

Becoming Great in His Kingdom

Mark 10 :35-45

Online Sermon:

http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567

"I once heard the story of a rice farmer who saved an entire village from destruction. From his hilltop farm he felt the earthquake and saw the distant ocean swiftly withdraw from the shoreline. He knew that a tidal wave was coming. In the valley below, he saw his neighbors working low fields that would soon be flooded. They must run quickly to his hilltop, or they would all die. His rice barns were dry as tinder. So, with a torch he set fire to his barns and soon the fire gong started ringing. His neighbors saw the smoke and rushed to help him. Then from their safe perch they saw the tidal wave wash over the fields they had just left. In a flash they knew not only who had saved them but what their salvation had cost their benefactor. They later erected a monument to his

memory bearing the motto, "***He gave us all he had, and gave gladly.***" This poor farmer finished first in the eyes of his community, but it cost him everything he had."¹

Though there be but one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-5) this does not mean that in our human nature believers have ceased to be like this farmer free from "self-glory, self-reliance, self-sufficiency,



and freed from the desire to pursue power, possessions, prestige and positions" of authority in the church.² If you

think for a moment that you are completely free from such self-glorifying passions then listen to the story in Mark 10:35-45 concerning two of Jesus' most prominent disciples. For a third and final time Jesus predicts His death and resurrection (8:31-33; 9:30-32).³ Although the disciples were "astonished" at

¹ Alan Carr, "[The High Cost of Finishing First \(Mark 10:35-45\)](#)," in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 862.

² Tony Evans, "[The Greatness of Servanthood](#)," in *Tony Evans Sermon Archive* (Tony Evans, 2015), Mk 10:35-45.

³ David Turner and Darrell L. Bock, [Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 11: Matthew and Mark](#) (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 492.

Jesus' passion-predictions (10:32) they could not “reconcile the idea of a suffering Savior with that of a conquering King.”⁴

Jesus promised the “apostles in regeneration that they would sit upon thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28).⁵ On the road to Capernaum this started a sharp dispute amongst the disciples who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God to which Jesus said, “anyone who wants to be first must be the very last and servant of all” (9:33-35).

Believing in faith that the kingdom of God was near,⁶ James, John, and their “mom” Salome sought a private meeting with Jesus (10:45) to politic a superior position of power and authority in His kingdom. The goal of this sermon is not to demean those who in the power of the Holy Spirit went on to do great things but to invite you the Christian reader to see how easy it is in our sinful nature to act upon Satan’s cunning

⁴ Douglas Mangum, ed., [Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament](#), Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Mk 10:32–34.

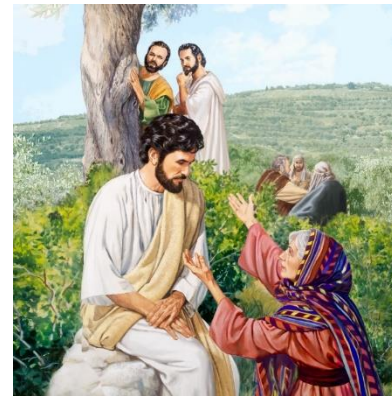
⁵ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., [St. Mark](#), vol. 2, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 64.

⁶ R. Alan Cole, [Mark: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 245.

whisper, “The Lord takes care of those who take care of themselves.”⁷ Let’s get back to the story and hear about their “audacious but sinful request.”

The Enormous Request

Holding onto “momma’s arm” these two “Sons of Thunder” in essence asked Jesus “for a monarch’s gift,” a blank cheque⁸ in which they could ask and receive anything from their Lord! While their open request “seems utterly preposterous”⁹ in their minds they were just claiming the promise Jesus made earlier, “ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). Despite their “ill conceived ambition”¹⁰ the Lord does not respond in indignation but grace



⁷ Daniel L. Akin, [Exalting Jesus in Mark](#), ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), Mk 10:35–40.

⁸ R. Alan Cole, [Mark: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 245.

⁹ Walter W. Wessel, “[Mark](#),” in [The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke](#), ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 719.

¹⁰ James R. Edwards, [The Gospel according to Mark](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 322.

and mercy and merely asks, “what do you want me to do for you?” They had brought “momma” with them in hopes that her being Mary’s sister and them being cousins to Jesus might curry favor in His eyes, as if genealogy had anything to do with either entrance or position in His kingdom.¹¹

“Despite Jesus’ constant teaching on lowly service (8:33-10:16),¹² they were not satisfied with merely ruling on one of the thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel they wanted more,¹³ “for one to sit at Jesus’ right and the other at Jesus’ left side in His glory” (10:37).

In Jewish social settings “the honor belonged to the person sitting in the center of the company followed by those who seated to the right and left, respectively.”¹⁴ James and John’s request in essence was to have the highest honored seats next to Jesus at the Messianic banquet¹⁵ so that their presumed superior leadership might become eternal and superior¹⁶ to

¹¹ Alan Carr, [“The High Cost of Finishing First \(Mark 10:35–45\),”](#) in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 863.

¹² D. A. Carson, [“The Gospels and Acts,”](#) in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 1796.

¹³ Daniel L. Akin, [Exalting Jesus in Mark](#), ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), Mk 10:35–37.

¹⁴ James R. Edwards, [“Mark,”](#) in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, ed. J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 887.

that of the other disciples and saints! Though they honored Jesus by addressing Him as “Teacher” and believing in great faith He was about to establish His kingdom,¹⁷ their insensitivity to the brutality of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice He was about to make only accentuated the truth that the yeast of the Pharisees for religious power and status had crept into their souls, not just theirs but all the apostles! “How easily worship and discipleship are blended with self-interest; or worse, self-interest is masked as worship and discipleship!”¹⁸

Reflection. The reader is left at this point to wonder how would the Lamb who was about to be slain correct the spoiled, sinful view that His children had of what it truly meant to be great in His kingdom? Would they ever stop defining greatness in terms of power, position and prestige and see it instead as being a servant to all? Are you currently serving with a servant’s heart or “what’s in it for me” attitude? Is your opinion the only one that matters or are you willing to seek God’s will with the family of saints which can do nothing without the Vine?

¹⁵ William L. Lane, [The Gospel of Mark](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 379.

¹⁶ Alan Carr, [“The High Cost of Finishing First \(Mark 10:35–45\),”](#) in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 862–863.

¹⁷ Clinton E. Arnold, [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke](#), vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 265.

¹⁸ James R. Edwards, [The Gospel according to Mark](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 322.

Don't Know What you are Asking!

In response to their outrageous request Jesus does not rebuke but gently reminds them they do not know the significance of their request! “The way to privileged position in the Messianic kingdom is not by grabbing for power but by



relinquishing it through suffering and death.”¹⁹ Since the pathway to glory²⁰ would not come without suffering Jesus

asks them, “can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with” (10:38)? While in the Old Testament the “cup” sometimes signified joy and prosperity (Psalms 16:5, 23:5, 116:13),²¹ most cases and in this context, it invites the disciples to see clearly the “cup of the Messiah’s bitter destiny (Mark 14:36-41).²² Jesus was about to be delivered over to the chief priests, teachers of the law and

Gentile authorities to be mocked, spit on, abandoned, and crucified and if that were not difficult enough to endure He was about to receive divine punishment from God and ransom His own life for the many (10:45) so that “by His sufferings we might be healed” (Isaiah 53:5)!²³

“It pleased God thus to make the Captain of our salvation perfect in sufferings!”²⁴ The disciples did not know what they were asking, for to “participate in Christ’s glory” they too must share in His passion and be willing to be totally buried²⁵ and immersed or baptized into His death for the sake of others!

“Baptism in this context is a violent image connected with sorrow and grief. It has about it the sense of being forcibly plunged beneath the waters, cast into the depths”²⁶ of suffering and persecution that led even the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane in considering His suffering servant role He was about to endure to sweat “like drops of blood falling to the

¹⁹ Walter W. Wessel, *“Mark,”* in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 720.

²⁰ Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), Mk 10:38–40.

²¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 322.

²² Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 265.

²³ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 380.

²⁴ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *St. Mark*, vol. 2, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 65.

²⁵ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *St. Mark*, vol. 2, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 65.

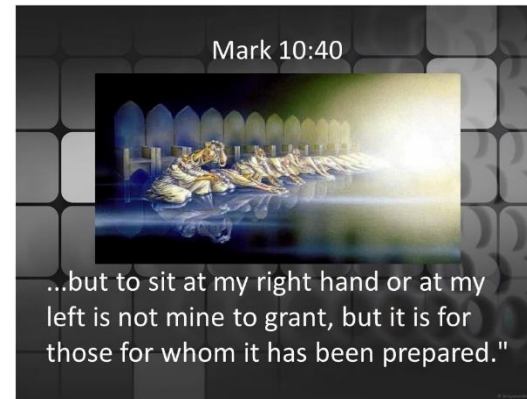
²⁶ Donald English, *The Message of Mark: The Mystery of Faith*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 181.

ground” (Luke 22:40-46)! In great naivete²⁷ both disciples affirm they can suffer like Jesus not knowing the irony that at the great moment of Christ’s passion it would be “two crucified rebels or terrorists (15:27)” on His left and right side, “making plain what in cold reality it meant to share in His cup and baptism!”²⁸

Request Denied

While their request was outrageous and even insulting to the One who would suffer and die to atone for the sins of the many, Jesus does not rebuke but instead invites James and John to a deeper understanding of glory in God’s kingdom. Jesus acknowledges that He had rightly nicknamed them both Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17)²⁹ for in a very limited sense they too would one day experience the cup and baptism of persecution for righteousness’s sake! James would be the first of the apostles to be “martyred at the hands of Herod Agrippa A.D. 44³⁰ and widespread tradition has John suffering and being exiled during the time of emperor Domitian but in the end dying of natural causes.³¹ Though neither of them could ever share in Christ’s ordained sufferings of atonement for the many, with gentleness and love Christ tells them that while their future

persecution and sacrifices were not going to be in vain, neither would they secure them a favoured position in His kingdom!³² The thrones were setup in the Ancient of Days and the Father alone has the authority to assign positions of power in His kingdom (Daniel 7)!³³ Even if He wanted too Jesus would not grant to James and John His left and right hand side at the Messianic banquet because God alone has granted these



positions to “those who they have been prepared.”³⁴ And since upon Christ’s return “you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” is it not likely that God the Father and the Holy Spirit rightly already have these honored places?

²⁷ Walter W. Wessel, [“Mark,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 720.

²⁸ R. Alan Cole, [Mark: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 246.

²⁹ James R. Edwards, [The Gospel according to Mark](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 323.

³⁰ James A. Brooks, [Mark](#), vol. 23, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 169.

³¹ James A. Brooks, [Mark](#), vol. 23, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 169.

³² Larry W. Hurtado, [Mark](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 171.

³³ Craig A. Evans, [The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke](#), ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 372.

³⁴ Walter W. Wessel, [“Mark,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 720.

Positions in the kingdom of God are not assigned based on lineage, money, power, entitlement but purely on the will of the God³⁵ who assigns one's spiritual gifts and subsequent roles!

Furthermore, while believers are to rejoice in every spiritual blessing at the hands of their Lord (Ephesians 1:3), the goal of their service is not to be reciprocally repaid blessings by His mighty hand³⁶ but to humbly offer oneself as a willing vessel to serve for His honor and glory! Christ is about to atone for the sins of the many on the cross but before He does so He wants the apostles to better understand how denying oneself, taking up one's cross and being a servant to the many is the key to being great and pleasing God the Father in heaven!

Seeking Positions of Power and Authority

When the other apostles heard about the private meeting³⁷ between Jesus and James, John, and their mother they became angry with them. They were not angry because their fellow apostles had been so insensitive to make such an

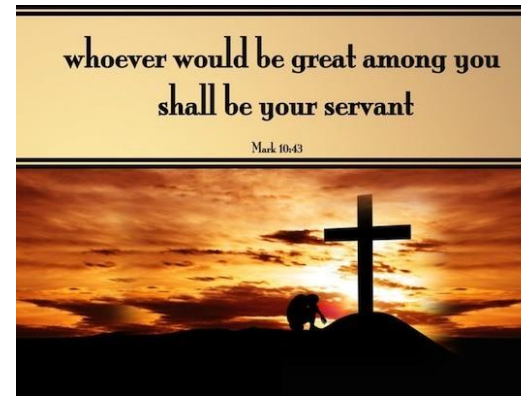
³⁵ Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament*, Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Mk 10:35–45.

³⁶ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 324.

³⁷ Alan Carr, "[The High Cost of Finishing First \(Mark 10:35–45\)](#)," in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 864–865.

³⁸ Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 373.

outrageous request right before Christ's crucifixion or because they were trying to use nepotism to seek favored positions of power³⁸ but were angry because they "beat them to the punch and may now have an edge over them for power slots"³⁹ in



Christ's kingdom. Since "our basic character is often shown by those things that provoke our strongest reactions,"⁴⁰ the apostles' anger at James and John merely betrayed

their "spiritual shallowness" and the truth that the "yeast" of the power seeking, self-indulgent Pharisees had also penetrated their hearts as well!⁴¹ Knowing that their relationships of "unconditional, unfailing, unquestioning love"⁴² for one another had been replaced with one of "selfish ambition and jealousy," Jesus once again tells them to be great in His kingdom requires one to first put aside the way the world

³⁹ David E. Garland, *Mark*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 412.

⁴⁰ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 247.

⁴¹ D. A. Carson, "[The Gospels and Acts](#)," in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 1796.

⁴² Alan Carr, "[The High Cost of Finishing First \(Mark 10:35–45\)](#)," in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 865.

exercises authority over one another. Jesus invites the apostle to reflect on the “leadership” they had received at the hands of the Greeks, Babylonians, Persians, and now Rome.⁴³ Was not their leadership characterized by tyranny and oppression?⁴⁴ For instance did not the Roman governors “likened by Emperor Tiberius to blood-sucking flies gorging themselves on a wounded man”⁴⁵ and in his leadership had not Pilate “flowed much Jewish blood in the streets of Judea during his prefecture?”⁴⁶ To be a “great” leader in God’s kingdom one simply must give up one’s “fleshly” desire to exercise authority by obtaining mastery over others.⁴⁷

Worldly glory and power-seeking methods are coercive and oppressive⁴⁸ and as such are a contradiction to the servant leadership model that Jesus had taught them that focuses on loving God and one another!

Reflection. When angry with other believers do you stop and determine if the reason for your anger is due to you seeing your

⁴³ Paul Barnett, [Mark: The Servant King](#), Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 1991), 199.

⁴⁴ Paul Barnett, [Mark: The Servant King](#), Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 1991), 199.

⁴⁵ Paul Barnett, [Mark: The Servant King](#), Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 1991), 199.

⁴⁶ Paul Barnett, [Mark: The Servant King](#), Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 1991), 199.

sin in their lives? Are you willing to not have a position of power in the church and yet still serve with all your heart, mind, and soul? Are you jealous of others in the church who hold either formal or informal positions of influence, if so, is it possible that the yeast of the Pharisees for power has got a foothold into your soul?

How to be Great in God’s Kingdom

In the final verses of today’s passage Jesus simply restates what He had told His apostles during His last prediction of His death.⁴⁹ To add more clarity this time Jesus uses His own life as an example of what being a “great” leader in kingdom entails. “No more do the ethics of the kingdom of God clash more vigorously with the ethics of the world than in the matters of power and service!”⁵⁰ Christ though being in the very nature of God (Philippians 2:6) “voluntarily veiled His glory as the Son

⁴⁷ James R. Edwards, [The Gospel according to Mark](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 325.

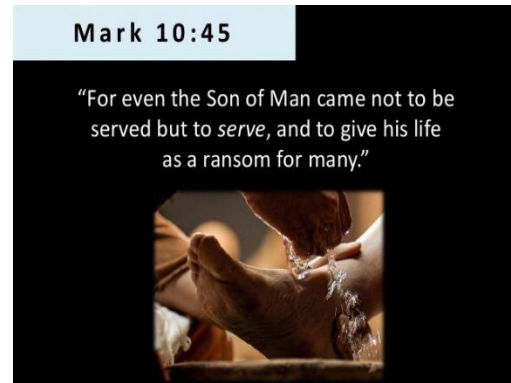
⁴⁸ Douglas Mangum, ed., [Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament](#), Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), Mk 10:35–45.

⁴⁹ Alan Carr, [“The High Cost of Finishing First \(Mark 10:35–45\),”](#) in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 866.

⁵⁰ James R. Edwards, [The Gospel according to Mark](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 325.

of Man” (Mark 8:38; 13:26; 14:62)⁵¹ and gave His life a ransom for all people. He who had no sin “delivered His soul to death,”⁵² and in experiencing the “undiluted wrath of almighty God”⁵³ atoned for our sins thus making “intercession for all of us, the

transgressors.”⁵⁴ The “strong man Satan” was utterly defeated on the cross⁵⁵ for Christ in His atoning death and resurrection broke the power sin and in His atonement accentuated the



truth, He is the only way, truth and life (Romans 6:1-11, John 14:6)! Though Christ could have “commanded legions of angels to do His every bidding”⁵⁶ and demanded that the world treat Him as King, Jesus chose to be born in a manger and in love to serve the many! Jesus invited the apostles and yes even us

today to see “greatness” in His kingdom measured by both love and humble service.⁵⁷ Jesus is not saying that there are to be no authoritative positions in the church but merely that “great” church leaders are those who know the source of their authority lies in being in the vine and as such rejoice in voluntarily serving those whom Christ died for ... everyone! For the church to reach its full potential as a light unto the nations (Matthew 5:14-16) then its leadership and members simply must give way “their fascination with dominance, control, yields, results and outcomes,”⁵⁸ and serve the many in love “with no thought, except heavenly crowns, of receiving recognition or thanks!”⁵⁹ What would our churches look like if they were filled with Christ-centered, God honoring servant leaders that have truly learned to deny themselves, take up their crosses and serve one another in love? Maybe then the invitation to be “fishers of men” might not just be for the disciples but us as well and maybe then the church would truly be a diverse but unified family of God fully submissive too and in love with He who purchased them at the price of His very life!

⁵¹ William L. Lane, [The Gospel of Mark](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 383.

⁵² Craig A. Evans, [The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke](#), ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 374.

⁵³ Alan Carr, [“The High Cost of Finishing First \(Mark 10:35–45\),”](#) in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 868.

⁵⁴ Craig A. Evans, [The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke](#), ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 374.

⁵⁵ Paul Barnett, [Mark: The Servant King](#), Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 1991), 202.

⁵⁶ Alan Carr, [“The High Cost of Finishing First \(Mark 10:35–45\),”](#) in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 867.

⁵⁷ Paul Barnett, [Mark: The Servant King](#), Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 1991), 200.

⁵⁸ James R. Edwards, [The Gospel according to Mark](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 326.

⁵⁹ Alan Carr, [“The High Cost of Finishing First \(Mark 10:35–45\),”](#) in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 866.