



## **Advent Series, Part 2**

### **Servant of Sinners**

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to Mark 10. It's good to be together around God's Word. Last week we started an Advent series. Advent means the arrival or coming of someone or something significant. During these weeks leading up to Christmas we're spending each Sunday specifically thinking about the coming of Jesus. I cannot wait to walk through this text with you today.

I had actually planned on preaching a different text from the Advent devotional guides we gave out last week, but as I was praying this week, I couldn't help but jump ahead to a text that we'll actually read in our Advent guide this next week: Mark 10.

On a side note, I want to let you know I've been talking with our elders and campus pastors regarding next year; we are planning to walk through a Bible reading journey together as a church. I wanted to share that with you now to give you a heads up. Some of you are very much advance planners, so if you want to be part of that, I want to let you know so you can plan accordingly. We're not going to start that plan until the first week in February.

I want to spend some time in January preparing us to read through the story of Scripture together. Then Lord willing in February, we'll start to walk together on a journey where we'll read the Bible six days of the week, giving you one day to catch up each week. And for those of you who can't miss a day, it will be okay if you miss a day along the way.

We're going to read selected chapters in the Bible chronologically. I think many Christians don't know how the Bible fits together, how one book ties to other books and what the overall story is. We'll be reading the whole story over the course of ten months, from February to November, then each Sunday we'll look at one of the passages from that week's reading. My hope is that you might see the big picture story of the Bible, some of you for the first time, and see how this story has the power to change your story on a day-by-day basis. That's just a heads-up for what's coming.

Today I have incredible news to share with you from Mark 10 that I believe most followers of Jesus don't realize. I know many people are coming in here today with all kinds of challenges and struggles in your life—marriage, family and work. I have news I believe will help and encourage you deeply today. If you're not a follower of Jesus, I have incredible news to share with you that will show you how wonderfully different Christianity is from every other religion in the world.

Let's dive right in. Here's how I want to set things up. If Advent refers to the coming of Jesus, then today I want to ask the question: why? Why did Jesus come? Let's start in Mark 10:35, then we're

going to camp out in verse 45—what I believe is one of the most breath-taking verses in the entire Bible. But let's look at the context that leads up to it.

<sup>35</sup> *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."* <sup>36</sup> *And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?"* <sup>37</sup> *And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."* <sup>38</sup> *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?"* <sup>39</sup> *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,"* <sup>40</sup> *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."* <sup>41</sup> *And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.* <sup>42</sup> *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."* <sup>43</sup> *But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,* <sup>44</sup> *and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.* <sup>45</sup> *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

There it is. Underline it, star it, highlight it, memorize it. 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."* We're going to see five reasons why Jesus came according to this one verse. Each one of these five reasons is awesome. I want to personalize these for you, because I want you to feel the weight and wonder of why Jesus came into your life.

## 1. Jesus came to suffer like you.

Jesus uses a title for Himself in verse 45 where He calls Himself "the Son of Man," a title that emphasizes how Jesus is indeed a man—a fully human person like us.

Now, that seems pretty simple, but I think we miss this. I think we have a tendency to think about Jesus as being so different from us. Obviously He is in one sense. Jesus is God Who has existed before time. That's clear in verse 45 with the phrase, *"the Son of Man came."* I mean who of us decided to "come" to the world? Which one of us was sitting around one day and said, "Hmm. I think I'll go into the world now." No one. We don't talk like this, because we didn't exist before we entered the world. But Jesus did, because Jesus is God. He decided to come. He came as a human, just like us.

I don't think we fully realize this. Just listen to us at Christmas, in some of our favorite carols:

- "Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright." I love that song. I love the way it sounds. I love the way it makes me feel. But let's be honest. Anybody who has ever had a baby knows that's not the way it works. Babies don't come out silent and they don't stay silent. Holy, yes; silent, no way. But "Screaming night, holy night" just doesn't have the same ring, does it?
- How about "Away in a manger"? "The cattle are lowing, the poor baby wakes. But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes." Are you serious? When was the last time you saw a newborn

baby wake up next to a cow and not be a bit bothered by that? Now, my point is not to ruin Christmas carols. By all means, sing them. We'll sing them here. But don't let them mask the reality: Jesus was a baby. He was a real baby, like we were real babies. That means He cried, He wanted food, He needed sleep—just like us.

This is so important on a deeper level. Think about it. Last week we talked about physical hurt, emotional hurt and relational hurt that we experience in this world. I want to remind us that Jesus came to this world and He experienced all of those things like us. I would actually argue He even experienced greater hurt than we do.

This is so important, because while we rightfully think of Jesus as different from us, that can easily cause us to think that Jesus is distant from our lives. But He is not. Are you hurting today? Jesus hurt. Are you broken? Jesus was broken. Are you tired? Jesus was tired. Ever feel let down? Jesus was let down. Do you grieve? Jesus grieved. Do you ever cry out because you feel like you just can't take it anymore? Jesus was full of sorrows, crying out to God in desperation.

Whatever physical, emotional or relational hurt you have, hear this good news: you do not have a God today Who is distant from your pain. You have a God Who is familiar with your pain. He's familiar with your hurt, sorrow and suffering. That's why Corrie ten Boom wrote from the depths of a Nazi death camp, "No matter how deep our darkness, He is deeper still." Jesus came to suffer like us.

We could stop here and this would be glorious. But it gets even better.

## **2. Jesus came to die instead of you.**

Jesus came to suffer like you, then the second reason He came was to die instead of you. The Son of Man came to give his life (verse 45). That's an interesting phrase when you think about it. When Jesus is talking about giving His life, He's talking about His death. What He's saying here is that He came to die. He was born to die.

Turn back a couple chapters to Mark 8 and look at verse 31. Just to give some more context, the first half of Mark's Gospel is spent on following Jesus' ministry in Galilee, then a transition takes place in chapter eight. From chapter eight to chapter ten, Jesus travels to Jerusalem, where He's going to be crucified. I want you to hear what He says, not once, not twice, but three times on His way to Jerusalem.

Look at Mark 8:31: "*And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.*" Then turn to Mark 9:30-31 and look what He says there: "*They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.'*" Now turn to Mark 10, our chapter today, and look at what Jesus said right before the passage we just read, starting in verse 32:

*<sup>32</sup> And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, <sup>33</sup> saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. <sup>34</sup> And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”*

Jesus knew what was going on here. He knew He was going to His death—the very reason He came in the first place. This is very different. Think about it. For us, death is an unavoidable outcome that we dread and fear. But for Jesus, death was His unshakable purpose in coming in the first place. It’s what He was anticipating.

Don’t just think about the difference between Jesus and us. Think about the difference between Jesus here and every other religious leader in world history. For other religious leaders, their death was the tragic end of their story. The focus in every other world religion is on a leader’s life and teachings—whatever it might have been. Mohammed died at 62. Confucius died at 72. The Buddha died at 80. Even Moses died at 120 years old. The death of each of these leaders marks the end of their mission.

Not so with Jesus. With Jesus, it’s the total opposite. Jesus was constantly talking about His death, anticipating His death, foretelling His death in such a way that the central symbol of Christianity for the last 2,000 years has been what? A cross. A place of death. And the cross is the point—it’s why He came. Jesus came to die instead of us.

Now, what does that mean? When you look at the end of Mark 10:45, you see the word “for.” Jesus came to give His life as a ransom “for” many. That word “for” in the original language of the New Testament literally means “instead of” or “in place of.” So put this together with what we talked about last week. Why do we die? We die because of sin—because of sin in our lives and in the world around us. Because of sin we are separated from God, so we will all experience eventual physical death. If we die separated from God, we will experience eternal spiritual death. But Jesus came to change that.

So hear this incredible news, especially if you are not a follower of Jesus today. Each person has sinned against God so is separated from God. If you die separated from God you will spend eternity separated from God. But the good news of the Bible is that Jesus came to die for you—instead of you. You deserve to experience eternal spiritual death, but Jesus came to pay the price of death for you.

You say, “Well, how can a man pay the price of eternal spiritual death?” That’s the beauty of Who Jesus is. He is fully man, which means He’s able to stand in your place. And He’s fully God, which means He’s able to bear divine infinite judgment. Jesus is the perfect Substitute for sinners, which means that when you put your faith in Him and what He did on the cross for you—instead of you—you can be saved from eternal death. Jesus came to die instead of you.

We’re only two reasons in. Let’s keep going.

### 3. Jesus came to set you free from slavery to sin.

Jesus came to give His life as a ransom, Mark 10:45 says. That word “ransom” —*lutron*—refers to a payment given to release someone from slavery, to buy their freedom. Here’s the picture. Each one of us are slaves to sin. Each one of us is prone to sin, which means you’re prone to choose your way over God’s ways. It’s like you can’t help it. You’re a slave to yourself in that sense, wanting what you want over what God wants. Even when you realize that what God wants for you is better and even when sin can prove so costly in your life, you are still a slave to sin and its effects. But Jesus came to change that. Jesus came to set you free from slavery to sin. Do you realize this?

I think many of us don’t. I talk with so many self-professing Christians who basically see themselves functionally as slaves to sin. They see themselves as slaves to anger, slaves to worry, slaves to lust and desire for all kinds of things in this world apart from God. They’re slaves to selfishness, and on and on and on. Without question—as long as we’re in this world, we will struggle with sin.

But here’s the good news of the Bible: Jesus didn’t just die so you could be forgiven of sin’s penalty. Jesus died so you could be free from the power of sin to live the life God has created you to live. Jesus came to conquer sin in His life, to conquer sin in His death, to conquer sin in His resurrection from the grave, then to put the power of His Spirit inside you right now. Jesus came to set you free from slavery to sin.

So the next time the devil tells you that you just can’t overcome this sin or that temptation, realize that is a lie. We just studied this in 1 John 4:4: *“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”* And 1 John 5:4 states, *“Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”* Jesus came to set you free from slavery to sin. It is not your master anymore.

There are three reasons. It just keeps getting better and better, and we haven’t even gotten to the one I am most excited about getting to—that’s number five.

### 4. Jesus came to show you how to love.

According to Mark 10:45, Jesus came to show you how to love. This is why it’s so important to read the context of a verse, not just to read a verse by itself. In this passage, Jesus is saying to His disciples who were seeking greatness, “You want to be great? Here’s how you become great. You become a servant of others. Here’s how you become first: you become last. You lay down your life for others.”

This is a revolutionary, strong and needed word, especially for each one of us in this room who has any sort of leadership position. If you are in a leadership position over one person, a couple people, or multitudes of people—in your home, family, work, community, church—the words of Jesus.

He is saying to you right now, “Do not lord your leadership over those you lead. Do not aggressively assert your authority over them.” Jesus is saying to you, “Lead with love. Lead by serving.

Lead, not by asserting yourself over others, but by sacrificing yourself for others.” Jesus says, “See yourself as their slave.”

Now, that is a very different view of leadership than the world has. It’s what we so often adopt in this city. What was that quote from President Bush’s funeral this last week? “Those who travel the high road of humility in Washington DC are not bothered by heavy traffic.” Things look radically different when leaders today lead according to these words from Jesus.

I can already hear some people thinking, “It sounds good, but that’s preposterous pride. You can’t lead that way. To see yourself as another’s slave? That’s crazy.” Well, it is pretty crazy, yet it leads to the last reason Jesus came, according to Mark 10:45—and this one takes the cake. This one is just over the top. This one almost feels blasphemous to say, but I’m going to say it because Jesus said it. Here it is, the fifth reason Jesus came.

## **5. Jesus came to be your Servant.**

Hear this in your life: Jesus came to be your servant, to be your slave. *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve...”* The word for “serve” here literally means to wait on tables. So get this: When Jesus is looking for a word to describe why He came to you and me, He says, “I came to wait on you.”

Think about that. You go to a restaurant and somebody comes to your table and asks, “How can I help you? What can I get you? How can I serve you?” Jesus says, “That’s why I came: to say that to you. How can I help you? What can I get you? I am your Servant.” Jesus says this to you. God in the flesh says this to you.

This is lunacy. No religious teacher talks like this. This sounds crazy to us, until we realize this is not crazy—this is Christianity. This is Christ. Jesus did not come as some potentate whose personal whims are to be catered to by lowly servants. Jesus came to be the lowly Servant of you and me. Jesus told His followers and He’s telling His followers today, right now, that He did not come so that we might serve Him. He came to serve us. Jesus is saying, “In My relationship with you, I am the Servant. I serve you. I work for you. I wait on you.”

Doesn’t that sound almost blasphemous? But it’s not just stated here. Think about Philippians 2:5-7: *“Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”* Now, let’s be clear what the Bible does not mean when it calls Jesus our servant. The Bible doesn’t mean we tell Jesus whatever we want Him to do and He automatically does it. That’s what James and John were trying to do in Mark 10. Jesus was not their servant in that way. He’s not our servant in that way. That would be a perversion of what Jesus is saying here.

This does not mean that there isn’t a sense in which we are servants of Jesus. We see that at other points in Scripture. Paul repeatedly calls himself a servant of Christ Jesus. Disciples are in a sense

servants of Jesus. But follow what Jesus is saying here in Mark 10, because in many ways this is the essence of Christianity. I'm convinced so many Christians miss it in our daily lives. Think about how someone becomes a Christian. How do you become a follower of Christ? The Christian life begins at the moment you or I stop trying to serve God and we trust God to serve us. The Christian life begins at the moment when you realize you have sin in your heart against God and there's no amount of good you can do to cover over that. No matter how many times you go to church, read the Bible, pray, live a moral life, show kindness to others, do good works—on and on and on and on—if you do all these things in your life, you still cannot cover over the stain of sin in your heart before God.

This means you need God to do something for you. You need God to serve you. You need God to cover over that stain of sin. You need God to forgive you of your sin, to free you from sin. You need God to serve you in this way. Jesus says, "That's why I came. Not to be served by you, but to serve you." If you have never asked God to serve you in that way, I invite you to do that today. Please, if you're visiting with us—friends, family members, just exploring Christianity, whatever you might be—hear and believe this good news today. God has brought you here today because He wants to serve you. He wants to forgive you of all your sin, to free you from slavery to it, to give you eternal life with Him. That's why Jesus came and today you can do what some people stood across this gathering last week and did. You can ask Jesus to serve you, to save you from your sin—and He will. He wants to serve you today.

Then Christians, please get this. This is so key to Christianity. Once you ask Jesus to serve you in this way, to save you from your sin, you don't then move on from needing to be served by Jesus. No. The Christian life becomes a life of daily being served by Jesus.

Let me give you an illustration. Eleven years ago our second son Joshua was born. We brought him home from the hospital and because we had adopted our first son, Caleb, at ten months old, we had no idea how this newborn thing worked. Heather and I were panicking. How do you change a newborn's diaper? How in the world do they sleep? Do they ever sleep?

I remember when we were giving him a bath that first night we brought him home, I told Heather, "We've got to get the instructions they gave us at the hospital." So we pulled out step-by-step instructions the hospital sent home with us. "First, wet the rag. Second, put a dab of light, organic, tear-free, alcohol-free, bacteria-free, gluten-free, whatever-else-free baby soap on the rag." We're walking through this step by step. He is screaming, crying, freezing cold. I know he's thinking, "Why did I get stuck with the rookies? They have no clue."

Here's the deal. On that first day we had him in our home, he did not serve us at all. He was totally dependent on being served by us. If he didn't let himself be served by us, then he would die. So get that picture in your mind. Jesus said earlier in this chapter, in Mark 10:15, "*Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.*" This is Christianity. This is the heart of Christianity. Jesus did not come in search of servants who would help Him out. That's not Christianity. Christ came to serve you.

And you can't live without Him serving you. It totally misses the point to begin a relationship with God through Jesus Christ by trusting Him to save you, but then rising up and trying to live out the Christian life on your own. "Don't do it," Mark 10:45 says. "Don't do it." Jesus did not come ultimately to be served by you, but to serve you. It makes sense when you really think about it, because everything in the Christian life depends on Jesus serving you. Everything.

Think about it. What is prayer? Is prayer not saying, "God, I need Your help. God, I'm going through this or that—I need Your help." Or praying for somebody else. "This person, that person, is going through this or that. They need Your help." Prayer is asking God to serve us, asking God to help us in these ways, to wait on us in these ways. And God has told us to do that. God actually delights in us doing that. He said, "Ask Me to serve you in this way and I will give you everything you ask in My name, according to My will."

Think about reading and understanding the Bible. We can't do that on our own, can we? We need God's Spirit to help us understand the Bible. So whenever we open it, we ask God to serve us, to help us understand it. Think about different facets of your life. I think about parenting conversations that Heather and I have non-stop. Every night. We're just looking up and each conversation ends with the same conclusion: "God, help us." I pray all the time for Heather and my kids. I just plead, "God, please help me be the best husband and dad possible for them."

Truth be told, I pray for you the same way. I was praying this morning, "I don't know how to be a good pastor for you." I plead for God's help to make me the pastor you need me to be. I think about decisions all week, when I'm just pleading for God's wisdom. I think about struggles where I'm just pleading for God's grace. I need God to serve me all day long—and so do you.

At this point some of you might think, "Yep. This is the problem with Christianity. Christianity is for the weak. Christianity is for those who need a crutch, who cannot do it on their own." Some might even think, "I don't need God to serve me. I get up early every morning. I work hard all day at my job. I provide and care for my family. I make all kinds of decisions. I do all kinds of good things."

I don't doubt that you do but let me ask you a question. Where did you get the breath to wake up this morning? Who provided the food and water to get you through the day? Where did you get that ability to work hard? Who made it possible for you to have a family? Ladies and gentlemen, there's not one person in this gathering today who is self-sufficient. Every person in this gathering is ultimately God-dependent. Even if you hate God, the reality is your very breath at this moment comes from the very One you hate.

Every one of you needs God to serve you. Your relationship with God begins with realizing that. Then it continues moment by moment, day by day, with that realization. And the great news of the Bible is that God desires to do this for you. This is the mammoth meaning of Christmas. Jesus came to serve you. Jesus came to take away all your sin and help you in all your struggles.



Think about it. In all your struggles with sin, Jesus right now, today and this week, wants to serve you. In all your struggles with worry, Jesus wants to serve you. In all your struggles with anger, lust, envy, pride, fear, apathy and selfishness, no matter what you're struggling with, Jesus—the One Who has all power over all sin and all temptation—is saying to you today, “I came here to serve you.”

Then think about your struggles with suffering or when you face disappointment or even depression, Jesus is your Servant. He wants to serve you with joy and hope. When you face pain and grief, Jesus wants to serve you with peace and comfort.

Think about families who have lost loved ones this last year. Christmas is going to be a pretty tender time. Know this: you are not alone this Christmas. Jesus is your Servant. He wants to serve you in every way your soul needs.

Jesus is with you to serve you in that moment, in that doctor's office, when you get that diagnosis that you never could have imagined hearing. In that moment, know this: Jesus is your Servant. He's there to wait on you, to help you.

I think about Eleanor and Johnny out in the Prince William campus with their four-year-old little girl, Ashley. We've shared their story before. Eleanor has fought through serious stomach cancer and she's been doing so well, but this week they discovered new cancer on her small intestines that is inoperable. So they're exploring chemo. But this is Christianity—not just that Jesus saved this brother and sister from their sin, but that Jesus is with this brother and sister right now as their Servant. That's Christianity.

Jesus is your Servant in every circumstance that this life brings you. Every single follower of Jesus within the sound of my voice, be sure of this: there is coming a day when you will breathe your last breath. You don't know when. It could be today. It could be tomorrow. It could be years from now. You don't know when, but you can know in that moment, when you breathe your last breath, the King Who conquered death will be there to serve you and usher you into eternal life with Him.

This is the incredible news of the Bible. Jesus came to suffer like you. He came to die instead of you. He came to free you from slavery to sin. He came to show you how to love. And Jesus came to be your Servant. So look to Him, love and worship Him. In that way, every moment of every day, Jesus is your Servant.

Let's pray.

Oh Jesus, we praise You for this truth. It is breathtaking to even think about! Then to think that it's a reality right now, that You're saying to every one of us that You came to serve us, is overwhelming. I pray that these words will soak deeply into individual hearts right now. No matter what people are going through, I pray they would have their spiritual eyes open in this moment to see You, Jesus, saying, “I came to serve you. I came to serve you.”

God, I pray even right now, as we respond to this Word, that You would bring some people to be served by You for the first time through a personal relationship with You, to be saved from their sin, to trust in You to cover over the stain of sin in their hearts. I pray for that reality to happen today.

Then, God, I pray that in our lives—in my life—that You would teach us what it means to be served by You, moment by moment, to live with dependence on You serving us with everything we need. We praise and love You, God, and we pray this in Jesus' name—the name of Jesus, our Servant. Amen.

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