.'

And he serves by giving his life as a ransom for many. Now imagine a group of pirates have captured the wife of a sea captain. What must he do if he wants her back? He's got to pay a ransom - money in exchange for her life. Or, in the first century, if you wanted to secure the release of prisoners of war, you had to pay a ransom. To obtain the freedom of a slave, he or she had to be

ransomed. And someone in prison who couldn't pay their debts, could only get out if someone else paid their debt, the ransom, for them.

But in the Old Testament this word ransom was also used for the sacrifice made in exchange for someone who's life had been forfeited. Or as a verb it was used to describe how God had rescued, ransomed, redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt.

And so Jesus is saying, that's what I've come to do. Unlike every other person you think of as great, unlike all the metrics you use to assess greatness, I've not come to be served, but to serve. I've not come to take the first place but the last. I've come to give myself as your ransom.

But what do you need ransoming from? What war have you been taken prisoner in? What debt do you owe that you cannot repay? What have you been enslaved to that you need freeing? Why is your life forfeit, that Christ must give his in exchange for yours?

Well, look how Jesus follows up James and John's request for the best seats, v38, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?"

And the cup he's talking about is the cup the prophets spoke about: the cup of God's wrath against sin. The cup that everyone of us deserves to drink for the times we've put ourselves first, and sacrificed others for our ambitions, or resented others' success, or been glad at their failure, or insisted on having things our way. And the baptism he was to undergo was to be submerged under wave upon wave of suffering for our sin.

And Jesus is saying, I've come to drink your cup, to take your place, to suffer the wrath of God in place of you.

And when you know you need that, it's not the best seats you'll be asking for, like James and John. Instead, like Bartimaeus you'll cry out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

And he will. You see, the crowd tell Bartimaeus to be quiet, because they're ok with Bartimaeus being blind, just as the world is ok with you continuing to think that greatness and making it in life is about power or possessions or prestige. But Bartimaeus refuses to give up, because he doesn't want to stay blind. He doesn't want to stay as he is. And so v48, 'He cried out all the more.'

And then Mark tells us, v49, 'And Jesus *stopped*.'

Think about that. What can make Jesus stop? He has set his face to Jerusalem and nothing is going to stop him. Except one thing: a blind beggar crying out for mercy. And Jesus calls him to come, and asks him that question, v51, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight."'

James and John want to be seen. Bartimaeus just wants to see. Verse 52, 'And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight.'

The Irish writer Brian Keenan was held hostage in Beirut by Islamic Jihad for four and half years. And on his release in 1990 he was asked what he was going to do. He replied, 'I'm going to visit

every country in the world, eat all the food of the world, drink all the drink of the world - and, I hope, make love to every woman in the world. And then I might get a good night's sleep.'

So what does Bartimaeus do now he can finally see? Start planning a trip to see the seven wonders of the ancient world? Check out all the beautiful women of the world? No. Verse 52, 'Immediately he recovered his sight and followed [Jesus] on the way.'

He starts the day sitting by a road begging. But he ends it following Jesus down that road. He starts it knowing Jesus of Nazareth is the longed for king, and he ends it following his king on the road to Jerusalem. He starts it on the outside of a society that sees greatness as power and influence and he has none of those. But he ends it as one brought inside, because Jesus had mercy on him.

And Jesus does the same for us. You see, neither James nor John, nor you or I, deserve the best seats. And yet, Paul says, Christ doesn't just ransom us, he lifts us up. Ephesians 2:4-7: 'But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.'

We do not deserve any seat in Christ's kingdom, but in his mercy he gives us them.

How will you live in response to that? You could go on having your view of greatness, and making it in life, shaped by the world. Or, you can do what Bartimaeus does and say, 'no, Christ is my king, I'm following him.'

And when you do, you'll serve others: not for your glory, but for his.

It's what James and John did. Here, they told Jesus, 'sure we can drink the cup and be baptised with the baptism', without knowing what they were saying. But within a few days they watched as Jesus gave his life as their ransom. And they saw him raised from the dead. And like Bartimaeus, their lives were also transformed. And both became servant leaders. And James was martyred and John exiled, because both followed the King who came to serve.

The question is, will you? You can see life as about power and position and prestige, in whatever way that works in your life. Or, like Bartimaeus, you can cry out for mercy, see your life transformed, and discover the joy and freedom of giving yourself away in service of God and others, because you'll do it for his glory, not yours.