

That word “ransom” (Mark 10:35-45)

Like the disciples, we’ve missed the point here.

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It is rather jarring to read Jesus predict his own death and resurrection, only to be followed by a discussion amongst his closest friends that completely minimizes the seriousness of said prediction.

Sadly, our passage is not the first time this happens in Mark. Twice before this Jesus speaks of his death and resurrection, only to be met with foolish commentary by the disciples. The first time Peter has the audacity to rebuke Jesus, and the second time this passion prediction is followed by a question about who is the greatest among them.

Because this precedent has already been set, the response from the disciples in our text should not be surprising. By now perhaps we should expect it. But every single time I read it, I can’t shake how odd it seems that the disciples would hear Jesus talk about his pain and suffering and then follow with comparatively trivial conversation.

Beyond the obvious difference in importance between Jesus’ passion and where the disciples get to sit at the table, there is exemplified here such a dramatic misunderstanding of the moment—one that has serious repercussions. How could they miss Jesus’ plainly stated mission statement not once, not twice, but three times in such seemingly short succession? It’s almost hard to believe—until you realize that so many of us have been doing the same thing with this entire pericope for years.

The verse that ends this passage uses a word, *ransom*, that is a kind of one-off in the New Testament, mentioned here and in the synoptic parallel of this encounter. Yet it has launched endless atonement theory variations wrestling with the cosmic calculus of salvation.

In reading this passage, how did we miss Jesus' mission statement so badly? We know this story through and through. Jesus corrects James and John, letting them know that they need to be careful about what they're asking for. He tells them that their underlying assumptions about greatness are flawed and that if they truly want greatness they need to be servants. He tells them that if they want to be the first, they must be a slave to all. And his final statement is that he does not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

How do we miss it? How can this ransom that is offered be anything other than his entire life? Not simply his death and the salvific debt that is paid on the cross (if he's speaking about that at all here), but that he is giving up his entire life for the benefit of all.

I wish I could distance myself from the actions of the disciples in this text and say, "we're not like them." But collectively, we've missed the mission as well. We're so ready to think about the eschatological effect of Jesus' sacrifice that we often miss the exhortation here to give our entire lives in service to others. May our lives be ransom: not lives worthy of paying sin's debt, but lives given for the sake of others, sacrificed in service for the good of all.