

Matthew 20:17-28

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[0:00] Good morning. I invite you to turn with me to Matthew chapter 20. We're going to continue our series in the book of Matthew together.

! 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.

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked him for something. 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? I said to him, We are able. 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.

[1:41] 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 lorded over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them, 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, even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

So this is God's word. Let's pray. O Lord, our God, in these next minutes, will the words of my mouth, the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in your sight.

O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. When was the last time you had a duh moment?

Some of us, it was probably this morning, right? Today is a duh kind of moment for two of Christ's disciples, James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

[2:57] Now, they've been traveling, probably for several weeks now, south from the Sea of Galilee, down the Jordan River Valley, towards the Dead Sea.

And now, we see today in verse 17 that Jesus is going up to Jerusalem, which what that means is, we'll see in verse 29 next week, they're in Jericho, and that's just northwest of the Dead Sea.

And they're turning west to head uphill towards Jerusalem. And do we have it? Do we have the picture? We do? Cool. Yeah, so I had the opportunity to go this summer and see, like, this is the road, eventually, that they're going to be going up.

It's a really big uphill climb to head west to Jerusalem. In verses 18 and 19, Jesus tells them again why we're going, or what he's going to do when he gets to Jerusalem.

What's going to happen there? He's going to be betrayed. He's going to be tried and falsely convicted. The Roman government is going to crucify him. And that's all bad news, right?

[4:08] For the man that the disciples hope will be the Messiah, their Savior King. But then, he'll be raised to life on the third day.

And that's more than just a cool trick, right? At the end of today's passage, Jesus is going to follow this explanation of what he's going to do, an explanation of why he's going to do it, why it's going to happen.

But before he does that, what happens? He gets interrupted, right? He's going to have a conversation. And what a conversation it is. In chapter 18, we've recently heard Jesus say, when the disciples asked, you know, who's greatest in the kingdom?

We recently heard him say, truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you'll never enter the kingdom of God. And just last week, Jesus said, the first will be last, and the last first.

And just now, in verses 17 through 19, he said, I'm going to the extreme in terms of humility, a cross, right?

[5:13] And so, of course, note the sarcasm, of course, what the disciples come and ask next is what? Verse 20, 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? What? She said to him, say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand, one at your left in your kingdom, right? So Jesus has been saying, turn, humble yourself like children, or you'll never enter the kingdom.

Then he says, the last will be first, and the first will be last. Then he says, I'm going to the cross to be crucified. And so, of course, yeah, Jesus, we would really like some prominence right about now. I mean, could anything be more tone deaf? Could anything be more out of place? John Wesley put it this way. He said, considering what he had just been speaking was ever anything more unreasonable?

Probably not, John Wesley. Probably not, right? Now, how would you respond if you were in Christ's shoes here? Let's look at what he says.

[6:28] Verse 22. Jesus answered, you do not know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? I said to him, we are able.

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.

Now, it is easy for us, sitting in nice padded chairs here, right, to look at James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and think, what fools.

Because, of course, they are, right? But the Holy Spirit did not lead Matthew to preserve this conversation so that we can gloat over that.

The Holy Spirit led Matthew to record this conversation for us so that we could see ourselves.

[7:33] Right? For some of us, we look at the disciples and say, oh, these fools, right? Others of us, we're going to get to it in a minute, already see ourselves, but most of us probably look at them and be like, oh, wow, you guys are morons, right?

And we probably also look at other people like they're fools too, right? If people around us are walking in foolishness contrary to God's wisdom, or walking in sin contrary to God's commands, or they just don't get it, like James and John don't get it here, right?

What Jesus has been talking about for weeks at this point for them, right? We look at them with annoyance, or a superior spirit, because we don't see it in ourselves.

In our view, we get it, right? We're not fools. Now, if that's your reaction, if the disciples look like morons, if we read these words and are ready to judge, or if that's how we operate with our families, or with our brothers and sisters in Christ, or our neighbors, if other people are the frustrating ones, the slow ones, the ones who don't get us, get it.

Let this passage be a mirror. Now, you see yourself in it. Because I'm not as wise as I think I am. I have blind spots I don't know about.

[9:04] That's why there are blind spots. If I could see myself as Jesus sees me, I'd be amazed at how foolish I am, right?

Friends, let's use this as a mirror. The disciples don't get it. Where don't I get it? The disciples are slow to learn here. Where am I slow to see the things of God?

Their ambitions don't align with Christ's goals. Where are my ambitions contrary to his? Friends, let this passage humble us. I'll give you an example.

Here's what it looks like in my life right now. Last week, what did we see in the first half of chapter 20? The heavenly reward for God's people. We saw that it was enormous to reign with Christ.

A hundredfold recompense for every trial and tribulation. An eternal life to dwell with God forever. It's the reward that can't be added to.

[10:11] And what's the result of that? It's the application. What is that supposed to do in our lives, that message? It challenged us all to think

and live as if that were true.

To live today as if infinite blessing is actually ours in Christ's tomorrow. And this whole past week, I have been, that's just been convicting me.

It's been a pebble in my shoe or just a gnat picking at me, right? There are some things, and specifically dissatisfaction in my own life.

Like, that's what it has been just driving against, right? There's some things in this world I'd really like to see change, right? Some things about my own circumstances or relationships, etc. I'm sure that you would like some things in your life to change too, right?

And that's normal. In a fallen, broken, sinful world, nothing is left untarnished. Nothing is perfect as it should be. So, all of us lead and live a less than perfect life.

[11:13] And of course, we're disappointed by those shortcomings. We should feel disappointment and grief and pain in the midst of trouble. We should want to see change. But what happens when my sin gets a hold of that disappointment?

What happens? I start dwelling on it. I start feeling I'm owed a perfect life. I start feeling selfishly sorry for myself, right? And my genuine disappointment slowly turns into dissatisfaction and then to discontentment, right?

And my genuine mourning over brokenness starts morphing into bitterness, right? Friends, discontentment and bitterness are not fruits of the Spirit.

So, last week's sermon is laser-focused on me, right? On my own sin problem, right? It should be prompting me to say, well, in a few short years, I will see him face to face.

And be greeted by the Lord himself and be ushered into that blessing that we spoke of, that reward that cannot be added to. Blessing I can't count. How should that affect me?

[12:24] Well, you know what? I think I can manage, actually. You know, with disappointment right now. If things aren't complete today, I'm not going to get bent out of shape about it because I have this hope.

Right? That's what it ought to be doing in me. This gospel promise should drag me out of wallowing in discontentment and bitterness, right? That's what it ought to be doing in me.

Has it? Not quite. Not yet. Like a fool, like James and John, I still don't get it in my heart.

I've heard Jesus say it. I've understood. I've preached it, how it ought to transform my thoughts in my life. And yet I still find myself running, ruminating all this week in sinful discontentment.

Right? I too have been slow to get it. Friends, in a thousand ways, I am just like James in this passage. And I bet you're John.

[13:31] We are the sons of Zebedee. We don't live in the light of his call in all sorts of ways. They've heard Jesus. They don't get it yet.

The truth of his word. It hasn't seeded itself in their hearts in the way that transforms their lives. My friends, I've heard the truth of God's word. But it hasn't fully displaced the foolishness in me.

The sinful discontentment in my heart. Even just this week. I bet there's something similar going on in your heart. And so if you're reading this passage and say, boy, those disciples, they're fools.

I'd encourage you to find in this passage a mirror. How are you like James and John? How are you not getting it? But this passage is not only a mirror.

Perhaps, you know, what we've just said. You're like, yep, I'm there. I get it. I get it. Thanks, Dave. That's really helpful. I already see all my weaknesses.

[14:38] I'm very aware of them. Perhaps the mirror isn't as necessary for you. For some of us, our shortcomings, we see them with great clarity. And we dwell on them a lot.

And we drive ourselves to despair because of it. Now, in one sense, it is very healthy to see where you fall short and where you sin. We need to see where we fall short so we know where to grow. We need, we must, must see our need for a Savior. So we must see our sin. But a lot of focus on me is actually not the point of the gospel, right?

Too much focus on our own shortcomings and too little focus on Christ and his grace, that's destructive. Maybe you already know all too well how much you fall short, how much you sin, and maybe that's what's filling your mind.

Not discontentment like me, but shame and hatred of self. And it can drive us to despair and it can lead us to wonder, well, did God even love me? Lead us to doubt God's love for us even.

[15:47] And if that's where you are, this passage is for you too. Because what's on display in this passage is not simply the disciples' folly, but also the Lord's patience towards his people, even in their sin and their foolishness.

If you're struggling under the burden of despair and your own shortcomings, take notice. How does our Lord treat those who don't get it?

Does he respond like you and I would? What is his attitude towards those who are foolish and sinful? He corrects them, but he does not reject them.

He doesn't get frustrated or exasperated. He could have rebuked them sharply. Have you been listening to anything I've said?

Have you not heard me talking about humility and becoming a child? The first would be last. What are you, morons? He could have said that. He could have shamed them for their ingratitude, right?

[16:58] I just told you that you were about to be seated on 12 thrones. Is that not enough for you? You need to make sure you have the best of those 12 seats?

You didn't earn them to begin with. What makes you think you can demand more, right? You ungrateful wretches. He could have said that. He could have mocked them, right?

Probably my favorite. You're not man enough to come speak to me on your own. You have to hide behind mommy. And you think you deserve the greatest thrones? He could have said that.

But he chose not to. He corrected them. He definitely set them straight. But he corrected them without anger or mocking. If you're burdened under the shame of sin or the weight of your own foolishness, like them, if you don't need this passage as a mirror, or even if you've been shown it now with that mirror, because if you don't see how Jesus could or would love someone like you, see in this moment, Jesus loving someone like you.

They couldn't have misread his statements any worse. And he didn't scorn them. They couldn't have shown themselves really any more foolish in this moment.

[18:26] And he didn't reject them. Seeing as how he was talking about his crucifixion, they couldn't have shown a more selfish, sinful heart in that moment than in the request they did make.

And he didn't condemn them. You can run to Jesus because he loves sinners and fools. And in fact, after we've used this text as a mirror, we'll see, we know that there are only sinners and fools.

And friends, Christ calls us towards that same patience outwardly too, right? He deals with James and John patiently when they don't get it.

He deals with us patiently when we don't get it. And he calls for his people to show that same patience, that same understanding, right?

And so that person who persists in foolishness or sin, that person who irritates you, who with their ongoing foolishness or their ongoing sin, God is patient with them just as he is patient with you.

[19:40] When this passage shows us ourselves in a mirror, we are foolish and sinful and don't get it too, suddenly I can't be so high and mighty and judgmental when I see another person doing something similar, even if it's not the same thing that I'm prone to, right?

Because the mirror shows me that I don't get it, not just in one spot, but all over the place, right? When I see how Christ has treated me in my many sins and follies, it begins to reshape my heart, right?

To be patient too. Parents, take notice. When your kids don't get it, when they continue in foolishness, when they're selfish like James and John, when they don't make progress after the millionth time, and managers and leaders and supervisors of all kinds, right?

How do you view and how do you treat those in your charge when they don't get it? Now, I'm not saying let everything slide, right?

Jesus corrects them. What I am saying, with what attitude does our Lord correct them? And how does he correct us? How does he receive us when we're fools?

[21:01] Let that affect your heart. And oh Lord, Holy Spirit, will you use this to mold our hearts? Will you shape us to respond in like manner?

Right? And as we are starting now to speak about leadership and parents and elsewhere, Jesus transitions to just that.

Look, verse 24. 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. Their great ones exercise authority over them. 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. Leadership, for Christians, is not an opportunity to accumulate servants. [22:06] It is an opportunity to serve. And when we think about leadership, especially within the sphere of our Christian life, two areas especially come to the forefront.

the church and the family. Two areas of leadership that are within the kingdoms. Certainly it has application outside. We'll get to that.

But mostly, we're going to be thinking about the church and the home. And here, Jesus teaches us just what leadership in the church and the family is supposed to look like.

Now, you may have heard terms like male headship or complementarianism. Kind of broadly, what those mean is that we believe the scriptures plainly teach, and the global church has uniformly understood this throughout the centuries, that the Lord has set a special responsibility for men to lead in the church and the home.

Now, scriptures do not say that every woman submits to every man or that men are better or more holy or more able than women. But the Lord has in his sovereign will simply called men to be husband leaders in the home and elders and pastors in the church.

[23:20] But what does that mean? Now, whether you really liked what I just said or it rubbed you the wrong way, stick with me because neither of you are going to be happy.

What does that look like? First, what does it not look like? Jesus says, verse 25, that contrary to the world's ways, the leadership of a husband isn't about exercising authority.

It is not that. That might seem really foreign to us. What is leadership if not exercising authority? Well, let's follow Christ's teaching.

Verse 25, Jesus says that, what, pagan rulers and leaders use their position to lord over and exercise authority over others.

in verse 26, he does not say, so when you're a leader in my kingdom and when you lord over and exercise authority over others, just do it nice.

[24:27] That's not what he says. No, he says, verse 25, pagan leaders use their position to exercise authority over others. Then in verse 26, he says, it shall not be so among you.

translation, translation, if your view of leadership, if you view leadership in terms of exercising authority over someone, your view of leadership is pagan.

Jesus says, that view comes from the world, not from me, and it doesn't belong in my kingdom. It shall not be so among you.

Now, we're so accustomed to leadership and positions of authority and responsibility being just that, what Jesus excluded in verse 25, exercising authority, that we don't really know what else leadership could look like.

What else is leadership if not exercising authority? Well, the role of a leader secular, secular or Christian, is what?

[25:42] To lead their group towards a goal. Pretty simple, right? CEOs lead their companies towards innovation and profitability. That's the goal. Teachers lead their classrooms to learn.

That's the goal. Coast Guard officers lead their teams to save lives or interdict drugs. Navy officers, I think they drink coffee. I'm not sure. Wow.

Found my crowd. All right. Leadership is always pointed towards a goal, right? A specific goal. It's not just some general authority for a person to use any way they see fit.

Right? Leadership is always pointed in a direction. There's no such thing as a leader in general or a leader at large. It's always tied to a group and that group's goals.

Right? That person who on LinkedIn calls themselves an influencer, right? They're a joke, right? Hi, I'm Dave, leader of men. Good for you, friend.

[26:51] Right? Leaders all have a commission to lead a particular group of people for a particular goal. If they go beyond that commission, we

have names for that.

Corruption, abuse of authority, right? That's the name for that. And guess what? There are very clearly laid out in Scripture specific goals for the commission of male leaders in the kingdom too. And they all have a common theme. Let's try to find it. What's the goal? What's the goal for male headship with fathers to their children?

Ephesians 6. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Fathers, what's the goal? To get your way? To make the decisions? To exercise authority over them?

[27:58] No. The goal is leading your children to know and love the Lord. That's the goal.

And in fact, always insisting on your own way, your own preferences, probably gets in the way of that. And what's the goal for male headship as a husband?

Ephesians 5. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.

So what's the goal, husbands? To make the decisions? To get your way? To exercise authority over your wife?

No. What's the goal? What's your commission? Her growth in the Lord. That's the extent of it.

[29:00] The goal is not to get your wife to submit to your will. The goal is to lead your wife to submit to God's will. It's not about you.

That's your leadership commission. It's the same in the church. What goal has the Lord set for the male elders and pastors? Hebrews chapter 13. Obey your leaders and submit to them.

That's the elders and pastors in the church. For they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. What's the goal? Not leaders getting their own way.

It's not about the leaders at all. It's about the congregation to keep watch over their souls that they are growing in the Lord. Are you noticing a trend here in all these leadership commissions?

Here is probably the ultimate goal statement for the people of God. Deuteronomy chapter 6. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul with all your might and these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

[30:15] You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise. What's the goal?

That you would love the Lord and know Him and lead others to do the same. So, leadership is always aimed at a goal.

And the goal of leadership in the kingdom is leading others to love and serve the Lord. Husbands and fathers and pastors are charged to lead their families and congregations into holiness and love for the Lord.

It's not about the leader at all. It's about that goal. That's why Jesus said the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.

Love for God is the goal. So, what's the method? Jesus has an answer for that too. Jesus has already excluded verse 25 and 26 exercising authority over our families and congregations which makes a lot of sense when you consider the goal.

[31:35] Right? I can't command you to love Jesus. I mean, I can but it's stupid, right? That's something that I can't achieve just by exercising authority over you.

I can't from a position of authority command or change your heart by that command. Right? In fact, commanding something like that is probably really counterproductive. Right?

You resent me for it and maybe Christ too. That's the method that Jesus prohibits. What method does Jesus command? Verse 26.

Whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be your slave even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

What's the method? What's the method for leading people to love Jesus? Act like Jesus.

[32:49] Love like Jesus. Serve like Jesus. Consider others first like Jesus.

Make sacrifices for others like Jesus. Show them Jesus. it's leadership by example not dominion. Show them what Jesus is like and they will love him. Show them that Jesus is transforming your soul and they'll want it too. They'll want him too. Show them that Jesus is worth your all and they will think he's worth theirs. That's the method not dominion.

The apostle Peter who probably led the complaint against James and John that day makes this lead by godly example thing explicit in his instructions to leaders in the church.

[34:05] In 1 Peter 5 he says so I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed here's the goal shepherd the flock of God that is among you that's the goal to shepherd to spiritually protect and spiritually feed them here's how not to do it here's the not method exercising oversight not under compulsion but willingly as God would have you not for shameful gain not to be served but eagerly not domineering over those in your charge not lording it over them but and here's the method being examples to the flock there it is how do spiritual leaders lead others into godliness by their own godly example male headship is not about who's in charge male headship is about who's in charge of showing them

Jesus I must add that each of these commissions contained an element of instruction or teaching too right elders are to watch their life and doctrine parents are to instruct their children in the ways of the Lord as well husbands are to wash their wives in the water of the word and so the goal is leading those in our care to love Jesus and the method is modeling Jesus ways and speaking about him insisting on my own way because I'm a husband or a father or a pastor is the precise opposite of this what does verse 25 tell us about the husband who demands his own way what does verse 25 tell us about the husband who treats his family like servants where do those notions of leadership come from a

Christian husband who rules over his house who insists on his own way who treats his wife like a servant who thinks headship is about his will oh my goodness that's not Christian leadership that's pagan!

leadership right unfortunately that's how some people have even in the church defined male headship or complementarianism pick your term they've said that idea why I submit to your husband means allow him to rule over you like the pagans do that's an insult to God and his word which is why I'm sometimes uneasy using terms like complementarianism because they what do you mean by that right and that's another thing like you might say well I thought this was kind of a conservative church doesn't sound as conservative as I thought it would be like well what do you mean by conservative right I mean that I take Jesus teaching really really seriously I think that other kind of conservatism is the conservatism of the Pharisees so husbands be really careful if you say well I'm leading my family somewhere against my wife's wishes for her own good right perhaps that's called for on a rare occasion but if it's anything like a regular occurrence

I bet you're leading her there for your own good and giving it a false label one that mocks Christ and what's more the scriptures demonstrate and support women being extremely active and leading in all sorts of other ways inside the church and out and our church family has been tremendously blessed by the ministry of women while the elders attend the ministry of word and prayer women have initiated some of the best ministry our church has done in four years our church family has been served by two female deacons and nearly another this year that's not women usurping authority that's women walking into exactly the ministry that male hemnship is designed to propel them we're excited to see what's in store for our church family that springs from the idea of women and men in the future now

[38:30] Christ's commands extend to all of life which means that while it's important to give the bulk of our attention to leadership in the kingdom sphere in the family and in the church this has to affect Christians who are leading in other contexts too so how does this call to servant leadership in the family and the church extend to other kinds of leadership I'll just give you the example of how I tried to do this in my Coast Guard career it's just one simple thing but I found it impactful

there is a difference between a leader saying get your act together and perform and a leader saying what can I do to make you succeed here's what that looked like for me as a Coast Guard Officer and a Coast Guard Command Center Command Center is where they run search and rescue cases among other things the command duty officer is kind of like cadets and Navy officers and what it's like having the deck and the con in the command center it's being the manager of the command center during a search and rescue case most of my CDO command duty officer peers ran a tight ship status update is needed in a search and rescue case lives are on the line and time is short so that's what they were trained to do having that bias towards action being assertive to the point of aggressive always pushing the team to do better I took a slightly different approach based on this passage because as cadets you have to write leadership papers and so you quoted Jesus and had been thinking about it right I was still assertive but instead of asking why is that taking so long I asked what can I do to free you up for this important task right that's it I asked how I could serve them how can I free you up and you could ask them which CDO they'd rather stand watch with and that's still good leadership I think right it focuses the priorities it sets the direction it communicates the urgency and was it effective I think so not one time on my watch did we lose a life after a distress call came in certain leadership works it's almost like Jesus knew what he was saying and he said verse 27 whoever would be first among you must be your slave why all of this has been a picture of the gospel verse 28 even as the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many and so it's now that we basically close the sermon and turn our eyes to the communion table at the outset today in verses 18 and 19

Jesus explained what he was going to do in Jerusalem go there be betrayed falsely condemned and convicted handed over to Rome and crucified and then on the third day be raised to life that's what now in verse 28 he explains why he was going to be the ransom for people just like James and John you and me he was going to stand in our place as a ransom a ransom is a price paid to redeem someone he paid the price for the sin and the folly of the sons of Zebedee the price for your sins and mine God is good so divine justice requires our evil doing to be punished the price of sinning against an infinitely great God is infinite and we don't even get it how can we pay it so God chose to pay it himself because he is a good God who loves he came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many and so friend if you are among the many for whom he paid the ransom if you are among those who have repented of sin and believed on Christ this meal is a testimony of his matchless grace that God served you oh my goodness it is the celebration of that we are the recipients of unparalleled grace communion is the testimony of what he offers you he offers his life to atone for your sins so that you might live with this God forever so friends for all of us who are going to be celebrating communion let's stand we'll go to either side take the elements we'll return to our seats and we will celebrate this great grace together!

[44:26] how dear the father's love for this how best beyond all measure that he should give his holy son to men who wretch his treasure!

how great the king of saving! the father turns his face away as wounds which guard the chosen one bring many signs to hold me behold the man upon a cross my soul upon his shoulders ashamed I hear my mocking voice call it among the spires it was my sin that held it there until it was accomplished he he!
he!