

Matthew 20:20-28: Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. ²¹ And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." ²² Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." ²³ He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." ²⁴ And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. ²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Intro: In the parable of the amazing grace of the owner of the vineyard, we saw that in the kingdom of heaven, there will be no sinful comparisons or works-righteousness legalism; God always does what's right; God is absolutely sovereign & free to give grace to whom He pleases; God is extravagantly generous, so we should be thankful & amazed by grace; & all God's children are fundamentally equal in His sight. Two weeks ago, we saw Jesus focus His disciples' hearts & minds on the first & primary reality that will make all of this amazing grace we receive possible: the deliverance, sufferings, death, & resurrection of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem.

Today, we see Jesus teaches that suffering & sacrifice must come before honor, & true greatness is found in humbly serving others, even as He did, when He gave the ultimate example of service: His death on that cross!

1. Jesus' Disciples (And All Men!) Have A Relentless Desire To Be Great And To Be First

Matthew 20:20-21: Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. ²¹ And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."

a. James and John & their mother come to Jesus asking for greatness: In Mark's Gospel, James and John came asking this question of Jesus, & in Matthew we learn that they got their mother's help too! They're asking for the honor & privilege of sitting at the right & left hand of Jesus in His kingdom – to share Christ's preeminence.

b. What's good about this question? 1) They know that Jesus is a King & He has a kingdom! See their faith!
2) Maybe they want to be near Jesus? Or do they just want the power, honor, & prestige: they just want to be great?

c. Jesus knows their question is about being first & great: Matthew 20:26-27: But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave

Jesus just kindly rebuked His disciples for this kind of desire! See His love & patience with His disciples!

- **Matthew 19:30:** But many who are first will be last, and the last first. **"For"** – then the parable. And then:

- **Matthew 20:16:** So the last will be first, and the first last.

J. MacArthur: The only way the first are last & the last are first is if everyone finishes the race at the same time!

d. The disciples are preoccupied with this desire for greatness: Matthew 18:1-4: At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³ and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

We must turn! We must turn from this desire to be the greatest! We must turn from trusting in ourselves & in everything else except God! We must turn from pride! We must turn from wanting to be God & having things our way! We must be born again! We must repent!

David Platt: To be a citizen of the kingdom, you must become a child of the King . . . you must turn from yourself and trust in the Father. Like a child, you thrust yourself upon God and confess your need for Him. **GOSPEL!**

e. We must beware of using Jesus to get what we really want: What we really want is our god. Prosperity preachers use Jesus like this: come to Jesus & He'll give you money & health & wealth! Or we can use Jesus like this: come to Jesus, & He'll fix your life, fix your marriage, fix your drug problem, help you get your family back! Jesus' disciples are not idolaters like the Pharisees. But they do have mixed motives. We must beware of loving God's gifts more than we love God Himself. May we know, believe, feel, & say like the Psalmist:

Psalm 73:25: Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

Psalm 43:4: Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy

Psalm 16:2: I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."

Psalm 37:4: Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

f. What we ask God for reveals what's in our hearts: 1 Kings 3:5-13: At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." ⁶ Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. ⁷ "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. ⁸ Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. ⁹ So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" ¹⁰ The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹ So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, ¹² I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. ¹³ Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for – both riches and honor – so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. **(Pray the Bible!)**

2. Jesus Teaches That Suffering And Sacrifice Must Come Before Honor

Matthew 20:22-23: Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." ²³ He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

a. Jesus informs James & John that they have no idea what they're asking for: They all ran away! They don't realize the amount of deep suffering it will take for them to be great, to be first! First the cross, then the crown!

b. There is a sense in which they cannot drink the cup Jesus will drink: Jesus was on His way to drink the cup of His Father's infinite curse, wrath, & judgment on that cross! Jesus begged for it to be taken away 3 times!

What's in the cup?: Jeremiah 25:15: This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it."

c. There is a sense in which they can & will drink the cup Jesus would drink: They will suffer for obedience! They fled in Jesus' greatest time of need, but something happened! Jesus rose up! And after that, they stood!

- **James** (1st disciple to be martyred): **Acts 12:1-2:** He [King Herod] had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.

- **John** (exiled): **Revelation 1:9:** I, John, your brother & companion in the suffering & kingdom & patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God & the testimony of Jesus.

This fact also totally contradicts the false prosperity gospel! All the disciples of Jesus suffered greatly!

- **2 Timothy 3:12:** Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted

d. God the Father determines who will sit near Jesus: Verse 23: but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.

- 1) Jesus, God the Son, is distinct from God the Father: Gino Jennings (modalists) are wrong!
- 2) God is the One Who determines greatness & gives honor: **Genesis 12:2:** I will make of you a great nation, & I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.
 - **Genesis 39:2:** The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man
 - **Exodus 7:1:** And the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh"
 - **Joshua 4:14:** On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they stood in awe of him
 - **Daniel 1:9:** And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs
 - **1 Samuel 2:6-8:** The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor.
 - **Psalms 75:6-7:** For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up, but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.

3. Jesus' Disciples Are Angry With Jealous Envy

Matthew 20:24: And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers.

The other ten disciples were very angry at James & John for asking this question. They all wanted the high place!

Mark 9:33-34: They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?"³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

a. Envy is evil: Proverbs 14:30: A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.

- **Matthew 27:18:** For he [Pilate] knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered [Jesus] up.

- **1 Peter 2:1:** Put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

b. We must fight envy by being satisfied in God, trusting God, & loving others: John Piper: Envy seems to be born of a restless heart that does not find God satisfying. We are craving & we are yearning. We are aching toward what somebody else has because God himself is not satisfying our soul. So envy is a wanting of something – some gift or some ability or some looks or something that somebody else has – with one of two feelings that make it bad. Either you have resentment that they have it, & you don't, & so your heart is irritated not just that you want it, but that they have it & you don't. & that is loveless. When we are upset that somebody else has something & we don't have it & it makes us irritated and angry, we know that lovelessness has gripped our soul. Or we feel discontent – not just resentment that they have it, but a discontent in our own soul that makes us distrustful of God or angry at God: Why didn't you give me that? Why do they have it & I don't? Why did you withhold this from me?

1) These disciples had Jesus! They were with Jesus! They would be with Him forever! Is He not enough?

2) Next, Jesus is going to tell them how to live (serve/slave) & that He's going to die for them! Trust Him!

3) These disciples must grow in love for each other & want what God has planned for their fellow disciples!

Prayer: That others may be loved more than I; That others may be chosen & I set aside; That others may be praised & I unnoticed; That others may be made more holy than me, as long as I am made as holy as I should be, oh Father, please grant me the grace to desire it. O Jesus, meek & humble of heart, please make my heart like Yours.

4. Jesus Teaches That To Be Great And To Be First You Must Be The Slave Of All And Serve Like Jesus

Matthew 20:25-28: But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

a. Jesus gives an illustration of how the world leads: Gentile rulers "lord it over" those they lead & Jesus contrasts this way of leading with service. Jesus turns worldly values upside down! In Jesus' Kingdom, slaves do the leading! Jesus' disciples should serve in humility. That is true greatness in God's eyes! (Herods: Murder!)

1 Peter 5:2-3: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ **not domineering** over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

Ligon Duncan: Holding an office in the church is not what makes you great. (Widow's mite; Sinner woman; Syro)

b. Jesus calls His disciples to be servants & slaves like Him: 1) As slaves, we will set aside our rights & riches for the sake of others: Jesus left His rights & riches to come to earth to save us! Jesus died! We must die to self for others! **Philippians 2:3-4:** Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Children; Husbands; Wives; Church relationships; Those hard to love; Those you view as "lower" than you, etc.

2) As slaves, we will view others as our owners, in the sense that we owe them love: Jesus is the only man Who ever lived Who loves His neighbor as He loves Himself perfectly.

- **Rom. 13:8:** Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law

3) As slaves, we will work hard to meet others needs: Jesus came to meet our greatest need! Salvation!

- **Romans 12:13:** Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

- **2 Corinthians 8:1-5:** We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints - ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

- **2 Corinthians 8:9:** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

4) As slaves, we will sacrifice for others: Jesus gave us the greatest sacrifice on the cross! Jesus washed His disciples' feet! **Romans 12:1:** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

5) As slaves, we will serve others: Jesus served us perfectly by the way He loved & gave Himself up to death for us! **Galatians 5:13-14:** For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

6) As slaves, in humility, we will realize we deserve nothing but hell, but Jesus saves! **Neh 8:10:** Joy of the LORD! - **Luke 17:7-10:** Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? ⁸ Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? ⁹ Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'

Slaves don't get paid! We are not looking for reward or recognition in this life! We will get our reward from God at the resurrection of the righteous! Jesus is our reward! (Gerry Evans; Paul Finkelston; Lois Harris; Counters)

c. We are able to be true slaves & servants to others only if we first are slaves & servants of God: 1) We set aside our rights & riches for Christ; 2) We realize we're owned by God; 3) We work out our salvation in fear & trembling; 4) We sacrifice for Jesus; 5) We serve God, by His grace & for His glory!; 6) We humble ourselves, knowing that we've sinned against God & deserve hell, but in Christ we have salvation & all we ever need!

Someone: He that has everything but does not have Christ has nothing. He that has nothing but Christ has everything. He that has everything and has Christ does not have anything more than he that has Christ alone.

d. Jesus gave Himself as the ultimate example of humble, costly service: Jesus is the ultimate slave: Verse 28: even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

- **Isaiah 53:11-12:** Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors

- **Philippians 2:5-11:** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

e. James, John, & their mother came asking for a gift, Jesus is the greatest gift: 1) Jesus' life, death, & resurrection are our only hope of being forgiven & being the slave of all for the glory of God!

2) Jesus came not to be served but to serve: **Acts 17:24-25:** The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

3) Jesus gave us the greatest gift in the universe: Himself! Jesus is the greatest gift of righteousness! He's the greatest gift of reconciliation & peace with God! He's the greatest gift of a relationship! He's the greatest gift of status! He's the greatest gift of power! He's the greatest gift of wealth! He's the greatest gift of glory! He's the greatest gift of joy, happiness, & satisfaction!

4) Jesus is our ransom: We were slaves of sin, death, Satan, & hell! Jesus died in our place! Jesus bore the anger of God so we never will! Jesus paid God the price we should have paid God! Jesus is our substitute! Now He owns us

We've seen Jesus teach that suffering & sacrifice must come before honor, and true greatness is found in humbly serving others, even as He did, when He gave the ultimate example of service: His death on that cross!

Jesus Became The Slave Of All And Ransomed His People From The Fall By Giving The Greatest Gift Of All!

James and John want a real high seat
To them the glory's really sweet
Their faith is mixed with pride – conceit
Yet Jesus loves His erring sheep
He'll redirect their prideful bleat
He died to make them whole – complete
He'd bow down and wash their feet
He gave His life – the life elite
And like a slave His back was beat
The Father's wrath He'd head-on meet
When on that cross His blood secrete
And all His people's sins delete

He rose up from the dead complete
The devil, hell, and sin defeat
And at His table we will eat
Who trust in Him – hate sin, deceit
In Christ we never shall retreat
But die to self and serve discreet
To serve like Him we will repeat
He changes hearts that do compete
It's others needs we'll seek to meet
All because He took the heat
And made our lives with Him so sweet!

The bitter cup our Savior drank
He paid the ransom with no bank
All evil's hopes and dreams He sank
For He's our Rock – our battle tank
All enemies He will outflank
Above all powers He holds rank
And Him forever we will thank!

Our Christ became the greatest slave
He served the lowest, sinful knave
And gave His life for those depraved
So all His people He could save
His precious life for us He gave
And faced the Father's wrath so brave
He died – they placed Him in a cave
But then He rose up from the grave
So all your sins our God could waive
The path to righteousness He'd pave
And change the way that you behave
Upon His palms your names engrave
And now by faith you'll be His slave
And Him above all things you'll crave!

Christ Jesus Was The Greatest Slave
He Came To Serve And Love And Save
Though In Perfection He'd Behave
He Drank God's Wrath Tsunami Wave
He Died But Then Rose From That Grave
By Faith Alone All Sin He'd Waive
God, With Christ's Righteousness, Did Pave
On His Palms He Did Engrave
Us, His Loved Ones, Christ He Gave
And Christ Is All, Our Love, Our Crave
So Now We're Others' Humble Slave
And Love And Serve Like Christ The Brave
Our Ransom, Joy, Who Came To Save!