

Instruction on Discipleship

Mark 10:1–52

28/29 May

The Place of the Passage

We have seen that [Mark 8](#) is the pinnacle and hinge of Mark. Here the Gospel's first eight chapters, and their portrayal of Jesus' attractive and well-received messianic identity, ends abruptly and a series of predictions of this Messiah's suffering and death begins ([Mark 8:31–33](#); [9:30–32](#); [10:32–34](#); cf. [Mark 9:12](#)). The unique contribution of [Mark 10](#) to the Gospel as a whole is the way in which it shows how Jesus connects his own path to that of his followers, turning upside down our expectations of what it means to be his disciple.

The Big Picture

[Mark 10](#) shows us that the path of Christian discipleship is glory through suffering, as was the path of Jesus.

Reflection and Discussion

In [Mark 10](#) we see Jesus upending our intuitive assumptions about discipleship in four areas in particular: marriage, entrance into the kingdom, the Messiah's role, and personal significance. Read [Mark 10:1–52](#) and consider the following questions. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible, pages 1914–1917, available online at www.esvbible.org.)

Upending Our Assumptions about Marriage and Divorce ([Mark 10:1–12](#)).

Once again, the Pharisees try to test Jesus and catch him (cf. [Mark 8:11](#); [12:15](#)) with a question, this time concerning the legality of divorce. In essence, they are asking what grounds for divorce can be legitimately acted upon while remaining in God's good favor. How does Jesus respond?

What do we learn about the nature of marriage in Jesus' response?

Upending Our Assumptions about Entering the Kingdom ([Mark 10:13–31](#)).

[Mark 10:13–16](#) set forth children as examples of the basic attitude everyone must have before he or she enters the kingdom of God (see also [Mark 9:35–36](#)). In [Mark 10:24](#), talking to his disciples as the rich young man walks away, Jesus once again speaks of "children" and entering "the kingdom of God." Mark is setting up a deliberate contrast between empty-handed reception of the kingdom "like a child," on the one hand, and the attitudes of the rich young man and Peter and the disciples, on the other. What might it look like to "receive the kingdom of God like a child" ([Mark 10:15](#))?

In answering the rich young man's earnest inquiry about what must be done to enter the kingdom, Jesus holds out before him the "horizontal" commands of the Ten Commandments, those having to do with human relationships ("do not defraud" probably combines the eighth and ninth commandments). While these have all been kept by the young man, Jesus has left off the "vertical" commands—most notably the first, "You shall have no other gods before me" ([Ex. 20:3](#)). Why might Jesus have done this?

In Jewish culture in biblical times, wealth was viewed as a sign of God’s favor and blessing—it was a given that “the blessing of the Lord makes rich” ([Prov. 10:22](#); see also [1 Kings 3:10–13](#); [Job 42:12](#); [Prov. 8:18](#); [10:4, 15](#); [14:24](#); [22:4](#); [Eccles. 5:19](#)). How does this help make sense of the disciples’ astonishment ([Mark 10:24, 26](#)) at Jesus’ statements regarding the difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom of God ([Mark 10:23, 24–25](#))?

Upending Our Assumptions about the Messiah’s Role ([Mark 10:32–34](#)).

For the third time in as many chapters, Jesus tells the disciples of his impending death and resurrection. Hearing it, the disciples “were amazed” (cf. [Mark 10:24](#)). Why? What assumption is Jesus here upending? In answering, consider the kind of messiah expected by the Jews in New Testament times.

Each of Jesus’ major predictions of his death and resurrection ([Mark 8:31](#); [9:30–32](#); [10:32–34](#)) is followed by instruction in discipleship ([Mark 8:32–38](#); [9:35–37](#); [10:35–45](#)). Here in [Mark 10:32](#), the author makes a point of telling us that “Jesus was walking ahead of them” in the march to Jerusalem and the cross. What does all this reveal about the connection between the path walked by Jesus and the path to be walked by his disciples?

Upending Our Assumptions about Personal Significance ([Mark 10:35–52](#)).

James and John rightly understand that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the son of David, who will one day sit on the throne in everlasting rule (see [2 Sam. 7:1–17](#), esp. [2 Sam. 7:12–16](#)). But they continue to understand Jesus’ messianic rule only in terms of the first half of Mark’s Gospel. They have not fully grasped (“You do not know what you are asking,” [Mark 10:38](#)) that the road to the throne for Jesus lies directly through suffering, the very suffering Jesus has just been explaining to them in [Mark 10:32–34](#), as throughout [Mark 8–10](#). What is the response of the rest of the disciples when they learn of the request of James and John? What does this suggest to us about what was motivating James and John in their request?

Stepping back and viewing [Mark 10:35–52](#) as a whole, we find that Mark is again (as in [Mark 10:13–31](#)) contrasting two encounters. Notice the parallels between the two accounts—James and John on the one hand, blind Bartimaeus on the other. In both cases: (1) Jesus is confronted with an unfocused request for compassionate action ([Mark 10:35, 48–50](#)); (2) Jesus initially responds by asking “What do you want me to do for you?” ([Mark 10:36, 51](#)); and (3) the person or people making the request clearly understand that Jesus is the Messiah ([Mark 10:37, 47–48](#)). Yet James and John make a radically different request than does Bartimaeus. How so?

Read through the following three sections on Gospel Glimpses, Whole-Bible Connections, and Theological Soundings. Then take time to reflect on the Personal Implications these sections may have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

UPSIDE-DOWN QUALIFICATION. A thread running through [Mark 10](#) is the strange way in which people qualify for entrance into God’s kingdom: namely, by sheer awareness of their inadequacy, nothing more. Thus little children possess all the qualification required,

as they have not yet allowed a lifetime of idolatry to build up around their hearts, as the rich young man had. Peter and the disciples seemed to be in much better shape than the rich young man, for they had sacrificed everything the rich young man had refused to sacrifice; yet Mark compares the rich young man with Peter to show that both, in their own way, failed to grasp the grace of the kingdom. The young man thought keeping the commandments was the key to entering the kingdom, while Peter thought sacrifice was the key. Both considered themselves “first.” But Jesus says, the “first will be last, and the last first” ([Mark 10:31](#)).

TRUE VISION. We see the gospel of grace in the subtle contrast of James and John with blind Bartimaeus. To both parties Jesus asks, “What do you want me to do for you?” ([Mark 10:36, 51](#)), yet while James and John request glory, Bartimaeus requests mercy. James and John, though physically seeing, were spiritually blind; Bartimaeus, though physically blind, was spiritually seeing. It is those who know their need, not those who assume their superiority, on whom God pours out mercy. All we bring is an awareness of our need for that mercy.

Whole-Bible Connections

THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP. In answering the Pharisees’ testing question about divorce, Jesus goes all the way back to the beginning to establish the foundation for marriage. While the Pharisees reach back to [Deuteronomy 24](#) to ask about the Mosaic law’s allowance for a certificate of divorce, Jesus reaches back even further, to Genesis. Marriage between one man and one woman, in permanent mutual faithfulness, was built into the fabric of the world from the start. And such faithful marriage is meant to provide a glimpse of the greatest romance of all, God’s love for his own bride ([Hosea 2](#); [Eph. 5:32](#); [Rev. 21:2](#)).

VISION/BLINDNESS. A theme that appears throughout the Bible is that of spiritual vision versus spiritual blindness. This whole-Bible motif first shows up in [Genesis 3](#), as Adam and Eve take of the forbidden fruit and “the eyes of both were opened” to experience what sin, guilt, and shame really are ([Gen. 3:7](#)), and the motif runs right through the Bible to the end of Revelation, where the new Jerusalem is described as requiring no created light by which to see, “for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb” ([Rev. 21:23](#)). A prominent instance of the vision/blindness theme is [Isaiah 6:9–10](#), picked up by Jesus ([Matt. 13:14–15](#)), John ([John 12:39–40](#)), and Paul ([Acts 28:25–27](#)) to explain rejection of God’s gracious salvation as blindness. Paul underscores this in [2 Corinthians 4](#), describing the light of creation as an analogy to the light that scatters the darkness of blind unbelief in the human heart. The motif of seeing/blindness is particularly meaningful to John, who uses it repeatedly throughout his Gospel and letters (e.g., John 3:3, 36; 6:30; 8:56; 9:1–41; 10:21; 11:37; 12:40; 14:19; 16:16–19; [1 John 2:11](#); [3:2](#)). Ultimately, Jesus is “the light of the world” ([John 8:12](#); [9:5](#); cf. [John 12:46](#)).

Theological Soundings

IDOLATRY. The root issue in the account of the rich young man is not financial but, more deeply, spiritual. Though he dutifully kept most of the commandments, he had neglected

the first commandment—the prohibition of idolatry. His real god was his wealth, as proven in his inability to follow Jesus if it meant parting with his possessions.

ATONEMENT. Jesus says in [Mark 10:45](#) that he came “to give his life as a ransom for many.” The metaphor here is profound and gets at the heart of the whole Bible. Jesus views his people as held captive and in need of a “ransom,” a payment to liberate them. Our profound debt is our sin, in which we are held captive, helpless unless someone helps us from the outside. Jesus himself settles this debt with the payment to the Father of his own blood on the cross as our substitute.

HEAVEN. The afterlife is mentioned twice in [Mark 10](#). First, in [Mark 10:30](#) Jesus concludes his response to Peter’s self-alleged sacrifice by commenting on the gift of eternal life “in the age to come.” Jesus’ point in context is that, along with the blessings of this life, eternal life in the coming age far outweighs any sacrifice made along the way (cf. [Rom. 8:18](#); [2 Cor. 4:17–18](#); on “the age to come” see also [Eph. 1:21](#); [Heb. 6:5](#)). Second, Jesus speaks of heaven to James and John, commenting that the seating at Jesus’ right and left is not his to grant, “but it is for those for whom it has been prepared” ([Mark 10:40](#)). In [Mark 10](#), then, we find affirmations of the supreme value of heaven as well as of the absolute divine prerogative as to who will enjoy it.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of [Mark 10:1–52](#) for your own life today. Note the personal implications for your walk with the Lord in light of (1) the Gospel Glimpses, (2) the Whole-Bible Connections, (3) the Theological Soundings, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses
2. Whole-Bible Connections
3. Theological Soundings
4. [Mark 10:1–52](#)

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you continue in this study of Mark. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to take note of these things to review again in the future.