

A MISSION STATEMENT FROM JESUS

MARK 10:32-52

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Mission statements are short declarations that precisely describe what people consider the most important reason for their existence. Today I want to consider one of several statements made by our Lord that very beautifully summarizes His mission here upon this earth. That statement is recorded in MARK 10:45 and MATTHEW 20:28. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

I would like to first consider this statement by itself. Then I would like to consider the statement in light of the events that surround it. And, finally, I would like to consider how the truth declared in this statement should be reflected in our own lives.

First, the statement considered by itself. Let me paraphrase this statement in an attempt to catch a glimpse of its beauty. “The One anointed to be King over all the nations came into this world, not to fulfill His own selfish ambitions, but to serve God; and God’s will was for Him to suffer and die so that others might have eternal life.” This paraphrase is not a quote from scripture. It is simply my attempt to interpret this mission statement of Jesus Christ, a statement that sums up the main reason for His coming to earth as a man. Let me now explain why I have interpreted Christ’s statement the way I have.

In trying to understand the meaning of this mission statement, the first thing I came across was the term “Son of Man.” I interpreted “Son of Man” as meaning Messiah or the One anointed to be King over the nations.

Jesus liked to call Himself “the Son of Man.” The phrase is used 94 times in the New Testament. And each time the phrase is recorded in the gospels, Jesus used it to talk about Himself. There is only one exception. It was the time when people who were angry with Jesus said, “You say the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?”

In the Old Testament we find verses like PSALM 80:17, where the phrase “Son of Man” means “the One who is at God’s right hand, the One who God has raised up for Himself.” People who knew how the term was used in Old Testament

scriptures would understand it to mean Messiah. And, Jesus clearly understood the term to refer to His Messiahship. For instance, when He was talking to Nicodemus, Jesus said, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.” It is a bit curious that, when Jesus used the term, He did not say, “I, the Son of Man, must be lifted up.” Perhaps the reason why Jesus did not do this is because He knew the popular concept of Messiah was one who would come as either a military leader or a political leader. Jesus wanted people to change their understanding of who the Messiah was before He identified Himself with the term. But the term “Son of Man” and the concept of the Messiah—that is the One anointed by God to be King—these two things were linked together in Jesus’ mind. And I believe those who heard Jesus talking about “the Son of Man” would also hear it as a direct reference to the Messiah. Jesus did not say “*a* Son of Man”. He said, “*the* Son of Man.” “The Son of Man came.” He was not created; He came. This suggests existence prior to His coming. The King came with a purpose, and the purpose existed before He came, and that purpose was to be a servant.

But, what kind of servant are we talking about here? Who did Jesus come to serve? It is easy to assume that Jesus is talking about serving people; however, I believe that the One He primarily came to serve was God the Father. In fact, the best way Jesus could serve people was to serve God the Father, because God loves people and will always work to help people receive the best.

Remember that these words were spoken right on the heels of our Lord’s encounter with the rich young ruler. The ruler was an example of a person who worked hard to treat people in a right way; but in doing so, he had failed to serve God the way that he should have. Perhaps one reason he was so wealthy is because he was so good with people. But he needed to be good with God.

Jesus came, not to be served. He did not have His own agenda. He emptied Himself of all selfish ambitions so that He could serve God. First, and foremost, He came to serve God and to do God’s will. The first words spoken by our Lord, recorded in LUKE 2:49, were spoken when Jesus was just twelve years old. He said to His parents, “Don’t you know that I have to be about my Father’s business?” And, in JOHN 6:38 Jesus said, “For I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me.” Jesus came to serve God, and it was God’s will that He minister to the needs of people. I believe it is important for us to see the order of things in this way, especially as we consider our role of imitating Christ.

As Jesus was serving God, what did His Heavenly Father require from Him? How did God want the Messiah to minister to the needs of people? The answer is found in the last part of the mission statement. God wanted Jesus to give

His life to be a ransom for many. Without this point, we stand in awe as we consider a King emptying Himself from all ambition to serve His Heavenly Father, but we hear no gospel. Without this point, all we have is a lofty ideal that is far too high to reach ourselves. We need this last statement if we are to have any hope of salvation. God's will for the King was for Him to suffer and die so that many people could be saved and experience eternal life.

And so, we conclude our brief survey of the mission statement alone. But now I want to place this statement back into its context and view it from that perspective. The overall setting for this mission statement is the whole story of Jesus Christ, the Servant of God. It takes in the first words He spoke and includes all of His teachings. This broad setting includes His death and His resurrection and His ascension and the pouring out of His Holy Spirit into the lives of those who believe so that His work of service can continue. That is the larger setting for this mission statement. The immediate setting is the paragraph that begins with verse 32 and ends with verse 52.

After dealing with the rich young ruler Jesus resumed His journey to Jerusalem. Jesus led the way. Following, probably at some distance, were the disciples who were amazed at their Lord's determination to go to Jerusalem. And following after the disciples were the crowds who were afraid.

So, the Lord makes the journey that would end in His passion. In a sense, He walked alone, because no one else could understand completely. The twelve disciples were amazed and the crowds were afraid. After a while Jesus gathered the twelve around Him and explained in detail what would happen in Jerusalem. It was in that context that James and John brought their request to Jesus. Jesus answered their reply in a kind way. But when the other ten disciples became angry, Jesus answered them with a rebuke. Then comes the mission statement. And then the story of Jesus healing Bartimaeus. This is the immediate context of the mission statement. Now let's see how it all fits together.

First of all, Jesus's mission statement declares that He came to serve, and the story tells us that the pathway of service God the Father wanted Him to take was a pathway that would lead Him to Jerusalem. It was the place where all the forces that were determined to kill Him had gathered. That accounts for the amazement of the disciples and the fear of the crowds. And Jesus was going to Jerusalem to allow Himself to be killed by these evil people. Such is the pathway of service God called Him to travel. But, the end of the journey would be victory for God. Those who hate truth can only kill the body. After they have killed the body, there is nothing more for them to do. But, after the body is killed, the truth has its victory. Victory comes after the pain. The resurrection comes after the cross. This was the pathway

of service that Jesus shared with His disciples.

I am told that one reason why few people want to enter into full-time ministry these days is because they know it will result in a great deal of suffering. I can testify that people who think this way are right. When a certain person determines to serve God full time, whether or not they are paid to do so, it is almost guaranteed that person will be hurt. But my experience also tells me that victory follows the hurt. Many people will never change until they have had the chance to lash out at others who are good, causing them hurt and pain. And with so many people, they will never change for the better until they see the person they have hurt loving them in return. When we choose to serve God we embrace this principle as a way of life. It becomes our pathway of service.

The request from James and John was in response to our Lord's sharing about the pathway of service that would result in victory. People usually interpret the request as being selfish. They say that James and John wanted to have high positions so they could control other people. The Bible doesn't tell us what their motive was for the request, but I personally don't think their motive was bad. I think the other ten disciples thought their motive was bad and selfish, and that is why they became indignant. But I would guess and even hope that James and John came to Jesus simply because they desired to be close to the King and use their influence to help other people the same way Jesus used His influence to help people.

People who desire to become a pastor or an elder or a Sunday school teacher or a leader of a small group can do so because they want to use the position to manipulate outcomes. But they can also desire the position, because they hope to have an influence on people that will be good and bring glory to God.

I would like to believe that James and John made their request with a good motive. They said they were willing to travel the pathway of suffering, even though they did not understand what that meant. No one can really understand the pathway of suffering until they have experienced it themselves. But at least James and John knew about the pathway in theory, and they were willing to travel it.

Jesus was kind in the way He answered James and John. He admitted them into the fellowship of His sufferings. He told them, in effect, that positions of honor did not matter at all. The positions of honor are prepared for those who earn them. They are not given upon request. Jesus could not guarantee them the positions of honor, but He could guarantee them that they would be counted as being worthy to share in His sufferings.

The rebuke that Jesus gave was not a reaction to the request of James and

John; rather, it was a reaction to the indignation of the other ten disciples. They were the ones who misunderstand the meaning of leadership in God's kingdom. Jesus told them that leadership in God's kingdom has nothing to do with control over people. Obviously they did not understand that a desire to be a leader in God's kingdom is a desire to serve that expresses itself in sacrifice.

And so, as King of God's kingdom, Jesus proclaims that His mission is to serve God in a way that expresses itself in sacrifice. Through the sacrifice, and as a direct result of the sacrifice, people would be reconciled to God. Jesus said in effect to the ten and the two, to the twelve, and to all their successors through the ages, "If you really want to know what it means to be a leader with authority and power, you must come this way with me."

And then, we come to the incident of the blind man, Bartemaeus, being healed. Those who were following Jesus rebuked the blind man. But, let's sympathize with these people for a moment. Even though they could not completely understand everything Jesus was saying, they could understand that He what He was doing was very, very important. Jesus was on a very high mission, and a blind beggar must not be allowed to interrupt him.

I have seen people get very irritated when they are interrupted while trying to read the Bible or study the Bible in preparation to teach and preach. I have seen people get upset when, during their quiet meditation with God, someone comes along with a need.

But here, we see Jesus stopping and calling to the beggar and healing him. The greatest and highest things must find a way to express themselves in the things that seem small and insignificant. The great things spoken in our Lord's mission statement are now illustrated when Jesus stops what He is doing to minister to the need of a blind beggar. To have refused would have been to deny His teaching about service.

And so, we come to the end of our brief survey of the mission statement in light of its context, and we consider application.

We cannot give our lives in the same way that Jesus gave His life. We cannot die a vicarious death that will free people from the bondage of sin so they can experience life eternal. But, we can experience fellowship with His sufferings in a way that will cause people to turn to God for salvation. We do this by ridding ourselves of any selfish ambition that might get in our way of serving God. Then we travel the pathway of service. We know that the pathway of service will require great sacrifice, and when our Lord asks us if we are willing to travel, we reply, just

as James and John replied, "Yes, Lord, I am willing to travel this road." It is a high road to travel that will involve pain as people get upset and hurt us in an attempt to do what they think is right. But it is also a glorious road when we see the very people who caused pain surrender their lives to the Savior. Saul of Tarsus hurt people, and felt justified in doing so. He was there when Steven, while being stoned to death, cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Steven's suffering was not in vain, and I am sure those words of love were never forgotten by the man who became Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ.

The mission statement of Jesus Christ is meant to be our mission statement. We are to look at it as one would look into a mirror. We must see the Son of Man, but we must also see ourselves. But we should also see the reflection of ourselves becoming more and more like our dear Savior, day by day.

Let's make the mission statement of Jesus Christ become our own mission statement. Let's remind ourselves every morning and every evening that our mission is to empty ourselves of all selfish ambition and serve God. Our mission is not to be served, but to serve in such a way as to cause people to be reconciled to God.