

Sermons on Matthew
Whoever Desires to Become Great
Matthew 20:17-28

With Study Questions

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Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, ⁻¹⁸⁻ “ Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, ⁻¹⁹⁻ and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again. ”

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She said to Him, “ Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom. ” -

⁻²²⁻ But Jesus answered and said, “ You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? ”

They said to Him, “ We are able. ”

⁻²³⁻ So He said to them, “ You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those* for whom it is prepared by My Father. ”

⁻²⁴⁻ And when the ten heard *it*, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. ⁻²⁵⁻ But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, “ You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ⁻²⁶⁻ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ⁻²⁷⁻ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— ⁻²⁸⁻ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. ” (Matthew 20:17-28)

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to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, ⁻¹⁹⁻ __ and deliver Him to the Gentiles to _mock and to __scourge and to __crucify. And the third day He will __rise again_." (Matthew 20:17-19)

A Necessary Reminder

This is a repetition. Jesus had said this in Matthew 16:21 and 17:22, 23 (and veiled in Matthew 12:40). He doesn't want them to be caught off guard when something tragic takes place. The Christian is not insulated from heartbreak or sorrow. The sorrows of this world are what cast the faithful to the feet of Christ—to the cross of Christ, which is only source of true and definitive peace.

These things I have spoken to you, that __in Me you may have peace. __In the world you __will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, __I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

We are also reminded of His ultimate victory—on the third day He will rise again. Life, with little effort, continually reminds us that we are dust. Jesus reminds His followers of the hope that is found in Him. It is with little wonder that the faithful are beckoned to “**not forsake our own assembling to together**” (Hebrews 10:25). It is a violation of our broken and sinful nature to remember the manifold blessings of God. We forget and we need to be reminded.

Bless __the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! ² Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: ³ _Who forgives all your iniquities, Who _heals all your diseases, ⁴ Who redeems your life from destruction, _Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, ⁵ Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that __your youth is renewed like the eagle's (Psalm 103:1-5).

There are certain things we never seem to forget, like riding a bicycle. But the love and grace of God are so incomprehensible and so beyond our customary inclinations, the person who does forsake

God's provision for nurturing His children will rapidly find themselves in a dry and weary land.

O God, You *are* my God; Early will I seek You; _My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water. ² So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see __Your power and Your glory (Psalm 63:1, 2).

No Hesitation

And there is no hesitation in the conviction of Jesus. He knows His mission and sets out for it. Jesus is no double-minded man. He has come to do the will of His Father.

...then He said, “ *Behold, I have come to do Your will, __O God.* ” He takes away the first that He may establish the second. ⁻¹⁰⁻ __By that will we have been __sanctified __through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all* (Hebrews 10:9, 10).

Jesus is the covenant-keeper. He doesn't entertain thoughts on how He might escape from His convictions. Husbands are called to imitate this unwavering loyalty in their covenants with their wives. We are called to be single-minded in our quests and passions.

There is often controversy surrounding who crucified Jesus. In a certain sense we all crucified Jesus on account of sin. Here Jesus spreads out the culpability to both Jew and gentile. The chief priest, scribes and gentiles all participate in this.

He will rise again. This is the hope of the Christian—the ultimate victory over death itself. Jesus has overcome the world, and by this we understand death, which is the final chapter in every worldly chronicle.

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Still Posturing

After learning from the dialogue with the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-26) that it is impossible to obtain eternal life through human efforts, Peter wanted to know what benefits there were to the sacrificial following of Christ. Jesus taught that the benefits of following Jesus, both in history and eternity, were innumerable (Matthew 19:27-30). Jesus then gave the parable of the laborers in the vineyard to teach us that the benefits which flow from God are not meritorious but gratuitous; it is therefore justifiable for God to grant the same blessings to those who one hour to those who worked all day.

Yet the posturing continues.

The mother of James and John kneels before Jesus and requests positions of honor for her two sons. Some have less than proper motives in following Christ. Some begin with sound motives then are led astray. It's hard to say which is the case here. Either way, they don't seem to be getting the point.

The kingdom of God can be a confusing issue. In a certain sense it exists here and now, manifested in an observable way in Christ's church. In another sense it is hidden, eternal and within the hearts of men. But, as Jesus will soon indicate, those who seek to be

great in the kingdom of God should not imitate the type of worldly greatness associated with kingdoms and the way they advance.

Cup and Baptism

As for the cup and baptism Jesus speaks of, it is to be understood as the cup of God's wrath which He will undergo in Jerusalem on Calvary. Isaiah offers this picture:

***_Awake, awake! Stand up, O Jerusalem, You who
_have drunk at the hand of the Lord The cup of His
fury; You have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling,
And drained it out (Isaiah 51:17).***

It was the thought of this cup which brought "**exceeding sorrow**" (Matthew 26:38) to the heart of Christ in Gethsemane prior to His crucifixion. The baptism Jesus speaks of can be thought of in a similar manner.

***But _I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how
distressed I am till it is _accomplished (Luke 12:50)!***

Why would a baptism bring distress to Jesus? Because it is a baptism of judgment. Jesus will be immersed in judgment on the cross.

A Different Kind of Baptism

James and John, perhaps not fully understanding, answer in the affirmative when asked if they are able to drink the cup and be baptized in God's wrath. Jesus says they will indeed experience these things. But we should not think that James and John died for sinners. They will, however, be "**baptized into His death**" (Romans 6:3) and will subsequently walk in "**newness of life**" (Romans 6:4).

In this respect Christians are called to present their bodies as a "**living sacrifice**" (Romans 12:1). Paul viewed himself as one who was poured out as "**drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith**" (Philippians 2:17). This sacrificial disposition provides much benefit to the body of Christ. For, even though Paul did not die

for sinners, he presents his own sufferings as something so profitable to the body of Christ that he rejoiced in them.

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church (Colossians 1:24).

By lacking *hysteremata*, we should not think that the cross was insufficient, but rather Paul speaks of things we have yet to be accomplished, recognizing that all is accomplished by the power of the cross of Christ and the “zeal of the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 9:7).

Positions of Authority

When Jesus says that positions of authority (whether it is the tiers around the throne or heaven or positions of authority in this age—all very mysterious and not clearly taught in Scripture) are not His to give, He is not advocating an essential distinction between Himself and the Father but rather an economical distinction wherein He subjects Himself to the Father. Jesus teaches that the Father prepares such things and such people.

Climbing ecclesiological or denomination ladders in an effort to obtain power of prestige is not the disposition garnished by the truly faithful. Pride and ambition do not advance the kingdom of heaven, and we must ever be seeking to put those attributes to death for they are relentless.

And when the ten heard *it*, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. ⁻²⁵⁻ But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, “ You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ⁻²⁶⁻ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ⁻²⁷⁻ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— ⁻²⁸⁻ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. ” (Matthew 20:24-28)

Lording it Over or Serving?

Whether despots, tyrants, kings, senators, congressmen, governors or presidents, it is common for political rulers to be self-absorbed and lord it over those they are called to serve. Truly humble political leadership is almost an unrecognizable anomaly. Jesus seizes this common trait to reveal how just the opposite is required for those who seek to be great in the kingdom of God.

Whether we have gifts in teaching, exhorting, discernment, ministry, hospitality, etc, we are to utilize our gifts and posts in life to serve; the higher the post the greater the servant and the greater the servant the higher the post.

We tend to think that those who serve are not in positions of authority; but it is just the opposite. What parent doesn't dedicate their entire life to serving their children? Yet the child is not the head of the parent but the opposite. And the child should not think of their parent as their servant.

Similarly, Jesus came to serve and give His life as a ransom. We should not think this makes Him our servant and us His master. For it is Jesus who determines how we will be served by Him. Jesus served us by becoming of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, humbling Himself to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-9). It is the mind of Christ in these actions that we are called to have if we're seeking to be great in the kingdom of God.

-So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, " _Do you __know what I have done to you? ⁻¹³⁻ _You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for *so* I am. ⁻¹⁴⁻ _If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, __you also ought to wash one another's feet. ⁻¹⁵⁻ For __I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. ⁻¹⁶⁻ __Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. ⁻¹⁷⁻ __If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them (John 13:12-17).

Questions for Study

1. What are some reasons Jesus foretold His death and resurrection (pages 2, 3)?
2. Why do we need to hear things repeatedly (page 2)?
3. Discuss Jesus' undivided conviction (pages 4)?
4. Who crucified Jesus (page 4)?
5. What is the hope of the Christian (page 4)?
6. What did James and John want (page 5)?
7. What does Jesus mean by the cup and baptism (pages 5, 6)?
8. Does being a servant mean losing authority?
Explain (pages 7, 8).
9. In what respects should we imitate Jesus (pages 7, 8)?