

# Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Mark

## Session Seventeen – Mark 10:32-52

***Mark 10:32 They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid.***

“On their way up to Jerusalem.” Some geography is helpful here. Mark has drawn a map for us of the week leading up to this moment. Jesus and the disciples were in the far north, at Caesarea Philippi; they then headed back south and “passed through Galilee” and into their home base at Capernaum; the beginning of Chapter 10 had us heading south again, “into the region of Judea and across the Jordan.”

This is not an accidental route. Jesus, avoids travelling around the west side of the Sea of Galilee, avoiding Herod’s new capital of Tiberias. The region of Judea across the Jordan is back to John the Baptist’s old stomping ground, just outside of the jurisdiction of the Temple authorities. Jesus is ending his ministry in the same place it began with his Baptism. He’s there long enough to attract crowds, whom he taught.

But now, they are “on their way up to Jerusalem.” This is both a geographic and spiritual reference. Jerusalem is high up in the Judean hills, at 780m, or 2500ft. The baptismal area where Jesus is located at this point is 260m, or 850ft below sea level – a difference of more than a kilometre in height!

But it is spiritual as well. To go to Jerusalem is, in Hebrew, “to make Aliyah,” which means, “to go up.” To this day, no matter where in the world you are travelling from, if you are going to Jerusalem, you are said to be making “Aliyah.” To leave Jerusalem, conversely, you are said to be “going down - Yerida.” Jerusalem, from the Hebrew perspective, is the spiritual “high place,” or “acropolis,” of the world.

There is a section of the Psalms known as the Psalms of Ascent – Psalms 120-134. Most famous of these is 121 – “I lift up my eyes to the hills.” Pilgrims to Jerusalem would recite these Psalms, which call upon God for protection on the journey – a dangerous trek, as the Good Samaritan story reminds us – for help for the arduous trek, and in anticipation of the blessing which awaits.

***121:1-2 - I lift up my eyes to the mountains - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.***

***122:1-2 - I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord." Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem.***

***125:1-2 - Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and forevermore.***

***126:1-3 - When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.***

These psalms, doubtless recited by Jesus and the disciples on their journey, conclude with a crescendo of praise, a celebration of unity, and a blessing upon those who serve in the Temple. Whenever I am travelling to Jerusalem, ascending the steep road from Jericho, I always sing Psalm 121, "I Joyed When To the House of God".

***Mark 10:32 They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid.***

***"Jesus is leading the way."*** Salvation history is underway, and Jesus is leading his people, even as Moses led the people through the desert, and Joshua led them into the Promised Land. It will take great courage for Jesus to lead the way, for he knows what is coming. Do you think Peter would have chosen to lead?

***"and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid."*** All of them know, regardless of Jesus' predictions, that danger awaits in Jerusalem. They have been carefully avoiding the centres of power controlled by Jesus' opponents. Now they are heading right into the lion's mouth. The Jesus retinue, which consists of more than the disciples, dread what is to come.

***Mark 10:32-34 Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. 33 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34 who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."***

Small wonder they were astonished and afraid! If this is what was going to happen, why on earth would you go? This is the third time Jesus predicts what is going to happen. The first was at Caesarea Philippi, after Peter's realization that Jesus is indeed the

Messiah; the second followed the Transfiguration; and now this, as they are about to make their ascent to Jerusalem.

The timing of the predictions is not accidental; first, after Jesus' identification as Messiah, he explains what Messiah really means; the second, after the revelation of his full glory, shows that to suffer and die does not imply the lessening of his glory; and now, at the onset of his journey to Jerusalem, to show that what is to happen is not accidental, but intentional. It must happen.

The predictions differ slightly, rising in intensity each time. The first time, he describes himself as ***“rejected”*** by the religious authorities; the second, ***“betrayed into the hands of men;”*** the third, ***“delivered over”*** to the religious authorities, who condemn him, then hand him over to the Gentiles, for Roman humiliation and execution. Each time, he says, ***“after three days he will rise.”***

***Mark 10:35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” 36 “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. 37 They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”***

Despite Jesus' predictions, the disciples are still clinging to the old model of the militarily triumphant Messiah. James and John callously demand that Jesus do for them whatever they ask, which is to sit at the right and left side of Jesus in his glory. They are picturing a King on his throne, with his favourites on either side. They want to rule! They are refusing to grasp what lies ahead.

***Mark 10:38 “You don't know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” 39 “We can,” they answered.***

Jesus is asking them if they are prepared to suffer as he is prepared to suffer, using the illustration of the rites of Communion and Baptism. Mark's listeners understand the symbolism of Communion as representing the sacrifice of Christ – the giving of his body and blood – and Baptism as representing his death and resurrection. But James and John either do not have this understanding, or overestimate their commitment.

***Mark 10:39 Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with***

Jesus predicts that they will indeed suffer in the future – James will be killed by Herod Antipas – “put to death by the sword” – the first of the Twelve to die. John, if it is the John of the Revelation, will be the only Apostle to live to old age, but will suffer persecution, imprisonment, and if church tradition is to be believed, poisoning.

***Mark 10:40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”***

What is happening here is the outworking of a long-established, long-prepared plan. The future goal is set, the plan is in action. To whom are the places of authority given? Is it possible that we have already been given the answer with the Transfiguration event? Throughout Church History, other possibilities include Mary and John the Baptist.

***Mark 10:41-44 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 42 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.***

Not surprisingly, this angling for preference has upset the others, and caused disunity among the disciples, which must have been painful for Jesus. Small wonder that in the Gospel of John, Jesus expresses time and again the importance of unity – that the disciples “be one.” The danger of fragmentation in the church is all too apparent today.

Here, Jesus reiterated the need to be operating in contrast to the ways and workings of the world. We are not to seek power, but rather the opportunities to serve; pride is to be replaced by humility, and a servant attitude. Shockingly, James and John had just treated Jesus as a servant, making demands of him; Jesus’ response, “***What do you want me to do for you?***” was a servant’s response. He had been modelling this already.

***Mark 10:45 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.”***

Who are we to demand to be served, when Jesus himself came to serve? That is our example. The Gospel of John, written much later than Mark, and to supplement that which John felt was not as fully explained in the earlier Gospels, spends a lot of time expanding on this saying, with the “footwashing” episode as the primary example.

***“to give his life as a ransom for many”*** is not a concept central to the Biblical teaching. The idea of sacrifice certainly is, but the impossibility of “ransom for a life” is not. Psalm 49:7-9 is explicit on this point:

***No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them - the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough - so that they should live on forever and not see decay.***

And yet that is precisely what Jesus does! It is only the sacrifice of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, which is sufficient to “ransom” the lost from their captivity to sin and death, and free them to eternal life. It is closer to this Isaiah passage:

***Isaiah 53:5-6 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.***

***Mark 10:46 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging.***

Jericho is the starting point of the Jerusalem road. We should always take notice when a character appears by name. In this case, it is an otherwise nameless beggar. But his name is preserved in the record; later, we read that after his healing, ***“he followed Jesus along the road.”*** From this, we have a good indication that Bartimaeus became a known figure to the early Christian community.

***Mark 10:47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” 48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”***

Bartimaeus, in referring to Jesus as Son of David, is recognising Jesus as a successor to the ancient King, and therefore as Messiah. The response of the crowd to his begging for mercy is to tell him to shut up. We hope it is not the response of Jesus’ followers!

***Mark 10:49-50 Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” 50 Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.***

The response of those who had told Bartimaeus to be quiet not turns to mocking – ***“Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.”*** Note the important transition – Bartimaeus had been calling Jesus. Jesus now calls him. He’s reversing the roles of authority. There’s a lesson going on here.

***Throwing his cloak aside...*** The cloak was placed before him to collect alms. It may be his sole worldly possession. He abandons it to come to Jesus – another sign of truly committed discipleship, and a contrast to the “rich young man” earlier in the chapter.

***Exodus 22:26-27 - If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, because that cloak is the only covering your neighbor has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.***

***Mark 10:51 “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.***

Jesus knows the man is blind, and so the question seems redundant. But something important is being pointed out here. Jesus’ response is word for word the same response he gave to James and John. It is the response of a servant, not the response of a master. Jesus is demonstrating his servant attitude, to illustrate clearly the words he just shared with the disciples – not to be served, as James and John wanted, but to serve.

***Mark 10:51-52 The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” 52 “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.***

***“Rabbi, I want to see.”*** The NIV translation misses something here (as do many others). The actual text says, ***“Rabbouni,”*** which is the same way Mary Magdalene addresses Jesus at the Resurrection. Other times, when Jesus is called “Rabbi,” it is as a title – “Teacher.” Rabbouni takes the possessive case, and means, “My teacher.” It is a title of intimacy and respect.

Bartimaeus sees, in ways the disciples did not. He recognises Jesus’ power, his Messiahship, and the need not to demand favours, but to beg for mercy. In this miracle, and in contrast to James and John, Bartimaeus demonstrates what it is to be a disciple. To recognise Jesus as Messiah; to recognise our own need; to beg for mercy; to have faith in the power of Jesus; and to follow.

**Next week: Palm Sunday! Mark 11**