

## KINGDOM SERVANTHOOD

From Matthew 20:17-34

10.18.2020

### INTRODUCTION

1. Illustration: One of my favorite things to watch on YouTube is home renovation How-To's.
2. Transition: This passage is kinda like that. You want greatness? Don't watch the world's way. Watch me. You want glory? Watch me. Like, comment, subscribe. I'm the pattern. I'm the model.

Just like those videos provide a compelling model for home transformation, Jesus' life should provide a compelling model - and basis - for life transformation. This passage, specifically, offers insight into what it means to be transformed by a vision of true greatness through the servanthood of Jesus Christ.

3. Proposition: **Because the Son of Man surrendered all to save many, freely give your life to the gospel-centered service of others.**

### THE SON OF MAN'S SERVANTHOOD FORETOLD, FORTHOLD, AND FOR ALL TO SEE

Last week we learned about the parable about day laborers who were all paid a day's wage, though not all of them had worked a full day. And while those who had worked longer complained about the wage they received, the landowner was right to point out that he had done them no wrong because even the ones who worked all day had agreed beforehand to the wage they would receive.

The point is that because everyone in the Messiah's Kingdom has received grace from God, there is no room for entitlement,

comparison, or envy among God's people. The apparent disparities between believers are only incidental in the grand scheme of things. Ultimately there is only a fundamental *Kingdom equality* among God's people such that the last are first and the first are last.

If last week's passage was about Kingdom equality, this week's passage is about Kingdom servanthood.

There aren't levels of authority or glory like you see in the world. In the Messiah's Kingdom, we are all equal participants with total freedom *to glory in servitude*.

Our passage this morning is broken up into three parts. Each one brings our attention to the servanthood of the Son of Man

#### 1. The Son of Man's Servanthood Foretold (vv. 17-19)

We are all equal participant's in Christ's Kingdom. One Christian may experience severe trials, hardships, and persecution while another may lead a relatively peaceful and easy life. And yet, by God's grace, both receive an eternal and imperishable inheritance from God. While our fleshly sense of entitlement (especially if we're on the receiving end of hardship) may lead us to cry "foul", we cannot forget that God is no man's debtor. We must remind ourselves of God's immeasurable grace that invited us to work the vineyard in the first place! What is the *basis* for that kind of grace? The servant-hearted sacrifice of the Son of Man. [Read vv. 17-19]

If you've been counting, this is the third time (of four) Jesus has foretold his death (16:21; 17:22-23; 26:2), although it's the first time he names Jerusalem and the people who would condemn and kill him. It seems like an odd place in the gospel to insert another foretelling of his death and resurrection, but it serves to beautifully drive

home the prior point while also preparing the hearer for the next one:

The Son of Man surrendered everything in order to give us access to His Kingdom. Surely it is only right that we surrender our sinful and misguided sense of entitlement that breeds only envy and discontentment.

Jesus died to bring all of us into his vineyard – not so that we can complain when we feel worse off, but so that we can rejoice in the abundant grace He has lavished on us.

Jesus also brought us in – not so that we can compete with one another over who'll be better off, but so that we can become servants to all. Jesus' giving himself over to betrayal, condemnation, torture, and crucifixion were not attempts to be better off, were they? No. They were acts of sacrificial, servant-hearted love.

And it's precisely this kind of radical servanthood that's foretold in these verses.

## **2. The Son of Man's Servanthood Forthtold (vv. 20-28)**

Having foretold the extent of his commitment to kingdom servanthood in 17-19, Jesus addresses the centrality of kingdom servanthood outright in verses 20-28.

In this scene, the mother of the sons of Zebedee (James and John) makes a request of Jesus. Though it's not mentioned explicitly in this text, the mother's name is Salome (cf. Mark 1:40). More than likely, Salome was also the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother which made her sons Jesus' cousins.

Out of concern for her sons' well-being, Salome asks that Jesus give them unique positions of honor in his coming kingdom, represented by their physical proximity to the throne (cf. 1 Kings 2:19; Ps. 16:11; 110:1).

It's important to note that while Matthew records the mother making this request, Mark 10:35-37 records that it was the brothers themselves who petitioned Jesus. These accounts do not necessarily contradict one another if Mark counts the request by the mother as the sons' since she was making it on their behalf. Another option is that Matthew's record is an abridgment of a fuller conversation in which both parties ask the same question separately at different points in the discussion.

Regardless, by the time we get to verse 22, it is clear in the grammar that he is addressing the mother *and* her sons. *Y'all don't know what you are asking.*

Sure, sitting next to Jesus *sounds* like a great idea. Especially considering what Jesus had just said in 19:28:

*Truly, I say to you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon the twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Sign me up for that! You sure? My path to glory is filled with suffering, condemnation, and judgement. Remember the whole bit about me being tortured and crucified? "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?"

In their naivete, James and John answer in the affirmative, but Jesus only makes one promise, "My cup you shall drink." Yes, James and John, you will suffer. And suffer they did. James was one of the first martyrs (cf. Acts 12:2) and John ended up in exile.

Despite their sufferings, James' and John's future positions are not a matter of Jesus' choosing, but the Father's. "They will need to submit to the Father's will for their future, just as Jesus did."<sup>1</sup>

The other disciples are hearing all this, and they're getting a bit feisty. "Hey, what are you trying to pull? You think because you're cousins, you'll get special treatment?" And here we go again, right?

The disciples are so infatuated with worldly greatness and glory, they cannot grasp the true nature of heavenly greatness and glory.

[read 25-28]

The world has one way of doing things. For the most part, its structure is top-down. The few at the top have the most authority, and that authority cascades downward. Jesus is not criticizing the structure per se. In fact the phrase "lord it over" should not be understood as the abuse of power, but as the act of having authority, parallel to "exercise authority" in the next line.<sup>2</sup>

Where the authority in this world is structured top-down, authority in the Messiah's Kingdom is structured bottom-up. Greatness is not measured in power, but in humility and servanthood.

How great is the Son of Man? What glory awaits Him in the coming Kingdom? And yet what kind of humility and servanthood, according to the Father's plan, needed to precede that glory and greatness?

It was the kind of humility that came, not to be served, but to serve. It was the kind of servanthood that came to die to pay for my sin and your sin so we could be brought into that Kingdom.

Do you see it? Jesus' absolute commitment to servanthood unto death is what frees us to live surrendered lives in service to others.

The world says greatness is found in being served. Jesus says greatness is found in serving others.

My flesh says, freedom is getting what I want from others. Jesus says freedom is giving all I have to others.

*Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave*

Why? Because the Son of Man has served you! He gave his life to pay for you! Can you see the profound glory in Christ's servanthood?

We are the disciples. We are the ones whose flesh wants to be well-off. We want to be the ones in charge. We want to be great. And as soon as anything threatens what we think we should have, watch out!

Gospel principle: When we lay down our false sense of entitlement, we are radically set free to serve others.

### **3. The Son of Man's Servanthood for All to See (vv. 29-34)**

There were at least two men in Jericho who couldn't see at all. They were so helpless, their lives were resigned to

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<sup>1</sup> ESV Study Bible (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), p. 1863).

<sup>2</sup> D.A. Carson, "Matthew" in TEBC, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), p. 432.

sitting outside the city and relying 100% on the generosity of passing strangers.

One day they hear that Jesus is passing by and call out to him. Against the objections of the crowd, they cry out again. Jesus attends to their cry and is moved with compassion. He heals them and they become his followers.

I hope you can see the subtle beauty of this short miracle story. The Son of Man's servanthood isn't just anticipated in the crucifixion; it's not merely stated in Jesus' teachings, it's also active throughout Jesus' life and ministry.

Jesus cared for the poor, the blind, the sick, the marginalized. He may have been God incarnate, but it never kept him from stopping what he was doing, going against the crowd, and touching a sick man's eyes.

And it's that commitment to servanthood which is the basis for our entry into Christ's Kingdom.

We are also the blind men. We our eyes to be restored by Jesus so that we can see him for who he is in all his lowly glory. We need to see Christ's absolute commitment to servanthood. And when we do, our lives will be changed; when we do we will follow Jesus into the freedom of servanthood.

Brothers and sisters: The Son of Man surrendered all to save many, let us likewise give our lives to the gospel-centered service of others.