

main course

encounters in Mark's Gospel – ten

Jesus and the loaded question – Mk 10.32-45

This is one of a number of '**encounters in Mark's Gospel**' each of which enables a small-group conversation around a particular story in Mark's Gospel. These conversations aim to help you, and everyone else in your group, to:

- build up your **confidence** in actively exploring bits of the Bible
- **make connections** between the biblical story and your own life story
- find fresh **vision** for the business of being human today

all from watching and talking freely with each other about encounters between Jesus and those he meets – as we find them recorded in Mark's Gospel.

INTRODUCTION

This tenth **encounter in Mark's Gospel** tells of an over-reaction to the growing edginess that Jesus' followers felt as they approached Jerusalem. But even this ineptitude is well worth watching, for it shows how much those who knew Jesus well still had to learn. Will we learn anything new as we watch it all happen in front of us?

STRUCTURE

Each of your **encounters in Mark's Gospel** will follow the same basic structure:

1. Assembling and beginning
2. Sharing the story of the encounter
3. Our initial reactions - sharing our own first responses
4. Extra Insights 1 – learning from Mark's big story
5. Extra Insights 2 – learning about Jesus' world
6. Exploring the Encounter Triangle
 - What do we think was learned from encountering Jesus?
 - What do we think Jesus learned from the encounter?
 - What have we learned from watching the encounter?
7. Deciding how that helps us to live now
8. (*optional*) Rounding it off with a song

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1. ASSEMBLING and BEGINNING

The group needs to gather, settle in and prepare for a shared conversation. This may or may not include prayer or worship or some catering option, depending on your local circumstances and context.

2. SHARING THE STORY

The conversation is started by hearing or sharing the story that will form its focus – the story told in **Mark 10.32-45**. This might be done in one of the following ways:

- Someone reads **Mark 10.32-45** straight from their Bible
- The group re-constructs the story of **Mark 10.32-45** from various rememberings
- The story of **Mark 10.32-45** is told by someone who has prepared it for telling
- A locally-devised combination of some of the above

Mark 10.32-45 is one of those stories that is present in Matthew's Gospel and partly in Luke's Gospel as well as in Mark, so if your group uses a remembering and re-telling approach you are going to have to decide how closely you all want to keep to Mark's particular telling.

3. OUR INITIAL REACTIONS

The group should then consider the question:

- "What is this story about?"

This can be done with a brief time of discussion in twos and threes followed by reporting to the whole group, or done as a whole group conversation – as group size and local practice allow. Let's be clear, there's no 'right' answer to this question – it's simply an assembling of ways in which hearing the story has struck group members and their memories of how they have learned its 'meaning' from past encounters and received teaching.

4. EXTRA INSIGHTS part one – learning from Mark's big story

Share the information about how Mark has used this story and where he's placed it in his big story that's given in the EXTRA INSIGHTS on **page 6** at the end of these notes

5. EXTRA INSIGHTS part two – learning about Jesus' world

Share the information about the social, political and religious world in which Jesus lived that's given in the EXTRA INSIGHTS on **page 7** at the end of these notes

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6. EXPLORING THE ENCOUNTER TRIANGLE

The group takes time to explore the story (in the light of their initial ideas and the Extra Insights that they've shared), standing, in turn, at each corner of the triangle:

Standing and looking at the story from the perspective of James and John, consider:

- **What do we think James & John uncovered in this encounter with Jesus?**
 - *teasing this out ... What anxieties and aspirations might lie behind this thunderous, loaded question to Jesus? What about the question upset the other disciples? Just how different is Jesus' viewpoint from theirs?*

Standing and looking at the story from Jesus' perspective, consider:

- **What do we think Jesus learned from this encounter with James & John?**
 - *teasing this out ... What troubles Jesus about this loaded question? What is Jesus wrestling with as he talks about his mission? What does this difference of opinion tell Jesus about the world, his disciples, his God and himself?*

Standing where we stand, watching the whole encounter, consider:

- **What have we learned from watching these proceedings?**
 - *teasing this out ... What previous understandings of this story did we bring? What have we found in the story this time? What about this story connects with our own stories? What do we take away from watching this encounter together?*

7. HOW DOES THAT HELP US TO LIVE NOW?

Now your group needs to bring it all home. Working as a group, consider two questions:

- **In what ways does this story speak to us today?**

Be imaginative. Be playful. Be daring. Be incredibly serious. Try ideas. Disagree. Come to a consensus. Work with the story like you're squeezing oranges. What good ideas to help us with living now can the group find from what you have watched?

- **What are we going to do differently now?**

Be practical. Be realistic. But be prepared to face the risks and challenges the story raises. Honestly address what the story seems to be saying to you and your situation as individuals, but also as a group, in your church and in your local community.

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8. ROUNDING IT OFF WITH A SONG (optional)

NO CROWN, NO THRONE, NO GLORY based on Mark 10:32-45

tune: Aurelia, Rejoice and Sing no.566

1. No crown, no throne, no glory,
to share with eager friends,
no easy public triumph
to which the world attends,
but mocking, spitting, flogging
and shouts of "Crucify!";
till naked, cramping, retching,
You hang, alone, to die.

4. Upturning expectations
with selfless sacrifice,
exploding preconceptions
by how You lived and died,
You summon us to follow,
as bearers of your grace,
that we ourselves, absurdly,
may live as in Your place.

2. No cup of celebration,
no feasting through the night,
no show'rs of joy and blessing
shared out as though by right,
but tears of bitter anguish,
of loneliness and pain,
and darkness drenched in sorrow -
this cup was Yours to drain.

John M. Campbell

3. No condescending master
no patronage to share,
no lord, no squire, no owner
with charity to spare,
but God as slave-like servant,
obedient to the last;
Your life laid down as ransom,
as rescue from our past.

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EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

This is one of a number of **encounters in Mark's Gospel** that are being offered through the Vision4Life website. Between them these conversation materials explore a whole range of different encounters that Jesus has in the course of the Gospel story. If your group found this one helpful they may wish to try some of the others.

*Full acknowledgement for the ideas and information that have helped us to construct these materials is given in the **Introduction to the 'encounters in Mark's Gospel'** programme on the Vision4Life website:*

www.vision4life.org.uk

see the following two pages for the "Extra Insights" materials for this conversation...

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EXTRA INSIGHTS

part one – learning from Mark's big story

What can we learn from the stories Mark places both before and after our story and from the way our story works in the whole-Gospel storyline?

The bit before our bit (Mk 10.17-31)

- **The role of wealth is overturned** – Both the man who would be holy and the watching disciples see no problem in his wealth, only a sign of God's blessing. Yet Jesus indicates that it is beyond impossible for those who would hold fast to their wealth to enter the kingdom of heaven, even while the kingdom is open to outcasts, to the underclass of childhood and to despised people of various sorts. Truly, the first will be last and the last first. Perhaps, that applies to the seating plan for glory too – Mark 15.26-27 tells us that when Jesus is publicly proclaimed "King of the Jews" in Golgotha, the places to his right and left were occupied by outlaws.

The bit after our bit (Mk 10.46-52)

- **A blind man sees and follows** – if the story of the blind man from Bethsaida whom Jesus healed in two stages (Mark 8.22-26) is offered as a sort of commentary on the following story where Peter sees, yet doesn't see, who Jesus is, then perhaps this bit after our bit, that also tells of Jesus healing a blind man, may be a sort of follow-up commentary on our story. This time the blind man, named Bartimaeus, is anxious to be healed, even running over to Jesus when bidden and once he sees (only a word from Jesus, not even a single touch) he uses his sight to follow Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. Perhaps this suggests that, if we have eyes to see, the whole of the Gospel and its meaning is there in our story. Consider, also, the contrast between what Bartimaeus wants and what James and John want, and what Jesus does in each case. Which of these looks like a true disciple?

Our story in the flow of Mark's whole-Gospel story

- Our story contains the third and fullest of Jesus' three predictions of his impending suffering and death. These three predictions act as marker posts along the road to Jerusalem where they will prove to be achingly accurate. Our story also contains the clearest explanation this Gospel gives anywhere as to **why** Jesus must suffer and die – and it is still an allusive, poetic sort of an explanation, not the precise statement of an exact legal transaction that mediaeval theologians later read out of it. If the cross is the obvious focus of Mark's big story, it is here, and in Gethsemane, that we come closest to seeing why that might be the case.

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EXTRA INSIGHTS

part two – learning about Jesus' world

Some things don't change – the basis of this whole episode is the persistence of these loyal followers of Jesus in seeing the leader and the final outcome they **want** to see. Jesus is being relentlessly fitted into their hopes and expectations. His words and deeds are not being heard or their implications understood. We see this acted out all through the story. That determination to force things to fit with our dearest hopes and dreams is surely a risk that is as real today as it was then, however different our social worlds may be. We, too, have an innate tendency to try to make the evidence of the Gospel story fit with "my Jesus".

The overturning of status hits home – Having spoken again and again of the overturning of expectations and value, Jesus makes clear here, clearer than anywhere else in the Gospel, that all this accepting of the unacceptable and offering of hope to the hopeless comes at vast personal cost to the prophet who preaches it. Somehow the re-balancing of value and worth requires the one who has the greatest worth in the eyes of God to embrace total degradation and rejection at the hands of those who **think** they are in charge – both religiously and politically. This is no failure and no accident; this is a deliberately engineered strategy to unleash hope and fairness and caring community in our cruel, violent and exploitative world. This, we will find in Gethsemane, is the only option that will allow the breaking in of God's alternative way of being and doing.

What does this say to Mark's first readers? – this passage does not leave James and John, nor the other the disciples, looking like trustworthy religious leaders. Yet, by the time Mark is assembling his Gospel, the leadership of the whole church is presumably focussed on these same disciples as the key eyewitnesses and leading authorities. This story affords them no honour, awards them no elevated status; before Mark's readers, this very story (amongst others in the Gospel) makes James and John and the other disciples drink from a cup of shaming and gives them a sort of baptism of degradation. This is how it must be if you would be 'great' amongst the followers of Jesus, the truly human one.