

Eastwood Baptist (AM, 11/3/18) **THE SERVANT GOES UP TO JERUSALEM** (Mark 10:32-45)

**Introduction** Have you ever felt alone in a crowd? Jesus found himself alone in a crowd as he went up to Jerusalem to die. Only he fully understood what he was doing, although some others had a partial understanding.

**Going up to Jerusalem to Die** (vv.32-34) **Read v.32a.** Mark reminds us that Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, and is about to remind us of why he is going there. Clearly Mark sees this as very important. He seems to identify two groups of people who are with Jesus, and to distinguish their feelings. The twelve are astonished. We are not told why, but the context suggests that they are astonished that he is going up to Jerusalem. This is probably because they have an awareness of opposition to Jesus, and hence some understanding of the danger will face in Jerusalem, but also presumably because they have at least partially understood his predictions of what will happen there. The broader group following Jesus are simply afraid, based on their own expectation of danger and the fear that they could get involved. **Read vv.32b-34.** This is the third time Mark records Jesus' prediction of his death and resurrection in his Gospel. The other two occur not long before this one, in 8:31 and in 9:30-31. Mark clearly wants us to see the importance of Jesus' death and resurrection. He understands Jesus' words at the time of writing his Gospel, and so can we as we read it, but it was harder for the Twelve at the time.

**Seeking Places of Honour** (vv.35-37) James and John show that they still hold to expectations of triumph and glory for Jesus as Messiah by asking for the largest shares in that glory. This is another repetition in today's passage, since Mark has recorded in 9:33-34, immediately after Jesus' second prediction of his suffering and death, that the Twelve had argued while on the road to Capernaum about who among them was the greatest. Nonetheless, we should not be too quick to condemn James and John. On one level, their request shows great faith. Despite their astonishment and awareness of danger, they continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah and rightly to expect that he will enter into glory. But they are wrong about how and when he will do this. And they are wrong in their ideas about greatness, despite Jesus having responded to their earlier argument about greatness (9:35) by teaching them that "anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all". But even where they are mistaken, we should be slow to feel superior. Throughout history, Christians have been inclined to re-shape the gospel to fit our human inclinations, not least in this area of greatness.

**“Can You Drink the Cup I Drink?”** (vv.38-40) Jesus’ response to James and John challenges their lack of understanding. **Read vv.38-40.** He challenges them with two metaphors, metaphors of drinking a cup and of being immersed – the Greek word *baptizō* had the ordinary meaning of “dip” or “immerse” in the first century, as well as coming to have the narrower sense of “baptise” in Christian usage. I suspect that James and John probably lacked any precise understanding of Jesus’ meaning, but Mark’s Gospel helps its readers to understand. Mark’s record of Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane has Jesus again using the language of a cup, a cup from which he shrinks. Here the reference is clearly to Jesus’ death on the cross. So this metaphor is similar to Jesus’ earlier demand that his disciples must be willing to take up their cross and follow him. The way toward greatness as his disciples involves dying to oneself, obeying God the Father and being prepared to undergo suffering. The metaphor of baptism, or immersion, probably intensifies this by suggesting going through deep waters of suffering. But it could also refer to actual baptism, since Jesus in his baptism committed himself to God’s purpose, and we in our baptism identify with Jesus, especially in his death and resurrection, and commit ourselves to follow him.

**Servants Following Jesus the Servant** (vv.41-45) But we now see how hard we find it to be humble servants when others are pursuing honour. **Read v.41.** James and John are the ones who have openly sought the highest places of honour, but the other ten reveal by their indignation that they are not comfortable with missing out. I can sympathise with this. When those close to us pursue acclaim, and especially when they seem to achieve it, it is not easy to maintain our commitment to following Jesus’ way of servanthood. In their case, they were also influenced by living in a world which encouraged the pursuit of honour. **Read v.42.** The Gentile world of Jesus’ day was a world which gave great importance to honour and status, and saw no problem in pursuing these. The disciples may well have looked at the Romans, the dominant nation of their day, and been tempted to imitate them. This is not to say that the Jews were free of such desires, or that Australians are today. As a nation, we like to think of ourselves as egalitarian, but we still like to gain power and to be admired by others. And Australian Christians are by no means free of these desires. To them and to us, Jesus says that his way is the way of service. **Read vv.43-44.** This was counter-cultural for Jesus’ disciples, and it still is for us. Even when we embrace the language of servanthood, we find it difficult to embrace the spirit of servanthood. Immediately we tell ourselves that we excel others in our willingness to serve, we have fallen away from the spirit of Jesus’ teaching. And the fact that it is Jesus’ teaching is reason enough to embrace it wholeheartedly. Yet there is an

even stronger reason. Jesus did not merely teach this – he embodied it! **Read v.45.** Jesus' example demands that those who follow him imitate his genuine servanthood. But there is more than just servanthood in the closing words of this passage. There is that in what Jesus has done which goes beyond what we can imitate. He gave his life as a ransom for many, as a ransom for us. Again we have a metaphor: a ransom is normally a price paid to set a slave free. We shouldn't press the details of the implied comparison, but we can take from it that human beings are slaves to sin and to Satan until they accept what Jesus has done for them. So first we need to put our faith in Jesus, who by dying on the cross has done what no one else could do, then we need to follow him by living as his servants and the servants of other people.

**Conclusion**       Who is our Jesus? Is he the Suffering Servant? Is he the one who gave his life as our ransom? Have we accepted in faith what he has done for us? And if we have, are we genuinely content to be servants, to put our own success and desires and reputation to one side in order to follow Jesus?