

Understanding Christian Service

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Date: 28 December 2025

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[0:00] My name is Randon Schleiden. I am an ordained teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church of America, the same denomination as this church body. I'm currently serving as a chaplain in the United States Army here at Fort Carson, and I have the privilege of opening God's word with you today.

And if you would please turn in your Bibles to Mark chapter 10, and we'll be reading from verse 35 to 45. Mark chapter 10, verses 35 to 45.

As I see that most of you are there, have found it in your bulletins, let us first go to the Lord in prayer and ask his help for understanding this passage. Father in heaven, mighty is your name. We pray that in your strength you would build us up though we are weak.

We pray that in your word and through your word you would do the work which you promise it will do, which is to rebuke us and correct us, to reform us, to improve us, to train us in righteousness, that we would be prepared for every good work, maturing Christ.

Father, we pray that what we aren't yet, you would continue to make us through the sanctification of your word and the life that you take us through. We pray you do this work by the power of your spirit in Christ's name. Amen.

[1:11] If you would, please follow along as I read from Mark chapter 10, verses 35 to 45. And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus 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 all 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.

[2:20] 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.

As you look at this passage, I want you to recall another scripture that says in John 9, We must work the works of him who sent us while it is day. For night is coming when no one can work.

And we know that God has prepared good works beforehand, before we even came about, that we would walk in them. And so what I want to challenge you with is that there is work ahead for us to do as Christians, as disciples of Christ.

And as we look towards that calling which God has called us, we see in this passage, we are called to bear out those good works, to walk in them which Christ has called us to, by serving others.

And so in this passage, I would argue that at least one of the main ideas that Christ means for us to take away from his word, is that Christians serve. Christians serve.

[3 : 24] And you may think, okay, yeah, I know Christians in the church are supposed to serve. I think this passage tells us, at least in three ways, how we are to serve, or with what mind. Christians serve, first of all, because Christ first served us.

Christians serve because Christ first served us. Second, I want you to see that Christians serve in the face of trials. Christians serve others in the face of trials.

And third, this passage tells us that Christians serve for a reward that's prepared in advance according to the purposes of God. Now, as we look at this passage, in this assembly, in this congregation, this flock, I know that you all have been in Romans, and you've been running through Romans.

And then the Advent season came. And so you've likely also been focusing on the Advent season, the nativity scene, the birth of Christ, the second person of the Trinity taking flesh to himself.

And then here I am coming to preach a sermon from the book of Mark. So let me tell you a little bit about where we are in this passage. You see, in Mark chapter 1, we find immediately that Mark is a fast-paced gospel where Jesus is on mission, doing the work that God called him to do.

[4 : 40] And in all the gospel accounts, essentially, there's kind of a three-phase breakdown. The first phase is Jesus' Galilean or countryside ministry. He ministers the gospel and the truth of who he is and what he's about to do in the countryside.

And then you have Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, phase 2, where Jesus is en route to Jerusalem, where he will complete phase 3, which is going to the cross, dying, raising, ascending on high.

Where we are in this passage in chapter 10 is right at the end of phase 2. Jesus is completing his journey or road to Jerusalem. He is right on the cusp or right at the gates of entering the city.

Now, closer to our passage of this morning, in Mark chapter 10, verse 32, it says the disciples were amazed at Jesus. Now, if you've read the gospel of Mark, you know that there's plenty recorded that the disciples had to be amazed about.

You'd see that Jesus did miracles of healing. He healed the blind. He healed the sick. He healed lepers. He forgave sin, which only God can do. You know that Jesus exercised authority over the winds and the sea and calmed the storm, showing that he was very God of very God, author of creation.

[5 : 51] They had plenty to be amazed about. But this passage tells us, in Mark chapter 10, around verse 30, that they were amazed at Jesus' determination to fulfill the will of God.

Because Jesus said, hey, when I get to this city of Jerusalem, I'm going to be put to death. I'm going to be scorched. I'm going to suffer. I'm going to bleed. I'm going to be spit on, and I'm going to die. And what they saw after Jesus shared that with them, is that he continued marching, not losing a step towards the city, where he would be put to death for the sins of many.

And so Mark chapter 10 is right on the edge of that. And so as you see these Advent candles, and remember what it means that Jesus took flesh to himself, that God was willing to go to the cross for us, that we would have life as sinners.

I want you to link the reality of that truth, of what those candles represent, to this one, that Jesus was born to die, to go to a cross, to shed his blood, and have it applied to you and me by name, so that we would be counted as children of God.

So with that introduction, let us go into the passage. We serve as Christians because of Christ's service, because Christ first served. Look at verse 45 of our passage. It says, The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

[7:12] When it describes Jesus, when he describes himself as the Son of Man, that Son of Man phrase, you may know, is one of Jesus' favorite descriptions or titles for himself. It's pulled from a few places in scripture, but specifically and most often referenced to Daniel chapter 7.

And without reading that passage, the summary is that Daniel receives a vision from the Lord, of the Messiah, the Son of Man, the promised descendant of David, the one who would take away the sin of the world, that that one is in this vision given to Daniel, receiving all authority and dominion and power from God on high, and he's being given the throne, and this majestic sight that Daniel gets to report to all of God's children.

And so, when Jesus says, The Son of Man, speaking of himself, came not to be served, but to serve, he says the one who sits on the throne is also going to be the one who gets lowest beneath other people in service, to lift them up.

You see, when Jesus came from on high to low, a king to be a servant to all, he left what he had always enjoyed, which was the immediate presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit from all eternity, to do the work of redemption that God had called him to.

Jesus left comfort. He left the service of angels and all other eternal created beings that God had made to serve him so that he could rescue you and I.

[8:38] If you read passages from places like the book of Luke, chapter 15 and elsewhere, it says that Jesus even came and left that glorious company to sit in the company of drunkards and sinners, tax collectors and cheats and prostitutes.

And in the presence of a military company, I would also say that if Jesus came for them, he also came for soldiers and for airmen and for sailors and Marines. But we have an issue here that we have to resolve.

Jesus says he came to give his life as a ransom for many. For those of you who have read through the Psalms recently, maybe you've come across Psalm 49 where it says, truly, no man can ransom another or give to God the price of his life.

For the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice. That he should live on forever and never see the pit. And then it says in verse 15, but God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol for he will receive me.

And so what Psalm 49 says is that if you're guilty of sin, which each of us are, each a sinner before God apart from Christ, we cannot pay the debt that we owe God for the sin and our offense against him.

[9:54] A debt that we cannot pay by any work in this world, any money in our bank account, any good that we do, any service we offer, the whole of our lives cannot purchase away the sin debt that we owe God. But then in verse 15, it says, but God can pay that debt if he so chooses for us.

And when you look at this passage in verse 49, it tells us that Christ offers to do just that and he accomplishes it. But verse 45 of our passage says, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

And that might trigger again in your mind to go back to the Old Testament, places like Isaiah 53, not coincidentally called the servant song, referring to God's chosen servant to redeem his people.

It says, out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous and he shall bear their sins or bear their iniquities.

Don't ever think for a moment that because God is sovereign, he has not made it his work to receive many into his presence at the command of his will. Some people think that because God is sovereign, it means that only a few will be elected to be saved.

[11:09] But the most that could ever be saved are saved because God is sovereign and he's chosen many to be received into his presence through the work of Christ. And so I ask you at this moment, is Christ and his service, his suffering on your behalf, the foundation and motive from which you serve other people?

Is he the rock that you build your Christian service around? Or is that motive other? Is it to look good or be thought well of by others? Is it so that you could be promoted one day?

Is it so that your spouse will thank you because you thank them? Or is it because Christ suffered for you and so you would willingly suffer for others? Maybe in application it looks like this.

Maybe you're a spouse or maybe you're a wife who willingly sacrifices a career that you could have in service to your family. Or maybe you're a teenager who willingly drives your younger siblings to music lessons.

Or maybe you're simply a politician who still willingly prays in the name of Christ because you know he deserves honor and glory in the office he has appointed you to. Now look at verses 43 and 44.

[12:24] It says, those that would be great, here's Jesus' lesson to the disciples. Let me back up for a moment. James and John make their requests and they say, hey Jesus, we know you're going to be in power. They haven't comprehended what type of power.

They don't really understand what Jesus' kingdom is going to be just yet. But they know he's going to have a throne. They know he's going to be in power. So they make their request based on that understanding. And Jesus says, I'll tell you what, I've got a lesson for all of the disciples.

I know this is an issue in your hearts. So he says, huddle up. And he brings in all 12 of his disciples. And this is what he says. Those that would be great among you must become your servant.

And those who would be first among you must be slave of all. Here's what Jesus is saying. There is a formula for receiving glory from God. There is a formula for giving glory to God and for receiving glory from God.

Jesus says, there's two formulas you can pick from. The first formula is the world's formula. which says, you lie, you cheat, you beg, you borrow, you steal, you do whatever you need to to get ahead of the person next to you.

[13:29] To be elevated in the eyes of the world. To pad your bank accounts. To have a bigger house. To have a greater title. To have more power and authority. That's what the world says to do.

But what Jesus says is, here's my model. You suffer unto service of other people. And he says, let me walk it out in front of you. You've heard the saying, monkey see, monkey do.

Jesus says, watch what I do, hear what I teach, and then follow my example. As Christians, we are called to be chiefly concerned with the glory of God.

And when we're purchased in Christ, we are given the strength and the spirit to do exactly that. To glorify him with our heart and with our work and with our energy. That's why when we say the Lord's Prayer, it says, our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name.

We say that every single Sunday here. When we sing the Gloria Patri right before the sermon, we say, glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. Glory, glory, glory to our triune God.

[14:34] And the five solas of the Reformation, one of them is sola deo gloria. Glory to God alone and Christ alone. the first catechism question, what is the chief and a man?

To glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Glory to God, glory to God, glory to God. No higher privilege or calling that a Christian could be made for than that work.

And God is glorified when you willingly suffer unto the blessing of other people, especially other children of God. J.C. Ryle, who was an Anglican minister, Church of England, he said this, kind of pointing at the issue of the heart of the disciples that Jesus was speaking to.

He said, let all those who desire to please Christ watch and pray against self-esteem. Now, we live in a world where they tell you you need to be more confident in yourself, more courageous in your own strength, more confident in your abilities.

Do more from within the strength that you can find within yourself. And here we have a renowned pastor who understood the gospel with great clarity, said, don't trust your heart, trust the strength that is found outside of you available only in Christ.

[15:58] In Jesus' lesson, if you think about who the disciples became, they were ministers. When I was walking through a food line parking lot in Mississippi during grad school, I bumped into a lady where the shopping carts were and she said, hey young man, thank you for this cart.

And then she said, what are you here in Mississippi for? Because she heard my accent. She knew I wasn't from there and I said, oh I'm in seminary here. I'm training to be a minister. And she said, oh, a holy man.

Right? And she said it with a southern twang which I can't replicate. But the implication there was if you're going to be a minister, your life needs to be above reproach because people are watching.

And yet, the implication of Jesus' lesson to his disciples is that even you as ministers can be guilty of trying to climb to the top in the wrong way if you are not watching your heart and seeking God's will in Christ's order for your life.

And if it's true of pastors, it can be true of anyone. Because if pastors and shepherds and elders of the flock are supposed to be the ones you look to for an example then know that if they need to be on guard, so do we all.

[17:10] If I was going to give you a definition of service from this passage, it might be something like suffering for the good of one another is what Christian service is. Suffering for the good of one another or for another. R.C. Sproul, another theologian that many of you know the name of, said, there is no theology of glory without a theology of suffering.

That is, if you don't understand how suffering plays into serving others, you might not understand Christian service or in full yet. And so while the Bible isn't calling you to make your life miserable and even harder in suffering than God has already said it would be, the Bible does here in this passage tell you we need to willingly accept suffering as God assigns it so we can live and walk through that suffering relying on Christ's strength to his glory while blessing others.

And so that makes me think of that song, Just a Closer Walk with Thee. The passage says, Through this world of toils and snares, if I falter, Lord who cares? Who with me my burden shares?

None but Thee, Lord, none but Thee. Or maybe if you're a little younger in this passage, you know the children's rhyme or song that goes, we're going on a bear hunt?

When it comes to Christian suffering, it's kind of like that song where it says, we're going through suffering, we can't go over it, we can't go under it, we're just going to have to go through it.

[18 : 35] And so that's our first and majority of our sermon points this morning, but I would tell you here's our second point. Christians serve because Christ first served, but second, Christians serve in the face of wrath and trials.

Look at verse 39. Jesus asked them, he says, can you drink the cup that I drink? And they say self-confidently of self-esteem we can. He says, well let me tell you what, verse 39, the cup that I drink, you will drink.

Now here's what Jesus isn't saying, he's not saying you will also die on a cross for the sins of many. Only he can do that. Only he is perfect, only he's very God of very God, only his blood is worth infinite value, valuable enough to cover the cost of the sins for the offense we have against God.

But he says, if you are in me, and you receive my spirit, and you belong to God in Christ, you will suffer for my name, in my name, for the glory of God. And so Jesus kind of implies that until he drinks his cup of wine on the cross, they won't have the strength of the Holy Spirit they need in full as it's poured out at Pentecost to bear the cross, to bear the suffering that God calls each of the disciples to.

And many of them were martyred. I mean, can you imagine, just stop and think for a minute, can you imagine suffering in this world as if you were a Christian, but not having the strength of the Holy Spirit to do so?

[19 : 59] Suffering, forbearing the name of a Christian, but not being a Christian, how awful that would be. And yet, Jesus says, I won't leave you without the Holy Spirit. I will drink the cup I must drink, so that when you are called to drink the cup that you're called to drink, to God's glory and in my name, you will have the strength to do so from on high.

And Jesus essentially says by this thing that the cup that I drink, you will drink. Jesus says this, Christian suffering is not optional.

And there aren't two types of suffering. There isn't suffering light and suffering heavy. He says there is just Christian suffering and you will suffer in the way that God has called you to and when you suffer, do so to service to others.

Now, the Bible's clear. We don't get credit before the Lord for suffering for wrong that we do. For instance, if you steal a car, let's say you steal a Corvette and you drive it and you crash it and you find yourself standing before a judge and the judge says, you're going to suffer for the wrong that you've done, you're going to go to jail and you're going to pay a fine.

You don't give glory to God for suffering for the wrong that you did. You are able to glorify God when you suffer injustices for righteousness sake.

[21 : 14] When you suffer injustices so that Christ will be glorified. In the book of Acts, we have a record of Paul's ministry and in Acts 14, Paul is stoned for preaching the gospel.

He's in Antioch, he's in the city, he's preaching the gospel and here's what you find is that when he's preaching, they hate the truth of the gospel so much and the one who bore that message to them, loving the people by being willing to be stoned so that they would have life in the gospel, carried to them, that their ears might hear, that their heart might beat, relying upon Christ, they stone Paul.

They take him out of the city and they stone him. They're so sure that he's dead that they leave him outside the city and when the disciples come to get Paul's body, they realize he's still alive and he gets up and he goes right back to preaching and he tells them that it's through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God.

Yet he was willing to serve anyone who would listen in Antioch even unto the point of death. Now why am I sharing this with you? Because 2025 is essentially behind us.

But 2026 is ahead of us and there's work to be done as Christians and as a family. There is good that we can do obeying the Spirit's leading, serving others even while we willingly suffer.

[22:31] Are you beginning to prepare your heart to suffer unto the service of others in this body, in your immediate family, inside the church, to your neighbors, in your neighborhood? Maybe it means serving in the nursery and signing up to watch someone else's kids who may or may not be rambunctious so that other adults can attend worship together.

Would you give up hearing the preached word so other people could hear it that Sunday without distraction? Would you be willing to give money to the missionaries that are on your board instead of continuing to increase your retirement account?

Would you be willing to honor and applaud and pray for other people who are leaders in ministry in this church even though you thought you might have been a better fit for leading that committee that got stood up?

Service creates discomfort and suffering creates discomfort. In service, you essentially give away your comfort so that others might be comfortable. You might pause and think about how you would do that in this body.

Here's our last point. That in Christ, Christians serve for a reward prepared in advance according to the purposes of God. Look at verse 40. It says, 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.

[23:48] It is for those for whom it has been prepared. Does that mean that God already knows, has already chosen, has already appointed who would sit in higher seats of honor and glory? That's essentially what it means.

It's talking about the providence of God. That God has ordered the events of history from the beginning to the end. The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, What is the providence of God?

It is his most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions. That means that God orders your life so that you would be matured and improved for eternity.

Every single thing you go through, he's not surprised. He allows it to happen. He's appointed it at the time that you are facing it so that you would turn to him and walk faithfully through it. It's kind of like how your kids go to school or how you went to school.

You went to elementary school and then to middle school and then to high school and then to college or a trade school or into vocational training. Why? To be prepared for the time when you're done with school, to raise your family, to live life, to work in a job, to be prepared for that thing ahead.

[24:57] The suffering and the service you go through now is a schoolhouse to be trained in righteousness for eternity. So don't despise the service that God calls you to but embrace it with a grateful heart.

But I might ask you this, how much suffering has God appointed you for in your life? It's a question we probably don't want the answer to because if we knew we wouldn't run and embrace that suffering that he's appointed for us.

Jesus uniquely knew what suffering he would face because the scriptures are primarily written about him and so when he read the suffering servant would die on a cross and that people would gamble for his clothes whenever he was being put to death, he knew that was about him.

And so he had to face those sufferings in his heart and his mind advance of when he faced them in his body. When you read about the martyrs, here's an example of what Jesus means.

When he says, it's not mine to grant whether you sit at my right hand or my left hand in glory. If you were to go to Revelation 6, it says this about the martyrs. It says, John recording this, when he opened the fifth scroll, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

[26 : 13] They cried out with a loud voice, O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer.

Until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete who were to be killed as they themselves had been. What this says is that God knows who will be slain as martyrs, who will be slain in faithfulness, who will suffer for Christ's name.

And in this account you see that those faithful who died as martyrs bearing the testimony of Christ's death and resurrection and his sufficiency, they are surrounded around the altar where the scroll is being opened and where the throne of Christ is.

There's not much closer to Christ's throne in this depiction in Revelation of Jesus' court, of his throne room. There's not much closer to Jesus' throne than the altar. And the people that are closer to the altar are those who died in faithfulness in a very special way.

And so Jesus is just saying they were appointed to that death that God might be glorified. God might be glorified. It's also important for you to remember that as you're called to serve others, even through suffering, that what Christ desires for you, even in that suffering, is greater than what you desire for yourself.

[27 : 28] James and John wanted glory for themselves. Jesus says, I've got something much greater for you and it looks much different than what you think it'll look like. That's why Ephesians 3, describing what Christ has for us, says, You see, because here's part of the reward.

Jesus says in John 14, I go to prepare a place for you. He knows how many rooms he needs to prepare. Whose name is going to go on that door? Your name and your name and your name, they're all going to go on places Jesus has prepared for you.

It's like a soldier who goes to war. He willingly fights with more vigor because he knows that there may be peace and resolution of conflict ahead. He fights so that there might be peace.

And yet, a soldier is most miserable when he loses hope of peace. Don't lose sight of the reward that Christ has for you even while you suffer. That there is a room prepared for you. Peace. I think about faithful ministers like John MacArthur who just passed away this last year.

He preached until the very end. He was faithful and ministering and active in the church and active in his body and active in his family until the very end. R.C. Sproul, the same way. Alistair Begg is exemplifying that as well.

[28 : 43] They are preaching to the end and the only way that they have the strength of body and the strength of will to continue ministering the gospel until the day they die is because they know there is a reward worth much more than the suffering they face.

So your reward is the full presence of God in Christ, a room with your name on it, a crown of glory, peace after a short life of suffering and service to others, and fellowship with other saints for all eternity who have also endured as you have.

This is why Psalm 11 says, the Lord is righteous and he loves righteous deeds and the upright in heart will behold his face. So as I close with this comment, think about this.

Are you prepared for good works? Are you prepared to serve others through suffering? Will you rely upon the sufficiency of Christ's work and build upon the foundation of his work and joyfully fulfill your Christian calling and the privilege of the duty that you can fulfill in the strength of the Spirit this year?

Let us pray. Father in heaven, I thank you for the glory of the work of Christ. I thank you for him coming, taking on flesh and being born. I thank you for his willingness, his determination to go to the cross and to follow your will that we would be redeemed.

[29 : 58] Sinners reconciled to a holy God. I pray that you would bless his work in his name and that he would be glorified and that we would adore him more even as we serve others in the Christian family and in this world through the suffering that you call us to.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.