

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Mark 10:32-45

Year B - Lent 5, Text: Mark 10:(32-34) 35-45
Year B - Lent 5, Text: (John 12:20-33)

As pointed out in previous pericope studies, Mark's Gospel contains three blocks of prediction, confusion, and clarification (Mark 8:27-38; Mark 9:30-37; and Mark 10:32-44). For no apparent reason, the prediction element (10:32-34) is considered an "optional" part of this pericope selection. It should be cited when dealing with this passage.

Verse 10:32 refers to Jesus and the disciples "going up to Jerusalem." Regardless of what direction they were coming from, when people approached Jerusalem, they "went up." When they departed from Jerusalem, they "went down." After all, God's people believed that Jerusalem and its Temple were situated on the highest mountain, the spiritual pinnacle, of the world.

In typical rabbinic style, Jesus walks ahead of the disciples along with a second group of followers. The disciples are amazed and the followers are afraid. Jesus takes the disciples aside and begins to tell them (and therefore continued to tell them) what will happen to Him after He enters Jerusalem.

Verses 10:33-34: Jesus predicts His coming trial, passion, death, and resurrection in detail. Note that He refers to Himself as "the Son of Man," a term used 82 times in the four Gospels (NRSV).

To understand the significance of this term, it is essential to understand the book of Daniel (particularly chapter 7). The message of Daniel is that the Jewish people have suffered for centuries under a series of foreign powers: the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians, the Greeks, the Ptolemies — and now the Seleucids. The writer assures his readers that the time will soon come when the Jewish people ("the Son of Man"/"the saints of the Most High") will overthrow and dominate the nations of the world forever. However, Jesus rejected that hope and set about forming a community that would serve the nations of the world forever.

Verses 10:35-40: James and John come to Jesus with a request. (In Matthew 20:20-23, it is their mother who makes the request.) They ask that they might be assigned places of honor to His right and left hand when He is enthroned as Messianic King in Jerusalem. The brothers simply do not understand what Jesus has been teaching them. Their hope is to sit on thrones of gold. Little do they understand that they are asking to be nailed to crosses to the right and left of Jesus.

In the conversation that follows, Jesus sets out to change their view of things. Are James and John ready to endure being drowned in pain? Furthermore, the only one who has the authority to assign people a place of special dignity, to Jesus' right or left, is His Father.

Verses 10:41-43: The other ten disciples respond to the brothers' selfish request as we might expect. Jesus calls the disciples together and reminds the Twelve of the pagan pattern of absolute rule. In the pagan world, the "power boys" know nothing of the equality that characterizes the sons of Abraham, and still less of the principle of service that will distinguish Jesus' followers: "If you want to be great, serve!"

Verses 10:44-45: The two sayings in these verses reflect that in v. 43, although they are more strongly worded. A slave (*doulos*) is much lower in the social scale than a servant (*diakonos*); the slave's submission is to be total. The mission of Jesus, the Son of Man, is demonstrated in His serving, which will eventually involve paying a ransom price with life itself.

The Jewish world knew of both brigandage and the holding of hostages for ransom. Our Lord speaks of profiting many (i.e., all). In His Person, the Son of Man is one with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. He dies that a multitude might live.

