**NOT SO WITH YOU**

September 8, 2013

Mark 10:32-52

Key Verse: 10:43 “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.”

John Stott says in his book “The Cross of Christ” that our world is full of Jameses and Johns, go-getters and status-seekers, hungry for honor and prestige, measuring life by achievements, and everlastingly dreaming of success.” In today’s passage, Jesus said, “Not so with you.” Even many Christians serve God to get honor and recognition for themselves. Jesus said, “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.” Martin Luther King, Jr. said that everyone can become great because anyone can serve. He said, “You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to know Plato and Aristotle. You don’t have to know Einstein’s theory of relativity. You don’t have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love. And you can be that servant.” Jesus wants us to be transformed in our inner man to be like him in humbleness, obedience and servantship.

Look at verse 32a. “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 knew well what awaited him in Jerusalem. It was suffering and death. Yet he pressed forward with resolution. The disciples were astonished at Jesus. It was because Jesus had firmly decided to give his life to obey the will of God. Hebrews 12:2 says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” When we look to Jesus, we see victory over the world and joy in the midst of pain.

Look at verses 32b-34. “Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ‘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.’” This is the third time Jesus has mentioned these things to all of his disciples (Mk 8:31-32; 9:31-32). Sometimes it is hard to accept God’s will because it is so contrary to human desires. But God does not change his will; we must learn to accept it through prayer. Then we can keep in step with God.

There is a strange phenomenon in chapters 8-10 of Mark’s gospel. Each time Jesus predicts his suffering, death and resurrection, the disciples react strangely. At the first prediction, Peter began to rebuke Jesus. At the second prediction, all the disciples were afraid and could not speak to Jesus. At the third prediction, James and John make a mad dash for power. The disciples did not listen to Jesus at all. Planting gospel faith in a person is a spiritual battle because sinful human beings do not listen to God’s word. It requires a challenging spirit, persistence and perseverance.

We should never give up like Jesus and patiently and faithfully preach the gospel through one-to-one Bible study, until it spreads to all Canadian young people.

**First**, Jesus encourages James and John to share his sufferings (35-41). The disciples knew that Jesus was serious. Something big was going to happen in Jerusalem, though they did not quite understand what. To James and John, timing was important. James and John decided to act quickly before anyone else. They came forward and said, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” They were like little children trying to induce Jesus to give what they wanted even if it was not the right thing. They were actually pretty sneaky. But Jesus loved them and asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” James and John felt that Jesus understood them. So they opened their hearts and said: “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory” (37). They wanted to share power with Jesus as numbers one and two, pushing Peter aside. The desire to grab power to rule over others may be hidden in the heart of each person. Those who seem humble, kind and gentle when they have no power can suddenly change when power is given.

President Abraham Lincoln said, “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.” Obviously, President Lincoln had experienced a few surprises after entrusting men with power. There was a head waiter. One day he served a very influential leader in the community. This man asked for an extra portion of butter. The waiter said, “No.” Then the man stood to his feet and said, “Do you know who I am?” He proceeded to explain which boards and councils he was on and the measure of power he held in the city. Then the head waiter replied, “Do you know who I am? I am in charge of the butter in this restaurant.” Sinful man always tries to gain and exercise power, even deceitfully. Many postmodern young people understand this. So they are cynical. They distrust power structures and avoid politics.

James and John’s bold power play was shocking. But Jesus did not rebuke them. Jesus understood them deeply and addressed their real spiritual problem. Look at verse 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?’” Jesus pointed out their spiritual ignorance. They thought of Jesus’ glory in terms of worldly glory. They imagined that Jesus would exercise power as a king over the world. They were asking to be prime ministers in his earthly kingdom. However, Jesus’ glory is much greater than this. Jesus’ glory is the glory of the Son of God. In his glory, Jesus sits at the right hand of God Almighty. Jesus rules all creation. Legions of angels attend him, ready to obey his slightest command. Peoples of every tribe, tongue and nation kneel at his feet, throwing crowns before him, worshiping him as God.

No one in heaven dares ask to be at Jesus’ side in glory. In God’s history, many suffered much to fulfill the will of God, such as David. But David did not ask for a position at Jesus’ right hand. David humbly called Jesus his Lord in submission and worship (Mk 12:36). The one who seriously tried to get such a position was Satan. We know what happened to him (Isa 14:13-15). James and John had no idea what was really involved in their request. Jesus understood them and said, “You don’t know what you are asking.” However, Jesus did not stop there. He asked if they could drink his cup or share his baptism. Here “cup” means “cup of suffering,” and “baptism,” means “baptism into death” (Lk 12:50; Mk 14:36). Jesus channeled their request in a positive direction. Jesus was a good shepherd for them. But they must realize that sufferings precede glory. No suffering, no glory! No cross, no crown!

Look at verses 39-40. “’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, 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.’” James and John still did not know what they were talking about. Yet Jesus accepted their answer as their willing offer to participate in his suffering. Yet Jesus made no promise about the positions they asked for. Jesus helped them realize that God is the sovereign Ruler of his kingdom. Not even Jesus can decide who sits at his right or left. Only God the Father can do so. The disciples needed to accept God’s sovereignty and trust God for their future honor and glory. In accepting God’s sovereignty they could find true freedom from their nagging ambition. This discussion began with them trying to get glory from Jesus without suffering. It ends with Jesus promising them suffering without guaranteeing the positions they asked for.

**Second**, Jesus teaches his disciples to serve and to give (41-45). When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had done, they were indignant. They resented that James and John tried to steal the position of honor. This was a very serious situation because the fellowship among 12 disciples may be broken, had Jesus not taken immediate action. 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.” The disciples knew well about Roman rule. It was based on brute force; the oppressed had to comply or die. In spite of their own experience of suffering, the disciples were exhibiting the same lust for power in their words and deeds. It is a repeated irony in history that oppressed people throw off their yoke only to become oppressors themselves. Jesus came to break this vicious cycle. Jesus taught his disciples that they must be different. Look at verses 43-44. “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to become first must be slave of all.” Jesus turned hierarchical thinking upside down. The greatest one is not on the top looking down, exercising authority by force. The greatest one is on the bottom, looking up and serving all others. How can sinful men who want to exalt themselves at every opportunity become servants of others? Jesus set the example for us.

Look at verse 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.” Jesus is the eternal God. Jesus is the Creator God. John 1:3 says, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” Yet when Jesus came into this world, he was born in a manger. He lived a poor life. He became a friend and servant to all kinds of people. He took time to listen to a man with leprosy who cried for help; and Jesus healed him. Jesus visited a lonely Samaritan woman, and risked being misunderstood to help her find living water for her soul. Most of all, Jesus served his disciples by living with them daily, bearing their selfishness, pride, fear, doubt and all their sins. Jesus served them in the hope that they would each be changed into servants of God and history makers in God’s world salvation work. Finally, Jesus gave his life on the cross as a ransom for their sins and for all sinners. Philippians 2:5-8 tells us: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

As a conclusion to this section, Mark inserts Jesus’ healing of blind Bartimaeus. In this passage, we learn what a prayer is. As Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside begging, he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. He began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many people began to rebuke him, “Be quiet! Shut up! Jesus is too busy for you.” But the more he was rebuked, the more he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” He only cried out for mercy with a deep sense of need before the Messiah. He cried out as a matter of life and death. Then Jesus called him, and asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus’ question was the same one he had asked James and John. Jesus gave the man a chance to say explicitly what he wanted from Jesus. Jesus knows what we need before we ask, but it pleases Jesus to help us ask for the right thing. Jesus is not a miracle machine. Jesus is a personal God who wants to have a relationship with us. “The blind man said, ‘Rabbi, I want to see.’” The blind man’s request was exactly what he should ask for. What he really needed was to see. Jesus said, “Go, your faith has healed you.” And immediately the man received his sight and followed Jesus. This was a lesson to James and John and the other disciples as well. They should cry out to accept the gospel in their hearts. They should cry out to be changed in their inner beings from proud and selfish into humble and sacrificial. This is what Jesus wanted for them and what they really needed.

We sinful human beings have a nagging desire to exalt ourselves and be served by others. But Jesus said, “Not so with you.” Jesus wants us to be transformed in our inner man to be like him in humbleness, obedience and servantship.