

Temptations of Power

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[0 : 00] You may be seated. Good morning. My name's Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today.

A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and His life and His death and His resurrection. And in the first half of the Gospel, we were asking this question of who is Jesus, and that reached its climax in many ways in the middle of chapter 8 when Peter finally recognizes that Jesus is the Christ.

He is the one that they've been looking for for thousands of years. And now as we continue in the Gospel, they're following Jesus quite literally on His way to the cross, and so we're asking a different question, which is what does it look like to follow after Jesus?

[1 : 21] In the last few weeks as we've looked at Jesus' teaching, we've seen the way that the kingdom operates is very different than the way of the world. There is an upside-down quality to the cross, and yet the disciples are still functioning by worldly principles.

And so we looked, first of all, at the worldly view of marriage and sex, which Jesus corrects. Then the worldly view of children, which Jesus turns upside down.

Last week, the worldly view of money. Jesus isn't done yet, though, and so this week we're going to see Him address the topic of power, success, glory, and fame.

And we'll see the approach of the Christian is very different from that of the world. And so I invite you to turn with me now to Mark chapter 10, starting at verse 32.

You can turn in your Bible. You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. Remember that no matter where you turn, this is God's Word. And Proverbs 30, verse 5, tells us every word of God proves true.

[2 : 29] He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 32. 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. Verse 35. 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.

[3 : 40] 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. Verse 41. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in Heaven, we praise You again that we're here together this morning, and that You speak to us, to our hearts by Your Word.

We confess that we have hungry hearts that love and run after many things. We ask that You'd be at work by Your Spirit, that we would love one thing, that we would love You.

[5 : 25] We ask this morning now, as we look at Your Word, that You would cast a spotlight on Jesus, that we would see His glory and His beauty and His holiness and His love, and that You would grow our love and affection for Him, our reverence and our awe for Him, that we would follow Him and love Him and obey Him.

We ask all these things in His mighty name. Amen. If this passage feels familiar at all, if it feels like a deja vu from previous sections in the Gospel of Mark, that's because, in fact, it is.

Mark is famous for having three different passion predictions, three different places where Jesus tries to teach His disciples about what is to come later in His ministry, and this is the final of the three.

The disappointing thing is that it was a repetition not just in His prediction, but in the failed response, the inappropriate response of His disciples. Remember in chapter 8, Jesus first told them about His future, and it was Peter who rebuked Him, and Jesus had to tell him, Get behind me, Satan, because Peter did not understand the true nature of Jesus' purpose and mission.

But then it happens again in the next chapter. In chapter 9, Jesus tells them again that the Son of Man is going to suffer and die, and remember at that point, they are afraid to ask any more, so they instead choose the very smart strategy of immediately arguing amongst themselves about who is the greatest.

[7 : 03] It's at that point, you remember that Jesus tells them, Mark chapter 9, verse 35, If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.

And so here, as we come to chapter 10, we would expect the disciples would have learned something. They would have made some improvement from chapter 9. They would have understood that glory is not what they should be chasing after.

Instead, here we see that they have learned something. It's just the wrong thing. There's a similar response here. They long for greatness, but James and John have finally gotten their act together.

They have a better plan and strategy than they had before. Last time, all of them were arguing about who would be the greatest. They decide this time they're going to take matters into their own hands.

The rest of the disciples are chumps. They don't understand what actually needs to happen, which is to make the grab for power that will set them above everyone else. They don't need to argue with anyone.

[8 : 09] They can skip all of that and take matters into their own hands and ensure that they are actually the greatest, because they're going to sit next to Jesus.

When I was growing up, I'm the youngest of three sons, and so my brothers and I came up with this brilliant concept, which we called the magic number.

The magic number was the number three, because there was three of us. And so this especially applied to desserts that were left in the house. If there were three pieces of cake left, we would tell our parents, look, it's the magic number.

The conclusion is obvious. What must you do? You must make sure each of your three sons gets a piece of cake. And of course, I think our parents realized with some amusement that it was probably better for our metabolism than for theirs.

And so this proved to often be a winning strategy. We just needed to point out there's only three things left. You have three sons. Do I need to help you figure this out even more?

[9 : 16] Here we have the same thing going on. There's a magic number. There's James and John. There's two of them. They also are brothers. And guess how many sides Jesus has? Jesus has two, a left side and a right side.

So we don't have to compete against each other as brothers. Instead, we know there's the exact number that we need. We'll leave it up to Jesus to decide who's going to be on the right side so we do not have to compete.

Either way, we're both going to get great seats. And yet the irony is thick here because we see verse 32, Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem.

He is literally walking towards the cross. He is literally telling them about his suffering. And what is it that James and John have on their mind?

We have stock options with Jesus. We were smart enough to get in on the ground floor. We knew Jesus before it was cool.

[10 : 26] We know as he's heading towards Jerusalem, this is going to be his big moment. This is when he's going to do everything we know that the Christ is supposed to accomplish. He's going to become powerful and glorious.

He's going to overthrow the Romans. And so before it's too late, we need to ensure that we cash in everything we have. Jesus is about to get really big.

And we'll get big too. There's only two slots and there are 12 disciples. We need to make sure we're the ones who ask first.

We made the smart move. We got in on the ground level. It has certainly earned us something.

Finally, where dreams will come true. And at the same time, Jesus has been trying to tell them he is revealing more and more how bad it is going to get the level of suffering they will experience.

[11 : 34] They are obsessed with glory, but Jesus has just told them, verse 33, it's going to get really bad. He's going to face death. And it's not just that he's going to face death, but there are some Jews who are going to go so against the norms of God's people that they're going to hand over another Jew to the Gentiles of all people.

And not only are they going to hand him over the Gentiles, those Gentiles, verse 34, are going to mock him, spit on him, whip him, and kill him. And if it couldn't get any worse for the disciples, remember how last week's passage ended, verse 31, the first will be last and the last first.

In other words, it would be challenging for the disciples to look any more ridiculous and tone deaf than they look here. Brothers and sisters, we are also tempted by power and glory and forget how tone deaf and ridiculous we look.

We want, when we speak to people, for their ears to perk up, for things to happen, for people to act and change and listen. We need or want others to know how strong and smart and fast and wealthy and beautiful we are.

We want and need others to recognize the cars we drive, the toys that we have, the restaurants we can visit, the experiences we can afford. We want a more prestigious job, not because it's an opportunity for us to do more good for God in this world, so that we can prove something to ourselves and others.

[13 : 24] I'm finally worthy. I finally proved I have a right to exist in this world. This desire for greatness, it drives the desire and the need for affirmation on social media, for likes and comments.

We want our kids to behave not because it's for their good, but so that other people would see that we're the parents who have it all together.

And they would praise us and admire us and look up to us. And yet, our children can't be fooled, and they know the truth and resent it.

We have the desperate insecurity that's revealed by name-dropping. We know someone who matters, and therefore, we must matter too. Because greatness is about others recognizing us, serving us, deferring to us.

And yet, it's all so transparent, so easy to spot. We think we can hide from other people the things we wear on our sleeves. And so Jesus speaks into that mess here in verses 42 through 45 when he tells them there's actually a different paradigm to operate by.

[14 : 52] You are looking to be like the Gentile rulers, verse 42, who receive all these great things, but in fact, the opposite is what you should be aiming for. Verse 43, whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

You must change your entire way of thinking about yourself, your identity, an entirely new definition of greatness. You need to reorient your values and aspirations and ambition.

And it's important to note here that Jesus is not giving some sort of leadership hack. Because what he says here is a sort of thing you might hear from all sorts of leadership gurus, whether they're Christians or not.

But the worldly advice would go like this, a humble servant, that's the way you get into the record of great leaders. That's the way people will remember you and give you glory.

And Jesus is saying here, no, this is something different. Getting into the book of great leaders and people is irrelevant. There's a completely different mental model paradigm for what is important in life.

[16 : 03] The world will tell you, become great by being humble. That's the trick. And Jesus says, becoming great in the eyes of the world isn't the goal.

It's not the aim. Instead, it's to take on a different position. Verse 43, servant. Verse 44, slave.

And so we see the same principle that we talked about when Jesus gave similar instruction in chapter 9, that there is this principle of the gospel that's opposed to the principle of the world.

The principle of the world is that we push others down so that we can lift ourselves up. And Jesus comes and flips that and says, no, the gospel, we lift others up and push ourselves down.

There's a different way, a different path for the Christian, and it's the way of Jesus. That we don't evaluate others based on how they advance our goals or meet our needs, based on what they can do for us.

[17 : 06] If we're concerned primarily about honor and status, then we will evaluate other people on how they relate to that. In fact, we stop the constant need, the drive for the approval and admiration of others, and instead we start exalting others and lifting them up, even when, especially when, it doesn't advance our personal goals or ambitions.

In fact, how we treat those who have less power than us reveals the most about our character, whether we actually understand and follow Jesus.

And it's more than simply acts of service. It is giving up entirely the obsession with personal glory and power and honor.

Remember two weeks ago when the disciples tried to be great friends to Jesus by blocking the children who are coming to him. The reason they did that is because those children had nothing they could offer to advance Jesus' mission and his purpose.

They had nothing to offer the world, and so therefore, they must have nothing to offer Jesus. Jesus interrupts them then and says, that's the point. I'm interested in those who know they have nothing to offer.

[18 : 29] That same idea, that same principle is reinforced here. Christians follow Jesus by offering things by offering things to those who have nothing to offer.

We show whether we understand and follow Jesus by how we treat those on the margins. But the haunting question is for us, why is it so hard?

Why is it that success and glory and power and fame are so alluring and attractive? When I was in college, I had a professor who had this sign in her office that said this, success is the best revenge.

And I asked her one time about it, and she indicated, in broad terms with no details, that there had been a time where there were those who had hurt her and opposed her, and she had realized this was the way she was going to make it all right.

Success is the best revenge seems like a great motivational line until you think about it and you realize how incredibly sad and bankrupt that line is.

[19 : 55] Because if success is the best form of revenge, it means that you are still controlled and dominated by the perceptions and beliefs of that person who hurt you.

And it helps us understand why success is so attractive. all of us have hurts and wounds that we're trying to patch and heal and success seems like an incredibly attractive option to do that.

Do you know the hurt of your own heart? Do you know the hunger of your own heart?

Maybe the bullying that you experienced as a kid still travels with you and you believe that if you accomplish enough, you can make those words untrue.

You can prove that you're somebody that you have worth. maybe you've come to the sobering realization that your spouse finds his work much more fascinating than you.

[21 : 18] But if your kids can just achieve enough, then somehow it will be all okay. maybe it's your father's yelling or perhaps more confusing his distance and his silence.

It's not a coincidence that so many ambitious and powerful men have absent fathers. your body can go without food for a few days but the heart is always hungry.

The heart never fasts. The heart always feeds on something. And so success and glory and power without addressing the deep issues and longings of our heart never ends well.

there are many things that we want to happen at our church things that we want to grow and increase and those things will only be dangerous to us if we don't address our hearts first.

And none of it matters if we don't get first things right. The matter of the heart Jesus knows greatness and success are like wealth they're very dangerous.

[22 : 52] They can and will shipwreck us outside of God's grace. In fact some people would say that success is more dangerous than failure.

That success reveals our character as much if not more than the obstacles we face. Now everything that I've said to you pretty much up to this point outside of mentioning Jesus and his teaching any secular prophet any sage could have mentioned these things to you.

And so what do we do? What does Jesus have to do with the hunger of our hearts if this is something that's recognized by wisdom teachers of all types? Well first I'll point out what's been pointed out by others the same thing I mentioned when we talked about children.

If this seems cliché if it seems normal in every day we have to remember that's because we live in a world that's been shaped by Jesus teaching. Okay when the disciples heard Jesus say these things it was not something that they'd heard over and over before it was radical.

they didn't turn to Jesus and say oh yeah we heard that same thing the other day on this great leadership podcast you should listen to it you would really like that guy.

[24 : 18] No the disciples were shocked they were shocked that Jesus view of power was completely opposite that of the world and so we recognize as we see this idea of servant leadership of making ourselves slaves and servants if it seems commonplace that's because of Jesus words in this passage what might seem normal for us was radical then because we live in a world shaped by this teaching the other thing that we recognize is this we might have a secular prophet or sage who recognizes that the heart has to feed on something Jesus is just the only one who gives us the food for the heart that's enough he's the only one who's able to fill what is otherwise a bottomless hole because the only thing that can replace the love of men is the love of God if you look with me on the back of your worship guide you'll see this first quote by a man named

Ryan Holiday and part of the reason I include this is because he's an agnostic he doesn't believe in Jesus in fact he runs a very progressive bookstore in Texas and by progressive I don't just mean a specific political position I mean that Ryan promotes and honors things that we would call truly wicked and yet in the midst of all this he understands at least something about the nature of the human heart he says everyone has a hungry heart but how we choose to feed that heart matters it's what determines the kind of person we end up being what kind of trouble we'll get into and whether we'll ever be full whether we'll ever really be still what you may know what you know is he's deeply fascinated by C.S.

Lewis many of his writings are informed by that great Christian thinker and so he is trying to do what many others are which is to have the kingdom without the king to have the fruits of Christianity without its root he has a piece of the truth but not the whole thing he knows the problem he just doesn't know the full solution and so we can say yes there are many secular sages and prophets and preachers who remind us of the need to fill the hunger of our hearts and it's Jesus alone who's able to give us what we need to turn away from the allure and temptation of power and glory and honor and success it is Jesus who allows us to replace the love of men with the love of God I've been telling you for weeks now that the heart must have something to feed on if we take away one thing we have to replace it with another and there is only one replacement that is great enough that is powerful enough that is glorious enough to take away this temptation it is the food and the love and the knowledge that we are secure in

Christ a woman named Rebecca McLaughlin says this if God himself has died for you what more do you have to prove if the creator of the universe loved you enough to give his life as a ransom for yours how precious does that make you Jesus sacrifice for us can breed humility if we will only let it we won't need to be recognized by others if we know we are seen and known and deeply loved by the king of all the universe himself we can unclench our grip on status if we know we're held in Jesus hands we can kneel down if we are sure he will one day lift us up Jesus love is the only thing secure enough great enough to release to release to release on to point out that crucifixion is for slaves but

Jesus receives it as a king ransoms are paid for kings not by kings and yet Jesus comes as the only king to pay a ransom for slaves and so the love of the world is replaced by the love of Jesus that's what he's telling us here in verse 45 for even the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many when you're secure and safe in the love of God glory and power and honor will not be tempting to you that's the only thing powerful enough in 2013 the football team at

[29 : 43] Olivet Middle School in Olivet Michigan came up with a plan and the students did this behind the backs of their coaches and behind the backs of their parents no one knew it was going to happen until it did they ran a play to intentionally not score they decided they would get as close to the goal line as possible but they would stop there they would not cross it why because they wanted their teammate Keith to have the first touchdown of his entire life Keith was a student with special needs who struggled with social and learning disabilities and so they stopped right there at the goal line and at the next play all of the players surrounded Keith and made sure that as they rushed he was in the middle with them holding the ball they decided they they decided instead of pushing others down to lift themselves up they would push themselves down to lift someone else up they went from looking for their own glory their own opportunities to score to become servants and slaves for

Keith their wide receiver justice Miller admitted that it wasn't his idea because all he would think about is himself and his friends but after what they did for Keith it has changed the way he looks at the world he just needed someone else to suggest it brothers and sisters we can only lift others up if and when we believe our spot our place is secure and it is in Jesus Christ we can only lift others up and look out for them when we know that no matter what we have a place on the team and we do because Jesus died for us 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 let's pray our father in heaven we praise you this morning that we are safe and secure in your love that nothing can threaten that that you have showed us our value and our worth in

Jesus and his sacrifice his death for us we ask that you would make us secure and safe in that that we would know it and so that we would be able to take risks to offer it and give it away to others we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ and