



Authentic Discipleship

Mark 10:32-52

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Let's read God's Word together from Mark 10:32-52:

And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "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. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 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. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 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 they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your holy inspired Word. We pray that You would open our hearts and minds to see glorious things that You've written. Amen.

The early church reformer, John Calvin, began his ground-breaking book on theology with this profound sentence: “Nearly all wisdom we possess, that is to say true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.” On paper it sounds really straightforward and it's brilliant if you think about it. You dive into who God is and His Word and you're being exposed for who you are. As you see yourself, that drives you back to God in desperation.

But we're way more complicated than this. We're all blind to Who God is and to who we are. We have built-in mechanisms that don't want to delve too deeply into the human heart. There's only a certain level to which we're willing to go—to a surface level. That's often our experience in life. We only want to go so deep. We can only handle so much. But that keeps us from knowing God because if you won't go deep into who you are, it's going to hinder your relationship with the Lord. We lack self-awareness and God-awareness. There are different levels to self-awareness. Praise God for children. They often point out to adults what we don't see. Right? I had this terrible habit when we were in Morocco and learning Arabic. Sometimes we were with English speakers and my speech would change to fit their broken English. Our kids

noticed and said, “Dad, you’re helping no one. It’s actually embarrassing to hear you talk like that.” So they made me realize that adapting to other people doesn’t help anyone.

Lacking self-awareness can also be ironic. Did you ever hear one sibling say to another sibling, “You spoiled brat. Don’t you live in the same house and receive the same things?”

Lacking self-awareness can be very frustrating. Take a person who just doesn’t listen and doesn’t know they’re not listening. You share a moving story and they respond with a story of their own that they thought would fit the conversation—or they give advice—but they just don’t connect

A person lacking self-awareness can also be very destructive. Counselors point out that people who are angry are often the last people to know they’re angry. Everyone else knows they’re angry and they’re destroying everyone else, but they can’t tell until they see the carnage left behind. Right? So self-awareness is critical.

The goal is not just to know ourselves; it’s to then submit to what does God thinks. That’s what Lordship is. Christ’s lordship in our lives is to see what He thinks, and thankfully Jesus isn’t leaving us in the dark. He came to show us Who God is and who we are. Jesus didn’t send a photo of Himself on a distant hill, hundreds of miles away. No, He came close up and personally. He wants to show us who we are. We don’t want to look at ourselves that closely; we don’t want to go that deeply into our need for Him. But the profound part is He’s there for us. He holds us fast. His grace is more than we ever realized.

Since it’s really in the context of relationships, we use John Calvin’s own words: “True and sound wisdom consists of two parts: knowing God and of ourselves in the context of life together on mission with Jesus.” That’s going to really reveal who we are and Who He is.

This is what we see in the Gospels. It begins in verse 32 of Mark, “...and they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem.” From the time Jesus called His disciples, they entered the journey with Him. They went into the synagogue where He taught and then healed a demon-possessed man. On their first day of ministry with Jesus, they were probably thinking, “Okay, what are we getting into? He called us to follow Him and then He goes to this house and He has dinner with strangers?” He gets to know you fast and brings you with Him. This is what Jesus is doing when He calls His disciples. Since chapter eight, He’s been on this journey to Jerusalem Where there are no small matters coming up, as we know.

Notice verse 32: “*Jesus was walking ahead of them.*” He’s leading the way. He’s not intimidated at what’s going to happen in Jerusalem. He’s leading them and saying, “Follow Me.” This becomes His theme, because that’s also how His life ended.

Of all the people in this story—and in our lives—the only person who doesn't lack self-awareness is Jesus. He knows Who He is. He knows His mission. He knows what He's doing. We don't. We're the ones wrestling. We're the ones who are not clear. But we're following Him and He knows what He's doing and where He's going.

It's a surprising twist to the story that the disciples haven't figured out some of His plan. Jesus has been so clear with His disciples. This is third time He's talked about His death. He's alluded to it. He's been doing miracles. He has authority over demons. He's healed the sick. He's raised the dead. They've seen it all. They know Who this is. He's the Messiah. Peter confessed that. Yet they struggled to really understand what He was doing.

We also struggle with knowing Who Jesus is. It's so clear. Look at verse 33: *“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. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”*

Now with all of this talk of death, shame, suffering, mocking, spitting, flogging, killing, you would think, “What in the world were they thinking when they asked their first question?” The sons of Zebedee, James and John, are not called Sons of Thunder for nothing. Right? *“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”*

Imagine yourself talking to Jesus that morning. “Jesus, I want You to do for me whatever I ask of You today. Will You sign right here? Don't read the fine print. Just sign right here. Will you do whatever I ask of You today?” That's basically what James and John said.

Look how gracious Jesus is. He simply replies, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* Now the reason why I read the whole story was because He asked the very same question of Bartimaeus in verse 51. He called Bartimaeus and said, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* So we're going to contrast the disciples with Bartimaeus. If Jesus came to you and said “What do you want Me to do for you?” how would you answer that question? Let's get on the road here with the disciples and follow them as they answer His question. Then we'll take a turn through Jericho and see how Bartimaeus answers this question. But we're going to stay on the road with Jesus first.

The disciples answered Jesus in verse 37: *“Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”* What were they thinking? They misinterpreted all this activity of Jesus, thinking, “He's going to go into Jerusalem. He's going to blaze this thing. He's going to take ownership of this town and we better beat the twelve to this, John. I mean, I'll be vice president; you'll be chief of staff. We'll be ahead of the gang.” Not that the other ten were any

better. They were mad at James and John for asking, maybe because they thought, “Why don’t we draw straws for this instead of you guys picking Him. It wasn’t fair that you guys asked first.”

Jesus just politely said, “*You do not know what you are asking.*” In other words, “You have no idea. Have you been with Me so long and yet you still don’t see? Are you still thinking the thoughts of man and not of God?” Think about how you would answer these question. If Jesus asked you, “What do you want Me to do for you?” would your answer be based on just what you see in this life? *Jesus went on and said, “Yeah, you want to sit on My right and left in My glory. Well, “*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?*”

“Yeah, we can do that. I’m not sure what that is, but we’ll do that.” Well, we know from Scripture what that cup is that He’s going to drink. It’s the cup of God’s wrath against sin. Then He uses baptism here like a metaphor of the cross. Jesus is going to plunge into the water to be identified with sinners. This is the flood of God’s wrath and judgment to come out and rise again. His glory is going to come in a unique way. One commentator pointed out that the first people to sit at Jesus’ right hand and left were two thieves who hung beside Jesus on the cross.

“So, James and John. Is that what you want? You want to die on My right and left in My glory? Do you know what you’re asking?”

“Oh, okay. That’s not quite what I had in mind. I was thinking You were going to bring in glory here on earth.”

So notice their expectations. Yes, Jesus is a real Messiah. He will rise from the dead and will come in glory, but it’s going to be through suffering. He’s first a suffering Messiah before He’s a royal Messiah. This didn’t click for them, even the third time He explained His death. “I am going to suffer first before I enter My glory.” But think about it, you might be thinking, “Oh, I wouldn’t do that.” I’d be the 12th guy at the end of the line. I’m ignoring this whole thing. I really don’t want to suffer. I’m just following in the back, minding my own business, trying to be quiet.

The point is we’re living life according to our desires, our interests, our selfish moorings. Everything is gravitating around us. No, to be a disciple is to be centered around a master. There were disciples of John. There were disciples of the Pharisees. And there were disciples of Jesus. Discipleship is following a master, submitting, coming under his tutelage, saying, “I will follow you.” And that’s what following Jesus is.

But sometimes we don’t understand things until we fail in this way. The disciples were just failing left and right. “Can I be sitting on Your right and left?” They’re arguing who’s the greatest. Just like children, right? We’re like that, too, which is really insightful.

I was thinking of my own life. Where have I failed? Where haven't I failed? I remember as a new youth pastor at Grace—where David was a senior pastor—we took a few short-term mission trips. I was really excited about this one trip to Mexico and asked one of the single girls to take pictures. I said, “Hey, you're in charge of capturing all our serving and the whole story.”

So we get back and we're showing our slides during a Sunday night service. It's almost over and I realize, “I have not seen myself in any of these photos. People are going to think I was not there. I was serving. Do I need to get up and explain I really was there?” Then I remember that the photographer was recently engaged and there were lots of photos of her fiancé. He seemed to make it, but I did not seem to be there. I have to be honest, I was bothered. “Was my job was on the line? I don't know?”

Well, the Lord used this to show me my heart. God showed me through this vignette who I really was and what heart changes were needed.

Did I want the reputation of a servant more than serving? Did I want to cast myself as the hero of that trip? Did I understand greatness in God's Kingdom?”

What does it mean to serve? We buy into the world's understanding of greatness more than we buy into Jesus' understanding of greatness. Why can't we see what's great in God's Kingdom? Well, it's because His Kingdom comes in hidden ways. In secret ways.

Remember the proverbial mustard seed? It's so tiny, yet it's going to make a tree larger than all the other plants in the garden. So God's Kingdom comes in this hidden, subtle way, and it takes spiritual eyes to see. We're not born with that eyesight. That's something the Lord is helping us grow in and see for ourselves.

Think about what happens in your vocation when you get this. You become an employee who serves behind the scenes because you understand the cross and how it has shaped you. You're not just looking to get your name up front. There are subtle things you do that you don't even realize because Christ has so shaped you.

Think about a society full of servants like this. Are we praying for Venezuela right now, after seeing a corrupt government taking from people and trying to benefit themselves? Compare that a society where everyone is serving others, wanting them to flourish. What a change the cross makes in society. It's powerful. It makes sense. Greatness in Jesus' view makes perfect sense.

The motivation for this is found in verse 45. This is a verse I hope everyone has memorized: “*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” The Son of Man came. The word “came” implies preexistence. The eternal

Son of Man came —the eternal God came in the flesh—not to be served. The One Who could be served, “*came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

Think about it. Jesus came not to get, get, get, get, but to give, give, give. He’s defining humanity for us right here. The true human, God-man, showing us what it means to be human. It means to give and give and give; not just to serve ourselves. This verse explains why Jesus has been predicting His death all along: “I’m going to ransom you. I’m giving My very life to ransom you. That’s why I’m going to the cross.” What does the word “ransom” mean? It means to pay a price, to redeem someone, to buy back. Get this definition in your head: to exchange life for life.

This is the price Jesus paid: You were held captive. You were enslaved and trapped. You needed someone to pay a ransom. Jesus took your place. His death was an atoning sacrifice for you. He came to rescue you, to redeem you, to pay the ransom for your life. Think about what good news that is! He served you. If you’re a follower of Jesus Christ, He washed your feet. He died for you. He rescued you. He served you. This is what He came to do. His life defines greatness. He redefines every view you have of greatness. This is what greatness is and we see this in discipleship when we clearly see this through Christ.

Think about what we see so clearly about Jesus here. Jesus, the Servant King, rescues and calls us to follow His pattern of self-sacrifice. That’s what it means to be a disciple. Two things come to mind when we think of authentic discipleship. One is faith, trusting in the sacrifice of Christ, knowing we’ve been ransomed by Jesus. Secondly, authentic discipleship is following the pattern set before us by Jesus. Discipleship is a relational dynamic. Discipleship is not a code of knowledge you could learn in a classroom; it’s who we are as people, how we live, everything about us.

Tim Keller wrote, “We became debtors to everyone because of the love given to us in Christ.” We are now debtors to this world we live in through this. Let’s look now at the road to Jericho (verse 46). Let’s see how Bartimaeus answers this question. “*And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar... was sitting by the roadside.*” What words would you use to describe him? Sidelined, marginalized, powerless. He’s blind. He’s begging. These are the things that come to our minds. He’s not even in the center city. I don’t know why they pushed him out, but he’s outside the city. He’s really nobody in the world’s eyes.

When he hears Jesus of Nazareth is coming, he lights up. He gets excited. “Wow, today is a great day!” “*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*” But others tried to shut him up. Mark 10:48 says, “*Many rebuked him, telling him to be silent.*” Wow! What are they thinking? “Be

quiet. Shut up. Don't bother Him, He's busy. This is a holy man. He doesn't have time for you." I don't know what they were saying.

But Bartimaeus doesn't buy it. He gets even louder. "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*" They're holding him down. Nothing's going to stop him from crying out. Look at verse 49: "*Jesus stopped.*" He stopped in His tracks for this man. Think about that. "*Call him.*" Oh, what a joy. "Cheer up, on your feet, He's calling you." "*Throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?'*" There it is: "*What do you want me to do for you?*" And Bartimaeus said, "*Rabbi, let me recover my sight.*" Well, ironically, he sees better than those with two good eyes. While the disciples struggle to understand the implications of Jesus, already Bartimaeus sees that being a model disciple means following the Master.

This also reflects the structure of the way Mark's Gospel is written. It's profound. There are two healing miracles of blindness in Mark, and they both happen between 8:22 and the end of chapter 10 when Jesus entered the road to Jerusalem. These two miracles in Mark about blindness are the bookends to this journey toward Jerusalem. It's so strongly stated that you can't miss it. Unless you feel desperate for Jesus, you won't ask to see. Unless you're hungry, unless He is everything to you, you won't cry out. Will you be so bold to ask to see Jesus? Do you see yourself? Are you self-aware? That is discipleship.

I came across this insightful quote in "Knowing Ourselves," by Mark Twain in his humorous way: "I think we never become really and generally our entire and honest selves until we are dead. And not then. Until we have been dead years and years. People ought to start dead and then they would be honest so much earlier."

Well, maybe that was Bartimaeus' secret. Maybe he was dead—dead to what people thought. He knew he was desperate. He was a quintessential, authentic disciple. What does he admit he needs? First he cries out for mercy. Isn't that seeing well? He admits his needs. Do we see that clearly?

James and John act as if they deserve the Kingdom. Bartimaeus cries out for mercy and believes that Jesus is the Son of David, the Messiah. This is the first time in the Gospel someone publicly declares Jesus is the son of David, the Messiah. Peter did it privately, but then later didn't see the implications for it and was rebuked. But here Bartimaeus is crying out, "*Son of David*"—Messiah. He knows there's something true here and is boldly proclaiming it.

Bartimaeus throws off everything to follow Jesus. In his case it was his cloak. You know, the cloak of a homeless man would have been precious. It would have been his sleeping bag at night. If it was raining, it was his umbrella. When it was cold, it was his blanket. It was

everything to him and he threw it off to follow Jesus. Wow! What does that say? Is that like the widow offering all she had in the temple? Or like the rich young ruler in the previous passage who couldn't throw off everything to follow Jesus? He wanted to hold onto everything and it prevented him from following Jesus. Here Bartimaeus throws off all he has to follow Jesus, because he's believing "for what can a man give in return for his soul?"

Someone might ask, "Well, why did Jesus answer Bartimaeus' question but rebuke the disciples?" Jesus knows their hearts. The Sons of Zebedee asked for glory; Bartimaeus asked for ordinary health. He wanted to see. He wasn't asking for wealth or power or success, but only sight. He wanted some normalcy in his life. He wanted to contribute to society and help others. He especially, I'm sure, wanted to see Jesus.

Jesus is the true God and true man. He empowers people. That's what greatness means. He serves the least of these. He wanted Bartimaeus to get off the street, learn to work, get a job, serve others, follow Him faithfully and use his gifts for God's glory.

How do people in need come across to you? Are they problems you need to avoid? Are you passing them by, just going your own way? Do you not even stop? Does anyone stop you in your tracks? When you see someone who needs help, do you think, "Not me but someone else." Maybe it's time to consider teaching ESL, helping them learn English, so that they can do well in America. Or maybe helping them put a resume together. Maybe you're seeing someone who's not very good with their family you can help him love his wife and care for the kids better. Maybe someone you see needs tutoring. Maybe children aren't doing well in school. What is stopping you in your tracks to help, to serve in simple ways? What does it mean? Who is catching your attention?

This is what it means to follow Jesus. If He stops, you stop. That's the point of following Him. So you need to notice the black letters in your Bible, not just the red letters indicating what Jesus said. Notice what He did. How did He love people? How did He feel? How do you respond? This is what it means to follow Jesus.

What does it mean to be a disciple? We give hope where there is none. We're helping people discover their true identity as God made them in His image. We are pointing people to Jesus Who restores and ransoms them from captivity.

The first time I met Hassan, one of my good friends in Morocco, we were in a coffee shop. I asked him, "How did you come to believe in Jesus Christ? What happened?" He pulled a piece of paper out of his car and said, "I don't know. I don't really know how it happened, but this I do know. I was blind but now I see. I don't know everything about Him but I just know He's the way, He's the truth, He's the life" (John 9:25, 14:6).

Do we expect Jesus to open eyes? Are we eager to minister to others with good news? As we've been seeing with the disciples, discipleship is not complete in this life. We have much growing to do. There's much more to see. But Jesus can heal our blindness. He can grow us. This is what it means to increase in faith and fight unbelief. Don't stop when the self-portrait gets ugly and you don't want to go there in your own heart. As Jack Miller would say, "Cheer up. You're a lot worse off than you think you are. But in Jesus, you're far more loved than you could have ever imagined."

Let's pray.

Lord, thank You that that is Who You are. Thank You that following You is the greatest thing. Thank You for rescuing us. Thank You for showing Yourself. Thanks for being so patient when we don't see, when we lack total self-awareness. Lord, may we not lack awareness of You. Grow us. Open our eyes. Thank You for Your good news today, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.

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