

Cultivate Servanthood

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Date: 04 March 2018

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[0 : 00] Turn your Bible to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 20. This morning's sermon is titled! Cultivate Servanthood.

! Cultivate a particular Christian value.

The first sermon was Cultivate Community. This one, again, is Cultivate Servanthood. The next one is, the remaining five are Cultivate Generosity, Cultivate Honor, Cultivate Humility, Cultivate Respect, and Cultivate Gratitude.

And the reason we're doing this is these are values that, sadly, are not near as common as they used to be.

And I believe that with God's help, we can cultivate them. We need to cultivate them. And you'll notice that we're doing these only on the first Sunday of the month when we're all together and our children are with us as well because although these are values that should mark our lives as Christians, they're also values that can be taught to some degree to our children.

[1 : 32] And we need to really cultivate them. My mother's here, and most of you know my mother, and I remember when we were growing up, my mother would say things to us, and she would say, oh, when I was growing up, and I was like, that's not true.

It was not like that. She would say things like, for example, when they were younger, and they walked into a room, if there were five adults present, they had to address each one and say good morning.

And I thought, no way. Nobody did that. And she said, yeah, we did that. Now, what we did was we would walk into the room, we would say good morning to everyone. Today, kids walk in, they say nothing.

And so I've lived long enough to be able to say to my children, you know, when I was younger, we walked into a room, you had to say good morning. And it's changed.

And so we do need to pass these values on. But first of all, again, these are Christian values. But they can be taught to some degree. And so this morning, we continue with the second value, servanthood.

[2 : 44] And again, it is a call to us to cultivate servanthood. Again, I would be allowing a time for questions and answers at the end. So if you do have a question, please make note of it on one of the pastoral care forms.

We'll collect them. If you do use the form, no need to put your name on it, or you can ask the question verbally at the end. Matthew chapter 20, beginning in verse 20.

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons. And kneeling before him, she asked him for something. And he said to her, what do you want?

She said to him, say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left in your kingdom.

Jesus answered, you do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? They said to him, we are able.

- [3 : 54] He said to them, you will drink my cup. But to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant.
- But it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my father. And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers.
- But Jesus called them to him and said, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them.
- It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be a servant. And whoever would be first among you must be a slave.
- Let's pray together.
- [5 : 12] Father, we are grateful that we are able to have your word, read your word, and now to sit under the preaching of your word.
- And Lord, we pause because we need your help. Lord, I need your help in proclamation. We all need your help in hearing. Would you help us to hear as we ought to hear, Lord, so that we may grow in this important Christian value of servanthood.
- I pray that you would attend to the preaching of your word and its application in our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.
- If you look around the room, you would see that we are a diverse group. And two obvious differences that you will notice is we are different in terms of sex.
- We're also different in terms of age. But although we are diverse, the truth is we are very much alike. We actually have more in common than we have not in common.
- [6 : 28] For example, no matter what our sex is, no matter what our age is, or I guess to some degree, if you're very, very, very young, this may not apply, but for most of us, we are by nature selfish.
- We don't have to teach a child how to share a cookie. The child knows how to break the cookie in such a way that they get the bigger part and the other one gets the smaller part.
- We're born with this kind of selfishness. It doesn't have to be taught. It has to be untaught. By nature, we are self-centered. We are self-serving.
- And even when we come to Christ, the truth is, even though we are called to take of our cross daily and we are to die to self, the truth is, coming to Christ doesn't change our nature of being selfish and being self-centered.
- It doesn't change it. Now, as we follow Christ, what should happen over time is, over time, we should grow in being less selfish and less self-centered and more centered on other people and not just ourselves.
- [7 : 58] That's supposed to happen over time. What the Bible calls that is sanctification. But the truth is, the most sanctified person will not fully overcome selfishness and self-centeredness in this life.
- being selfish and being self-centered are part of our human fallen nature. In this passage that we just read, we have an account of selfishness and self-serving on display.
- And we also have an account of what Jesus says about it. And here's what Jesus told his disciples and what he is by extension telling all those who would be his disciple.
- In the kingdom of God, greatness is not determined by the position we hold, but by the service we give. That's the overarching point that Jesus makes as he addresses this situation of selfishness and self-centeredness that was on display in a very dramatic way among his disciples.
- He tells them that in the kingdom of God, greatness is not determined by the position we hold. Instead, it is determined by the service we give.

[9 : 45] As servants of Christ, we are called to cultivate servanthood. We who follow Christ are to be servants of Christ and servants of Christ are to cultivate servanthood.

In this passage, we observe, number one, a self-serving request on the part of the sons of Zebedee. Number two, a surprising response by the Lord Jesus.

Number three, a stinging reaction by the rest of the disciples. And then finally, number four, a sobering reminder reminder by the Lord Jesus.

In our remaining time, I want to consider each of these. First of all, let's consider the self-serving request by the sons of Zebedee. We see in verse 20 of this passage in Matthew that the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with the two sons and she knelt down, showing him great deference and great honor.

And she sought his permission to ask him something. So she came to Jesus and she basically said, Jesus, can I ask you something? And Jesus says to her, what do you want?

[11 : 06] And she responds, as we see in verse 21, she says, say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left in your kingdom.

And Jesus responds to her by making a statement and then asking a question. But before we consider what Jesus says to her, I think it's important to consider a bit more closely what's going on because there's a lot that's going on that wouldn't really meet our eyes on the face of it.

First of all, although the mother of the sons of Zebedee is not named, we are able to determine from other gospel accounts, the gospel accounts of, well, further in Matthew and then in Mark and in John, we're able to tell that this is Salome.

That's her name. The mother of the sons of Zebedee, James and John, is a woman by the name of Salome. And also, we're able to see that Salome was one of three women who were featured very prominently around the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus. And when you read the three accounts together, you're able to also see in particular from John's account in John 19:25, John talks about these three women who are with the mother of Jesus, Mary.

[12 : 43] Two of the women are named and one is not named and she is simply referred to as Mary's sister. And the deduction from that reference when you combine it with the other ones is that Salome was the sister of Mary.

And so what you have here is the aunt of Jesus. His auntie is coming and making requests of him and so really she's making requests on behalf of his first cousins, James and John.

And interestingly, James and John were the other two who they were, two of the three who were the inner circle of Jesus, Peter, James, and John. So really, that is what is happening here.

This is not a stranger coming up to Jesus and saying, hey, I want you to make my sons your right and left lieutenants. No. This is his aunt.

This is Auntie Salome who's coming to her nephew and she's saying to her nephew, now I know you got three on the inside.

[13 : 54] You got three there, but I want my two sons to be taken care of. Forget Peter. Put one on the left and put one on the right. Now I imagine between themselves they said, it doesn't matter who gets the right hand which is the hand of power so long as we get one of the positions.

Now, although Salome verbalized this request, I think it's important to see that it's James and John who were really asking to be seated on the right and the left of Jesus.

And this is certainly the view that Mark takes in his gospel in Mark chapter 10. Mark does not mention that the request came from the mother of James and John.

Mark simply says James and John asked to be on the right and on the left. They were throwing Peter under the bus and they wanted the top spots in the kingdom of God.

When you read accounts like this, you really do have to be encouraged when you are not, you know, all that you know we should be and all that we're called to be. I mean, here are these guys that they're with Jesus they're hearing him preach and teach and do miracles and all kinds of other things and they still have a lot of growth to experience.

[15 : 21] But these two men were making this request of Jesus. It was them behind their mother making this request.

And I think, again, when we consider what is happening here, it's very easy to judge James and John. But we shouldn't do that.

We should realize, we should be humbled by the reality that even as they walked with Jesus, they could have these selfish motivations and how much more we would be prone to selfish motivations who don't have the privilege that they had to literally walk with Jesus, to be in his inner circle, to observe him in the up-close way that they had.

And Matthew's actually trying to make this point to us. Matthew, remember, Matthew's laying out a gospel to tell a story. And so you would notice in verse 17, for example, you look up a few verses from verse 20, it says, as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, see, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.

Now, I don't think that we necessarily have to believe that this account of James and John asking for these positions followed immediately after Jesus said these words.

[17 : 19] I don't think we need to believe that. I don't think that's the case at all. But Matthew was trying to help us to see something. Matthew is trying to help us to see that even in the context of Jesus talking about what awaited him, that he is going to be mocked, and he is going to be flogged, and he is going to be crucified, here you have these two disciples who are asking to sit on his right and on his left, and what a contrast.

Jesus, the one who is going to sit on his throne in his kingdom, is going to go there by way of mocking and flogging and crucifixion, and James and John, all they see is a position of power, and they want to be seated next to Jesus, and what we see is they are clearly viewing the kingdom of God through the same lens of an earthly political kingdom.

they view these positions as positions to be esteemed and to be pursued, but the kingdom of God is quite opposite to the kingdoms of this world, and yet James and John did not understand this, and Matthew is making this very, very clear to us.

He's making it very clear the way to us. He said it was that they did not understand it, and that's why they were making this self-centered request.

Brothers and sisters, as we'll see shortly, the rest of the disciples, they didn't understand either. They did not understand servanthood in the kingdom of God, and again, because they did not understand, we should pause to recognize that we too can get it wrong.

[19 : 25] We too can have distorted views about the kingdom of God and how it operates in particular in the area of servanthood. Let's now consider the surprising response of Jesus.

Number two, a surprising response. Jesus' response is surprising because, as we have already seen, he doesn't direct his response to his aunt Salome.

In verse 22, he answers, you do not know what you are asking. Now, let me just pause and digress a little bit to say something. This is where having access to some language tools could help us right away to determine who Jesus is addressing.

One of the limitations in English is that we have some words, like some pronouns, like you. When I say you, I could mean one person, meaning Alexi and you, or I could say you and mean all of you.

But you would not know, except away from context, whether I'm speaking to one person or I'm speaking to more than one person. And sometimes in the Bible, it's hard to tell in our English Bibles whether it's talking to one person or another person or more than one person.

[20 : 58] Well, when you consider the word you in the original language, it is actually plural. So Jesus is not saying to Salome, his auntie, you don't know what you're asking.

It's not singular, it's plural. Jesus says, you don't know what you're asking. Jesus recognized that it wasn't Salome who was making this request, it was James and John who was making this request.

And he says to them, you do not know what you are asking. And this becomes even clearer when he says to them, are you able to drink the cup that I'm able to drink?

They said to him, we are able. He wasn't even addressing the three of them. He was only addressing two of them and they said, we are able.

Even the eagerness with which they answered him, they answered him quickly and he could tell they didn't really understand. And I'm sure you've been in a situation that where you ask a person something and just how they immediately say yes, you say, you know what?

[22 : 11] They don't understand what I just asked them. They don't understand what is entailed in that question. Jesus knew that if they really knew how greatness was achieved in the kingdom of God, they would not be so eager to be great and to pursue some position of greatness.

James and John did not understand what they were asking. They didn't understand that greatness in the kingdom of God was achieved very differently from greatness in the world.

Actually, quite the opposite in terms of how they achieved. They didn't understand what they were asking. As I thought of James and John not understanding what they were asking, I remembered this experience we had with our daughter Danielle, and she was much younger.

She was at the age where you would be asking, what do you want to be when you grow up? We asked, what do you want to be when you grow up? And she, being young, she began to just act it out.

And she was like doing this and pushing, and she was doing this. And I said, what is that? She said, a cashier. I will be a cashier. We thought, a cashier?

[23 : 35] Why do you want to be a cashier? Well, Danielle wanted to be a cashier because she thought the cashiers owned the money in the food store. I mean, she learned that they did not own the money.

She would go to Mr. Roberts store, and she learned it was Mr. Roberts' money. She no longer wanted to be a cashier. She didn't understand what she was asking. James and John did not understand what they were asking.

They thought, high positions in the kingdom of God are just like high positions in the world. You get to rule over people. Jesus knew that they were asking about positions in the kingdom of God, and he knew that it was based on their worldly understanding of position and power and authority.

And so he says to them, you don't know what you're asking. James and John saw these two positions on the side of Jesus as positions of power and privilege, but they were totally blind to the fact that to sit with Christ assures us of suffering and sacrifice, not of power and privilege.

marriage. And this is made very clear when Jesus says to them, are you able to drink of my cup? Are you able to drink of the cup that I am to drink?

[25 : 06] And again, their quick answer betrays the fact that they didn't understand all that it entailed, because if they did, they would not be so eager to answer, because none of us in our right mind eagerly signs up for suffering.

None of us in our right mind eagerly signs up for sacrifice. We do at times knowingly sign up for suffering and sign up for sacrifice, but we don't do so eagerly.

We do so soberly. We do so counting the cost. We do so understanding it. Clearly, they did not remember that Jesus said that he was going to be mocked and flogged and crucified.

And Jesus tells them, you are going to drink of the cup that I'm going to drink. And he was referring to suffering and sacrifice that awaited these two disciples.

And we know that James was the first apostle who was martyred. And we know that John was persecuted and he was exiled to the island of Patmos.

[26 : 18] But James and John had no clue that this is what really awaited them. Instead, what they saw was a kingdom of pomp and pageantry where they would have positions of influence and power.

And then Jesus gives them some disappointing news. Jesus says, and beside, the positions you want, they're not in my power to grant. They are for those for whom the Father has prepared them.

What is he really saying to James and John as he tells them, you know, I can't do anything about those positions that you want. they are for those for whom the Father has prepared them.

You know what he was doing? He was essentially saying to them, you have to trust God with your future. You have to trust God with your, not just your future place in the kingdom, your present place in the kingdom, but you have to trust God with your place in the kingdom of God.

You trust him with it. He'll make that determination in the end. And there's nothing we can do to manipulate it. There's nothing we can do to jockey for position in the kingdom of God.

[27 : 38] So James and John did not understand that following Christ was not a ticket to power and prestige. Instead, following Christ is the road of personal suffering and sacrifice for the cause of Christ.

and today people are not as concerned I find with positions of power so we don't follow Christ so much for positions of power but many follow Christ for material wealth and other trappings of success.

And the idea is you come to Christ and these things are going to be given to you. These things will be your lot. They will be your portion. And while these possessions and accomplishments do come to some who follow Christ for all kinds of different reasons they come to different people at different times and in different ways and to different degrees they are not what Jesus promises us.

You will find nowhere in scripture where Jesus promises many of the things that people crave after and run after and serve him for.

He doesn't promise us those particular things. Instead what he promises us is he promises us that we're going to be hated for following him.

[29 : 06] He promises us that we're going to be persecuted for his name's sake. And like James and John and the other disciples many who follow Christ today see following Christ as a means to worldly achievements and they miss the fact that it is instead a call to personal suffering and personal sacrifice.

God will be God to God to see! verse 24.

He says when the ten heard it they were indignant at the two brothers. When they heard it they were indignant at the two brothers. Now why were they indignant?

Why were they indignant? Now first of all notice that they looked beyond Sonomi as well. They realized this is not just a mother looking out for boys. this is her boys looking out for themselves.

And the reason they were indignant the reason they were indignant the reason they were upset is they were no different from James and John.

[31 : 00] They were no different. James and John beat them to the deal. James and John were the ones to ask first. You see if they really understood what Jesus said that these positions are for whom the father has prepared them they wouldn't be upset.

They wouldn't be upset because you wouldn't see a person who can't take something unto him or herself if they attempt to do it you wouldn't be upset if you know they just can't do it.

But these disciples were upset because they had the same view. And this thing about who is great this is not an unusual discussion among them.

Right over in the earlier chapter in Matthew chapter 18 in the first few verses in verses 1 through 4 we see Jesus addressing this issue with the disciples when they were arguing who is the greatest in the kingdom of God.

This was an ongoing discussion among them. So the ten were indignant because they were no different from Peter sorry from James and John.

[32 : 22] They were upset because they viewed the positions of left and right hand of Jesus in the kingdom of God the same way that James and John saw earthly power and political power and they wanted it as well and they didn't realize didn't understand what Jesus said those positions belong to whomever the father has prepared them for they understood that they wouldn't be upset they understood that they would not have been incensed and shown their indignation against James and John and the same is true today many who are following Christ are including church leaders jockeying for position competing for prominence and they don't realize that their place in the kingdom of

God is going to be determined by God himself now and in the future no need to fight about it at best we can get some illusion of a position illusion of a place of prominence but in reality we will only get what God himself designates for us in accordance with his own choices that's why they were upset they didn't understand what Jesus said and so in the end Jesus recognizes this he recognizes that it's not just James and John who don't understand how greatness comes in the kingdom of God he recognizes that all of his disciples didn't understand this they're still having problems shaking the worldly understanding of power and greatness as they sought to follow him and so what

Jesus does is he gives them a sober reminder about greatness in the kingdom of God versus greatness in the world and this is my fourth and final point a sober reminder again it is a reminder because Jesus has told them this before just over the previous two chapters away Matthew 18 we have this account they're arguing among themselves who is the greatest in the kingdom of God and Jesus at that time says you want to be great be like a little child and you'll be great in the kingdom of heaven but they still didn't get it they were looking at the kingdom of God through the eyes of worldly!

notice what he says to them in verse 25 but Jesus called them to him and said you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them and their great ones exercise authority over them notice Jesus uses these two words two times over them over them that is the description of positions of authority in the world that is the description of power in the world it is used over people it is it is the the top leaders they lorded over the people the delegated leaders they exercise the authority over the people Jesus says you know that and boy didn't they know that that's all they knew they knew that all too well and that shaped their understanding of authority and of power but

Jesus adds this he says it shall not be so among you and notice what he says to them in verses 26 and 27 he says it shall not be so among you but whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be your slave notice the contrast in these two verses Jesus uses two important words three times and they are the words among you and they are in direct contrast to those two words that we looked at earlier over them among you over them let's not miss that distinction in the world the way power is seen the way authority is seen is that it is over people lording it over them wielding authority over them but

[37 : 50] Jesus says not so among you not so in the kingdom of God it is not over you or over them leadership he says it is among you it is among you in the kingdom of God leadership is among the people because it is servanthood and it is for the people so Jesus talks about whoever will be great among you and whoever will be first among you in the kingdom of God leaders lead from among the people because they are servants of the people and in the kingdom of God the higher your position the greater your service or we could say that the other way the greater your service the greater your position and it's not a ceremonial position there's not a position where you can tell by some outward trapping that this person is really great in the kingdom of

God in the world it works that way in the world it's important to have that title it's important to have that position it's important to have all the trappings of the office but not so in the kingdom of God you know you watch for example the way prime ministers are treated and how people around them relate I was listening to the delegation not to the delegation I listened to the announcement of the delegation of all the people who went to the recent CARICOM heads meeting and all the different people who went in the entourage with the prime minister and you know all the different people are doing different things for him and it's amazing and it's amazing how it becomes very clear this is the important man people are serving him something as simple as if the prime minister were here and he was seated on the front row more than likely if he was going to address us somebody would walk up and they would bring whatever paper he was going to speak from he would walk up with hands flowing and they would rest his paper down and sometimes it doesn't happen but a lot of times you actually see it where they walk into a room and their hands are flowing and people are bringing things and so forth you know many people try to copy the same kinds of things in the church and it's like trying to mix together there churches that actually have what they call protocol ministries and they match them in exactly the same way that the world matches them and so when you do that what you actually are doing is you're diminishing the words of

Jesus what Jesus is saying to us is that to be great in the kingdom of God we don't need a position to be great in the kingdom of God we don't need some kind of title or some kind of trapping he says we determine our greatness by our service serving among the people as opposed to over the people and having people to serve us Jesus recognized what the disciples wanted to serve the people Jesus recognized that to be great in the kingdom of God is a call to service they wanted to sit on the left and the right

Jesus says no no no greatness comes through service and then in verse 28 he uses himself as the ultimate example he says even as let's start in verse 27 again and whoever notice a universal word and whoever would be first among you must be your slave servant versus slave the one who is just given to the service of another he says even as the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many Jesus uses himself as the ultimate example of servanthood!

And he says that he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many and notice how Jesus in his coming served us in a way we could never serve ourselves something we could never do for ourselves and one of the things that you find that people often do when they copy from the world be could be reconciled to

[44 : 52] God and he served us he came from heaven to earth took on the form of a servant and went to the cross and is the ultimate example of what it means to serve and to serve among the people when I ask us this morning as we think of these words of Jesus what does servanthood look like in your life what does it look like in your life I couldn't help but think that the first group of people who should be thinking long and hard about servanthood is husbands and the reason is scripture says that husbands are to love their wives the way Christ loved the church and he gave himself for the church I believe that the most obvious application this morning husbands is that we need to consider how are we serving as husbands what does that look like how are we serving our wives and it's so easy to think that we are to be served it's so easy to have this entitlement mentality that so many men actually have but when we consider the savior's example dying for his bride the church giving himself for her how are we serving our wives maybe that's the conversation we need to have with our wives to ask them how am

I serving you how can I better serve you and then for all of us how are we serving at home in our context most wives work most women work and then they have duties when they come home that they have a myriad of different things to do and we all need to be thinking how am I serving at home am I one who is valuing opportunities to serve or do I begrudge serving and I want to be served that's our case and we are not we are not modeling the value of servanthood in the kingdom of God and here parents we can help our children with this we can help our children by teaching them the value of what it is to serve and help them to see that work is not just work it is an opportunity to serve when you assign them to wash dishes!

that's not just washing the dishes that's not just a chore or work no that is serving the family because you're cleaning and washing the dishes when we clean up after ourselves we are serving our wives men and our mothers children how are we serving at work to review our jobs as just a place where we go as an employee we put in our however many hours and we get our paychecks back or do we see ourselves as a servant going in and seeking ways that we are able to serve that it is a value sometimes you see a person needing something needing help with something and it's so easy to have the attitude and let them figure it out for themselves instead of how can

I serve how can I give myself in this particular context and certainly when you think about serving in the church context in the local church context how are you serving are you serving and whether you're serving or not how can you perhaps serve in different ways or in new ways part of our challenge is that we live in two worlds we live out there and we live in the kingdom of God as well and the world shapes our thinking in so many ways and so scripture calls us to not be conformed to this world but to be transformed by having our minds renewed on the word of

God that we may think differently about these particular things those who follow Christ and who are thinking straight they don't regret servanthood they don't mind what the world thinks about them as they give themselves and as they serve and the reality is when you are a servant sometimes you're not going to be treated that well the world doesn't treat servants well the world looks up to people who they think can do something for them but it is our lot that we are called to follow Christ and being called to follow Christ we are called to service in the kingdom of God greatness is not determined by the position we hold but it is determined by the service we give and I pray that the Lord would help us all in our various spheres of existence at home at work in the church in our relationships that we would grow in being servants and I want to encourage us today as part of our conversation let's talk about servanthood husbands and wives let's talk about servanthood let's talk about how we are serving one another how we can better serve one another parents take some time talk to your children about serving and help them to understand the greatness in the kingdom of

[51 : 29] God comes to serving as for you to to