

## “Who Is This Son of Man?”

February 4, 2007

Mark 10:32-45

Why did Jesus have to die?

When children ask this question, I take a deep breath and sigh. How do you sum this up in concrete terms?

Why *did* Jesus *have* to die? One correct answer is Jesus had to die because God sent him to die. That seems a little rough, but it is true. It was God’s plan, God’s purpose, God’s *goodness*.

Turn to Mark 10 and we will read verses 32 through 45.

Mark 10:32-45

There are four things going on in our text.

**First, Jesus knew he came to die.** This is the third prediction of his passion. His first followed Peter’s confession. His second followed the transfiguration. This third is the most direct and shows that Jesus knew the political and judicial process by which he would be put to death. Jesus tells the disciples that they are headed to Jerusalem for the purpose of his suffering and death and resurrection. They do not seem to pick up on the significance of it – or – more likely, simply misunderstand how the kingdom of God was to be ushered in. Palm Sunday was more akin to their thinking. Good Friday just did not fit into the equation; Jesus’ talk about suffering and death were simply a metaphor for the struggle, it was not supposed to *actually* happen.

The predictions are important because they show that Jesus did not go to the cross by mistake. They demonstrate that God had a plan and that the plan was completed. The disciples were crushed when Jesus was crucified. They had expected a kingdom. To see Jesus on the cross; well, that just seemed to be about as opposite of the coming kingdom as they could imagine. But after the resurrection, they recalled the predictions of his rising again. It was not an allegory, it was not metaphorical. He meant it literally.

This leads us to the second thing. **Jesus’ obedience unto death – even death on a cross – demonstrates the life of obedience to which we are all called.** This totally escapes the disciples. James and John are part of Jesus’ inner circle and they come to him with a request that he honor that status in the new kingdom. The brothers’ request to sit at Jesus left and right suggests that they thought that the ultimate fulfillment of kingdom of God was coming soon, if not immediately. When Jesus started calling himself the Son of Man, the disciples went to that Daniel passage, the vision of the Son of Man coming in power and establishing an everlasting kingdom of glory and dominion. The establishment of the eternal throne of David in Jerusalem may require some suffering, but that would be a short-term problem with the reward of the kingdom of God following right behind.

But for Jesus, the focus was on the work of the Son of Man leading to the cross.

The reality is that Jesus could have avoided the cross. He did not have to head to Jerusalem. He did not have to continue teaching and preaching in ways that challenged the religious authorities. He did not have to continue bringing his growing number of disciples to Jerusalem such that the Roman authorities would be nervous about a violent insurrection seeking to restore the throne of David. He could have avoided all of it.

He did not. In obedience – even to the point of his death at the hands of Gentiles, ostracized from the people of God and killed in the most ignominious fashion possible – Jesus fulfilled the work of the Son of God. God’s plan was victorious in a way that seems like utter defeat in human terms.

**Which brings us to the third thing: Jesus points the disciples in a new understanding of greatness.** James and John’s request heads in the wrong direction. They seek personal glory and power. Jesus seeks to serve God.

The kingdom of God is not a political power structure like the United States government. Even though the disciples have begun early campaigns for glory positions, Jesus is having none of it. Nor is the Kingdom of God like *The Apprentice* or *American Idol*, where the weak are mocked and scorned. Those who are greatest in the kingdom of God are most often the least in our own eyes. Consider the examples of those who died this week; none of them would qualify as “great” within the overall scheme of American culture. None of their names will be widely known beyond the people in this congregation; yet, within our context and within the eyes of faith – they were great.

Rosalea Slemmer was a stalwart member of the Presbyterian Women. She was dedicated to helping others through support of the Crisis Center. She was a woman dedicated to prayer, praying for her family and for each one of you. She was a strong woman, yet a humble woman. It was not fame and notoriety she wanted, she sought to share the love of Christ with the people God brought into her life.

Mildred Campbell was a significant part of building this congregation. More than the physical structures, she was a guiding force in helping this congregation to mature from its infancy into a more mature expression of the body of Christ. She, too, was a strong yet humble woman. She was not looking for personal fame or power. She sought to share the love of Christ with the people God brought into her life.

Two quick items about Susan Shelton, Ginny Kink’s mom. She read her Bible daily. That Ginny knew it and that others knew it speaks volumes about how what we do often makes more of an impression than what we say. Her faith was important. The second thing occurred just last week: she had been taken to a home and gone to a dining room for dinner. When she came back, she reported to Ginny’s brother, “I had to go and be the life of the party because all those people were just staring at their plates!” The desire to share joy and life – even in the face of death – speaks of the assurance of hope that she had, and that we have.

Were these three perfect people? Of course not. But the point is that their faith in Jesus Christ made them people that God was perfecting for his purpose. They knew the joy of their savior and it shaped everything else they did. *That* is greatness.

Years from now, most people worshiping here will not know or remember our names. They will not know of the things that seem so important right now, whether it is our financial condition or number of members or activities or whatever. But the health of this congregation is not dependent upon them remembering our names. It *is* dependent upon how we serve God, proclaim the gospel, and reach out as Christ's ambassadors in this community. In other words, how we glorify God and enjoy him forever.

**And the final thing answers our first question: why did Jesus *have* to die? Because he came to give his life as a ransom for many.**

This is one of the clearest explanations of the work of the Son of God. The incarnation had a purpose, it had a goal, it was more than a friendly visit. It was more than an orientation or training to be citizens of the kingdom of heaven; yes, it was those things, but it was much, much more foundational.

**Why did Jesus have to die? To deal with the root cause of death: sin.**

From Adam and Eve to our own time, sin is a reality. What is sin? It is rebellion against God; whether in the personal form abusing one another to the corporate form of violating the covenant God established for his people.

This is not a topic on which we like to dwell for any length of time. OK, yes, we are sinful. We get it. The problem is that we underestimate the real consequence of sin: death. We know cognitively that we will die someday, maybe even someday soon. However, because "death is a part of life" (I heard myself say this to Abby at my Mom's memorial), we tend to gloss over why death is a part of life. We do not like to say that we experience the pain and grief of death because of sin.

Dealing with sin is why Jesus is more than a good teacher, a good man, a good example. The cross and resurrection is the stumbling block for so many people because it involves judgment and wrath for *our* sin. In the cross Jesus takes on the sin of the world, the judgment of God destroying all that which would oppose his good and perfect will, and engages death fully and completely. Our sin is paid for: completely. In his resurrection, Jesus shows that God is more powerful than death.

What are the things in your life that make you believe you are not worthy of God's love. Tony Campollo said it this way one time, "Take those things and hold them in front of you. Know that Jesus is looking, right now, from the cross and he went there to deal with those things." Have you cheated other people? Do you have sexual sin in your life? Do you harbor anger or bitterness against others and wish revenge? Whatever it is that you hold close and secret in your heart, hoping and praying that no one ever finds out about, Jesus is seeing from the cross. He is bearing the cost to redeem you from the destructiveness of whatever that is. Will you trust him?

That is the question when we approach the communion table. Jesus commanded us to join him in his death, that we might join him in his resurrection. “Take, eat, this is my body broken for you.” By eating the bread we are showing that Jesus endured the wrath and judgment of God for all things we have done that stand in rebellion. “This cup is my blood of the new covenant for the remission of sins.” In drinking the cup we are saying, “Jesus, I will take your life for mine.” We are joined in the reality of his death, we are joined in the promise of his resurrection.

### **Why did Jesus have to die? To be victorious over it.**

You have heard me say this several times recently, “Death does not have the last word.” Jesus predicted his victory over death. Because this is Superbowl Sunday, I can use this illustration: this was bigger than Joe Namath guaranteeing a victory. Jesus is not only declaring victory over the Romans – the worst they could do was torture and kill him – but he was declaring victory over death itself.

Now everyone knows that dead people do not get up. The disciples knew that dead people did not get up. Some Jews believed in some sort of heavenly resurrection; that is, their spirits might be raised in heaven in the presence of God. It was a mystery to be debated. But whatever it was, it was way down the road and it was not something that they ever expected they would experience.

Jesus said, “I am going to be killed and I am going to be raised up from the dead.” He was really going to be dead and then he was really going to be alive. It is no wonder that the disciples did not get it, we still struggle today even though we know he did it.

### **Why did Jesus have to die? Because God wanted to redeem us, to re-create us, to restore us to the purpose he originally intended for us.**

One of the hallmarks of God is bringing order out of chaos. Sin is a destruction of order, a breakdown of the created purpose. The result of that breakdown is death – it has to be. Jesus’ life was given, as he stated, as a ransom for many. The ransom is paid in full because Jesus’ sinless life was worth more than all the sinful lives of all time put together.

God’s loves us. He loves us so much that he sent Jesus. Whoever believes in him will not die but have eternal life.

This is a very different picture than the angry God waiting with a lightning bolt to zap us as soon as we step out of line. This is God who has endured our unfaithfulness and – while we were yet sinners – took steps to redeem us and restore us to life.

Was this the only way that God could have redeemed us? Well, it was the way that God did redeem us. He chose this way from the beginning of time and, even if it does not make sense to us, it made sense to God. The captive does not usually get to critique the method of their redemption; instead, they are grateful to the one who has saved them.

I want to remind us all where we are in this gospel. Mark is writing to believers in the early church in Rome; most likely during a period when they were experiencing persecution. They were paying for their faith with their lives. Mark was writing to encourage them, to teach them, to inspire them. Today, although we in Chula Vista do not experience physical persecution to the point of death for our faith, Mark's words are just as relevant.

The first half of the gospel, Mark 1-8, was designed to raise and answer the question, "Who is this?" That culminates in Peter's confession, "You are the Christ." Jesus' *power* – over illness, over evil, over death, over the established religion (including the gods of the Romans) – was the theme. The second half focuses on his work as the Son of God. It is work that leads Jesus directly to the cross, to give his life as a ransom, as a redeeming purchase, for many.

As we come to the table, we join with believers around the world and with the saints of the church who have gone before us. We come in expectation of sharing the meal that the one who is uniquely able has prepared for us. We come in expectation of being strengthened and fed by the one who did the work of the Son of God – faithful unto death on a cross, risen from the dead unto glory. His death is our death. His resurrection is our resurrection.

Why did Jesus have to die? Jesus had to die so that he could be raised from the dead, so that we – you and I – can be assured of the hope of eternal life with God that he promised.

"For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

8:45 invitation

10:00 song