

SERVANTHOOD

Matthew 20:17-28

One of the themes of the Messiah as foretold in the Old Testament is that of the Suffering Servant. Isaiah in particular explores the motif of the Servant of the Lord who would “*justify the many*” and “*bear their iniquities*” (Isaiah 53:11).

This Servant would be...

- Chosen by God from the womb (Isaiah 49:5).
- A recipient of the Spirit of God (Isaiah 42:1)
- Unimpressive in the eyes of men (Isaiah 52:14).
- A bringer of justice to the earth (Isaiah 42:4).
- A light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6).
- High and lifted up and greatly exalted (Isaiah 52:13).

As we come to this section of the Gospel of Matthew, we see this same motif coming to the forefront as Jesus sets forth His teaching concerning servanthood in the Kingdom.

Jesus had the heart of a servant. He did not come on the scene demanding that men worship Him. He did not build a palace for Himself or sit on a royal throne. He did not enjoy all of the comforts that this world has to offer. He could have done that. But He did not. He did not because He came to serve.

A PROPHETIC PORTRAYAL

17 And as Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, 18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and will deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up." (Matthew 20:17-19).

This is not the first time that Jesus had predicted His own death. Twice before, we have seen Jesus give a detailed prophecy of His impending death, burial and resurrection.

Matthew 16:21	Matthew 17:22-23	Mark 10:33-34
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<p>From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Suffer many things• Be killed• Be raised up on the third day.	<p>The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• They will kill Him• He will be raised on the third day.	<p>The Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Condemn Him to death• Deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him• On the third day He will be raised up
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With each prediction, a little more information has been given. First there was the message that the Son of Man would be killed and rise again. Then it is told that He would be delivered into the hands of men. Finally, the disciples are told about the mocking and the scourging that would accompany His death.

There is a principle here. It is that God's revelation is never given merely to satisfy curiosity. It is always given in terms of need and capacity. This means that God will only tell you what you need to know and what you are able to bear.

This means that you can take your prophecy chart down and burn it. God isn't telling you things that you don't need to know. As a result, you can begin to trust Him on a day by day basis.

Jesus is doing that. He is going to Jerusalem. Jerusalem has been foretold as the place of betrayal and arrest. There is a cross awaiting Him in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is that place of scourging and beating and mocking. Messiahs are put to death in Jerusalem. And Jesus is going there. I would have been headed in the other direction. But Jesus continued on His route to Jerusalem. Why? Because He loved us.

Verse 34 mentioned three groups of people that would be involved in putting Jesus to death.

- The Chief Priests
- The Scribes
- The Gentiles

That was just about everybody. It included religious leaders and it included theologians and it included the pagans. The world was universal in its rejection of Jesus.

Are you surprised at the growing hostility to Christianity? Are you surprised when you see our faith mocked and ridiculed by the media? Are you surprised when you see legislature outlawing prayer in the schools and legalizing abortion and the IRS closing down churches? You shouldn't be. You have been warned. The world is out to get

Christ and, if you are one of His, then the world is out to get you, too.

There is a battle going on. It is a battle between good and evil. Bad things happen in a battle. People get hurt and Messiahs get crucified. But we also have good news. Our King has won the battle. On Friday evil won. But on Sunday evil died. And you are on the side that came out victorious.

A MOTHER'S REQUEST

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, bowing down, and making a request of Him. 21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left." (Matthew 20:20-21).

The mother of James and John comes to Jesus with a request. It is a request that shows that she had not been listening to the prophecy of Jesus. As we shall see in the next several verses, James and John put her up to this. This is more than just an ambitious mother. It is also a case of two ambitious sons.

Her request is that Jesus might use His pull to make it so that James and John have the positions of honor on His left and on His right when He would come in His glory.

The other disciples did not ask for this. I think that they would have if they had thought of it. But they did not even think of asking. With the exception of Peter, they hadn't seen the glory of God. But James and John had. They had been with Jesus up on the mountain when He was transfigured. That had set them to thinking. For the first time, they had their minds set on the future. They realized that Jesus was more than He appeared. They realized that there was coming a day when the real Jesus would be unveiled. They had seen some of that unveiling. Now they wanted to make the most of it.

A RESERVED REFUSAL

22 But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able." 23 He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." (Matthew 20:22-23).

It is not so clear from the English translation, but from the use of the plural pronoun in the Greek, it is very evident that Jesus directs His answer, not only to the mother, but to her two sons. Jesus points out a lack of understanding on the part of the Zebedee brothers. What they are asking is a good thing, but they do not realize the scope of that which they are requesting. He asks them about their ability to drink of the cup from which He is soon to drink.

What are the cup of which Jesus speaks? It is the cup of His impending death. It is the cup of the wrath of God. It is the cup that had been described in the pages of the Old Testament:

*Rouse yourself! Rouse yourself!
Arise, O Jerusalem,
You who have drunk from the LORD's hand the cup of His anger;
The chalice of reeling you have drained to the dregs. (Isaiah 51:17).*

Jesus will have His disciples drink from a cup at the Last Supper. This cup will signify the blood which Jesus will shed upon the cross. The Scriptures teach that it is the blood of Jesus which is the price of our redemption. His blood was the sign of the wrath of God against sin. When Jesus comes to the garden of Gethsemane, He will pray that this cup might pass from Him (Matthew 26:39).

James and John were looking for an earthly kingdom. They were looking for earthly power and earthly authority. They needed a class in Reality 101. They had missed what the kingdom is all about. The kingdom is about death. You enter the kingdom by drinking the cup of Christ. It is a cup that identifies you with death. When you drink it, you are called to die to self. That part of your life that is self centered has to die.

By the way, this was fulfilled in a very real way in the lives of James and John. The book of Acts tells how James was beheaded by Herod Agrippa. To the best of our knowledge, he was the first of the apostles to be put to death. He would not be the last. Many years later, John would also be arrested and he would be banished to the Island of Patmos. There is a sense in which both of these brothers drank of the cup.

THE DISCIPLES' INDIGNATION

And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers. (Matthew 20:24).

When the other ten disciples heard of the request of James and John, they became angry

with James and John. I suspect that some of their anger was an anger at themselves over not having thought of asking the same question first.

20:20	20:22	20:24	20:25
James & John		Ten Disciples	
Ambitious Request	Reply of Jesus	Envious Response	Reply of Jesus

Jealousy is poison to a church. It can split a church faster than anything. The disciples were ready to split off and start their own denomination. And so, Jesus called them together.

THE TEACHING OF SERVANTHOOD

25 But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 26 It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall 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 20:25-28).

Jesus calls the disciples to Himself. He is going to address them in the midst of their jealousy. He is going to call them to a higher standard. He is going to explain to them what it means to be a servant of the Lord.

1. A Lordly Example: *"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them" (20:25).*

The church was never called to model the world. They are to have two separate and opposing styles of leadership. The world looks at leadership as the exercising of authority. But leadership in the church is identified as servanthood.

Francis of Assisi is said to have visited St Peter's Cathedral in Rome where his guide showed him the wondrous architecture and the priceless treasures, noting, "The church can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" Francis agreed, adding, "The church is also unable to say, 'In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk.'"

2. The Principle of Servanthood: *It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave (20:26-27).*

Our church leaders should never allow themselves to forget that they are to consider themselves as servants of God and of His church. It is notable how often Paul described himself as a “slave of God.”

3. Servanthood Exemplified: *Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (20:28).*

Jesus is the leader who leads. He never called His disciples to do anything that He was not willing to do Himself. He was the Servant of God. And He calls His followers to be servants, too.

Jesus came to serve. But that is not all. He also came to give His life as a ransom for many. The Greek text is worthy of notice. The word “ransom” is the Greek word λυτρον. It is one of three words used in the New Testament to describe “redemption.”

- a. Αγοραζω: “To purchase.”

When we think of making a purchase, we think of buying groceries or a car or a house or some other inanimate object. We don’t talk about purchasing people - that went out with slavery over a hundred years ago. But slavery was commonplace in Paul’s day. And you would commonly go into the marketplace - the Agora - to purchase a slave.

- b. Εξαγοραζω: “To purchase out.”

This is the same word with a prefix placed in front of it meaning “out.” The picture is that you go into the slave market and you purchase a slave and then you bring him OUT of the market.

- c. Λυτροω: “To release or set free.”

This is the word used here. It takes the picture one step further as you bring the slave out of the slave market and then set him free.

This is what Christ has done for us. He came into this world of sin. And He paid the ultimate price for us - His own blood shed on our behalf. He became our

ransom - our releasing price.

The preposition used here is also significant. Verse 28 says that Jesus came to “give His life a ransom FOR many.” The preposition is the Greek word *ἀντι*. It is the language of substitution. It tells us that Jesus came to “give His life a ransom IN THE PLACE of many.”

Finally, notice that while Jesus called His disciples to a LIFE of service, He Himself had resolved to go much further - to a DEATH of service. Jesus came to die. He came to die that we might live.