

Text: Matthew 20:20-28 (Pew Bible, pg.977)
“Engage ... Sacrificing Like Jesus”

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – Rick Warren is the pastor of the Saddleback Church in southern California. He and his wife Kay were hit with a devastating tragedy a few months ago when their son Matthew committed suicide. Last week Rick and Kay Warren granted an interview with Piers Morgan on CNN and they talked about the ordeal. If you didn't get a chance to watch it, I encourage you to find it online. There were many things they said that were helpful to families dealing with this issue mental illness and suicide, but one thing Rick said relates to what we're talking about these days. In describing the journey they been on for the last several months Rick said, “The last phase of grief recovery is service. You begin to use your pain to help others.”

What an important word for all of us to hear. Many of people are locked away in a depressed, self-loathing world, and all they can think about is themselves. And believers are not exempt. As we deal with our own pain, heartaches and suffering, we know we're recovering when we use what we've been through to help others. And Jesus is our supreme example in this, as He is in all things. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 20 to a passage that I have referred to often in this series I've entitled “Engage ... An Urgent Call to On-Mission Living.” Follow along as I read Matthew 20:20-28.

So Jesus calls us to follow Him into a life of serving God and others. He calls us to follow Him into an on-mission life. And in God's kingdom, you have a place ... you have a role to fulfill. And this gives meaning, purpose and significance to your life.

Jesus taps into a trait in human beings that can sometimes get out of control ... the desire to be great. Well Jesus had a definition of greatness in life, that is different from the world's definition, and we must learn it.

1. THE WRONG WAY TO GREATNESS

Now Jesus takes advantage of a rather embarrassing moment to teach His disciples something about the wrong way to achieve greatness. Jesus is working with his disciples to shape them into His likeness. They were far from the self-giving, self-sacrificing discipleship that Jesus had in mind for them. And it is apparent as they get into an argument about who is the greatest among them.

It's ironic however that all this comes just after Jesus announced again to his disciples what the future held for him. Go back just a few verses:

Matthew 20:18-19 - “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”

No sooner had Jesus reminded them of His calling to the Cross, we see this sinful attitude arising first in a well-meaning mother's request, as well as in the attitude of her two sons. You see, while Jesus was talking about giving His life, these disciples were worried about getting a new position. While Jesus was talking about assuming the position of a servant, they were planning for how to assume the position of greatness. While Jesus was talking about lowering Himself, these disciples were planning how to elevate themselves.

And that reveals the wrong way to greatness. There are actually three sinful attitudes that Jesus is getting at here. First you see...

- **Self-promotion (Matthew 20:20-21)**

You'll never be great if you are full of yourself. And that's what many of us are ... full of ourselves. James, John and their mother were full of themselves. Look at it again:

Matthew 20:20 - Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

Matthew 20:21 - "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

The indication seems to be that the mother was speaking at the request of her two sons. The mother of James and John was asking for her sons to have the two highest places of honor in Jesus' kingdom someday.

The request was truly self-seeking. Just think of it. For mom, her own prestige could be enhanced as she could bask in her children's position of honor. Imagine James and John thinking, of all the great people in the kingdom of God deserving of the places of honor, they should be at Jesus' right and left hand.

And there's some of this in all of us ... the desire to be noticed, to be applauded, to be recognized. But there's another attitude Jesus is putting His finger on in this teachable moment.

- **Self-confidence (Matthew 20:22-24)**

Now most of us would say that self-confidence is important for all of us, and it is to a degree. Many people lack the confidence to attempt anything because they think they will certainly fail at it. But there's a difference between being self-confident and being God-confident. Paul said, "I can do all things *through Christ who gives me strength.*"

Jesus continues to correct His disciples:

Matthew 20:22 - "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered.

What Jesus is talking about here is the cup of God's judgment on our sin that Jesus was about to drink for us. It was a common way to describe someone who was about to endure something incredibly painful. Of course, Jesus was talking about the sufferings of the Cross. And He asked His disciples, "Can you follow Me down this path? Can you drink this?"

And their answer reflects their own sinful self-confidence ... "we can." They thought they are perfectly prepared for their places of honor. But in the end, they would all abandon Jesus.

And Jesus prophesied over His followers. He pulled the curtain back to show them what they would face:

Matthew 20:23 - Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

In the end, they would drink from Jesus' cup, but it would not be out of ambitious self-confidence, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. James would be first apostle to be martyred for his commitment to Christ (Acts 12:2). John would be exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the Gospel of Jesus.

You and I will never be effective in serving God and others so long as we think we can do it in our own strength. It's only when we come to end of ourselves that Christ can move in and do something extraordinary through us.

But there's one more sinful attitude that marks the wrong way to achieve greatness:

- **Self-assertiveness (Matthew 20:25)**

In the eyes of the world, greatness is measured by how many people serve you. In the eyes of Jesus, greatness is measured by how many people you serve.

Matthew 20:25 - Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

When Jesus talks about those who “Lord it over them...” He uses a word that would have been familiar to them. It was a word by which they often referred to Jesus ... “Lord” (*kurios*). But there's a little prefix attached to the word that adds an ugly flavor to the word. It means “to rule down on another.” The picture here is of a dictatorial ruler, the most common type in those days. That's the primary model of leadership that they knew in that day.

Jesus went on to say that “their high officials exercise authority over them...” Here again the words “exercise authority” carry the idea of looking down on others. There's a little prefix to the word that gives the word the meaning of, “to show authority down.”

You see, if we see people as being inferior to us we will look down on them and feel that we can control them, rather than to serve them. We'll never be great in God's eyes so long as we have that view of ourselves. So there you have the wrong road to greatness. But Jesus goes on to teach...

2. THE RIGHT WAY TO GREATNESS

The way to greatness is the opposite of what most people think.

ILLUSTRATION – If you play golf you probably know that golf is a game of opposites. They tell us that when you swing left the ball goes right. They tell us that if we swing easy to go the ball goes a lot further. They tell us that you have to hit down on the ball to make it go up. No wonder most golfers are frustrated. Everything is backward.

The way to greatness is the opposite of what most people think.

Jesus teaches that you descend into greatness. We have to humble ourselves in order to be exalted.

Matthew 20:26 -Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,

ILLUSTRATION – Nick Saban, the head football coach of the University of Alabama, was interviewed at half-time of the Alabama/Texas A&M game a couple of weekends ago. During the first half, one of his star players scored a touchdown and was flagged for unsportsmanlike conduct for his taunting celebration of Johnny Manziel, the A&M quarterback. When the reporter asked Saban about it he said, “He wasn't thinking; that's not who we are.”

In essence, that's what Jesus meant when He told His team, His disciples, “Not so with you. That's not who we are. That may be the way the world looks at things, but not so with you.” The self-promotion, self-confidence and self-assertiveness of the world is the exact opposite of the Savior's way to greatness. There's an entirely different measure of greatness in God's mind. So how do we get to that?

- **Get an attitude!**

Now some of us already have an attitude. The people around you know it and are really disgusted with it. I'm not talking about that kind of attitude.

Matthew 20:26 -Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,

And when Jesus uses the word “servant” He uses the word is *diakonos*, from which we get our word "deacon." The word originally meant someone who performed menial tasks for others. It described the lowest level of hired help. It's interesting that Jesus elevated this term to characterize His most faithful followers.

Matthew 20:27 - and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—

The position of a slave was even lower than a servant. A slave didn't belong to himself, but to his master and could only go and do as his master wanted him to. The attitude of a servant and a slave is, "I'm not too good to do the most menial, degrading acts of service if that's what my master tells me to do."

ILLUSTRATION – I think it was Tim Keller who defined humility in this way: "Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is being so absorbed in serving others that you don't have time to think about yourself at all.

So get an attitude!

- **Get an eye for needs.**

What's the job of a servant? What's the job of a slave? It is to look to the needs of their master. They are attentive to the needs of the one whom they serve.

ILLUSTRATION – Just think of the last time you went to a restaurant where you had someone serving you. They come around and ask what you want to drink. Then they come back to see if you need a refill. And when your food is delivered they want to know if you need ketchup for your fries, or some grated cheese on your salad. They have an eye for the needs of the one they are serving.

The problem is that most of us have been conditioned by our own sin and by the way of the world to see ourselves always as the customer, the consumer, and not as the one who is serving.

A great servant is one who is constantly listening to the Master ... looking to the Master ... to see what He sees that others need.

- **Get out of your comfort zone.**

In other words, there's no serving without suffering. Now we're all for serving so long as it doesn't require us to go out of our way, or to change our lifestyle. And Jesus shows us by His example how to do this:

Matthew 20:28 - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus left the glory and the splendor of heaven to come into our stinking sinful lives to serve us by dying for our sins. Jesus, the Son of Almighty God became the Son of Man. He stepped out of the position of exaltation, and assumed the position of humiliation. He was willing to be inconvenienced and to be uncomfortable for our sakes.

And we will never be the servants Jesus saved us to be until we are willing to get out of our comfort zone.

In fact, Jesus did what He did to make us what He calls us to be. When He died on Cross to rip that prideful self-centeredness right out of us by saving us. His death was not just a good example to follow. It was certainly that for His followers, but it was much more than that. When He gave His life a ransom for many He was becoming the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

The word "ransom" was used for the payment of a redemption price for setting a slave free. So through Christ we are no longer slaves to sin, but slaves to righteousness. We are no longer slaves to self, but slaves to God.

Matthew 20:28 - The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

You see, this is what we remember when we share together in the Lord's Supper. And that's what we're going to do now. Now the Bible says that we should never take the Lord's Supper until we have examined ourselves, confessed any known sin and be restored in our relationship with Christ. I want to give you a few minutes to do that just now as our deacons prepare to serve.

Matthew 26:26 - While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Matthew 26:27 - Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."

Matthew 26:28 - This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.