

Who will we serve?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 March 2025

Preacher: Rev Gordon Kennedy

[0 : 00] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence.! May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher,! and your great glory our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. I wonder if anyone at home has a copy of this book. I have it here. Anybody willing to own up that you have one of these ones? It's a super book. You can see the pages are falling out.

And funny enough, all the pages that are falling out have got chocolate on them. And all the measurements in them are old money. So we've got ounces and ounces.

And I don't think we get any pounds, but lots of ounces. And quarter pints and all sorts of things. You'll notice there are no pictures.

[1 : 03] See? There are no pictures anywhere in the whole book. So whatever your cake turns out like, that's what it was meant to be. Nowadays, cake books are multicoloured.

And they have pictures in them of people who've baked them who look perfectly clean and tidy and neat and calm. And their cakes look like they've been made in a bakery shop.

You can see what you're aiming at before you start off in these modern books. Because you've got a picture. Not just a recipe.

But a picture. This is what it should look like. If you want it to look like the ones in the book, you are going to need a ruler to measure out where you put these half strawberries all the way around.

To get them even. Because Mary says you use exact measurements. Jesus is our Lord. Our saviour.

[2 : 10] Our king. Jesus is the sacrificial offering for us and our salvation. Jesus is also our example.

This is part of what is meant by the phrase, image of God. In the same way as God created humanity in his image and set us upon the earth to represent him before all creation, Jesus, as the image of the invisible God, is set before all creation, including us.

That we might see God. That we might, in Jesus, see what life lived together with God is like. Seeing Jesus, we see God. Following Jesus, we learn what it means to live together as God's people.

We learn what it means to live the life of the people of God. Last week, with some sadness, we heard that they're going to stop filming Blue Peter live.

[3 : 30] From now on, Blue Peter is going to be a pre-recorded program. So all Biddy Baxter's wee, here's one I prepared earlier, will indeed have been prepared earlier.

That's kind of what Jesus is. God holding Jesus before us and saying, here's one I have prepared for you to look at.

So that you will know what your life is meant to be like. This is your example. This is your goal. This is what you're aiming at.

The life of Jesus lived with your hands and your feet and your mouth and your ears. Jesus the King gives us an example.

Not an example of how we are to become royal. But a kingly, authorised example of how we are to become human.

[4 : 33] How we are to live. How we are to follow Jesus. And all the ways Jesus leads us, we follow Jesus all the way there.

Mothers always want the best for their children. Fathers do as well, but there's a fierceness in mums when it gets to the best for their children.

The mother of James and John comes to Jesus and asks for her boys to get the best seats in the kingdom. And doesn't that just ring true to life?

There's something right. There is something inevitable about a parent thinking that their children are just the best people for the best job.

This mother has grasped that Jesus is the King. She has got a hold of the fact that there's only one throne. And Jesus is the one who gets to sit on it.

[5 : 42] She's not trying in any way to displace or exceed Jesus. No, no. It's okay, Jesus. You can get the best seat.

But the two next to you. My boys are just right for them. Now, Jesus doesn't immediately reject her requests.

He could have said straight off the bat, what are you talking about? But he doesn't do that. He doesn't complain that her sons aren't good enough.

He doesn't suggest that he's keeping the best seats for someone else. Rather, Jesus talks about what it means to sit in any seat.

When we think of a throne, we think of a king who gets to do whatever they want. Surely that's the point of being a king. There's got to be some benefit for putting up with all the rest of the stuff.

[6 : 47] Jesus answered, you do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?

Jesus is saying, sitting on a throne in the kingdom of God, sitting on any throne in the kingdom of God, is not about getting to do what you want to do.

You don't know. You haven't yet fully understood the good news that God is declaring to you in my being king.

You don't yet know the kind of example that Jesus is for you. Jesus connects his kingly service and his kingly seats with this idea of a cup.

The cup of God which Jesus must drink. The cup of God which those who sit in any kind of seat with Jesus in the kingdom must drink.

[7 : 57] Once again, we need to look into the Old Testament to grasp what Jesus is speaking of when he talks about the cup. Jeremiah 25.

Thus the Lord, the God of Israel said to me, Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword I am sending among them. The cup is the container of the wrath of God, the justified and righteous anger of God against all human sin, against all human rejection of him.

There are some people who write and say that they don't like this idea of the wrath of God. God doesn't get wrathful, they hope.

God doesn't get angry, they try to say. God doesn't get angry, they try to say. God doesn't get angry. When you watch the news, and you see some of the wicked things that are happening, that are reported in the news, do you get angry?

[9 : 16] If you don't, are you not worried that there's something gone wrong somewhere? When we hear of children stabbed at a dance class, when we hear of people defrauded of thousands of pounds, do we not get angry about this wickedness?

Do we not want God to get angry about wickedness, angry enough to do something about it? Thank God for the wrath of God.

The effects of our sin, which are drunk in this cup, are described as making those who drink it stagger and be crazed as though drunk and incapacitated.

The judgment of God, a sword against human sin, will cause distress and confusion for all humans. Do you think you're asking for your sons to get two nice seats and sit with their feet up and tell people what to do?

Are they able to do this? Jesus is saying, Psalm 75, Here in the psalm, the contents of the cup are God's judgment upon all human sin.

[10 : 47] Those condemned by God will fall under his righteous judgment. Don't we want God to judge human sin and wickedness?

Using the image of the cup and these Old Testament verses, Jesus is declaring the gospel, the good news, to this mother, to James and to John, to all of us.

The good news which Jesus declares concerns human sin, your sin and mine. The good news which Jesus declares tells us that God is angry about sin.

Tells us that God has a purpose to judge human sin. If there were no sin, we would not need a dying saviour.

If there were no sin, we would not need a sacrifice offered on our behalf. All who follow Jesus must follow him here.

[12 : 00] You can't follow Jesus only into the bits that you think are nice and not into the bits that you think, oh, I wish he hadn't said that. He did say that.

And God did mean it. This is the only way we can come to forgiveness and acceptance with God. It is a narrow way.

It is a way of acknowledging our sin. It is a steep path. A steep path of confessing that we deserve this cup to come to us.

This is the gospel James and John are slow to understand. This is the good news which we are slow to submit to. Jesus said, you don't know what you're asking.

Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? And they said to him, we are able. Well, if only Jesus had spoken proper Glaswegian, his next words would have been, I write.

[13 : 15] All humans deserve this cup of God's wrath and judgment to come to them. all of us deserve God to hand us the cup and say, there you go, you mixed it, you drink it.

That's what we deserve. But we could not survive this. The judgment of God upon sin is a destructive judgment.

Sin is to be purged, to be burned out, to be cut away. If we were to drink this cup, it would be the end for us.

And that's why Jesus has come. That's why Jesus, the King, drinks this cup on our behalf, for us and for our salvation.

When Jesus tells James and John, you will drink this cup, what he means is that together with him, united to him, following Christ, all his disciples will come to the cross and have our sin put to death with Jesus on the cross.

[14 : 35] He drinks and in him we drink. He falls under the judgment of God that we might fall under his hand of mercy.

Jesus is the King. Jesus, the King, hangs enthroned upon the cross. It is for us he hung and suffered there.

Jesus reigns in his suffering and only after that will he reign in splendor. King Jesus humbles himself to this throne before God the Father raises him to the highest throne of glory and gives him the name above every other name.

What we have never understood is the example of Jesus in this. Sometimes we catch glimmers of grace and mercy in this.

He died so I don't need to die. The judgment of God fell upon him so it doesn't need to fall upon me. That's grace beyond our deserving.

[15 : 56] But even that is not the full extent of the cross of Jesus. Service through suffering. Self sacrifice for the salvation of others.

Jesus drinking what we could not drink becomes an example of life that we are to follow. A shape of life into which we are being transformed.

This is what we fail to grasp about Jesus throne. Jesus throne is not first of all a seat of privilege but a seat of service.

Jesus sets up the gospel idea of example by showing us what the example is in the rest of this passage.

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. Using the phrase Son of Man Jesus describes himself as a conqueror one who overcomes evil and wickedness.

[17 : 13] The phrase comes from Daniel chapter 7 I saw in the night visions and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man and he came to the ancient of days and was presented before him.

The conqueror has come to the throne of God. To him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples and nations and languages should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away. His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. It's a vision of a kingly figure under this name son of man coming to the great throne of glory and reigning in splendor after victory.

But what Daniel doesn't tell us is how the victory was won. Jesus tells us the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life.

A ransom for many. The expectation is that the conqueror will conquer with violence and with strength of arms. That a king will have others serve him and others do his work for him.

[18 : 34] But the example of Jesus is exactly the reverse of this. Jesus conquers by serving others. Jesus overcomes by serving us.

Jesus did not come to have creation run around after him but to give his life a ransom, a substitution, his life for our lives.

And this is the example Jesus sets before us to follow. Now we are right to believe that only Jesus can give his life to save another.

No matter what degree of service we offer it will never achieve the forgiveness of our sins, never mind the forgiveness of anyone else's sin. Nevertheless, Jesus is setting us an example which we are to follow.

Jesus said, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, their great ones exercise authority over them, it shall not be so among you.

[19 : 47] Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, whoever would be first among you must be your slave. With the same attitude of service with which the Lord Jesus Christ, the king and head of the church, the captain of your salvation, the Lord of glory has served you, with that same attitude, you are to serve others.

Seats in the kingdom of God are not reserved for a privileged few, but are prepared for servant followers. This is why Jesus does not deny James and John the seats.

They will follow his example. This is why Jesus has prepared seats for you. We are to follow Jesus all the way into kingly service.

Jesus uses the image of a cup rather than more precise examples of service because there are as many varieties of service as there are varieties of servants.

There is a service for Jesus which he has prepared for you. The acts of self giving are acts which only you can prepare and do and serve in.

[21 : 15] No one else can offer yourself. Only you can offer yourself. Jesus will lead you into service by breaking your heart with what breaks his.

What is it that tugs at your heart? Is it homelessness in our city? Is it the injustice of human trafficking? Is it the burden of poverty being borne by the marginalized in our community, in our city?

Is it the hopelessness of the lost who don't know Jesus? Jesus will open your eyes to a service that he has prepared you for and that is your call to service.

What you notice is where Jesus is leading you and you need to follow Jesus all the way there.

Jesus has given all of himself for you for us and for our salvation.

Jesus has done all this for us. What will we not do for him? Dare we pray that Jesus will break our hearts with what breaks his?

[22 : 41] Dare we follow Jesus into sacrificial service? But how can we not follow Jesus here? We don't get to stop following Jesus when we choose.

We follow Jesus all the way or not at all. And all the way is here. We need to follow Jesus when he leads us into service.

Because that's where he leads us. Dearly, dearly has he loved and we must love him too. trust in his redeeming blood and try his works to do.

Let's pray together. Father, break our hearts with what breaks yours.

Lord Jesus, open our eyes that we might see that special area of service that you have prepared us for. We pray that you would strengthen us to follow you there.

[24 : 03] We pray that you would equip us to follow your example of sacrificial self-giving. lead us, Lord.

Lead us in your righteous way. Hear our prayer. We ask it for your glory. Amen.
Amen.