

# **First Serve**

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Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 10:32-45

Topic

The twelve disciples of Jesus want to sit on thrones, but Jesus tells them they must first serve as slaves

Title

*"12 Jeers toward Slaves"*

## Introduction

Having a heavier waiter may cause you to eat more at a restaurant.

That's the latest finding from Cornell University's Food and Brand Lab, which over the years has produced surprising results about the unconscious factors that influence eating, like music and lighting.

In the current study, diners with heavier servers were four times likelier to order dessert, and they ordered 17% more alcoholic beverages.

Speaking of waiters, you may have seen the recent story out of the United Kingdom where a restaurant owner defended one of his waiters who suffers from autism after customers complained.

He took the discussion over to Facebook, where his defense of his waiter garnered over 19,000 'likes.'

One person commented, "Too many customers think they have the right to treat hospitality staff any way they want to. *They are wrong!!*"

A long-time waiter who writes a blog about server-diner relations likes to say, "We are servers, *not servants.*"

I was thinking about waiters because Jesus uses a word for "servant" that can describe those who wait tables.

His disciples can't wait to sit on thrones, but Jesus tells them that they must wait for the Kingdom of God on earth, and in the mean time, they will be expected to wait tables.

While your waiter at a restaurant is a server and not a servant, a disciple of Jesus Christ **is a server who is a servant.**

In fact, we are to be more than servants. A second word Jesus uses is "slave."

Today's Bible study will help us to gauge whether or not we are servers or servants, and if we are servants, whether or not we are slaves.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Must Wait To Sit On Your Throne, and #2 You Should Wait By Serving Tables.

## #1 You Must Wait To Sit On Your Throne

(v32-40)

Ray Charles may have had Georgia on his mind, but the twelve disciples of Jesus had the Kingdom of God on theirs. They fully expected Jesus to establish the promised Kingdom and rule it from Jerusalem.

If you keep in mind their preoccupation with the Kingdom of God on earth, you'll understand why they kept ignoring Jesus telling them He was going to suffer and die at the hands of both the Jews and the Romans.

Mar 10:32 Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him:

Jerusalem is elevated, so you are always described as "going up" to it, no matter which direction you approach from. They were on their way there to celebrate Passover.

Jesus was out in front, being followed by the twelve, and they by a larger crowd.

The twelve were "amazed," and I'm guessing from their discussions along the way that their amazement was in thinking it was at that time Jesus would establish the Kingdom.

The rest of the followers "were afraid." Jesus was in conflict with the religious leaders in Jerusalem; in fact, they wanted to kill Jesus. He had been avoiding direct confrontation with them, but now He was determined to get to Jerusalem. It was sure to be explosive.

Jesus tells His guys, for the third time, that He is going to Jerusalem to be killed.

Mar 10:33 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; Mar 10:34 and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."

The name, "Son of Man," comes from the seventh chapter of the Book of Daniel. It describes the Jewish Messiah, Who would inaugurate the Kingdom of God on the earth.

In a previous study we looked at Daniel, and we talked about why the twelve were so confused. They believed that Jesus was the Son of Man, the Messiah Who would rule, but they could not reconcile the Scriptures that described Him as the Suffering Servant Who must die.

Jesus was very specific, very detailed, about how He would be treated by both the Jewish leaders and by the Roman authorities. He didn't say He would be crucified, but He didn't need to, because it was understood. Rome didn't crucify its own citizens, but it was how they executed foreigners.

Don't overlook, "and the third day... rise again." Jesus was going to the Cross by divine appointment, to accomplish something cosmic. You see what it was in verse forty-five, "to give His life a ransom for many."

I've had folks ask for prayer because of various medical procedures they must undergo. As they describe what is going to happen to them - the poking, the prodding, the cutting, the chemo - I cringe, and commit to praying for them.

I can't even imagine someone saying, "In a few days, I'm going to be condemned, spit upon, mocked, scourged, and crucified." It seems that it would make a deep impression - especially if it were someone I was close to.

That's why what James and John do next is so incredible.

Mar 10:35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask."

John Stott calls this the most selfish prayer ever prayed. I'd have to agree, and then be ashamed, because I've prayed along these lines, too. Not these exact words, of course, but definitely with this attitude.

"Do whatever we ask." That's mind-blowing. It is the height of arrogance and folly to think I ought to receive whatever I ask from God.

They hadn't asked; they wanted a waver to ask anything. Sometimes we talk about people approaching God as if He were a genie in a bottle obligated to grant your wishes. This is pretty close to that.

Mar 10:36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

I'm thinking Jesus would have been right to just say "No," emphatically. Instead, He was patient with them. I'm glad He was, because we get to see their ridiculous request.

Mar 10:37 They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."

Their request was not completely out of left field. In the telling of this walk to Jerusalem in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said to the twelve, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (19:28).

They *were* promised thrones in the Kingdom of God. They did not realize that the Kingdom was being postponed, and would not be established until Jesus came back a second time. The whole crucifixion/resurrection/ascension-into-Heaven-for-an-unspecified-period-of-time was foreign to them.

They did not yet grasp that the Kingdom of God they would know in their lifetimes was the spiritual rule of God over the hearts of those whom they would reach with the Gospel - starting on the Day of Pentecost and continuing to today. They did not yet grasp it would be an invisible spiritual Kingdom that exists in the midst of the kingdom of the devil, and the kingdoms of men.

Mar 10:38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

The two images, the cup and baptism, are Old Testament pictures of being fully immersed in something, inside and out. Suffering was usually what they represented. Jesus was talking about His impending suffering, which is made clear a little later in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He asks His Father if it is possible to take away the "cup" of suffering.

James and John weren't thinking suffering. I'm going to make up a word: They were thinking *sovereigning* - they were thinking of ruling over others from a throne.

Mar 10:39 They said to Him, "We are able." So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized;

Guys, guys. Of course they were not "able." They were not really listening to Jesus.

They were not able, but later they would be enabled, after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, to be immersed in, and to drink their own cups of, suffering:

- James would get arrested and then beheaded by Herod Antipas.
- John would miraculously survive being boiled in oil, only to be exiled to the Island of Patmos in his 90's.

Mar 10:40 but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared."

Jesus **will** sit on a throne in Jerusalem. In the Revelation, in the midst of the Tribulation, we read, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (11:15).

In chapter twenty of the Revelation it says, "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them... And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (v4).

There will be a physical Kingdom of God on the earth that will last one thousand years. Afterwards comes eternity in either Hell or Heaven.

James and John are still waiting to see which thrones they will occupy. Jesus is content to let His Father assign responsibilities in the future Kingdom of God on the earth.

As far as thrones go, we, too, will sit on them. First Corinthians 6:2&3 portray us as judging the world, and as judging angels. Revelation 3:21 predicts a time when Jesus sits on His Kingdom throne, and Christians are seated with Him.

It is in our future to rule and reign with Jesus - seated on thrones.

**But not now.** Now the Kingdom is the spiritual rule of God in human hearts that receive the Gospel. We have work to do - as servants, and as slaves.

## #2 You Should Wait By Serving Tables

(v41-45)

Am I a server, or a servant? If I'm a servant, am I a slave? Those are the questions suggested by Jesus' discussion with the disciples.

Mar 10:41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John.

I wonder how Peter felt? Among the twelve, Peter, James, and John often formed an inner circle around Jesus. They were privileged to be with Him at times the other nine were not - like the raising of a little girl from the dead, and like on the Mountain of Transfiguration.

Now the two brothers aced Peter out of the equation.



The displeasure of the ten tells us that they, too, had throne-envy. They were upset that they'd been upstaged by James and John.

Mar 10:42 But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

What a concise summary of the world in which we live. The world values working to get ahead, to be on top, to have authority over others, who are seen as being 'under' your command.

Mar 10:43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.

"It" - this attitude of ruling over others - "shall not be so among you." Our spiritual life on earth now, while we wait for Jesus to return, is to bear absolutely no resemblance to the world's way of doing things.

BTW - A lot of what I read and hear about reaching those who are unchurched has to do with making the Gospel more mainstream so that we don't scare people off. Churches are going out of their way to seem less like churches. Truth is, people ought to know that the Gospel is radical, calling for, and empowering, radical changes.

Jesus described someone as "being your servant." Does He mean for you to kick-back and be served? Of course not.

He's giving you a way to properly evaluate people. The greatest Christians are those who serve you and others - *not* those who sit over you, ruling you, telling you what to do.

James and John, and the other ten, wanted to be seated on their thrones. Instead of being seated on thrones, we are to be serving tables.

The word for "servant" means *table server*; it is what we would call a waiter. You are not to be a person everyone serves; you are to be the person who serves everyone.

The word in Greek is *diakonos*, and you immediately recognize that from it we get our word deacon.

It is generally believed that the office of deacon originated in the selection of seven men by the apostles, among them Stephen, to assist with the charitable work of the early church as recorded in Acts chapter six.

Don't think of deacon in the sense of a board of guys that sits around making decisions and telling other people what to do. That is the exact opposite of what Jesus just said.

Another association with the word *diakonos* is 'not letting the dust settle.' You're so busy serving tables that it's kicking up dust and, before the dust can settle, you're back to serve even more.

I mentioned Stephen. He was the first martyr of the church age - stoned to death for his defense of the Gospel. He drank the cup; he was baptized with the baptism.

Which leads us to our first question for introspection: "Am I a server, or a servant?"

Each of us must answer for ourselves, and be careful to not compare ourself to others.

Be practical. Delineate what it is you do to serve the Lord. Not just in the church - although serving the household of faith is important.

Just existing as a Christian isn't serving the Lord. You have to actually be doing something. If you say, "I'm a Christian such-and-such," then what are you doing in your activities to promote the Gospel?

If you **are** doing things, do you think you can quit serving anytime you choose? Because, if you are serving as unto the Lord, you can't quit; you need to be released by Him.

I think we'd have to admit there are those who are servers, *not* servants. If that's you - admit it, then abandon the concept once-and-for-all.

Jesus wasn't done. Being a servant is a good start, but you really want and need to be a **slave**.

[Mar 10:44](#) And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.

If you recognize greatness by seeing believers serving, then you ought to desire to be the lowest servant in every situation. You ought to desire to be a "slave."

Here is a surprising fact: If you look in the Old Testament in the King James Version, you will find the English word "slave" only once.

But the Hebrew word appears 800 times in the noun form, and nearly 300 in the verb form. There is a word in the Old Testament for “slave” that appears eleven hundred times, but in your English Bible it’s only translated “slave” once.

If you go to the New Testament, you will find the Greek word for “slave” about 150 times in all its forms. And you will find it actually translated “slave” only a few of those 150 times.

These facts caused one scholar to comment, "the word “slave” is the most important, all-encompassing, and clarifying word to describe a Christian used in the New Testament, and yet whenever a Christian is in view, it’s not translated “slave."

We all have our images of slavery, and they are rightfully very bad ones, I'd guess, so this idea of being a slave is a hard sell. The translators chose words like "servant," and "bondservant" instead of "slave."

You've heard about the Jewish bondservant. It comes from Exodus 21:1-6. According to the Law, a man who couldn't pay a debt he owed had to become the servant of his creditor in order to work off the debt, or until the next sabbath year, whichever was shorter. If, during the time of his temporary service, he concluded that his master was a good man to work for, he could voluntarily convert his term of service into a life long commitment. In doing so he was agreeing to permanently subordinate his own interests in favor of his master's, to do whatever the master required. It was the servant's choice to enter into a bondservant relationship with his master, but once the agreement was made he could not choose to undo it later. It was a lifelong commitment.

If his master agreed, they would go before the judges to make the arrangement official, and then the master would drive an awl through his servant's earlobe and into the door post of the house. This was to signify that the servant had become permanently "attached" to the master's household. According to some traditions a golden ring was inserted through the hole in the bond servant's ear to memorialize the event.

You'd go from indentured servant to voluntary slave. I think that is the progression Jesus intends us to consider - going from servants to slaves.

Thus the next question: "Are you a servant, or are you a slave?" Again, each of us must consider that for ourself. But consider it we must, because the church age in which we live is the time when Jesus needs slaves who understand that their lives are totally in His hands.

Jesus isn't asking you to do anything He hasn't already done:

Mar 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

"Ransom" refers to a payment to effect the release of slaves or captives from bondage. The human race is held captive under the power of Satan and sin and death from which they cannot free themselves. Jesus' death paid the price that sets people free.

The preposition "for," used in Mark only here, reinforces the idea of substitution. It means *instead of, in the place of*.

Jesus gave His life a ransom, instead of you and I having to die. He took our place - the place of "many."

We are to understand “many” in the inclusive sense of “all.” It emphasizes how a large number derive the benefit from the single sacrifice of the one ransomer.

I'm not just making that up because I want it to be true. In First Timothy 2:5-6 we read,

1Ti 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,

1Ti 2:6 who gave Himself **a ransom for all**, to be testified in due time,

I mentioned that Jesus and the twelve were on their way to Jerusalem, to celebrate Passover. There, in the Upper Room, as they sat on cushions around a low, oval table, there were no servants, no slaves, to help them; just the thirteen of them.

At one point Jesus would get up, take off His outer garment, and gird Himself up as a slave would, to go around and wash the disciples feet.

It represented His decision in eternity past to voluntarily set aside the prerogatives of His deity, and take on the body of a man, in order to serve the human race as a slave - washing us clean by the power of His blood shed on the Cross at Calvary.

We know that Jesus was God's final sacrifice for sin. He was therefore called the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.

At Passover, just as the lambs were being slain in the Temple, Jesus died on the Cross.

It all comes together in Revelation 5:8-10(ESV), where we read,

Rev 5:8 And when [Jesus] had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the **Lamb**, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Rev 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were **slain**, and by your blood you **ransomed** people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,

Rev 5:10 and you have made them a **kingdom** and priests to our God, and they shall **reign** on the earth."

Jesus was the Lamb that was slain to ransom everyone who would believe in Him, and He will, in the future, set us on thrones to reign on the earth.

We often use the word "volunteer" when discussing areas of service in the life of our church family. It would be more biblical to use the word "slave."

Server... Servant... Slave. Rate yourself and make the necessary changes.