



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

A Costly Following

February 18, 2024

Mark 10:35-45

Clint Pressley

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." ³⁶ And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" ³⁷ And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." ³⁸ 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?" ³⁹ 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, ⁴⁰ 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." ⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. ⁴² And Jesus called them 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. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 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."

(Pastor Prays)

In 1945, the Lutheran pastor named Dietrich Bonhoffer had already spent two

years in a Nazi war prison. He was arrested by Hitler's Gestapo for preaching the gospel, but really it was for his anti-Nazi propaganda. There were a lot of Lutheran pastors in Germany, but he led something called the Confessing Church. It was a group of Lutherans in a small church that was bound together by the gospel. And they would not bow to the swastika. They clung to the cross. They believed Jesus is Lord.

If you know anything about history, you know that by the spring of 1945, the war was coming to an end. The Russians are coming across from the east. The Allies have crossed the line and they are coming into Berlin. And in April of 1945, as the Nazis felt themselves being squeezed by the Russians and the Americans coming through into Germany, Hitler began a wholesale extermination of all the war prisoners, including that Lutheran pastor. And Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as a 39-year-old man, had spent two years in that cell, and while he was there he was writing all kinds of things. He wrote a great poem called "Who am I?" It's a great poem. I would commend it to you.

But on April 19, 1945, they marched him out of his cell and unceremoniously marched him into the courtyard and right there in the prison courtyard, they hung him by his neck until he died. Three weeks later, Adolf Hitler would take a gun and kill his girlfriend, Eva Braun, and then put the gun to his own head and the war would be over. While Bonhoeffer languished in that prison before he was killed near the end of the war, he wrote several things, and one of those that became famous is the Christian classic called *The Cost of Discipleship*. Now, you may not know the book, but you probably already know the most famous line in that book. Bonhoeffer wrote, "When Christ calls a man, He bids him to come and die." It's the cost of discipleship. It's a hard lesson to learn. It's a hard lesson for us as American Christians to learn.

It's a hard lesson to learn, as even evidenced by the passage in front of us. The passage begins with the conversation, but before that, something is happening. So let's get the context so you know what's going on in Mark 10. In the previous verses, Jesus has just now given them a detailed explanation of

what's going to happen when they get to Jerusalem. What's going to be going on there? Jesus will be handed over to the authorities; He will be condemned. He will be beaten and He will be crucified. And on the third day, He will rise again from the dead. Now, you can imagine the silence that descended on the group when Jesus was telling them what was going to happen to Him when they go to Jerusalem. And then two of the greatest disciples—the brothers, James and John—had the audacity to ask Jesus to put them in positions of power when He comes into His glory. And out of that conversation, out of that event, Jesus pauses on the road and He teaches the disciples a lesson on the cost of discipleship that flies in the face of their understood greatness. And my hope today is that your heart and your mind and your soul will be strengthened as you seek to be a disciple because...

True Discipleship Is Truly Glorious

Let's go back and look at true disciples. I just want to walk through the text, and I'll come back and make some sermonic application. So let's just breeze through it, so you have a good understanding of these 10 verses. I'll come back and make some application. Join me there in verse 35: *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee*—They're called the Sons of Thunder. They got that name for a reason. James and John are part of the original inner group: James, John, Peter, and sometimes Andrew. James and John and Peter have been on the Mountain of Transfiguration. They are close to Jesus, and they come up to Jesus and they ask Him a question. First, they want a blank check. *"Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."* If you had a child, and they say, "Mom, do you promise to give me what I'm getting ready to ask you?" And if you're a mom with any sense, you will say, "No, I'm not doing that." They want a blank check. It's a demand really. And Jesus says to them—let's get to the bottom of it—*"What do you want me to do for you?"* And they say the most audacious thing: *And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."* It's admirable that they actually do believe Jesus is going into Jerusalem. He's going to be the Messiah and going to be King. They really think that they're going with Him, but three times Jesus has told them He is going there to die,

but that hasn't registered with them. And so they say, "When you come into your glory, would you make it so that one of us is on the right side and one of us on the left? We don't want to be king. We just want to be next to the power." It's audacious for them to do that for several reasons, and we'll go through that later. But they found a little time with Jesus by Himself, Peter wasn't there, the other 10 are gone, and they asked for this position of authority, and notice what Jesus says to them. *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?"* This is not like the baptism we do here. It's metaphorical language. *And they said to him, "We are able."* And do you see the hubris right there in the text? They say, as they thump their chest, "Yes, they don't call us the Sons of Thunder for nothing. Yes, we're able. We're able to do that." *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.* All Christians will at some point taste a little bit of that cup and a little bit of that baptism in verse 39. Verse 40: *"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.* Jesus tells them that they're acting like a bunch of pagans, like the Gentiles. *And Jesus called them 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."* That's not how my Kingdom runs. And you can just feel how ashamed the Twelve, and especially James and John, feel. And then Jesus gives the lesson in verse 43: *"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."*

Here's the Kingdom ethic. He turned it upside down from the world. In verse 44, there's the attitude, and whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all. In verse 45, He says, now look at me here. He's given you an example 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."* The most important verse in the entire passage says He came to give His life as a ransom for many. That's

true discipleship. It's truly glorious. Let's make some points out of it. Let's go back to it and see if we can't start slow and build and maybe learn some things about the discipleship. I'll start with the first one, number one:

True Discipleship Rejects Personal Gain

You see it right there in verse 35. James and John are asking for something. They've got Jesus alone, and it's astounding what they ask. They want a blank check. "Will you give us anything we ask for?" It's almost a demand. They want Him to give them whatever they want. You know, when I read it, I'm just stunned by several things. When I read this, I'm stunned by the unspiritual nature of the disciples. They've been with Jesus all this time, and we're coming down to just weeks now before Jesus is going to be crucified. They've been with Him a long time. They have heard Him on three different occasions tell them that He is going to Jerusalem to die. They have just come off of the third time, and I'm stunned by their unspiritual awareness of the situation. I mean, Jesus has just given them a detailed account of the way He's going to be killed, and they just say, "Hey, can we have some authority?" It's completely inappropriate. It's like wearing a bathing suit to a funeral. You just wouldn't. It doesn't fit. I'm stunned by their lack of awareness. I'm stunned by their own self-grandeur. James and John, the Sons of Thunder, think enough of themselves that they feel like they need to be sitting in positions of authority. It feels like a demand. This feels manipulative. When Matthew tells the story, it's actually not the two boys, James and John; it's their mom. Their mom has their ambition in mind. She comes to Jesus and she says, "Would you make my two sons sit on the throne next to you?" So you take all of what you know about the Bible and the New Testament—James and John, their mom's name is Salome. Salome is actually a sister to Mary, the mother of Jesus. So what you have here is Jesus's aunt comes in and puts a little family pressure on Jesus. She says, "You need to put your cousins beside you." It feels manipulative. You know, I'm astounded by the fact that James and John are friends with Peter. They're always with Jesus, the three of them. They were on the Mount of Transfiguration together. Peter has been the recognized leader. I'm astounded at their betrayal of Peter. When you read this, it's not a

pretty picture of those two disciples. It's what makes us believe that this is true. One of the things about the Bible is it's brutally honest about the heroes in the Bible. These guys, James and John, are seeking personal gain here. This reminds me of being a Christian in a church and pressing for a position, for a title. Pressing for how you will be seen, where you will sit, and pressing to be an influencer in the church.

What you have here with James and John is straight "what-about-me-ism," and it's unbecoming of a disciple. Why? Because the cross is where we're headed. I want to ask a couple of diagnostic questions to help you think through your own approach to discipleship. One would be, are you easily offended? Does it take very much to set you off? Are you easily offended? If so, there's a chip on your shoulder and it's called pride. Here's another one: Do you think your way is always the right way? Think about that as we go to the second point. Number two:

True Discipleship Fights Pride

Pride is natural, but true discipleship fights it. We are naturally prone to being prideful. Discipleship fights against that. You will find that in verse 38 where Jesus rebukes them. And as He rebukes them, He will then use two metaphors. Join me there in verse 38: *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?"* We are familiar with those two metaphors. The Old Testament oftentimes used the wrath of God as the cup. For those of us who know the New Testament, it resonates in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus asked the Father, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me." Jesus uses the word *baptism* as a metaphor in Luke 12:50 where Jesus says, *"I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!"* So the cup is the condemnation of God. Jesus drinks the cup for all the sins of every sinner who will ever be saved. The baptism is the flooding fury of the wrath of God. That is Jesus drowning in the ocean of God's judgment. It's what we call the passion of the Christ. And Jesus says, "Are you able to do that?"

And look at the hubris in verse 39. James and John say, “Yes, we’re able.” They are saying that they can handle it. This is them overestimating their own ability and underestimating God’s grace. You know why God sometimes takes us through such pain and hurting? Because we overestimate our ability and we underestimate our need for God. And there’s nothing like being broken; it makes you see your need. There’s nothing like having a really hard time and being stripped.

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.” He is saying that you’re going to take some of it. Not all of it, because Jesus takes all the wrath, but all Christian people take some of it. In order to be in fellowship with Christ, we also have to be in fellowship with His sufferings. James and John, it’s interesting that you can put them as the bookends of the apostles. James would be the first apostle who will die in Acts 12:1-2. King Harod will kill him by the sword. He’ll die instantly. That’s his way of suffering. He’ll be the first one to die. You read in the Book of Revelation, John lives longer than anybody. He outlives all of his friends. They’re gone. He’ll suffer on the Island of Patmos. Yes, those two guys will taste it.

And then Jesus tells the disciples that they’ve asked for something that can’t be given. What a great verse is verse 40. Just ponder it. Jesus said, *“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.”* Those seats are actually already reserved. You can’t have those seats. Isn’t it something that Paul says? You are God’s workmanship. You are created in Christ Jesus for good works that God has prepared beforehand so you might walk in them. It’s a good reminder of God’s plan. So these two guys, James and John, they’re doing terribly. They’re prideful. They’re asking for something. We get to verse 41, and the other 10 didn’t do any better. Let me show what I mean: *And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.* There becomes a 12-man melee—they are fighting against one another. Who has the right to sit there?

Who is the most popular? Who has the authority? Who has the influence? There are times for a church fight and a split. If a church goes off the rails doctrinally, or if it has abandoned that which we know to be biblically right and centered on the gospel, it's time for a split. But not when it's an opinion. These guys are fighting. There's jealousy. They're debating on who's right. How do we avoid that? I would just offer up a couple of ways. One way is that we need to pray for humility, to ask God to give you humility. It sounds like a dangerous prayer, because oftentimes you get humbled. There's no fun in that. But, it's going to keep you from being the enemy of God. God is opposed to the proud, so ask God to help you to be humble, to give you some humility. He'll gently lay that across your heart. Pray for humility. The second thing is to learn what grace is. So what you do is you think about how you are a filthy sinner that God should have sent to hell. You understand that since He didn't, that's grace. That He would love someone like you is grace. When you think about that deeply, that helps with humility in your heart.

Another thing that is helpful is to start thanking God for the 10,000 things that you could name right this moment that you ought to be thankful for that you haven't yet thanked God for. When you start seeing all that has come by God's goodness from His hand, it starts to build humility in your heart. True discipleship fights pride. Let me give you a third one. Number three:

True Discipleship Doesn't Use a Business Model

This doesn't look like the world we see. Jesus says it in verses 42-43. Here comes the lesson: *And Jesus called them 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."* In other words, we don't live like the pagans. We don't treat each other like the pagans. We're not running the military here. Discipleship is different. You're not in the business world. We're not depending on positional authority or worldly leadership. You're not living in a regime that says, "If the boss says something, it's got to be done." If you read the book by George Patton on leadership, you read that you have

got to cuss a lot for effect. But when it comes to how Christians interact with one another, Jesus says that's not where we find our model. You see, brothers and sisters, we are a family. We're a body of believers. We are bound together by the blood of Christ; we are an assembly. We are not like the pagans. What then is the right model? Here comes the model of what it looks like inside the church. Number four:

True Discipleship Actively Serves

I get that in verse 43: *"But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant..."* This is where we get the word *deacon*. It means *to serve*. That word is literally to wait on tables, to do the menial labor. It's not like it is in the world. It's different. It's different with us. In the church, the influencer, the one who is providing the most influence, is not the one who is the prettiest or with the loudest voice, or the one with the most money. The great ones in the church, are the *diaconis*, the ones who are serving. The ones who are actively doing the things that no one else sees. The ones joyfully tackling the menial issues and problems and tasks in a church. Jesus says that's the greatest. If you want to be great in the Body of Christ, that's how you do it. It's standing at the door and greeting people. It's leading in discipleship. It's standing with the weak and hurting. Here is the whole ethic of the Kingdom of God. Here is the complete opposite of understood greatness outside of the church. Jesus says that's not how we do it. Here is the nursery worker. It's the one that goes to the nursing home that nobody sees. It's the adults that show up at Intensity for the students just to have a presence. It's the offering up of a cup of cold water in the name of Jesus. Look, I think that aspiring for greatness is a really good thing, as long as you understand greatness as Jesus has explained it. Let me give you another one. This one is the hardest one for me. Number five:

True Discipleship Has a Selfless Attitude

I get that in verse 44. I want to write on the side of the page that I have an attitude problem. You probably do too, at some point. Verse 44: *"...and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all."* Have you ever

thought, “I’m not your slave?” But here’s the attitude—Jesus says that whoever’s going to be first is the word *doulos*. It’s the word *slave*. You have to have a good grasp on the word *slave*. You need to know what it means. It means just what you think it means. We are naturally prone to a “What about me?” attitude. What about me? What about me? And Jesus says that if you want to be first, if you want to be great in the Kingdom of God, here’s the attitude to cultivate: you would be willing to be the slave of anyone. That’s a tall order. I kept trying to find a loophole in this because we default into asking, “How does this make you feel?” And Jesus says the first in the Kingdom of God has a selfless attitude. Paul wrote in Philippians 2:3, *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves*. Jesus said it like this in verse 44, to be the slave of all. You are better than no one. Be willing to serve anyone. That is a remarkable attitudinal shift that we’ll be working on until the Lord calls us home. And that brings us to Christ in verse 45. It’s my last point, number six:

True Discipleship Looks to Christ

There is not a word wasted in this verse. Every phrase in verse 45 is important. This is the centerpiece of this entire passage. We look to Christ. Here’s our model. Jesus says, *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* Here’s the example you want to have, here’s the ethic. The first thing is to make sure you put your faith in what Christ has done for you on the cross, and then you look to Jesus as your model. How did He live? Not only that, He is also our Messiah. Jesus called Himself the Son of Man, that is the messianic title—He is our King. You see Him as your Ruler. He is not just our Messiah, He is our righteousness. What did Jesus say there in verse 45? *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve...”* Here is a brief description of His incarnation. At Christmas, Jesus becomes a man who came and lived as the second Adam. The first Adam in Genesis lost it for us. He and Eve sinned and everyone else since then has the second Adam in them. But Jesus comes not to be served, but to serve. And how did He do it? By living a perfect life. He’s our righteousness. He is also our Redeemer. Verse 45 says, *“For even the Son of*

Man came not to be served but to serve...” Look at the next words: “*...and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” You understand the word *ransom*. It’s the price for release. Someone has been kidnapped, and to get him back you pay a ransom. You’ve been kidnapped by your own sin, and Jesus pays the ransom. You are a slave to sin; Jesus pays the price. You are under the judgment of God; Jesus pays for your release. It’s the only use of the word *ransom* in all of the Gospels. Paul says in Romans 4 that He was delivered up for our trespasses, raised for our justification. Isaiah 53:5 points toward it: *But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.* Jesus says, “I came as a ransom for many.” Here’s the gospel—what should have happened to us happened to Jesus instead. It’s the highlight of this passage. It’s the heart of the gospel.

I’m going to explain the gospel, and you should preach it to yourself with joy. You can walk out of here confident in the gospel. If you’re not sure you are a Christian, when you hear me explain the gospel, I want you to listen, and when I get done, I want you ask God to save you. Gospel believers, you listen. The whole Bible teaches that God created us in His image—it’s why we respect you, it’s why you have dignity. You are created in the image of God, but the image of God in us has been disfigured. The whole Bible teaches that all of us are sinners. That sin is not just a mistake or a wrong decision. It’s a crime against a holy God. God is holy, and we are not, and therefore God will not have fellowship with us like He did with Adam before sin. Sin came in, and now there is no more fellowship. But God is not just a judge. He’s also very loving and kind and patient. God in His goodness sent us Jesus, who is fully God and fully man. He comes as the second Adam. He’s going to live like Adam should have, like we should. Jesus Christ on Earth lived perfectly under the Law of God and fulfilled all of that. It’s very important because He earned righteousness as a human. And as a human, He goes to the cross and pays the price. He takes the judgment that humans deserve and gives us a righteousness earned as a human. So that when you put your faith in Jesus, when you believe in Jesus, what happens is He takes all of your sin—every bit,

all of it, all of the guilt, every bit, all of it—away. And He covers you in the righteousness that He earned so that you are dependent not on what you do, but on what Christ has done. Christ paid for your sin and gives you His righteousness. And if you believe that, you can walk out of here today with joy and confidence.

(Pastor prays)