

BELPRES CHURCH

ALL IN

January 12, 2019

Speaker: Rev. Scott Dudley

Disclaimer: This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.

So Jesus, we ask that you would use your word, your Holy Spirit to help us understand that passage. Do what my words cannot do and bring us closer to you through what we just read. In your name, Jesus. Amen.

Well, I want to say hello to the 11:00 service, people watching online, you guys here in person. The snow is a mere nine hours away, yet, you bravely ventured forth. Well done. Well done. I think that means though that the 11:00 service is even braver because they're closer to the snow. So 11:00, well done.

There's a man named Will Willimon, who is chaplain at Duke University, and he tells a story of getting a phone call one day from an angry father. The father was mad because his daughter was graduating and was going to, in his words, waste it all by going and doing humanitarian work in Haiti. The dad said, "And I hold you," said to Willimon, "I hold you personally responsible for all of this because you're the one that introduced all this religion nonsense to her."

Willimon said, "Well, didn't you have her baptized?" The dad said, "Yes." Willimon said, "Well, didn't you take her to Sunday school all those years?" The dad said, "Yes." Willimon said, "And didn't you let her go on all those youth trips in high school?" The dad said, "Yes, but what's this got to do with anything?" Willimon said, "Well, it's your fault she's going to go dig wells in Haiti because you introduced her to Jesus." The dad said, "Yes, but we just wanted her Presbyterian." That is a true story.

We are doing a sermon series called All In about how we can experience the bigger life, the courage, the joy that Jesus wants to give us if we follow him all in instead of just kind of halfheartedly. This series is linked to what we're doing on Wednesday night. It's called The Rest of

the Story, where we go a little bit deeper into the Bible teaching and also really talk about how do we practically apply this in our lives. So I encourage you to join us on Wednesday. It's not too late. I find this scripture that Roslyn just read to be very, very challenging. Sometimes we need to be comforted, and the Bible does that, and sermons do that. Sometimes though we need to be called out and called up to a bigger life and told that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do it. That's what this scripture does, at least for me.

Two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, they come up to Jesus, and they say to him, "We want you to do for us whatever we ask." The primordial prayer. Right? "Jesus, do what I want." If I'm honest, if I'm really honest with myself, half or more of my prayers come down to some version of this. Right? "Jesus, fix this." "Jesus, fix that." "Jesus, don't let it snow on Sunday morning." Right? "Jesus, here's a problem. Make this problem go away, Jesus, so that I can be happy and comfortable." Rather than saying, "Jesus, here's a problem. What do you want to do with it? Show me my part. Give me courage to do it." Right?

Then, there's a whole host of prayers. "I don't pray nearly enough for the poor, for the lonely, for the forgotten. I don't pray enough. Jesus, take my idols out of my hands. Rid me of these idols of comfort, and status, and prestige, and luxury." See, the prayers we pray are a good indication of our true priorities, and too many of my prayers point to my addiction to self.

So James and John, they asked this question, "Jesus, we want you to do whatever we want." Jesus says, "Well, what do you want me to do?" They say, "Let one of us sit on your right hand and the other at your left in your glory." So here's the deal. They think Jesus is going to be a military hero who kicks out the Romans, sets himself up as King, and the position on the right and the left of the King's throne were the most powerful in the country. So basically, "Jesus, make us your vice messiahs." Okay?

Then, Jesus says, "You don't know what you're asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink?" They say, "Uh-huh, uh-huh. Yeah, we can." No, they can't. No, they can't because Jesus explained what he meant by that cup in the verse that immediately precedes their request. He says, "The son of man," that's Jesus, "will be delivered to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand them over to the Gentiles who will spit on him, flog him, and kill him. Three days later, he will rise." Jesus says this, and the very next thing the disciples say is, "We want you to do for us whatever we ask. Make us rich, and powerful, and all that stuff."

The degree of not getting it is off the charts, and especially since when you look back at Jesus' whole ministry, he's been saying constantly things like this, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me." "Well, nobody likes that kind of talk, Jesus. That ain't going to fill the pews, that kind of talk. No, no, no, no. I don't want to deny myself. I want you to do for me whatever I asked you to do."

But Jesus calls us to be all in for him to do what he says to do rather than what we want him to do.

It's called obedience, and that can be hard, but don't miss the promise. Don't miss the promise. Jesus says, "I will be crucified. I will be killed. But then what? Three days later, I will rise." See, when we kill our addiction to self and go all in for Jesus, we are reborn to a new life with some amazing promises that God gives us.

For example, we find freedom from fear and worry because we know that Jesus uses even the bad stuff for our eventual good. We find freedom from guilt and shame because he forgives us. Freedom from having to prove ourselves worthy all the time because I know the creator loves me and that's my security. Freedom from bitterness and anger because he helps us forgive and freedom from our addiction, our constant addiction to self, and that may be the greatest freedom of all.

Those are the freedoms from, but there's also some freedoms to, freedom to feel close to God and hear his voice, freedom to experience more courage, freedom to have meaningful relationships, freedom to make a difference in people's lives, freedom to live a bigger life, a bigger adventure. See, Jesus' most frequent promise is not, "I will be with you." Though he promises that. Jesus' most frequent promise is not, "I will give you peace." Though he promises that. Jesus' most frequent promise is, "Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and the gospel will save it."

He says it six different times. It's the only saying of his that makes it into all four gospels. No other saying of Jesus has this much emphasis in the Bible. It's important. "If you lose your life, you'll find it." So in other words, true joy, true courage, true freedom is not getting the grades I want, not in getting into the college I want, is not having the job I want, the house I want. I think that's what it is, but it's not. True joy, true courage comes from following Jesus with everything we have, and that's his promise.

However, that is a promise that Americans don't like. Right? "If you lose your life, you'll find it." That is a promise Americans... We're kind of like, "I'm with you, Jesus, on the second part of that sentence, but not sure I like the first part." Because see, we got this thing going on in the United States called consumer Christianity, where we treat God and by extension, the church kind of like we treat Amazon or Starbucks. Right? God's job is to give me what I want. God's job is to make me happy, and advance my goals, and fix my problems.

I have had people who've been having an affair look me straight in the eye and say, "I think God wants me to have this affair because it makes me happy and God wants me to be happy." No, he doesn't. God doesn't care if you're happy or not. He really doesn't. He wants you to be holy. He wants you to be whole. He wants you to have joy, which is different than happy. Happy is based on your happenings. Joy is there no matter what happens to be happening in your happenings.

But consumer Christianity says, "It is God's job to make me happy, and by extension, the church's job is to give me programs I like, and music I like, and sermons I like that don't contradict anything that I already think. If the church doesn't do that, then I will go church shopping." If ever there was a consumer phrase, there it is. Right? "And find a church that gives me what I want. Just like if I

don't like Starbucks, I'll go to Pete's," which is way better, by the way. But anyway, that's a side note. That's not a biblical truth. Just my opinion. Okay?

Now, I want to say right here. As a church, BelPres as a church, I actually think we do a little bit better on this. There are so many of you who are all in for Jesus. So many of you who are fighting the consumer Christian thing in your own life. 500 of you served in the month of December alone. 500 of you. We told you in December we needed \$1.5 million for our year end to kind of help our budget work for the rest of the year. You guys stepped up. You gave big. We met that goal, which allows us to continue all kinds of ministries. Thank you.

Those are signs of a church that is trying its hardest to be all in. Those are signs of a church that is working against consumer Christianity. But if I'm honest with myself, if I'm honest with myself and I think for all of us, we're all a little bit of a mix. There's a big part of me trying to be all in for Jesus and doing my best, but I also got some consumer Christian in me too. Right? "Jesus, your job is to make me happy." I got some of that in me as much as I fight it.

In my former church, there was a woman who constantly sent me angry emails about flowers in the worship service. I'm telling you this about my former church to keep it safely there. Okay? Right? So my former church. One week, she was mad because the flowers were the wrong color and they clashed with the carpet. I kid you not. Right? Another week, she sent me an angry email saying the flowers were in the wrong place. They weren't given enough prominence in the worship service, and she said that offends God because we're not honoring the dignity of his creation, on and on about that. She wasn't even on the flower team. Right? Like then, I might could have understood it, but she just like... She's obsessed with flowers. Week after week after week.

See, that's what happens in consumer Christianity. When your vision gets small, the small things start to seem very big, and you begin to think that the flowers being the wrong color offends God. When actually biblically speaking, it's pretty clear that it's your attitude that is offending God, not the flowers. Oh, someone said, "Hallelujah." Thank you for that. Right?

See, consumer Christians want everything to be the way they want it. Who cares what other people need? All of that shrinks our lives. Shrinks our lives, right? Jesus promises to make marriages new, to heal the vision, to bring it into racism and poverty, to transform this world, and we shrink that all the way down to, "Did I like the music? Did I like the flowers?" Then, we become who we don't want to be, right?

No, 20-year-old says, "Gosh, I really hope that I grow up to be super fussy about flowers in worship service," said no 20 year old ever. Right? But somehow, if we're not careful, we get there, and consumer Christianity kills the mission of the church, and we become anemic, weak, shriveled, irrelevant. What the Bible describes as having the form of godliness, but denying its power rather than the dynamic community of God transforming the world through the power of his Holy Spirit.

Pastors like me, pastors like me, we share a big part of the responsibility for creating this consumer Christian thing because see, too often, we try to cater to kind of consumer demands, consumer mentality because we want to get as many people to come to church as we can because we think that makes us look successful according to our world. So pastors bear a big part of the burden or share a part of the guilt for this. Right?

I think we're all a little bit mixed in this. All of us. Trying really hard to be all in, but lots of consumer Christian in us, so I want to do a little diagnostic test. Okay? Just a little diagnostic test to see where we are. See if any of these apply to you. Okay? You may be a consumer Christian if it's been over a year since you read something in the Bible that caused you to change something you think or do, or change a political opinion.

You may be a consumer Christian if you don't give up your money and time enough to change your lifestyle. You may be a consumer Christian if it's been more than a month since you read your Bible. You may be a consumer Christian if you get annoyed when there's music or something in church that you don't like. You may be a consumer Christian if half or more of your prayers come down to some version of, "Help me. Heal me. Fix my problems. Make me comfortable."

Now, by show of hands, how many of you recognize yourself in at least one or more of those? Raise your hands. Okay? Oh, I forgot one. I forgot one. You may be a consumer Christian if you did not just raise your hand, but your spouse and friends think you should have. We are all recovering consumer Christians. All of us. All. Even the disciples. Oh my goodness. Look at them. "Do whatever we ask you to do." Right? So let's do this right. Confession is good for us, so let's just do this like an AA support group. Okay? You know how those things go, right? Okay, so. Hi. My name is Scott, and I am a consumer Christian. You say?

Thank you. Okay. Now, it's your turn. Just put your name in the blank. Repeat after me. Hi. My name is.

And I am a consumer Christian.

And I am a consumer Christian.

Hi, sinners. Here's the thing. Here's the thing. Jesus promises so much more, and even phrasing it like that is a little consumer Christian. Right? Like if I'm going to quit consumer Christianity, my golly, what's in it for me? But Jesus does give us promises, and I think we have to hang on to those. If you lose your life, you'll find it. Don't just focus on the first part of that. Focus on the second part as well. Jesus offers us so much more.

In this text, the disciples asked to be vice messiahs. Here's what Jesus' response to what they want is. Here's what he says, "You know the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. Not so you. You're going to be a different kind of community. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you

must be your servant. For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many."

He redefines greatness as radical servanthood to the point that Jesus would die in a across to pay the penalty for our sins. The disciples wanted to sit at his left hand and at his right. Instead, Jesus was crucified with a thief on his left and a thief on his right because see, the disciple's request was too small. It wasn't too big. It was too small. It was the exact same thing the Romans want: power, prestige, money, status, achievement, comfort. Right?

All the stuff the Romans wanted, the disciples asking the same thing. It's just they... Instead of the Romans having that stuff, they want that stuff, but the same rotten system is still in place. We've just swapped people on top and bottom. Jesus wants to change the whole rotten system, not just rearrange the seating charts in the system.

Our prayers are too small. "Jesus, help me be popular in school." Jesus says, "How about we get rid of the whole rotten system that makes some people better like than others usually based on shallow things? Let's get rid of this. Are you in? Are you all in? Are you with me? Will you help me do that?" "Jesus, help me get the promotion." He says, "How about I make you free from needing the promotion to feel secure or to feel that you matter or that you're worthy? How about I free you from that? Are you in? Are you all in? Will you cooperate?" "Jesus, heal me," which sometimes he does. But also, I think he says, "How about I free you from the fear of death by helping you know to your bones that even if you die, you will rise again and be with me?"

Our prayers are way too small, so Jesus calls us out, and he calls us up to a bigger vision and a bigger life. How about instead of just replacing who's on the top and who's on the bottom of this rotten system, how about we get rid of this rotten system altogether and usher in a new one of justice, and peace, and righteousness, and joy, and courage, what he called the kingdom of God? He says, "Are you in? Are you all in?" I'm like, "Yeah. I'm in, Jesus. I'm pumped. I'm all in, unless it's hard, and then I don't know. Netflix is looking pretty good. I mean, new season of The Crown. I mean, come on." Right?

So how do we begin to step out of this consumer Christian thing? Because I know you, BelPres. I know your heart. You want to be all in. I've been with you a long time. I know you want to be all in, so how do we begin to do that? Well, that's part of why we're doing this series. We'll talk about it, but for today, a couple of things. First, want better. Want better. Don't just settle for consumer Christianity. Want the bigger thing. If you don't want the bigger thing, then at least pray the prayer, "Lord, help me to want to want the bigger thing."

I saw a post from someone who's been asking her Christian friends, "Would you exchange your comfort for unlimited joy, which may require some hardship and sacrifice?" She says almost everyone chooses comfort over joy. When did the people of God become so afraid? When did the people of God shrink our vision down to something so small? How did that happen to us? Jesus says, "I have come to give you an abundant life of meaning, purpose, joy, adventure," and we just

say, "Thanks, Jesus, but could you just keep the bad stuff from happening to me?" We are far too easily pleased, myself included.

It brings me to the second thing. Let Jesus offend you and make you uncomfortable. Jesus is always calling people out of their comfort zone. Feed someone. Care for someone in need. Right? Seek reconciliation. Forgive someone. Uncomfortable stuff to do because here's the thing. Comfort is crippling. The only way an athlete gets better is through the discomfort of practice, and the problem is we Americans, myself included, we really don't like to be uncomfortable, and so we don't grow, and we miss the bigger thing that Jesus wants to do.

Jesus made people uncomfortable all the time. He offended their religious traditions. He offended their politics. He told them to go do things that were hard like serve, and give, and all of that stuff. Right? It is hard. It is hard, which is part of why we're doing this series. But also, with the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do it. I know we can. Now, it's going to look different for every one of us. If you've got a serious health issue, maybe being all in for you is just getting out of bed in the morning. For others, it may be to serve in some way, to forgive someone, all kinds of stuff.

A friend of mine got a new job in a church, and his first year there, he did a great job. Just knocked it out of the park. Just did a great job. In fact, he did too good of a job because in year two, the senior pastor fired him. The reason the pastor fired him was he said that my friend was so gifted and capable that he, the senior pastor, felt like a failure whenever he was around him, and so he fired my friend. Not a decision I would've made, and I like it when people around me are better, and most of them are better than me. So that's a good thing, right?

Well, God took care of my friend. He landed in a great job, so my friend is okay, but here's the interesting thing. My friend has decided to keep going to that church where the pastor fired him and to stay in that church. He said, "God called us to a community, not just a pastor, and I don't feel like God has released us from that call. My kids love this church, and it's going to do good things for me to continue to go here."

So every Sunday, as that pastor who fired him is preaching, my friend is asking, "Jesus, help me forgive this man. Help me learn from this man." My friend speaks well of the pastor. He supports the pastor. He works for the good of the church. It's not comfortable. There are sometimes awkward questions about why he's not still on staff. It's hard to do. It's a hard thing.

Now, there may come a time when my friend will, God will say my friend can go to a different church, but for now, staying in that church is doing some amazing things for my friend's soul. He's learning humility, forgiveness, learning to let go of some of his consumer stuff and be part of what God is doing in that church. He is modeling what it means to be a class act for his kids. He is more concerned with being holy than happy. That's all in, and he's getting a much bigger life because of it, and he's becoming a much bigger person because of it.

Want more. Let Jesus make you uncomfortable, and then finally, if you're going to consume, consume Jesus. Not religion, not churchianity, but Jesus. Get closer to Jesus through the big four: prayer, worship, scripture, community. We'll talk about how to do those things in the weeks ahead, but for this week, here's your homework. For this week, just pray this prayer. "Jesus, help me see your goodness. Jesus, help me see your goodness." Because here's the thing. If being all in is a matter of duty, and obligation, and guilt, and shame, then it's just never going to work. Either we will end up following all the rules, and being judgmental and self-righteous, people who don't, and we'll be all legalistic, or we'll be discouraged and guilt-ridden the whole time.

When our kids were young, one of the pieces of advice we heard about parenting toddlers was to give them choices rather than commands that help them have a sense of control. Right? So kind of a love and logic approach. The problem is my son could see right through that, even as a toddler. Right? So we would say things like, "Would you like to put your own coat, on or would you like us to put the coat on for you?" He would say, "That's not a choice. No coat." Right? He had a point, right? So often, our parenting went from love and logic to threats and bribes. The true essence of parenting, right? "You better or I'll..." Right? True essence of parenting, threats and bribes.

Okay. God does not treat us that way. No threats. No bribes. James and John's request is so self-centered, but Jesus does not say, "You rotten, miserable little disciples. I am so disappointed in you. I'm not mad. I'm just disappointed." He doesn't say that, right? He doesn't say that. He responds with grace and calls them to a bigger vision. If being all in is just about duty and obligation, it's not going to work. But if it is a response to God's goodness, it becomes a joyful journey.

I saw this so clearly when I was in Greece this fall talking with Muslim refugees who'd become Christians, and I've told you some of their stories already. I got a few more I'll tell in the months ahead because I find them very inspiring. One young man I met there had fled Iran, and the reason he left Iran was because when he was still in Iran, a friend of his gave him an elite illegal copy of the Bible and told him about Jesus. This man started reading the Bible and saw... was just overwhelmed by Jesus' love. He said, "Jesus didn't have anything for himself. He had no money. He had no prestige. He was killed for us. No other God in any other religion does that."

He saw a God of love and not judgment, and that was brand new to him. Never heard of a God like that, and he said, "I realized that Jesus is the truth," and so he gave his life to Jesus, and Jesus was transforming his life. More courage, more joy. His relationships got better because he started treating people the way the Bible says to treat people because see, when we do what the Bible says to do, it actually works. Then, he started telling people about Jesus because he wanted them to have the joy that he had found. But in Iran, that's illegal, to tell people about Jesus, but he kept telling people about Jesus so they'd know the joy that he had. Eventually, he had to leave because his family threatened to kill him for being a Christian, and so he ended up in Turkey and then in Greece.

They told me this story, and I said, "That sounds really hard. That sounds really hard." He said, "No, no, no, no, no, no. This is my path. This is what I want to do for Jesus. He died for me."

He's transforming me. This is what I want to do for Jesus." Joyful response, and then I said, "Thank you because you teach me how to be a Christian."

He said, "No, no, no. That's not possible. You're a pastor. I can't teach you that." I said, "No, no, no. You teach me how to be a Christian because I'm not sure I would pay as high a price as you're paying to follow Jesus. I think I would. I hope I would, but I'm not sure. But when I see the self-evident joy you have and so much courage, oh my goodness, so much courage, you are more free than me."

"The only word I can think when I'm talking to you," I told him. "The only word I can think of when I'm talking to you is freedom, absolute freedom. You are all in for Jesus, and so you are not afraid of anything, and you are more free than me. So thank you for showing me what it means to be all in for Jesus."

His courage, freedom, his joy makes me want to follow Jesus with everything I got, and we met a lot of different refugees from a lot of different countries, mostly from Iran, who were like this man, and their connection to Jesus was just contagious. You just want what they have, which is probably why Christianity is actually exploding in Iran.

In fact, according to one study by a mission organization, Operation World, Christianity is growing faster in Iran than anywhere else in the world because people like this man, they change other people's lives. They can change a region. They can change a country. They can change a world. Christianity is dying in Europe and America, but is exploding everywhere else. It's exploding everywhere else, just not here yet.

But what if? What if? What if you and I, through the power of the Holy Spirit, become as brave and as filled with joy as that man? What if you and I follow Jesus with everything we have and experience more of his transforming love? What if you and I become the generation that kill this whole consumer Christian thing? What if we become the church who awakens to our true calling to launch a movement that changes our region, our nation, our world?

There is nothing so dangerous to the devil's plans as a woman or a man fully yielded to Jesus, and there is nothing the devil fears more than a church filled with true, genuine followers of Jesus. So what if? What if? What could Jesus do in your life, in my life, in our community, country, world if we were fully yielded and yielded to him? So are you in? Are you all in because that's where the real life starts? Amen?

Amen.

Jesus, thank you that you have bigger dreams for us than we have for ourselves. Lord, teach us not to settle. Teach us not to be so easily pleased, but hold out for the riches that you give, Jesus. Help us to do that. I confess all my consumer Christian things. I confess all the ways I'm addicted to all

sorts of comforts, but Jesus, break those chains off of me. Break those chains off of us. May we be the church, may we be the church that follows you with everything we've got and leads people to your throne, not ours. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Read Mark 10:32-43

1. What do you think is at the heart of James and John's request? Why do they ask this?
2. What has Jesus said immediately before James and John's request (vv 32-34)? How does that shape your reaction to their request in verse 35?
3. How does the entire chapter of Mark 10 shape our understanding of James and John's request? By arranging the stories the way he did and in the sequence he did, what is Mark trying to tell us?
4. In your own words, how does Jesus redefine greatness? What does it mean to be great in his Kingdom?
5. How do you think James and John felt when they heard this? How do you feel about Jesus' response?
6. From this passage what do you think God might be asking you to do, not do, or keep doing?