

A Ransom for Many

David Flatt

In the tenth chapter of Mark, Jesus spoke to the apostles of His death. This was the third time Jesus told them about going to Jerusalem to die (Mark 10:32-34). In response, they ask about their roles in Jesus' kingdom. The apostles were interested in power. Instead, Jesus spoke about self-giving service, indicating the meaning of His death.

“You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

The importance of this text cannot be overstated. It represents the great theological treaty of the gospel of Mark. Jesus states the meaning of His death. It would be a ransom. His death would purchase the freedom of the world.

While the apostles did not grasp what Jesus was conveying at this moment, in time they would. A proper understanding of this text requires an analysis of the cross of Jesus. The New Testament is designed to teach us the meaning of the cross of Jesus.

The Meaning of the Cross

1). The importance of the cross. In the opening of the Bible, Genesis shows us three problems. Genesis chapter three is about sin invading the world and its consequence of decay and death. Genesis chapter six describes human corruption. Genesis chapter eleven documents the rebellion of the nations against God. God divorces the nations and chooses someone new through whom to fulfill His promises. The cross of Jesus solves each of these problems.

First, sin was destroyed at the cross of Jesus. God used the Law of Moses to trap sin. Then, in the flesh of Jesus, God destroyed sin (Rom. 8:1-4). Second, righteousness was exonerated at the cross of Jesus. God brought evil into check at the cross. Third, the human family was reconstituted at the cross of Jesus. By faith in the cross of Jesus, everyone could be brought back into the family of God.

There is no alternative solution to any of these problems. Only the cross of Jesus can deal with our sins, make us righteous, and unify the human family. This is why Paul could write, “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14).

2). The cross changes our hearts. Self-giving love radiates from the cross of Jesus. What is the greatest text ever written about love? Undeniably, it is 1 Corinthians chapter thirteen. In the middle section, Paul wrote, “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

What was Paul thinking about when he wrote this passage? He must have been thinking about Jesus, his Savior, and ours. Each of the traits Paul lists can be seen at the cross of Jesus. The self-giving love of Jesus was never lost on Paul. It deeply changed him. By love, the cross of Jesus draws us to Him and can deeply change us.

3). The cross redefines our purpose. In Mark chapter ten, Jesus drew a contrast between the kingdoms of the Gentiles/the Roman Empire and His kingdom. The Romans used power to oppress. In the kingdom of Jesus, power would be used to serve.

At its core, every expression of sin is selfishness. The cross enables us to look beyond ourselves and seek the welfare of others first. When our hearts are changed, our purpose will change too. As Paul wrote, “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

4). The cross points to a bright future. Why did God destroy sin at the cross? Why did He exonerate righteousness? Why did He reconstitute the human family? God has a future for His people. He is going to bring us into His new world.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul reasserted the importance of the message of the cross. He cited an ancient writer to emphasize the bright future made possible by the cross: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9). In the next chapter, he stated, “For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's” (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

We cannot begin to fully conceive the new world of God and what He has planned for us. The cross points to this hopeful future. By believing what God accomplished at the cross of Jesus, we can become signposts pointing the world to this glorious future.

Conclusion

Jesus died as a ransom for many. He purchased the freedom of everyone. As big as the self-giving love of Jesus is, His love is also focused. His love is specifically directed at each one of us. The cross of Jesus can save us from our sins and transform our lives. But we must believe and obey.