



# The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V23 N10 March 7, 2021

## KING JESUS

“Descending the Ladder of Greatness”

Mark 10:35-45

### THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

#### Humility

I choose to esteem others above myself.

*“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”*

Philippians 2:3-4



How is true greatness achieved?

“It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love” (Jn 13:1).

The last thing Jesus did for his disciples was wash their feet—their dirty, smelly, ugly, callused feet. He did it to teach them a lesson. You see, after eating the Paschal meal, they began to argue over which of them was the greatest; it was a dispute they had had before (Lk 22:24-27; cf. Mk 9:34; 10:35-45). How like chickens they were! Chickens need to know which is the greatest, which is the least, and which is on every rung of the “pecking order” in between, and until that pecking order is established there can be no peace in the chicken yard. But rather than scold them for not paying attention to what he had repeatedly taught them, Jesus branded their minds with an image of greatness that marked them for the rest of their days. “He got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet” (Jn 13:4, 5).

Richard J. Foster writes, “Whenever there is trouble over who is the greatest, there is trouble over who is the least. That is the crux of the matter for us, isn’t it? Most of us know we will never be the greatest; just don’t let us be the least. Gathered at the Passover feast, the disciples were keenly aware that someone needed to wash the others’ feet. The problem was that the only people who washed feet were the least. So there they sat, feet caked with dirt. It was such a sore point that they were not even going to talk about it. No one wanted to be considered the least. Then Jesus took a towel and a basin and re-

defined greatness” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 126).

Mark 10:35-45 contains an invitation to greatness—Jesus’ invitation to greatness, which is radically different from the world’s. The world measures greatness in terms of how much and what kind of service one can *get* from others, but Jesus measures greatness in terms of how much and what kind of service one can *give* to others. And the possibilities are endless. Foster writes about ten different kinds of service. The “service of hiddenness” involves doing things for others that generally remain unknown. The “service of small things” involves following the example of Dorcas who did what she could by making garments for widows (Ac 9:39). The “service of guarding the reputation of others” involves refusing to take part in slanderous talk about them. The “service of being served” involves permitting others to serve us, never feeling that we must repay it. The “service of common courtesy” involves civility, which has fallen on hard times these days. The “service of hospitality” involves opening our homes to others. The “service of listening,” which Foster calls, “the first service that one owes to others in the fellowship” (138), involves taking time to understand and empathize with others. The “service of bearing one another’s burdens” and the “service of sharing one another’s sorrows” involve standing by others in bad times. And finally, the “service of sharing the word of life with one another” involves building one another up in the faith (134-140). “Everybody can be great because anybody can serve” —Martin Luther King, Jr.

We have a number of symbols for Christianity—the cross, of course, and the fish. It seems to me that the towel would be an excellent albeit probably less popular symbol.



## EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

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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."

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 said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 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."

41 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. 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."

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Box "then" indicating *time* in v. 35.
- Bracket "sit at your right" and "at your left" in v. 37.
- Circle "drink" (2x) in v. 39.
- Circle "baptized/baptism" (3x) in v. 39.
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 40, 45.
- Bracket "have been prepared" in v. 40.
- Circle "indignant" in v. 41.
- Bracket "lord it over" and "exercise authority over" in v. 42.
- Box "Instead" indicating *contrast* in v. 43.
- Underline "great" and "first" in vv. 43 and 44, respectively.
- Double underline "servant" and "slave" in vv. 43 and 44, respectively.
- Circle "ransom" in v. 45.
- Circle "for many" in v. 45.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about \_\_\_\_\_."



## DIG DEEPER

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Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. “Then” links verses 35-37 to what Jesus just said. How ironic! Don’t you agree? Explain.
  2. Jesus predicts his death a third time (vv. 32-34). Compare their reaction this time to previous times (cf. 8:31-33; 9:30-34).
  3. The request of James and John (v. 37)—commendable or not? Explain.
  4. To what do “cup” and “baptism” *figuratively* refer in verse 38?
  5. To Jesus’ profound question James and John give the simple answer, “We can.” What does their one-word answer [in Gk.] indicate to you?
  6. Explain the *contrast* introduced in verse 40.
  - 7 Describe how James’ and John’s ambitions affected the others.
  8. Jesus set the Gentiles’ view of greatness on its head. How so?
  9. Explain the *contrast* in verse 45.
  10. **Discussion:** Talk about what “a ransom for many” means.
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### Commentary On The Text

Mark 10:35-45 can be divided into two parts, the first containing the request of James and John (vv. 35-40) and the second containing Jesus' teaching in response to the indignation of the other disciples (vv. 41-45). The flow of the passage is summarized nicely by one commentator: "The episode begins with the request of the sons of Zebedee: they would like Jesus to grant them a wish (v 35). Jesus asks them what it is that they would like him to do for them (v 36). They tell him that they wish to sit at Jesus' right and left, that is, to assume positions of highest authority, second and third to Jesus himself, when the kingdom has come in its fullness (v 37). But Jesus tells them that they do not know what they ask, for there will be trials (v 38). They assure, him however, that they are equal to the task (v 39a). Jesus then declares that they will indeed share in his trials (v 39b), but he cannot grant their request: 'it is for those for whom it is prepared' (v 40). When the rest of the disciples hear of James and John's request, they are indignant (v 41). Jesus then summons his disciples and teaches them regarding humility and service (vv 42-44), concluding with his own example of offering service in place of being served (v 45)" (Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 34b, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 113).

Given what Jesus had just told them, the timing of their request was the worst. Verses 33-34 read, "'We are going up to Jerusalem,' he said, 'and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.' Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him." One writer rightly observes, "The petty selfishness of His followers at a time like this, when His mind was full of all that lay ahead at Jerusalem, must have cut Jesus to the quick, like their earlier argument as to who was the greatest among them (9:34)" (R. Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to Mark*, TNTC, 241). So, while Jesus spoke of being mocked, spat upon, flogged and killed, James and John pursued personal ambitions.

Their question didn't just occur to the "sons of thunder" (3:17; cf., 5:37; 9:2), who some think were Jesus' cousins (see Evans, 118). The Twelve considered the issue of greatness on two previous occasions: after Jesus predicted his death the first time (cf. 8:31-9:1) and after he predicted it a second time (9:30-35). And now after his third prediction, they do so again (10:32-45). As they got closer to Jerusalem,

Mark records that Jesus "took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him" (v. 32); it was "Then" that James and John asked Jesus to do them a favor and then that Jesus taught them again about greatness. Each passion prediction is thus followed by important teaching on true service and the possibility of suffering—put differently, what disciples should expect and how they should live.

Had James and John known the implications of what they were asking, they might not have asked in the first place, but they didn't. When Jesus asked them if they were prepared and able to suffer for him, their one-word answer clearly indicated they were clueless. As one writer puts it, "They believe they can endure a little hardship if Jesus will grant them seats of power and corner offices. They understand faithful discipleship to Jesus as a means to a selfish end; it will help them achieve their goal of having power over others" (David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*, 412). Jesus replies by assuring them, perhaps even warning them, that they will in fact suffer and possibly die. "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with," he told them. But he was in no position to grant their request. Places of power and privilege in the kingdom were God's alone to give (see Mt 19:28; cf., Lk 22:30).

When the other ten heard what the other two had asked and how Jesus had answered, they were livid, but not because of their friends' insensitivity and bad timing, but because of their opportunism. James and John had beaten them to the punch. But rather than step in as a referee, Jesus stepped in as a teacher. He taught them a lesson on greatness using contrast to do it. Greatness is not defined as the Gentiles define greatness. Great leaders do not use their position to "lord it over" people or merely "exercise authority" over them like Gentile leaders. Great leaders use their position to serve people. Greatness is measured in terms of service, so the one who wants to be the greatest must be the servant of all. Jesus is the perfect example of greatness for he did not come to be served, but to serve, and to pay the ultimate price for the release of people from their bondage to sin. "The passage brings out the danger of overweening ambition. Stott remarks that our world '(and even the church) is full of Jameses and Johns, go-getters and status-seekers, hungry for honour and prestige, measuring life by achievements, and everlastingly dreaming of success'" (Garland, 415).

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## Word Studies/Notes

vv. 35-45

Parallel to 9:33-37.

"Both passages deal with true greatness and both follow a prediction of Jesus' suffering and death. Both also show how spiritually undiscerning the disciples were" (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on 10:35-45).

v. 35 *sons of Zebedee*

See Mk 1:19; cf., 3:17

where they're called "sons of thunder." According to Matthew 20:20 their mother accompanied them; he puts their question in her mouth.

v. 35 *we want . . .*

"Teacher," they said,

"there is something we want you to do for us" (TEV).

"They sought from Jesus a monarch's gift, a sort of 'blank cheque' upon His favour" (R. Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to Mark*, TNTC, 241).

v. 37 *sit . . . left*

James and John asked

Jesus to give them the highest positions of prestige and power in his kingdom (cf. Mt 19:28). They were asking as individuals and not on behalf of the Twelve. "The specific nature of the request is uncertain. It may refer to being given the best seats in the messianic banquet (cf. Matt. 22:1-10; Luke 14:15-24; also 1 Kings 2:19; Ps. 110:1; 1 Esd. 4:29; Sir. 12:12; Josephus, *Ant.* 6.11.9 §245). Or to sitting at Jesus's side when he was to be enthroned as the supreme judge of the world (cf. 8:38; 13:26-27; 14:62; Matt. 19:28 25:31-46). That James and John want to 'sit' at Jesus's right and left hand, whereas at a banquet one usually reclined, favors the latter view (France 2002: 415)" (Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT, 484). "It was ambition, not loyalty, that motivated them. James and John were, after all, not only members of the 'twelve', but also members of the 'three' (9:2). Had not King David had his 'three' also who were close to the throne (2 Sa. 23:8)?" (Cole, 242).

v. 37 *glory*

I.e., the glory Jesus, the

Messiah, would receive sitting on the throne of David, ruling over Israel and the nations from Jerusalem. "The brothers' request reveals both a correct and an incorrect understanding of Jesus's messianic role. They recognize correctly that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, as Peter's confession (8:29), the transfiguration (9:2-8, esp. v.7), and Jesus's teachings concerning his coming glory and the coming of the kingdom (8:38-9:1) indicate. But they refuse to accept Jesus's repeated teaching concerning his coming passion (8:31; 9:31; 10:31-33)" (Stein, 484).

v. 38 *the cup, baptism*

The references to the

cup and baptism are examples of synonymous parallelism (Stein 1994b: 27) and point to Jesus's forthcoming death foretold in his three passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). Although the metaphor of a 16:13), it refers far more frequently to experiencing suffering and even death (Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15; 49:12; Lam. 4:21; Ezek. 23:31-

35; Hab. 2:16; cf. Ps. Sol. 8:15; Mart. Isa. 5:13)" (Stein, 485).

The expression "drink the cup" means to share the same fate. The metaphor of "baptism" may be connected to the imagery of being overwhelmed by a watery flood (Ps 42:7; 69:15; Isa 43:2). The verb means, "to immerse" or "submerge." It is used figuratively here with reference to being submerged in an experience. Referring to his crucifixion, Jesus asked James and John whether they could go through the terrible experience he was about to go through.

v. 39 *We can . . . you will.*

"No more naïve words

have ever been spoken as those found here coming from James and John, 'We are able.' They said it with such confidence and ease, yet they had little clue as to what they were affirming. In the next sentence Jesus confirms that they will indeed suffer for his name" (*The NET Bible*, 61sn on Mk 10:39). James was martyred (Ac 12:2) and John was banished to the island of Patmos (Re 1:9).

v. 42 *Gentiles*

It is said when Galba

became emperor of Rome in A. D. 68, he remarked that now that he was emperor, he could do what he liked and do it to anyone. "Jesus teaches that leadership in the kingdom of God is totally different. It does not involve being *master* over others at all; instead, it involves being their *servant*" (Stein, 486).

v. 43 *servant*

A house servant who

voluntarily renders useful service to others.

v. 44 *slave*

A bondservant who

forfeits his own rights to serve any and all. "True greatness involves being a servant and slave (8:34; 9:35; 10:31), as the two examples of synonymous parallelism (Stein 1994b: 27) in 10:43b-44 illustrate" (Stein, 487).

v. 45 *ransom*

Cf., Isa 53:10-12. "To

Mark's readers, 'ransom' would evoke the idea of a payment to secure the release of a slave or captive (A. Collins 1997)" (Stein, 488). The idea of Jesus as the "ransom" is that he paid the price with his own life by standing in humanity's place as a substitute ("for [Gk. *anti*] many" meaning "instead of"), enduring the judgment that was deserved for sin.

v. 45 *many*

The term can be under-

stood exclusively, as a large number but not all, or inclusively, as all. "In Semitic usage 'many' tends to be used inclusively as a synonym for 'all' (Maloney 1981: 139-42). This is how 1 Tim. 2:6 understands Jesus's ransom (*antilytron hyper pantōn*, a ransom for all), and the interchangeable use of 'many' and 'all' in Rom. 5:15, 18-19 proves this (Gnilka 1979:104)" (Stein, 489). As in Mk 1:34, "'Many' describes as numerous the 'all' whom he delivers; it does not leave out some of the 'all'" (Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 3rd ed., 134).



## APPLY THE TEXT

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### CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

If you want to be truly great, put aside selfish ambition  
and serve others selflessly like Jesus did.

### CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



## 3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What does this passage lead me to do?



## FAMILY TALK

When my kids would come home from kindergarten, we went over all the questions: What was the best/worst part of the day? Who did you sit with at lunch? Did you have a job? They would puff up and proudly announce when they got to be line leader! Oh, the thrill of being first and leading the class to the library, lunchroom and playground. After all, line leader is second only to the teacher and really the boss of the classroom; it's way better than "lame" jobs like passing out snacks or picking up trash. We aren't much different from our kindergarten kids and all have an innate desire to be the head of the pack, leader of the gang, the boss. Thankfully Jesus calls us to so much more through serving others. If I'm being truly honest with you, serving is not my spiritual gift, so I'm always thankful when others lead this charge. If you're like me and serving isn't your natural bent, pay attention to those around you like home group leaders or even your kids. Take note and respond positively when your children have crazy ideas for serving others. One child wants to go door-to-door during a canned food drive; do it. Another child seeks to check on the elderly during crazy weather; make the call. Yet another frequently seeks to give away their time or possessions; join them. Allowing your kids to lead the charge in serving others is the best of both worlds. They get to be the "family line leader" while still showing the love of Jesus to the community. We are praying for you!

### What Does The Bible Say?

Read Mark 10:35-45.

1. What request did James and John make of Jesus?
2. How did Jesus answer James and John?
3. What do we have to do to be great in His kingdom?

### What Do You Think?

Why would James and John ask for these special places?

### What Do You Do?

Pretend to be the waiter or waitress for the whole day. Set the table, help serve the family and provide condiments. Help the family when they need an extra serving or drink and clear the table. How easy/hard was it to serve the whole day?

## CORE COMPETENCY: Humility

I make others more important than me.

## MEMORY VERSE: Mathew 20:16

*"So the last will be first and the first will be last."*

## KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: [kids@wearecentral.org](mailto:kids@wearecentral.org)

- \_\_\_\_\_ I completed my Bible Study
- \_\_\_\_\_ I memorized this week's verse
- \_\_\_\_\_ I brought my Bible to church
- \_\_\_\_\_ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE PARENT SIGNATURE

# OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

## CENTRAL BELIEFS

**Authority of the Bible** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)  
*I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.*

**Church** (Ephesians 4:15-16)  
*I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.*

**Eternity** (John 14:1-4)  
*I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.*

**The Holy Spirit** (Romans 8:9)  
*I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.*

**Humanity** (John 3:16)  
*I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.*

**Identity in Christ** (John 1:12)  
*I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.*

**Jesus Christ** (Hebrews 1:1-4)  
*I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.*

**Life Purpose** (Acts 20:24)  
*I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.*

**Personal God** (Psalm 121:1-2)  
*I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.*

**Salvation by Grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9)  
*I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.*



## CENTRAL VIRTUES

**Love** (1 John 4:10-12)  
*I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.*

**Joy** (John 15:11)  
*I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.*

**Peace** (Philippians 4:6-7)  
*I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.*

**Patience** (Proverbs 14:29)  
*I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.*

**Kindness/Goodness** (1 Thessalonians 5:15)  
*I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others*

**Faithfulness** (Proverbs 3:3-4)

*I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.*

**Gentleness** (Philippians 4:5)

*I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.*

**Self-Control** (Titus 2:11-13)

*I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.*

**Grace** (Colossians 3:13)

*I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.*

**Hope** (1 Peter 1:3-5)

*I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.*

**Humility** (Philippians 2:3-4)

*I choose to esteem others above myself.*



## CENTRAL PRACTICES

**Bible Study** (Hebrews 4:12)

*I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Biblical Community** (Acts 2:44-47)

*I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.*

**Compassion** (Psalm 82:3-4)

*I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.*

**Disciple-Making** (2 Timothy 2:2)

*I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.*

**Evangelism** (Acts 1:8)

*I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.*

**Generosity** (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

*I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.*

**Prayer** (Psalm 66:16-20)

*I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Single-Mindedness** (Matthew 6:33)

*I focus on God and His priorities for my life.*

**Spiritual Gifts** (Romans 12:4-6)

*I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.*

**Worship** (Psalm 95:1-7)

*I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.*

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**Stephanie Thomas** (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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