Servant/King

December 6, 2026

Lesson Summary

Main Passages
Mark 10:35-45; John 13:1-17; Revelation 19:16

Session Outline
1. Suffering and Service (Mark 10:35-45)
2. The Servant King (John 13:1-17)
3. King of Kings (Revelation 19:16)

Theological Theme
Jesus is the King of kings, but He modeled humility and obedience in His earthly ministry.

Call to Action
We serve because Jesus has served us. Who can you serve this week?

Leader Guide

Servant/King

Introduction

Those in power have enjoyed special perks and privileges for millennia. It's easy to see with a quick look at history.

Take Louis XIV of France, for example. Every morning, he had a "getting-up ceremony" in which members of his court (this number was probably around one hundred men) would watch as the king was washed, shaved, combed, and dressed. He had a daily "going-to-bed" ceremony, too.[1]

England's Henry VIII famously kept a "Groom of the King's Close Stool," whose job it was to be on hand and ready for trips to the restroom. Kings of England kept someone in this position until King Edward VII did away with it in 1901.[2]

Biblical history gives us an example of this type of privilege, too. After deposing his wife for refusing to appear before his drunk friends at a banquet (interestingly, some scholars suggest her appearance at the men's banquet might have violated Persian law), King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) signed off on the idea to take beautiful virgins from every corner of his vast empire and bring them to him to find a new queen who pleased him (Esther 1–2). Many other examples of this can be found throughout Scripture.

Power, especially that of a king, usually comes with privileges, but thankfully, that's not the way Jesus, the King of kings, lived or led.

? What other stories from history or pop culture come to mind when you think of people in power enjoying special privileges?

? What do you know about how Jesus approached special privileges during His ministry?

Session Summary

Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and He is sovereign and supreme over all people and things.

Yet Jesus didn't act like those with earthly power often do. Instead of requiring His followers to serve Him, which He certainly deserved as God in the flesh, He humbly served others. He acted in obedience to the Father's will for His life. He set an example of what true leadership and authority look like in the kingdom.

1. Suffering and Service (Mark 10:35-45)

What did James and John think they were asking for in this passage?

How did Jesus point to the reality they did not see in the moment?

In this well-known interaction, James and John asked to sit at Jesus's right and left sides in glory. To sit at the right hand of a king was a great honor, and the left hand was a close second. James and John sought honor in God's kingdom in the same way humans were honored on earth. But Jesus's perspective on greatness was entirely different.

In verse 42, Jesus described worldly leadership: people in positions of power "lord it over" those beneath them. Jesus described these rulers as "tyrants" (v. 42). This is the leadership that those living under the harsh authority of the Roman Empire were used to. But that's not the way it works in God's kingdom.

Jesus turned their idea of leadership and authority on its head:

> *"But it is not so among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all."* —Mark 10:43-44

In the church Jesus is building, the expectation for those in leadership is to take on the role of a servant. A servant does what the master (in the case of believers, our Master is Jesus) requires, putting on a spirit of humility and working for the good of others.

The Son Who Gave

The greatest example of servant leadership is the Son of Man. Giving is the essence of servanthood, and Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many (cp. Is 53:10–12). "Ransom" refers to the price paid to release a slave. The words of v. 45 are crucial to Jesus's self-understanding of his death.

Paul also wrote about this idea:

> *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves.* —Philippians 2:3

And Jesus not only taught this way; He lived it. He modeled servant humility for His disciples (including us). If He lived this way, how much more should we?

> *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* —Mark 10:45



What are some ways you've been surprised by the reality of the kingdom of God compared with your expectations of it?

2. The Servant King (John 13:1-17)



How did the disciples react to Jesus's actions in this passage? Why?



How do these events tie in with what Jesus taught in our previous passage in Mark?

In the Gospel accounts, we see Jesus serving again and again. He healed, helped, and taught, and in this passage, not far from His ultimate sacrifice on the cross, Jesus took on the role of a literal servant before the Twelve.

Imagine what it would have been like to live in the first century. Everyone walked everywhere, on dusty, dirty roads in sandals. So when a person entered someone's home, their feet were washed—but this was a lowly task only given to Gentile slaves. A Jewish slave would not even have been expected to do it. And in a household with no slaves, water would be provided for the guests to wash their own feet.[3]

One thing that never happened? Someone with high status or a position of authority washing others' feet. Such a task was beneath them. But Jesus was different.

Jesus "laid aside his outer clothing" (v. 4). This note might not mean much to us, but it provides incredibly important context. Jesus was taking the posture of a slave.[4] This is how the King of kings showed His authority and led in the upside-down kingdom He was building. He served.

Even without the historical context, we can see from the disciples' reactions that this was outside of the norm. Peter declared, "You will never wash my feet," but Jesus persisted (v. 8).

John notes that the enemy was already burrowed in the heart of Judas (v. 11). Jesus was fully divine, and He knew Judas would betray Him very soon.

But Jesus still washed Judas's feet. In the face of betrayal, He still loved and served. He set an example, and He charged His disciples to do the same: "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (v. 14). Jesus's emphasis here wasn't on literal foot washing but on serving others as a regular way of life.

This is made clear by His powerful words: "Truly I tell you, a servant is not greater than his master, and a messenger is not greater than the one who sent him" (John 13:16).



How does Jesus's service to us motivate us to serve others? How does it free us to do so?

3. King of Kings (Revelation 19:16)



What does this verse communicate about Jesus's identity?



Why is this relevant to our discussion today?

For those of you who weren't with us as we studied Revelation, this chapter presents an image of Jesus that might look different from images we frequently call to mind. This picture of Jesus is powerful, fierce, and victorious over the forces of evil, as evidenced by His titles of King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Old Testament features this "king of kings" title to refer to the rulers of powerful ancient kingdoms, whom God put in place and worked through to bring about His will:

> *"Your Majesty, you are king of kings. The God of the heavens has given you sovereignty, power, strength, and glory."* —Daniel 2:37

> *Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, an expert in the law of the God of the heavens: Greetings.* —Ezra 7:12

What an interesting progression in the pages of Scripture. This title, first ascribed in the Old Testament to human kings who were powerful by human standards, finds new meaning in the New Testament.

> *"These will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings. Those with him are called, chosen, and faithful."* —Revelation 17:14

Christ's power and authority are higher than those of any earthly king. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus is more powerful than mighty ancient Rome, yet during His earthly ministry, He adopted the posture of a servant. Unlike so many leaders who came before Him and have come since, Jesus chose not to take advantage of the perks of His status. Instead, He humbled Himself, was obedient to God the Father, and served others. This calls to mind one of our passages from last week:

> *Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus,*
>
> > *who, existing in the form of God,*
> > *did not consider equality with God*
> > *as something to be exploited.*
> > *Instead he emptied himself*
> > *by assuming the form of a servant,*
> > *taking on the likeness of humanity.*
> > *And when he had come as a man,*
> > *he humbled himself by becoming obedient*
> > *to the point of death—*
> > *even to death on a cross.* —Philippians 2:5-8



How does Jesus's humility further reveal His greatness?

Conclusion

Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him (Matthew 28:18). His power and authority are higher than any kingdom or thing or person on this earth.

In His earthly ministry, Jesus didn't act like one with supreme power and authority. He taught that the truly great in the kingdom would be servants. He didn't come to be served, though He deserves service from all of creation. He humbly assumed the role of a slave and, in an act that would have been completely mind-blowing for His followers, washed His disciples' feet. Jesus came to serve and give His life as a sacrifice for His people.

How does the example of leadership and authority that Jesus set differ from what we commonly see in human kingdoms and organizations?

How are we called to be humble and serve others in light of our identity in Christ?

How might living this way give you opportunities to share Jesus with others?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for sending Jesus to model obedience and humble service. Thank Him for the gift of His Son. Ask for His help as you seek to live in obedient Christlikeness this Christmas season.

Memory Verse

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

Additional Resources

- *Let Earth Receive Her King* by Alistair Begg
- *Family Advent* by Matt and Lauren Chandler
- *The Expected One* by Scott James


GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS
GATHER
GIVE
GO
GROUPS

Historical Context of Mark

Purpose

Mark's Gospel is a narrative about Jesus. Mark identifies his theme in the first verse: "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." That Jesus is the divine Son of God is the major emphasis of his Gospel. God announced it at Jesus's baptism in 1:11. Demons and unclean spirits recognized and acknowledged it in 3:11 and 5:7. God reaffirmed it at the transfiguration in 9:7. Jesus taught it parabolically in 12:1–12, hinted at it in 13:32, and confessed it directly in 14:61–62. Finally, the Roman centurion confessed it openly and without qualification in 15:39. Thus Mark's purpose was to summon people to repent and respond in faith to the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1:1,15).

Author

The Gospel of Mark is anonymous. Eusebius, the early church historian, writing in AD 326, preserved the words of Papias, an early church father. Papias quoted "the elder," probably John, as saying that Mark recorded Peter's preaching about the things Jesus said and did, but not in order. Thus Mark was considered the author of this Gospel even in the first century.

Setting

According to the early church fathers, Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome just before or just after Peter's martyrdom. Further confirmation of the Roman origin of Mark's Gospel is found in Mark 15:21 where Mark noted that Simon, a Cyrenian who carried Jesus's cross, was the father of Alexander and Rufus, men apparently known to the believers in Rome.

Special Features

Mark's Gospel emphasizes actions and deeds. Jesus is on the go—healing, casting out demons, performing miracles, hurrying from place to place, and teaching. In Mark everything happens "immediately." As soon as one episode ends, another begins. The rapid pace slows down when Jesus enters Jerusalem (11:1). Thereafter, events are marked by days, and his final day by hours.

Extended Commentary

Mark 10:35-45

At 10:33 Jesus specified the destination of His way—Jerusalem, where He would face condemnation, torture, and death. Jerusalem has already been depicted as the home base of Jesus' opponents (3:22; 7:1). Jesus' acceptance of His role as Suffering Servant stands in sharpest contrast with James and John's demand: "Teacher, … do … whatever we ask." Our prayer requests say much about us. Later Bartimaeus would ask Jesus for sight so he could follow Jesus in the way of the cross. Here James and John's request for the seats of honor at Jesus' coming in glory confirms that Peter was not the only disciple interested in sharing only the Messiah's glory (8:32) and that the lesson of "greatness through service" (9:35) was not easily grasped. Jesus promised James and John that they would fulfill their calling as disciples by sharing His cup of suffering (see Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17, 22) and baptism of death. Christian leaders are to be distinguished from secular leaders who "lord it over." Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve, sets the pattern for Christian leaders. His costly "ransom" frees us for service.[4]

John 13:1-17

The love of Jesus for His disciples, and those who would come to be His disciples, is shown in the washing of the disciples' feet. The servant motif, so prevalent in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 10:45), is here revealed as well in the Gospel of John. Servanthood is a direct extension and representation of love (13:1). What enabled Jesus to perform this act of utter humility was a keen understanding of who He was, where He had come from, and where He was going (13:3). This is a key to humility in all persons—a healthy and balanced understanding of who they are.

If Jesus, Lord and Teacher, washes our feet, how much more should we wash one another's feet (13:14). What is at hand is not the institution of an ordinance of foot-washing, as this passage has sometimes been interpreted, but the lifestyle of humble servanthood.[5]

Revelation 19:16

Heaven is opened, and the One whose coming has been faithfully petitioned from ages past, the Word of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, appears to battle the enemies of God in a conflict whose outcome is not in doubt. When the Lamb comes with His heavenly armies, the first beast and the second beast are thrown into the lake of fire from which there is no return. The dragon, who is the serpent of old, the devil and Satan, is cast into a hellish abyss that is shut and sealed for a thousand years. Since the powers of evil reigned for "three and a half years" (the period of time between the ascension and return of our Lord), Christ will reign for a "thousand years." The dead in Christ are raised to govern with Him, and God's rightful rule over the earth is vindicated.[6]

References

1. "A Day in the Life of Louis XIV," Château de Versailles, accessed October 5, 2026, https://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover/history/key-dates/day-life-louis-xiv#mornings.
2. Ben Johnson, "Groom of the Stool," Historic UK, March 2, 2015, https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Groom-of-the-Stool/.
3. F. L. Anderson and Daniel Webster Kurtz, "Washing of Feet," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr et al. (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 3072.
4. Christopher A. Beetham and Nancy L. Erickson, eds., *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible*, One-Volume Edition, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 966.
5. David S. Dockery, *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998).
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.