

## **REFLECTIONS ON SERVANT LEADERSHIP OF JESUS IN MARK 10: 35-45: ITS IMPLICATION FOR NIGERIAN LEADERSHIP**

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### **Abstract:**

Nigeria has been plagued with many social ills, ranging from insecurity, corruption, embezzlement, economic woes, social discrimination, political instability, tribal discrimination, religious bigotry, and gross violation of human rights. These problems pose a threat to the survival of individuals and the nation as a whole. The effect of these ills has pushed Nigerians into abject poverty, penury, and backwardness. The situation has been attributed to ‘bad’ leadership among other factors. Therefore, Nigeria is at the mercy of a few corrupt, tyrannical, and wicked leaders. Scholars have treated the concept of leadership, the qualities of good leadership, the theory of leadership, the principles of leadership, the features of a good leader, and servant leadership. But these scholars have not paid attention to the exemplary leadership as contained in the Mark’s gospel, Chapter 10:35-45, and its implications on Nigerian society. In view of the aforementioned corrupt practices among the leadership, the study examines the servant leadership pattern of Jesus as contained in Mark 10, verses 35-45, as a template for Nigerian leadership. The research employs the narrative, descriptive, and hermeneutical methods. The finding reveals that people who are saddled with the responsibility of governance misconstrue the essence of governance and abuse their privileged position. Servant leadership is an ideal instrument of good governance, and servant leadership and good governance are independent variables that are inseparable. The study concludes that the Jesus servant-leadership model is an ideal pattern and sure way to secure good governance, and therefore recommends that leaders should see their position as an opportunity to serve and not to be served, which they will give account and will be held accountable.

**Keywords:** Governance, Leadership, Patriotism, Servant, Servant-leadership

## **1. Introduction**

The bane of Nigeria is bad leadership, the nation has witnessed leaders of all kinds. The best description of most of them is tyrants, they have common features which ranges from abuse of human right, promotion of corruption and destruction of nation's economy. History have shown in different parts of the nation that people have misunderstood leadership. Hence dictatorship, anarchy, highhandedness and corruption have gained entrance into nooks and crannies of the society. The need quality leadership cannot be overemphasised, though tough and demanding, it is an important phenomenon that revolves round the destiny of people in the society. It is a pivot upon which every human activity revolves.

According to Abogunrin (2009), Leadership involves the exercise of power and authority has been abused by the politicians. In a socio-political situation of the country, it is expedient to examine servant leadership model of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the thrust of this research is to investigate Christ-servant leadership pattern in an attempt to proffer solution to Nigeria leadership problem. An exegetical analysis of Mark 10:35-45 will also be done. In order to have a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, a cursory look at Mark's presentation of Jesus Christ as servant leader will also be examined. While considering leadership challenges in nation, the study will expatiate on the features of Christ-servant leadership as model for Nigeria leadership.

## **2. The Text: Mark 10:35-45**

35 Καί προσπορεύονται αὐτῷ Ἰάκωβος καί Ἰωάννης οἱ υἱοὶ Ζεβεδαίου λέγοντες αὐτῷ Διδάσκαλε θέλομεν ἵνα ὁ ἐάν αἰτήσωμέν σε ποιήσῃς ἡμῖν. 36 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Τί θέλετέ (με) ποιήσω ὑμῖν 37 οἱ δὲ εἶπαν αὐτῷ Δός ἡμῖν ἵνα εἰς σου ἐκ δεξιῶν καί εἰς ἐξ ἀριστερῶν καθίσωμεν ἐν τῇ δόξῃ σου. 38 ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Οὐκ οἶδατε αἰτεῖσθε δυνασθε πλεῖν τὸ ποτήριον ὃ ἐγὼ πίνω ἢ τὸ βάπτισμα ὃ ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι βαπτισθῆναι; 39 οἱ δὲ εἶπαν αὐτῷ Δυνάμεθα. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Τὸ ποτήριον ὃ ἐγὼ πίνω πίεσθε καί τὸ βάπτισμα ὃ ἐγὼ βαπτίζομαι βαπτισθήσεσθε 40 τὸ δὲ καθίσαι ἐκ δεξιῶν μου ἢ ἐξ εὐωνύμων οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμὸν δοῦναι, ἀλλ' οἷς ἡτοιμάσται 41 καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ δέκα ἠρξάντο ἀγανακτεῖν περὶ Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωάννου. 42 καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος αὐτούς ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγει αὐτοῖς, Οἶδατε ὅτι οἱ δοκουντες ἀρχειν τῶν ἐθνῶν κατακυριεύουσιν αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ μεγάλοι αὐτῶν κατεξουσιάζουσιν αὐτῶν. 43 οὐχ οὕτως δὲ ἔστιν ἐν ὑμῖν, ἀλλ' ὅς ἂν θέλῃ μέγας γενέσθαι ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος, 44 καὶ ὅς ἂν θέλῃ ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι πρῶτος ἔσται πάντων δούλος 45 Καὶ γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ

ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἦλθεν διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ διακονήσαυ καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντί πολλῶν.

35 And James and John, the son of zeb'edee, came forward to him and said to him "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you" 36 And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink, or to be baptized?" 39 And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized. 40 but to sit at my right hand or my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those whom it has been prepared. 41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be a slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

### **3. Exegesis of the Servant Leadership in Luke 10: 35-45**

The passion prophecies found in Luke 9:30–32 and 10:32–34 set the stage for Jesus' teachings on humility and servanthood, particularly directed at his disciples (9:33; 10:35–37). As Ackroyd, Cleaney, and Parker (2012) observe, despite Jesus' clear message at Caesarea Philippi and Peter's confession, the disciples, especially the sons of Zebedee, failed to grasp the gravity of his mission. Their misguided ambition led them to request positions of honor in Christ's glory, exposing their shallow understanding and drawing criticism from the other ten disciples—who themselves were preoccupied with status.

Jesus responds by redefining greatness through servanthood, emphasizing that the Son of Man's ultimate act of service will be his sacrificial death, a theme that deepens the earlier instruction in 9:35–37. The disciples' failure to comprehend Jesus' destiny, marked by rejection and death, is evident in James and John's request, which, as Ademola (2017) notes, coincided with Jesus' announcement of his impending suffering in Jerusalem and resurrection after three days. Adamolekun (2016) interprets their petition, particularly in verses 35 and 37, as grounded in a political and eschatological expectation—seeing Jesus as a messianic king restoring David's throne. Their desire to sit at his right and left suggests aspirations for high status in his

coming reign (cf. I Kings 2:19; Ps. 110:1). Jesus' journey to Jerusalem signaled for them an imminent display of divine glory.

In verses 38–39, Jesus confronts their misunderstanding. His probing questions underscore the cost of sharing in his glory—namely, sharing in his suffering. Alexander (2018) highlights the metaphors of the “cup” and “baptism” as symbols of Jesus' coming passion, reflecting Old Testament imagery of divine judgment (cf. Isa. 53:5). While these images signify Jesus' role as the sacrificial lamb for sin of humanity, they also point to the moral and spiritual trials the disciples would face. Elwell (2016) and Ferguson & Wright (2018) affirm that the “cup” often represented God's wrath and judgment, and Jesus willingly embraced this on behalf of sinners. Greenleaf (2017) and others further explain that Jesus' baptism refers not to water immersion but to being overwhelmed by suffering, aligning with John the Baptist's message of repentance and divine judgment. Jesus, in this act, identifies with humanity's sinfulness and submits to God's will through his death on the cross.

In verse 39, Jesus acknowledges that James and John will indeed face suffering (cf. Acts 12:2; Rev. 1:9), though the nature of their participation differs from his. Their commitment is commendable, but they still lack a full understanding. Iroegbu (2005) notes that Jesus' refusal to grant their request in verse 40 aligns with his complete submission to the Father's authority. The places of honor belong only to those for whom they have been prepared by God. Verses 41–44 reveal the disciples' jealousy and internal strife, further highlighting their flawed conception of leadership. Janvier and Theba (2021) point out that Jesus had to shape this group of ambitious individuals into leaders for the early Church. Kato (2015) contrasts this with the ruling style of Gentile leaders who wield power for personal gain, referencing coinage depicting Roman emperors as semi-divine figures to illustrate worldly conceptions of authority. Jesus subverts this by presenting leadership as selfless service.

Kelling (2018) emphasizes that greatness in Jesus' community is achieved through servanthood. True leadership, Jesus teaches, involves caring for others before oneself and showing love through service. Verses 43 and 44 redefine greatness in the Kingdom as rooted in humility, compassion, and devotion to God and others (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19; Gal. 5:13). In verse 45, Jesus states plainly that the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Kpena (2019) affirms that this declaration epitomizes servant leadership. Jesus sets aside divine glory to fulfill God's redemptive plan through his death, reshaping perceptions of rank and status. The

phrase “The Son of Man came...” connects Jesus’ sacrificial service to his messianic mission (cf. Isa. 53:10), highlighting its voluntary and redemptive nature.

Lane (2017) interprets the “ransom” metaphor as denoting deliverance from bondage—whether slavery, sin, or death—through substitution. Jesus dies in place of the many, fulfilling the role of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:10. This act of divine love liberates humanity from separation from God and establishes a new way of life rooted in sacrificial obedience. Okojie (2013) argues that while Jesus alone could accomplish this redemptive mission, his example calls the disciples to follow in his footsteps through humble service. John, the son of Zebedee, ultimately grasped this truth, as seen in 1 John 3:16: “He laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” Thus, Jesus’ life and death become the ultimate model for leadership—not of dominance, but of service.

At Qumran, the term “the many” referred specifically to the chosen community — God’s end-time people. The majestic figure of the Son of Man is identified with this group, which will be justified and saved during the final judgment. Jesus’ willing, innocent death, aligned with God’s will, fits the message of Isaiah 53. The full meaning of Jesus’ suffering and sacrificial death can only be grasped through his life, death, and resurrection as narrated in the Gospels. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus’ statement about giving his life as a ransom directly corresponds to his death. Because Jesus’ will was perfectly in line with God’s purpose, he had to die in place of the guilty (Mark 8:31, 33). That’s what it means for him to give his life as a ransom for many.

#### **4. Leadership**

Leadership is the act of exercising authority and influence. It has some qualities and responsibilities attached to it. It is ability to inspire, direct, motivate and encourage others positively to a target end. It is a process in which leaders influence followers in given contexts to achieve the purposes to which they were called. A leader is the one who lead by example and persuasion. According to Munroe (2025) leadership is the ability to influence, inspire, motivate, encourage people by passion, produced by a conviction, generated by vision, driven by a purpose. Leadership by all standards is the capacity to carry others along to achieve the vision, goal and purpose by serving and leading by example. It is the aspect of asking the led to do as you do. This is because of the confidence they have in you that you would always do the right thing. Leadership is service oriented, it can render services to the citizenry to make provision for the yearning and



aspirations of the society. Hemphill (2019) considered leadership as “the behaviour of an individual who is involved who in directing group activities”. The key thought here is the directing of group activities. Yet, how an individual directs these activities, in what spirit humane or bureaucratic will determine the ultimate success or failure of those group activities.

In the Art of Leadership by Packer (2013), leadership is seen as “the process of helping a group to achieve goals which seems desirable to the group.” It is more interesting to note that Tead stresses the obvious importance of “helping” as against Hemphill who uses the word “directing”. This therefore, provides an informative and significant distinction which differentiates considerably between the humane and the bureaucratic approach. This means that servant role in leadership is not to direct, but to help achieve the common or the desirable goal of a group.

Packer’s form of leadership role is geared towards participative type of leadership qualities while Hemphill’s approach may tend to lording over others. Leadership is not lordship for the two are mutually incompatible in the servant leadership. Servant role in leadership must be learned and encouraged because it is divine and not human by nature. It manifests itself by first seeking the good of others before that of self and not vice versa. The sinful self naturally seeks almost anything, and I mean anything, by wanting to lead others without counting the costs. But the leadership that seeks to serve others as servant is not sought for by anything. Its manifestation springs from an inner will to be of service to God and man. This is a type of leadership spirit or role that Nigeria needs at this present stage of her political history as a developing nation.

Philip (2014) encouraged the political aspirants into the prospective political offices should see themselves as leaders with the drives of serving others and not themselves in their desires, once more, to control the buoyant economy of this great nation in Africa. In other words, our politicians must know that the success or failure of the coming Third Republic would depend largely on the type of leadership role that is put on operation. It should not be the type of leadership that seeks for power but service, not for self but others, not for greed but love. This type of leadership role is servant hood.

Servant leadership is a rare commodity in our world today and especially in the most parts of the African countries with Nigeria not as an exception. This is not to say that such leadership role is not being practiced. In some quarters. But whenever it is manifested by such leaders, it is because of God has moved upon their hearts,

whether or not they declare themselves to be children of God. This is the thrust of the message of John (III John 11). It is a constant desire to seek the good of others. It is when our leaders see themselves as servants of the people they serve that there can be a solution to the problems of tribal, religious and political differences that continue to threaten the necessary developments in Nigeria as a sovereign nation. Here the servant hood model of Jesus Christ is the example for us.

### **5. Islamic Perspective on Servant Leadership**

The religion of Islam transcends ethnic boundary in its theory and practice. The adherents, irrespective of social status, colour, race, language or place of origin; believe in one God, Allah, read the same Quran in the same language, pray in the same manner and face the East during prayer. This is an eloquent demonstration of brotherhood of mankind and unity with God. The people in power (Leaders) should fulfil their obligations towards the citizen. It is not only necessary but essential that leaders should intensify efforts towards safeguarding of human rights and guaranteeing freedom of justice and equity. Quran admonishes that leaders should rule with the fear of Allah, bearing in mind that they will give account of their stewardship on the day of reckoning.

In line with the leadership pattern in Islam and the conduct of public affairs, Quran lays down certain general discussions which if the country carries into effect will revolutionise the administrative network of the government and enhance good governance. “Allah commands leaders to entrust authority into the hands of those who are best fitted to discharge it, and that when you are called upon to judge between, or exercise authority over the people, you must do so equitably and with justice. Surely, excellent is that with which Allah admonishes you. Allah is All-hearing, All-seeing” Quran 4:59

This Allah’s injunction encouraged leaders to allocate responsibilities to those who are best capable to handle them. In Nigeria for example, the federal character syndrome should not be operated like a national cake that could be shared equally or otherwise without considering the competence of the benefactor. Although the letter and spirit of the system as well as that quota system have good foundation on which the nation edifice could be built. Another example was Muslim-Muslim ticket of the present administration in the country which attracted a lot of criticism among citizens, both Christians and Muslims. These reactions was based on people’s opinion that leadership was insensitive and unfair to people of other faith.

## **6. Servant Leadership in Nigerian Context**

Leadership generally could be understood in Nigeria from the traditional point of view. The socio-political and religious powers revolves round the palace. The kings and chiefs are believed to be helpers and intermediaries of the Supreme Being. They attend to all the needs of the community. It is not surprising therefore, to find in many parts of Africa the king or chief is held in high esteem. In Nigeria for instance the king or chief is held in high esteem. In Northern, Western and Southern Nigeria politics is more sophisticated and hieratical. The king or chief wields more power over a large expanse of territory.

The emergence of colonial administrators did not change the situation. The European administrators were highly revered. They proved more superior to the traditional rulers, all and sundry were ruled and dominated. They were carried by hand from one place or one community to the other. Although they came with a religion of love which did not reflect in their dealings with the people.

Pobee (2021) noted that Jesus' actions and teachings during the time August Ceasar, Herod, Pharisees and Rabbi especially on servant leadership was direct opposite of their convetional, cultural and traditional practices. While leadership was viewed as lordship, intimidation and domination of other by the Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures, Jesus saw it as a humble service to others. He through love and compassion ministered to the needs of others. He was moved with compassion to feed the multitude, heal the sick and delivered the oppressed and paid the sacrifice of love to fulfil his Father's mission to save the lost humanity (John 2:1 – 10; 6:1 – 6).

This exemplary life can go a long way to Nigerian leaders of dictatorship oppressive leadership. Nigerian political leaders should be aware of the fact that it is God who has given them the opportunity of leadership and that they are also accountable to Him. Therefore it is position that can lead one to the attainment of heaven or hell. Taiwo (2011) agreed with the assertion that says: "... that when God gives you leadership, it is like He has given you a key to Paradise and to Hell. If you do the right thing, then you go to Paradise. If you do the wrong thing you go to Hell."

Nigerian leaders should use their mandate to serve the people. They should cultivate Christ like qualities of leadership – humility, love, compassion, faithfulness, enthusiasm and generosity. Instead looting public treasury to enrich themselves they should use available resources to improve life of the people and their standard living. Although Nigerian concept of leadership is that of lordship and ruler



ship, leaders who respond to the gospel should make a difference by their exemplary life.

## **7. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The solution to Nigerian leadership problem is not a particular ideology. It is having Christ-servant leaders. Most leaders placed more values on ego rather than service, while Jesus rendered sacrificial and humble service to people. Thus, if Nigerian leaders can follow this example, the country will be a paradise on earth. It was Jesus' outstanding leadership qualities such as humility, love and care that led to excellence, prominence and success of his mission on earth. The socio-political situation in nation will change for better if leaders will learn lessons from Christ-servant leadership style. It is therefore recommended that the church should show leadership example of humility and piety, and should tell truth to leaders without fear. Citizen should choose leaders with the fear of God.

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