

## Kingdom Leadership

(Mark 10:32-52)

Imagine you're out hiking in the woods and you lost any semblance of a trail hours ago; so you're stumbling through thick underbrush, winding your way through the trees and looking for some way back to where you started - when suddenly you come upon a well-manicured English garden, with plants and flowers carefully arranged and a wide, cobblestone path across it to the other side of the woods. What would you have to assume? There must be a gardener. Things like this don't just appear in the woods by themselves. Somebody put in a lot of thought and work in creating this garden, right? Now suppose you go to dinner at a restaurant. It's a popular place and you'll have to wait for a table. But as soon as you enter, you're warmly greeted by a host who takes your name, hands you a little buzzer which lets you know when your table is ready, and then personally escorts you to a comfortable table in a waiting area where you find soft drinks and chips and dips, compliments of the house. What would you have to assume? The manager here must be really good. These things don't happen by accident. Somebody has carefully thought through how to make people feel welcome, and then made sure that design is followed. Or imagine you're invited for dinner by a family with several small children; and you wonder how much adult conversation will actually take place. The kids are excited when you come and make you feel like Santa just arrived at their house. Each wants to show you their room, their toys, their pets, their backyard. They're just a lot of fun. And when it's time to sit down, your hostess tells you the kids have already eaten and they go to their room to watch a video while the adults have a leisurely meal and conversation. You keep waiting to hear a wail or a crash from the back of the house, but it's quiet. After dinner, the kids rejoin the adults and you play a few games before it's time for you to leave. Again, what would you have to assume? These parents are in control of their home. They've thought through the kind of atmosphere they want and they've followed through on their plan. Just as we wouldn't think a garden in the woods just happened, so too, anytime we see a family, a business, a school, a church, or any kind of enterprise that is working well and smoothly, we don't think it just happened. They all require leadership; someone who can see the way things need to work and is able to motivate, mobilize, resource and direct others to implement that vision. Leadership determines everything. A school reflects the principal, a company reflects the CEO, a family reflects the parents. Effective leadership makes the difference between failure and success, between excellence and mediocrity; and this morning as we continue looking at the ways Jesus confronted His culture with the values of the Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Mark, we're going to look at the difference between leadership in God's kingdom and leadership in our culture. Jesus was the greatest leader the world has ever known. He never wrote a book, never held an office, never led an army and yet in 3 short years He set in motion a movement which changed the face of the world. And yet He breaks most of the rules about the way the cultures of this world says leaders are to operate. Most of us are in some kind of leadership position - in our family, at work, in our church or in the community; and so this is a valuable topic for us to consider this morning; and we learn three lessons from Jesus about kingdom leadership in Mark 10. 1. Leaders in God's kingdom lead by following. 2. Leaders in God's kingdom lead by contributing. 3. Leaders in God's kingdom lead by example.

The first lesson we learn from Jesus in this passage about leadership is that leaders in God's kingdom lead by following. In the kingdom of God, a person isn't a leader because they hold a position; or because of the power of their own will or personality, or because people like them. The kingdom of God exists wherever God is king; and in God's kingdom, only those who obey Him are put into leadership. Jesus was a leader, not because He was elected or because He was popular, but because He got His marching orders from God. Kingdom leadership is never a popularity contest. There were times when Jesus was very popular and times when Jesus was very unpopular, but Jesus remained unfazed by either popularity or unpopularity because His focus was on following His Father; on pleasing God rather than pleasing people; which is once again evident in Mark 10. Jesus and His disciples are now close to Jerusalem and the end of His ministry, and so Jesus reminds His men one more time about what's about to happen. *"They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of*

*them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful.* (Why are those following Jesus both amazed and afraid? For a long time now, Jesus' enemies have been trying to arrest Him and put Him to death but as long as He stayed up north in Galilee and out of Judea, the religious establishment with its base in Jerusalem couldn't touch Him. But Jerusalem is where Jesus is going now; and His disciples are terrified of what might happen.) *"And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man (which was a popular name for the Messiah in first century Israel) will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again."* (Mark 10:32-34) For several months now, Jesus has been telling His disciples what will happen to Him in Jerusalem, and once again He predicts His betrayal, arrest, torture, mocking, crucifixion and resurrection. How did Jesus know what would happen to Him? Over and over He tells His disciples, "It is written." This is what the OT Scripture said would happen to the Messiah. Jesus understood the Scriptures and the plan of God; and submitted Himself wholly to it; and the closer Jesus gets to the cross, the more often He reminds His disciples that all this is happening so that what was written in the Prophets might be fulfilled. So, from whom was Jesus getting His marching orders? Clearly not from His followers: the last thing they wanted was for Him to die, because they didn't yet understand that His death and resurrection were at the heart of God's plan to save mankind. If Jesus had tried to please His disciples, we would still be lost in our sins. And He certainly wasn't following the great crowds which constantly surrounded Him now. They wanted to make Him king. They thought the kingdom of God was about to appear. But Jesus was a leader because He knew who to follow. He alone understood what the Father had given Him to do and He was going to do it, whether anyone else approved or even understood.

Mahatma Gandhi is supposed to have said, "There go my people and I must follow them because I am their leader." And we're attracted by his humility. But I think Gandhi was speaking tongue-in-cheek there because Gandhi didn't follow his people; he had his own unique vision for India from which he refused to be swayed. Leadership is always about change. If people don't need to change, leadership is unnecessary. And because we naturally resist change, a leader must be clear in their own mind about where he or she is going and must have the courage to go there especially when others disagree. Clarity and courage are essential for effective leadership, because most problems – whether in business, politics, the church or the home – are the result of leaders who refuse to lead; leaders more concerned with protecting their position than with taking people where they need to go or helping people to get the job done; leaders who won't confront bullying or incompetence or distraction or substandard work. And the absence of clear and courageous leaders who lead is particularly acute today in our homes. This is the age of the child-driven home and parents controlled by their children's agenda rather than vice versa. There is so much distrust of the abuse of authority that many parents have swung to the other extreme and have abdicated authority. They want to be their child's friend instead of their child's parent. They plead, they negotiate, they avoid uncomfortable but necessary conversations, and as a result, an entire generation of children is growing up with no respect for authority – because they've never experienced being under authority. True leadership is a tremendous challenge because there will always be push back; because we all doubt ourselves and because we all want to be liked. I've been leading Creekside for over 25 years and my greatest failings as a leader have been in the areas of clarity and courage. There have been lots of times when I wasn't always clear about what God had called us to do. And there have been times when even though I was clear, I didn't have the courage to do it. So where do I find the clarity to recognize where change is needed and the courage to lead others to change? This is where the example of Jesus and kingdom leadership is so helpful. How did Jesus know what to do? And where did He find the courage to do it? "It is written." Jesus knew what God had called Him to do because He knew the Scriptures; and He leads others not by imposing His own will on people nor by following the will of the people but by following His Father's instructions. He lives under God's authority and that is why He has authority. The most important lesson in leadership I have had to learn is that my job is not to be popular or to keep people happy, or even to get people to follow me. My job is to follow Christ, to be faithful to what He calls me to do, and to lead in the direction He wants us to go. If I do that, whether anybody follows is not my responsibility. And if you are a leader, that's your job too, whether as a parent, a teacher, a boss or an employer. Our master is in heaven and our job is to do His will in our leadership. So how do we do that?

Normally, the need for leadership appears as a need for change. Something isn't working. Often there's conflict. Maybe the need for change is at home. There are conflicting schedules; everybody is always hurrying from one

thing for another. There's chaos and tension. You know we can't go on forever like this; something has to change. Or maybe the need for change is at work. We keep running up against the same obstacle. We keep having the same problem. We keep making the same mistake. Or maybe the need for change is in the church. We're losing momentum. People are just going through the motions. Nobody's heart is in it any more. Or maybe the need for change is in the community. People are slipping through the cracks. Needs aren't being met. Resources are being wasted. You get the idea. Whether we're talking home, work, church or community, if something doesn't change, we're in trouble. So how do you lead by following God in that situation? The first thing you do won't surprise anybody; you pray. James writes, *"If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all generously and without reproach."* How can I know what God wants me to do unless I ask? Then after I pray for guidance I ask a very simple question. "What's the right thing to do?" Not "What's the expedient thing to do?" or "What does my wife want me to do?" or "What do my children want?" Or what will keep everybody happy and cause the least conflict? And especially not "What do I want?" God's will generally is stated in moral terms; in terms of right and wrong and so I need to ask, "What's the right thing to do - the most honest, the most compassionate, the most fair, the most Christ-like thing to do?" Normally, you will know in your conscience the right answer. And if you don't, get some counsel from those who know the Scriptures and who walk with Christ. Because once you know the right thing to do and what God wants, you will find you have both the clarity and the courage you need to lead. And it will keep your ego and your personal agenda and your insecurities and your need to win out of it. This is about obeying God; not about enforcing my will on others. Kingdom leaders only lead by following. My job is to come up with the world's greatest plan, it is to follow Jesus and Jesus makes His will clear in the Bible. I find the more I make obeying Him my goal, the more people seem to follow and the more we get done together. Leaders in God's kingdom lead by following; and when we cease to be first and foremost follower of Christ, we cease to be leaders in Christ's kingdom.

Here is a second lesson about Kingdom Leadership from Mark 10: leaders in God's kingdom lead by contributing. Kingdom leaders are interested in what they can give; not in what they can get. Remember when you were a kid - how you envied your parents? They got to do what they wanted to do. They got to stay up as late as they wanted, they got to watch whatever TV programs they wanted, eat what they wanted, spend their money the way they wanted. And we thought, "I can't wait to be an adult and be the one in charge." And that's why some people want to be leaders. They look at leadership as the one who gets to be in control, the one who gets the perks, the one who gets the corner office. I think that's the way Jesus' disciples looked at leadership because right after Jesus reminds His disciples about what's about to happen to Him in Jerusalem, two of His disciples, James and his brother John, approach Jesus with a request. *"James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, \*came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on {Your} left, in Your glory." (Mark 10:15-37)* This is the third time Jesus has talked with His disciples about what awaits Him and each time He ends having to correct His disciples' false ideas about leadership. The first time Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to the cross, Peter says, "God forbid! That can't happen to You! The Messiah's can't be rejected and killed!" Jesus tells Peter that he's not thinking about God's interests but his own; and then He tells the disciples that if they want to follow Him they are going to have to deny themselves and take up their cross. The second time Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to the cross, they begin to argue about which of them is the greatest - completely missing what He's been talking about; and again, Jesus has to correct them again and tells them that anyone who wants to be first will be last of all and servant of all. And now as Jesus reminds His disciples one more time about what's about to happen to Him, He has to correct their ideas of leadership once again. James and John know that one day Jesus will rule over the entire earth and they want to rule with Him. *"Grant that we may sit, one on your right and one on your left in your glory."* Only very special people could sit next to a king, because it is a position of equality. So James and John are asking Jesus to put them over everybody else. Yet Jesus doesn't say, "What's the matter with you guys? How can you be so arrogant?" He just tells them they don't realize what they're asking for. *"But 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?" (Mark 10:38)* Jesus asks these ambitious brothers, "Are you ready to pay the price of what you're asking for? Are you ready to go to the cross with Me?" Most people who long to be the one in charge, have no idea of the high cost of leadership; that there is always a cross that comes with the crown. Jesus talks about a cup He must drink and a baptism He must undergo before He wears His crown. The cup is a symbol of all we experience in life - both good and bad. When Jesus is

praying in the Garden before He is arrested, He says, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will but Your will be done," What cup is Jesus referring to? Everything He will experience in dying the death we deserved to die and bearing the punishment we deserved to bear; the suffering, the anguish, the pain, the rejection, the mocking, the scourging, the spitting; everything wrapped up in crucifixion – and that's the cup Jesus asks the Zebedee brothers if they're ready to drink. Baptism is a picture of an event which totally affects us and transforms us; and again, Jesus is talking about His sufferings. "Are you guys ready to be baptized with the same baptism I'll be?" "Are you ready to go through the same sufferings I go through in order to one day sit on My throne." Jesus never tells the disciples their desire for leadership is wrong. He tells them they haven't really counted the cost of that desire yet. *"They said to Him, 'We are able,'* (Mark 10:39) which is about the stupidest statement in the Bible. "Sure Jesus, whatever you endure, we can endure. Bring it on." These brothers have no idea what awaits Jesus. But Jesus doesn't argue with them. *'And Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized.'* James was the first of the 12 to be martyred, beheaded by King Herod and his brother, John was the last of the 12 to die - burned in oil for his faith. James and John did drink the cup Jesus drank and did follow Him into suffering. *"But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."* (Mark 10:39-40) Jesus tells these guys that He's not in a position to grant their request. Only the Father will decide who is rewarded with what in the kingdom and He alone knows who He has prepared the best seats for. Only one thing is for sure: the highest seats in the kingdom will be for those with the most scars; for those who have endured the most for following Jesus.

The other disciples have been listening to this conversation and there's another bench clearing brawl. *"Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant (extremely angry) with James and John."* (Mark 10:41) "Who do you guys think you are? What makes you think you deserve to sit on Jesus' right and left any more than the rest of us?" So Jesus steps in. *"Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, 'You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them.'* The disciples were very familiar with the Roman officers and government officials who ruled Israel; always looking down on them and acting like big shots. But Jesus says that leaders in the culture are not our models for kingdom leadership *"But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."* (Mark 10:42-45) Jesus says there is nothing wrong with wanting to be great or to be the best. What matters is the road we take to get there. In the kingdom, the road up always leads down. The leader is the servant; and the greater a leader you are, the more people you serve. Kingdom leaders are concerned with what they can contribute to others: not with what we get from others. And Jesus is the model of this kind of kingdom leadership. Even though He is the King, the ruler not only of Israel but of the entire earth, He didn't come to earth to be served but to serve and to give His life as our ransom, buying us out of the slave market of sin. He is the ruler who serves and the servant who rules. In the kingdom, a leader leads by contributing to the welfare of others. You know, servant leadership has become a popular concept in the business world, primarily through the research and writing of management expert, Robert Greenleaf, who created the term back in the 60s. If you look for books on Servant Leadership on Amazon today, you'll find literally hundreds: *Leaders Eat Last, The Power of Servant Leadership, The Servant as Leader.* Of course Christians have been familiar with servant leadership for centuries because of Jesus. *"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many."* I've known for a long time that to lead effectively, I must be a servant to those whom I lead; but what I've discovered recently is that I have to be a servant leader; not just a servant. In fact, I've found that it is easy to think I'm leading when all I'm doing is serving and doing things for people. If I make sure there are pitchers of ice water at meetings I lead, or turn off all the lights and check all the doors in the building at the end of the day or pay for somebody's lunch, I figure I'm a servant leader. I may be a servant but simply giving people what they want or doing nice things for them doesn't make me a servant leader. A leader is always someone who knows where he or she is going and is able to persuade others to go with them; and if I don't know where I'm going or if nobody else is going there with me, I'm not a servant leader, no matter how many nice things I do for people. A leader leads. A leader takes people where they wouldn't go otherwise. As Tom Landry – the longtime coach of the Dallas Cowboys used to say, "My job is to make a bunch of men do what they don't want to do so they can accomplish what they want to accomplish." Servant leaders are concerned with what they can contribute to others. How can I develop others? Open doors or create opportunities for others?

They lead with others in mind: how can I contribute to others? Develop others? Make more leaders? Take others where they would not be able to go otherwise? Servant leaders are more concerned about what others are doing because of them than they are about what they are doing. For me, that means developing more preachers and teachers of the Scriptures; more disciple-making community group leaders; more people that can do what I do – which is far more costly than simply serving. When I simply serve someone by doing something for someone they could do for themselves, I'm in control. But when I try to lead someone or to develop someone, I'm no longer in control. They get to choose whether they'll follow or not. The success of my leadership is no longer in my hands but in the hands of those whom I lead. And that's why one of the biggest challenges any church staff member faces is measuring his or her ministry not by what they are doing but by what others are doing because of them. The same is true for parenting. I loved serving my kids. They were happy with me when I did and I like to please. "Hey Kids, want to go do something fun today?" "Sure Dad, what are we going to do?" I'd take them on some adventure and they thought I was the best dad ever. They didn't have the same reaction when I said, "Hey Kids, want to do something fun today? Let's pull the weeds out of the front yard." Yet that was serving them too; training them to see a job through to its conclusion, putting up with griping and complaining and distractions; when it would have been so much easier and faster to have done the job by myself. Leaders in God's kingdom lead by contributing; taking people beyond where they can go by themselves; opening up opportunities, and developing people to go beyond where we are. Ask yourself, what is my contribution to others? Who is better off because of me? Jesus taught us that in the kingdom, it's never what we get but what we give that matters.

I see a third thing we learn from Jesus about kingdom leadership in this passage. Kingdom leaders lead by example. Jesus just told His disciples that if they want to be first in God's kingdom, they must become the servant of all; and it is no accident that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all place the following incident right after this conversation because it perfectly illustrates how Jesus practiced what He preached. *"Then they \*came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar {named} Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. (Beggars in the first century were as common as the homeless are in big cities today and pretty much as invisible.) When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Now obviously, this man has heard about Jesus; and he seizes the opportunity, trying to get Jesus' attention.) Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Get the picture? Huge crowd, people pushing and shoving, trying to see Jesus; with a little knot of disciples around Jesus, like Secret Service agents around the President, trying to keep the crowd moving; with a blind beggar yelling at Jesus for attention along with hundreds of others. It's bedlam.) And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him {here.}" So they \*called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you." Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" (That's the way a servant speaks. "What can I do for you?) And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, (Teacher) {I want} to regain my sight!" And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and {began} following Him on the road. (Mark 10:46-52)* This miracle is identical to so many miracles already recorded in the gospels. So why is this particular miracle repeated in all three of the synoptic gospels? Jesus practiced what He preached. He led by example. He made Himself the servant of all. No one was beneath Him or unworthy of His attention. He exemplifies the attitude He just taught His disciples to have. Kingdom leaders lead by example – not by rhetoric or by personality or by position. In the kingdom, you are a leader because you model the values of the kingdom. That's why when Paul lays out the qualifications for elders – the leaders of the church - in 1 Timothy, he talks far more about the character of the leader than about his competency. That's why Peter tells church elders that they are to be examples to the flock. That's why Paul tell the Corinthians to "imitate me as I imitate Christ" in 1 Cor. 11:1. In our culture, people are leaders because of their education or because of their personality or because of their title. In the kingdom, people lead by example. That's why Jesus tells us to first take the log out of our own eye so we can see clearly to take the speck out of our brother's eye. Until I'm doing what I believe others should be doing, I am in no position to lead them. That means kingdom leaders lead from the front, not from the rear. They say, "Follow me and do what I do;" not, "Do what I say." One of my greatest motivations to keep growing in following Jesus has been my own children and now my grandchildren because I know that we reproduce what we are, not what we say. My example – good or otherwise – will have a far greater impact on my children than what I tell them. They will remember what their dad did long after they'll be able to remember anything I might have told them.

*The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.* That's why Jesus is the true leader of the kingdom. He exemplified everything in this passage. He leads by following: Paul writes in Philip 2:5-11 that even though Jesus is the Son of God and equal to His Father in every way, He humbled Himself and became a man out of obedience to His Father's will; and lived as God's obedient servant. That's why He said, "I do nothing on my own initiative but only what the Father gives me to do." And He leads by contributing and giving; becoming obedient to His Father even to the point of dying on the cross for our sins and in our place so that we could be pardoned and redeemed and restored to the destiny God created us for. Jesus does for us what we could not do for ourselves. He puts us ahead of Himself, our need ahead of His safety, convenience and comfort; and then He calls us to follow His example and to treat others the way He has treated us. If you are a leader, there is no better example to follow than Jesus. However, Jesus isn't just our example, He is our enabler. The message of the Bible is pretty simple. Here's what you're supposed to do. Here's how you've failed to do it. Here's how Jesus did it for you. Here's how Jesus will do it in you. We're saved by what Jesus has done in the past and we're saved by what Jesus is doing right now. I cannot lead you anywhere but Jesus can. He is a much better leader than I. He is better than my best ideas, my best plans and best strategies. My job isn't to lead you, but to follow Him. Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives within me and the life I live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." That's the way we lead and the way we live; by faith in Christ who lives within us and gives us the strength, the clarity, the courage to follow Him and to lead others.

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