

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Christmas 2017
TITLE: Jesus the Servant

SCRIPTURE: Mark 10:45

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There's a reason we talk about "the reason for the season" during Christmas, and that's because we somehow manage every year to get distracted by things that are not ultimate things. Traditions are great. Christmas parties are great. Gifts are great. Families are great. Traveling is great. But none of these things have innate holiday goodness. The goodness of these things comes from Jesus himself, and every December we need a fresh reminder of why we celebrate, and why and how he is good and makes these things good.

The gospel of Mark is the only one of the four biographies of Jesus that doesn't mention something about what we call Christmas. Matthew talks about how Joseph was nervous about the whole thing. Luke talks about how Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her what was about to happen. John says that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." But Mark... Mark starts when Jesus was 30 and hanging out down by the river with his cousin John.

However, there are several lines in Mark's gospel that seem to point to a reason for Jesus' coming. One of the clearest of these verses is Mark 10:45:

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many.

This is Jesus himself speaking, and his purpose-language here is strong. He even states it positively and negatively. He didn't come for one reason, but he did come for another. And the intention of the incarnation is service. "The Son of Man *came to serve*." But in what way is the point of Christmas Jesus serving us? That sounds so weird. It's usually not framed like that. What does this mean? Simply put, how is it that Christmas is about service?

This line from Jesus is the last line in a brief story Mark is recording. Jesus and his disciples are walking to Jerusalem, and James and John pull him aside to ask him a question. They ask if they can sit as Jesus' right hand and left hand when he comes into his glory (10:37). James and John wanted places of recognition and importance. And when the other disciples hear about this, they get upset (10:41). But they're probably just mad because they wanted to ask too, but James and John beat them to it. And Jesus seizes the opportunity. He realizes that this is a great teaching moment.

Jesus tells them that the world works by power and authority from the top-down. It's a hierarchy in which certain people determine and demand certain things, and plan and command other things, and then everybody under them does what they say. But Jesus tells them that that's not the way God's kingdom works.

Jesus tells them that if you want to be great in God's economy, the primary thing you should do is aspire to not be know. Just serve people. Serve people so that God will be known, not you. Greatness before

God is about being a servant to all, and giving your life away so that other people can live. And then comes our verse: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

And this is how – in a very slight-of-hand way – we're reminded of the point of Christmas. Jesus is saying that he came into this world of power-hungry people; he entered into this fractured world of oppression and sadness; and even though he is the Rightful King, he did not come to be waited on hand and foot, but came to earth *in order to serve*. He came to serve both the oppressed AND the oppressors, the powerful AND the powerless. And this is why we celebrate this time of year, because Jesus came as the great servant to humanity.

But it says that he came as a ransom; what does that mean? Ransom is a word about the payment for a prisoner of war, or the cost to free a slave. Jesus is saying that giving his life is the price of setting people free. He came as our great representative, to live and die in our place, and this is him serving humanity because of how great of a cost it was. And he gave his life willingly for us. As Paul Tripp writes: "It's not just the Christmas story, but also the entire redemptive story that hinges on one thing – the willing servitude of Jesus." And this is how Christmas is about service. Mark 10 and Philippians 2 agree. Jesus came from heaven to earth to serve, and his ultimate act of service was his giving his life for sinners.

So, how should we respond to this? Here are four suggestions:

1. Change how you think about power. Mark 10:45 is the punch line at the end of a story about how the world works. But God works differently. He works through radical service.
2. Don't serve God. This is an issue of motive. "The Son of Man did not come to be served." Meaning, in our service we should not think that we are paying God back or that he owes us. We should simply serve because he is worthy.
3. Give your life away for others. We are called to serve with no expectation of return. We are called to look outside of ourselves, no matter what we feel, in order to care for and love others.
4. Trust the willingness of Jesus. If the Christmas story is true, it is a divine intervention that is simultaneously a divine invitation. Jesus' coming to earth is his way of saying "You don't have to trust yourself anymore. You don't have to trust in the power-hunger of this world. You can trust me. I have come to bring true and lasting life."

For Discussion —

1. Personally, what stood out to you most from this sermon?
2. According to this message, how is Christmas about service?
3. Jesus says that God works in the world differently than earthly power structures. What's the biggest difference between the two?
4. What does it mean that Jesus came to give his life "as a ransom for many"?
5. Who do you know who most embodies this idea of a life of Christ-like service?
6. Which of the four suggested responses feels the most urgent to you personally?