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NT(IBS) 511 Mark
April 22, 2020

Module 10 Interpretation: Mark 10:35-45

1a. What are the key elements of the disciples' misunderstanding of Jesus' passion prediction in 10:35-45?

- A. The Request 10:35-37
- B. Jesus' response 10:38-40
- C. The 10 disciples' response 10:41

1b. Define the key elements of the disciples' misunderstanding of Jesus' passion prediction in 10:35-45

- A. The Request: I see four components in the request and will investigate each in order:
 - 1. Preparation for request 35a
 - 2. Initial request 35b
 - 3. Jesus grants permission to continue 36
 - 4. Full request 37
- 1. Preparation for request All 35a
 - a. There is no transition language used between the end of the Passion Prediction in 34 and the beginning of 35.
 - i. Are we to assume that 35 happens immediately after 34?
 - ii. **If so, the timing of this request seems incredibly insensitive on the part of James and John given that Jesus has just described a violent death.**
 - iii. If not, I would like to know how long between the prediction and this conversation between the sons of Zebedee and Jesus.
 - iv. Either way, Mark could have been more helpful to his reader by indicating the timing of these interactions.

- b. Mark doesn't tell us if the group (Jesus, disciples, others) is still **on their way to Jerusalem** (10:32), so in the absence of other information, this is the logical assumption I make, with all of the baggage that understanding carries in regards to what it means for Jesus' life (see Dr. Miller's careful explanation in his 3rd Passion Prediction Interpretation, p. 3-4)
 - c. James and John are identified as the instigating actors in this conversation
 - i. Mark reminds us that James and John are brothers; they share a father in Zebedee
 - ii. Mark told us about their recruitment as disciples in 1:19-20
 - iii. Mark also told us about Jesus' nickname for these brothers: Sons of Thunder 3:17
 - iv. Mark also told us that James and John were included in the small "insider" group of three that were invited to see Jesus transfigured 9:2-3
 - v. These brothers were specified more often than all but Peter thus far in Mark's account, **which helps us to believe that they had a significant relationship with Jesus.**
 - d. The brothers physically move to be closer to Jesus before making their request
 - i. The word choice, "came forward" also indicates a willingness to be out front. They are not hiding the fact that they are making this request, which makes me think they see nothing wrong with making it.
 - ii. Also, they step "to him," which indicates a familiarity and comfortability. Just a few verses before people in close proximity to Jesus were described as "afraid" (10:32)—this choice to move closer seems in direct contrast to that feeling.
 - e. The text does not differentiate which brother is about to speak. They are talked about as a pair.
2. Initial request All 35b
- a. The brothers address Jesus as "Teacher" rather than "Rabbi," which again, is a choice of familiarity.
 - b. The request comes from both—"we"—and yet I assume only one of them is speaking on behalf of both.
 - c. Rather than make their actual request from the beginning, they make an open-ended request.
 - i. The language rings as adolescent to me: "we want you to do whatever we ask"
 - ii. This is the kind of request I've taught my children to run from! The kind that can get you in trouble!
 - iii. This request to make a request seems quite bold and in nature with their nickname!
 - iv. Also, this request to make a request definitely builds drama.
3. Jesus grants permission to continue All 36
- a. Jesus replies to both brothers collectively
 - b. He uses the plural "you"—indicating that whatever they ask and his reply to "them" will be collective in nature

- c. His response does not respond to the boldness I perceive in the brothers' request. It is a simple acquiescence to hear their request.
 - d. I'm not sure that I should, but I almost hear a curiosity in Jesus' reply and imagine a bit of a crinkle of a smile on his lips as he responds, "What is it you want?" So much drama from these brothers!
- 4. Full request All 37
 - a. Again, neither brother is named as the speaker. Are we to assume that they spoke in unison or that one spoke for both? I feel like the latter is the most likely option.
 - b. The sentence structure of this request is worth investigating.
 - i. The subject of the sentence is an "understood YOU" which in grammar terms indicates a sentence of command. The brothers are giving Jesus a COMMAND as part of their request. This is BOLD!
 - ii. The verb choice, "Grant," indicates that the brothers believe that it is within Jesus' power to make such a decision. This is progress in that they are indirectly acknowledging his authority and power.
 - iii. The direct object, "us," indicates they would be the benefactors of his granting, and the verbal that follows explains their request "to sit" in very specific locations.
 - iv. They seem to understand how demonstrative their request to sit on either side of Jesus by their acknowledgement that it will be in HIS glory. Wow. Again, this is bold.
 - v. Do these brothers understand what Jesus' glory will be? Do they know what they are asking?
 - vi. **In sum, the request of James and John is quite BOLD!**
- B. Jesus' Response 10:38-40 I see three components in Jesus' response and will investigate them in order.
 - 1. Jesus' initial response and question 38
 - 2. The brothers respond 39a
 - 3. Jesus responds fully 39b-40
 - 1. Jesus' initial response and question All 38
 - a. It's significant that Mark begins Jesus' response with a brief preparatory statement launched with a CONTRASTING coordinating conjunction--"But"-- so as to prepare the reader for the disagreement coming. Mark could have just said "Jesus said" but he begins with a word that indicates argument.
 - b. Jesus' words indicate a kind of pity. **The brothers don't realize what they are asking. They don't understand the full implications of their request.**
 - c. To help them understand, he asks a question.

- i. We know the question is a metaphor.
- ii. The “cup” will be seen again in a few short chapters as Jesus prays for the “cup to be taken from him”
 - 1. But the disciples don’t know this metaphor yet.
 - 2. So do they fully understand this metaphor? I can’t imagine that they do.
- iii. They will have more familiarity with baptism
 - 1. But is Jesus talking about baptism of water or the Holy Spirit?
 - 2. I think he is talking about the Holy Spirit. If this is the case, the brothers won’t grasp this concept either.
- d. I feel like **the point of the question is to help the brothers understand just how much they don’t understand.**

2. The brothers respond All 39a

- a. Mark gives no indication of hesitation or time to think before the brothers respond.
 - i. These were weighty things to ponder that Jesus asked
 - ii. It troubles me that there is no pause to consider
- b. They answer in the affirmative
 - i. Do they know what they are saying?
 - 1. That in “drinking the cup” they are saying they will die a brutal death, one not unlike the one Jesus has just described in his prediction (33-34).
 - 2. That in being baptized like Jesus they will receive the power that resides in Jesus
 - ii. **I feel certain that they have no idea what they are saying, even if there is truth in their words. They are likely truly willing, but do not grasp what they are saying.**

3. Jesus responds fully 39b-40

- a. Jesus seems to know their future and so responds in kind. 40
 - i. They will likely drink from the same cup in that they will be abused, mistreated and possibly killed.
 - ii. They will be baptized in the same manner as Jesus.
 - iii. James and John still don’t know what these metaphors truly mean.
- b. Jesus explains that the thing for which the brothers have asked is not for him to grant. 40
 - i. This calls into question the authority that the brothers have acknowledged implicitly in their question to him.
- c. Instead, this choice for who will sit to J’s right or left is predetermined. 40

- i. Jesus is under the authority of another
- ii. There is more at play here than the brothers realize.

d. Jesus' response is incredibly patient and kind. 40

- i. He doesn't make fun of what they don't know.
- ii. He is not upset by their bold question.
- iii. He carefully responds to their request with the best explanation he can give within the limits of the brothers' understanding.

C. The disciples' response All 41

1. Mark does not give a careful timeline of these interactions.
2. We are given very nondescript words to describe "when" the other ten hear "this"
 - i. They might have overheard this entire exchange because they were nearby
 - ii. They might have heard about the conversation at some point after from one of the participants
 - iii. We cannot be certain when they heard what they heard
 - iv. We cannot be certain exactly what they heard since we are given a very nondescript demonstrative pronoun ("this") with no real antecedent
3. Regardless of when they heard whatever they hear, their response was collective. Mark indicates that all 10 of the other disciples were unified in their response.
4. **Regardless of when they heard whatever they hear, the 10's response was anger**
 - i. We are told they "began" to be angry
 1. The present participle verb is an indication that their anger had a starting point and was then continuous
 - ii. The recipients of the 10's anger were James and John together
 1. Are they angry at their boldness?
 2. Are they angry at the presumption that they deserve special treatment over and above the others?
 3. Are they angry that Jesus did not respond differently to what must have been perceived by the 10 as a presumptuous and bold request?

SUMMARY OF THE DISCIPLES MISUNDERSTANDING 10: 35-41

- Given the intense and dark revelation of the Passion Prediction in 10:33-34, James and John's request in 10:35-39 puts on vibrant display just how much the disciples still don't understand about what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah.
- If this was an immediate (or fairly soon after) response from James and John, I am left astonished at their insensitivity to Jesus' words as well as the boldness of their question.
- James and John are not connecting that Jesus' impending death, his continual teaching that those who serve will be "first" in his kingdom, has not resonated at all. They are still asking to have places of honor, to essentially, be "first"
- Jesus handles their request magnanimously given the context of their request in relationship to his prior revelation.
- The other 10 disciples also don't understand that Jesus came to serve and that to follow Him means to act as He does, to follow Him in all their ways, including being patient and kind when their fellow disciples are being obnoxious.

2a. What are the key elements of Jesus' correction of this misunderstanding in 10:35-45?

- A. Jesus' physical response to misunderstanding 42a
- B. Contrast of Gentile Rulers with the disciples 42b-44
- C. Son of Man as example 45

2b. Define the key elements of Jesus' correction of this misunderstanding in 10:35-45

- A. Jesus' physical response to misunderstanding All 42a
 - a. It's important that Jesus calls all of them together before he responds
 - b. In that moment they were triangulated—James and John were in conflict with the other 10 over something that was said between the two brothers and Jesus. This is a recipe for disaster within a tight-knit group like the disciples.
 - c. **That Jesus has them all together before he responds with a correction is vitally important to the continued cohesion of the group.**
 - d. **Jesus is a good leader.**

B. Contrast of Gentile Rulers with the disciples 42b-44

a. Jesus sets up a contrast of rulers/leaders in his correction 42b-44

Among Gentiles 42b ↓	↔	Among you (disciples) 43a ↓
Rulers 42b ↓	↔	Whoever wishes to be great 43b ↓
Lord it over them 42b	≠	Must be servants 43b
Their great ones 42b ↓	↔	To be first 44 ↓
Are tyrants 42b	≠	Must be slave of all 44

- b. While all of Jesus' disciples were Jews, they had lived among and under enough Gentiles to know that what he said about Gentile leaders was true. Jesus uses an apt comparison for the disciples to understand. 42b-43
- All of Galilee and Israel had long been under Roman (Gentile) rule.
 - I assume the disciples would have had plenty of life experience to affirm Jesus' assertion that "great" (read powerful) Gentile rulers were tyrants.
- c. In Jesus' upside-down economy, the great are servants. This is a difficult word for the disciples to comprehend given the context in which they have lived, and moreover, the wrong assumptions that have been made about a Jewish Messiah. All 43
- This assertion that the great are servants is still attempting to correct Peter's confusion over the meaning of the word "Messiah"—when he names Jesus with this important epithet and then proceeds to show a clear misunderstanding of the true meaning for Jesus as the suffering Messiah (as in Isaiah 53).
 - Jesus is trying again!
- d. Jesus doubles down on his initial assertion that the great must be servants and says that the first must be slaves! 44
- e. **The heart of Jesus' correction lies in this comparison and assertion. All 43-44**

- i. James and John should not be asking how they can share Jesus' glory if they are truly following Jesus' way. (reference to 37)
 - ii. The disciples should not be angry with their friends if they have the heart of a servant like the One they are following. (reference to 41)
- C. Son of Man (SofM) as example 45
 - a. Just in case the disciples missed it in 43-44, Jesus recaps for them in this verse!
 - b. He uses his favorite name for himself, "SoM"—making himself the example of how to behave.
 - i. In reference to Dr. Miller's good work regarding the "SoM" title on p.9 of his Interpretation of the third Passion Prediction, the connotations of divinity are important here.
 - ii. **His divinity and authority are wrapped up in his name, and yet he will "serve" "many" to the point of death.**
 - c. Using the contrast set up in the previous two verses, he aligns himself with the "great" by asserting his choice to serve.
 - d. He goes a step further by asserting that he will serve to the point of giving up his life, echoing the Passion Prediction that began this cycle in Mark 10:33-34 and 45
 - e. The word "ransom" is important
 - i. This is a reference to the exchange that must happen and that Jesus has alluded to in the first correction to the first Passion Prediction and misunderstanding in 8:35-37.
 - ii. **The transaction referenced here is the main way that Jesus will serve. It's what He came to do.**
 - iii. **It is in this kind of service—the life-giving-away kind—that the disciples must follow Jesus.**

SUMMARY of Jesus' Correction: 10:42-45

- Jesus prioritizes teaching his disciples to be better, and to be better together. He is a good leader.
- Jesus sets up a comparison to help His disciples understand that no one should be asking for privileged position. That, instead, the great are servants, slaves even, to all. This is the goal to aspire towards (not sitting at his right or left hand in His glory).
- Jesus makes himself the example to follow, reminding the disciples again that He came to serve and give his life away. If they choose to follow him, they will need to do the same.

Interactions with Secondary Sources

Witherington, Ben III. *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. W.B. Eerdmans, 2001.

1. Witherington does not comment on the timing of the request from the Zebedee brothers but does talk about the irony and inappropriateness of the response given the prediction that Jesus has just made about his death (286).
2. He also discusses these 10 verses as a unit (286).
3. He also assesses the situation similarly: the brothers really have no idea what they are asking, but W goes onto conjecture where/in what setting they would like to sit on either side of Jesus (from a historical/eschatological perspective) and gives a much fuller understanding from the OT of the implications of “the cup” and the baptism. This kind of secondary information is hugely helpful to understanding this conversation (286-287).
4. W calls the comparison between the secular leaders and Jesus’ leadership a “parable”—I would not have thought it as such. I feel like the story is an apt comparison from real life—and the leaders don’t represent something else (like in a parable) (288).
5. W also talks of “echoes” of Isaiah 53, although he do so in comparing it to v.45 (and I compared it to v.43). The argument still holds, though, and I’m feeling excited that I picked up on this, certainly not to the depth W explores, but still! (288-290).

Stein, Robert H. *Mark*. Edited by Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein, Baker Academic, 2008. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament.

1. The first thing I notice is that Stein groups v.41 with v.42-45, saying that he feels that v.41 introduces what follows rather than concluding what has just happened. (482, 486) I disagree and I don’t feel like Stein makes a good case for his argument.
2. Stein also discusses the many OT references to the metaphors of “cup” and “baptism”—and I’m wondering how I didn’t realize this! (485-486).
3. Stein discusses v.45 as “the most disputed verse in all of Mark” due to questions of its authenticity (487).
4. Stein also calls v.45 a “concluding example of the teachings”—also seeing it as a reiterating of Jesus’ point with him at the center (488).
5. Stein reminds us again of prediction--misunderstanding—teaching/correction cycle that we have been studying as a primary structure in Mark (489).