

The Church's Service

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[0 : 00] So we're in Matthew 20 and you heard it read and you can probably pick up these three sort of quite quick scenes. You have the first scene, Jesus talking about the cross.

Second scene, what it means to follow Jesus based on this question of the mother there. And lastly, how we become his followers. So the cross, what it means to follow him and how we become his followers.

So we'll look at these one at a time. First, verses 17 to 19, Jesus explains what will happen in Jerusalem. And listen to it here. The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes. They'll condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked, flogged, crucified and raised on the third day. So this is the third time that Jesus has predicted his death in Matthew. The first time Peter said, that will never happen, Lord. The second time, the disciples were just really confused. So at this point, they're batting 0 for 2.

[1 : 04] And it's not looking great this time, to be honest. So if we dive into the prediction, you'll see that there's a lot of details there.

More details than in the previous predictions of his death. And you'll notice, when Jesus describes his death, he's not describing this glorious martyrdom.

This is not this heroic death on the battlefield like at the end of Avengers Endgame or something like that, right? It's not that. The death he describes... Sorry if I ruined the movie for you.

It's an ugly death, isn't it? It's an ugly death. It's sordid. And the focus of the description seems to be humiliation.

And it could seem like a rather pointless thing. Except that Jesus explains what his death means in verse 28. If you slide your eyes down to verse 28 there.

[2 : 11] The purpose of this death is... The Son of Man came to give his life as a ransom for many. That's the purpose of what Jesus is describing.

Now... It's quite a... So my son banged my notes out of my hand before I came into church.

And I've lost a page. Oh, gee. Thankfully... Oh, here it is. All right.

Ransom for many. So what does this mean? This is... His death was a ransom. Behind this word, there's a lot going on behind this one word here.

Ransom. It's quite a rich metaphor. So our understanding of the word ransom is you pay somebody that's kidnapped... You know, kidnapped somebody, right? And it's kind of...

[3 : 16] There's a lot more going on. So in the Greek, in the original language, the word, it was connected to warfare. So if you were captured in a war back in the days, they killed you or you were enslaved.

So those were your two options. There's no POW camps or anything. You're killed or you're enslaved. And the only way out of being a slave in this foreign country is if, like, a loved one or your tribe purchased you back.

So that's the metaphor. So Jesus is saying quite a number of things to us. One of the things he's saying, though, is that you were enslaved. That's what I purchased you from.

You were actually enslaved. You don't know this, but you were actually enslaved. And what that enslavement looks like is it looks like living for yourself. It looks like doing your own thing. So God may be somewhere vaguely in your life, you know, but he might be just sort of over there somewhere.

But you're basically enslaved to your own desires, and there's no way out of that for you. You're separated from God. And not only that, but God is angry about it.

[4 : 23] He's angry that you're enslaved, and he's angry about the results of that enslavement.

Because people living for themselves hurts the world he has made.

God is angry about that. He's angry about social injustice. He's angry about people profiting from ruining the environment. He's angry about that.

So God is angry, but we're enslaved to ourselves, and we're his children, and he loves us. We're part of his creation. What does this God do?

Well, he does the most morally beautiful thing one person can do for another, and that is lays down his life. He lays down his life for us.

He is mocked and flogged and crucified. Jesus paid the price for our sin. God pulled his anger out on Jesus, not us. The ransom was paid.

[5 : 25] We were freed from our enslavement. Because there's a transformation that happens in that as well. Now, you might be sitting there thinking, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Like, I know, I know, I know, I know, I know, I know, I know, I know.

That's the Christian story. But why? Why doesn't God just let it go? Seriously. So we've done bad stuff.

Why doesn't he just forgive us? Why the messy death? Why not just let it go and let's get on with it and just, God, be cool with us, cool with everything?

It's a great question. Let me give you a short illustration. Imagine someone drives into your car, a drunk driver. Your car is smashed. Policeman comes and says, look, look, look.

Why don't you just forgive them? Just let it go. Let's say that you do that. Let's say you forgive them. Because you actually know this drunk driver.

[6 : 28] And you know that they're completely broke. And they have lots of problems in their life. And they're going through a really difficult time. Let's say you actually do forgive them. You find that in your heart to forgive them. That's amazing.

But the car is still smashed. What's my point here? Every wrong has a cost. And someone's got to pay it.

A drunk driver could pay it. You might pay it. Somebody else might pay it. But somebody has to absorb the cost. There is always a price to be paid, even when there's forgiveness.

And on the cross, Jesus paid that price. He absorbed the cost. There is no cost-free forgiveness. That's why God, it's one reason why God can't just sort of go, you know what? It's fine to worry about it.

So Jesus outlines what's going to happen to him. And then he explains it later on. So that's the first section. The second section. How does the team respond?

[7 : 26] Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee come up with their sons. And kneeling before him, she says, she wants something. And he says what he wants. And she says, say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one on your right hand and one on your left, in your kingdom.

So I remember going on a road trip with a couple of fellas years ago, a long time ago, when I was a young man. And I can't remember where we were going, but I vividly remember this conversation. Larry was driving. Dave was sitting in the front seat. I was sitting in the back seat. Dave was speaking about his girlfriend who we dated for a long time.

And they're just recently broken up. And he's like 20. I've never heard him share his heart like this. 20 minutes of just pouring out the pain he was in, all the troubles and how hurt he was and how it all went down.

He was just pouring his heart out. And then he stopped. And there was a five-second pause. And Larry, from the front seat, says, I think I like strawberry yogurt the best.

[8 : 37] So I remember this. I remember this so vividly. The whole time Dave was speaking, and I've never heard him talk like this, Larry was thinking about yogurt.

It would have been difficult to come up with a more ludicrous thing in response to what Dave had been talking about, I think. Now, on a much grander scale, this is what we've got here.

I mean, the timing and the request of this mother is just outrageous. Like, the heart of Jesus and the heart of this family are so acutely divergent.

And clearly, the passage is setting up some kind of contrast here. And it's asking us, how are we going to live? You've got a choice to make. Are you going to live a life of sacrifice and service, or are you going to live a life of just self-seeking?

Let's have a closer look at this, all right? So the request. Grant us to sit at your right hand and one at your left in your kingdom. So what is that one that want?

[9 : 40] The mum, James and John. What do they want? What do they expect to be sitting on? It's not cushions. It's not beanbags. It's not mid-century, modern, super cool, teak chairs. Thrones.

That's what's going to be in the left and right of Jesus. Thrones. Jesus has been talking about death, and he's been talking about the kingdom, and all they hear is kingdom, kingdom, kingdom, kingdom, kingdom, kingdom, kingdom, kingdom.

Christ is giving this very detailed description of his death, and in their heads it's like, kingdom, kingdom. These guys want power, and I think they put their mother up to the question, right?

They just, they want power, and they believe there's, the thing is they believe there's going to be a kingdom, but they presume, they sort of presume it's going to be like Rome, but maybe even better than Rome, and they're calling shotgun on the best seats.

It's crazy, too, because it actually says that she kneels before Jesus. She worshiped Jesus. She kneels before Jesus, so she has a very high view of Jesus, but she's also got a very high view of her boys.

[10 : 48] So she believed the kingdom was coming. She just had no idea what it would look like.

That's a warning to us, I think. You can have a high view of Jesus. That doesn't mean everything in our hearts are in order.

And Christ's response, though, is quite interesting, isn't it? He doesn't say, oh, come on. Come on, guys. This is ridiculous.

He doesn't say that. He's so gracious. He says, you don't know what you're asking.

I mean, he's just spoke about his humiliation and his death and resurrection. It's probably very heavy on his heart. And he's saying to him, you don't know what you're asking for.

And then he says, are you able to drink the cup that I'm going to experience? Now, the cup in the Old Testament, it's connected to a few different things, but predominantly it's connected to suffering.

[11 : 50] He's saying, are you willing to suffer like I will suffer? Verse 22, the disciples, James and John, say, we are able. But I bet if we could go there and hear the conversation, I bet it's a fairly high pitched version of that.

It's like, yep, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Now, the surprising response of Jesus, again, is he says, actually, you're right.

You will experience some of the suffering of what I'm going through. And the Bible teaches us that this has actually happened. James, really early on in Acts, was murdered by Herod.

It says he was killed by the sword. And John was banished to live out his life in a cave in the island of Patmos. So they will both know suffering. And then what happens next there, verse 24, still in this middle section.

And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the brotherhood. This is the other disciples. Why were they indignant? Probably because James and John got their request in first. And then Jesus pivots.

[12 : 55] And he addresses their original request. You know, these two folks want the power positions. He addresses this original request. He says, you know the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.

And their great ones exercise authority over them. So he gives an example of how the rest of the world works. You know the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. Christ is saying the way of the world is to look for the highest place.

So I knew a guy in New Zealand who ran a large company. And if he had an important meeting where there was going to be negotiations, he would arrange the meeting around lunchtime.

And then partway through the meeting, a butler type person on staff, dressed quite nicely, right, would just come into the meeting. They'd meet in a boardroom. And just start setting up lunch before this guy on you.

And like a silver service kind of lunch. Like in downtown Abbey, if you imagine a butler comes in and just starts putting a setting before this person. Silver cutlery, fine china, linen placements, cloth napkins, wrap across the legs there.

[14 : 03] Amazing food. Like you're at a really high-end restaurant. Like a butler serving a lord or a lady. But the person would only do it to the guy that I knew.

Would just set up the silver service. Nothing for the other person. Just in front of that one person. In front of my mate. He would say nothing to the other person. And would just eat the food. Right?

He did this on purpose, of course. Like it was a play. It was like a thing that he did. And the whole point of this scene was to get the idea across to this other person.

I am more important than you. Look. Look what happens to me here. Offer nothing to the other person. You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.

So Jesus says this and then he has this cracker of a line. In verse 26 he says, It shall not be so among you. So the Gentiles out there.

[15:12] People lord it. They grab for power. They lord it over each other. It shall not be with you. That is not the way that you will live your life.

It's kind of a Gandalf. You shall not pass. Kind of line, isn't it? I love this line. This desire to be seen as powerful and sort of impose yourself on others.

Jesus says, No. It shall not be with you. Verse 26. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant. And whoever would be the first among you must be your slave.

What kind of sense does that make? The servant word. And the servant word here is a real low word. It means like cleaning tables and picking up trash and washing dishes.

It's lowly work. So there's this amazing contrast between the goals of James and John, calling shotgun on the best seats, and the goals of Jesus.

[16:10] These guys, they want power. They want status. They want privilege. And Jesus says, It shall not be with us. And he's going to show us the way.

He's come down from the throne of heaven to be mocked and spat on and beaten for us to serve us. Now, as an aside, Jesus is not saying we shouldn't have organized authority structures and we shouldn't have leaders.

But rather, it's the posture of the heart when you're in those positions, that's vitally important. So there's a seminary in Australia. It's a theological school. True story. So it happened a few years ago.

The caretaker resigned. And before a replacement was found, the staff signed up to do various jobs of the upkeep of the place. But they couldn't find anyone to clean the toilets.

One day, a student came into the school really early to study and went into the bathroom and there was a guy cleaning the toilet and it was the school president cleaning the toilet.

[17:13] So it's not that we don't have authority as structures. It's the posture of the heart when you're actually in these positions. One more story here. So I've got a mate of mine in New Zealand.

I've got a lot of mates. I've got a mate of mine in New Zealand and a big church that had a big car park. And, you know, sometimes these big churches with big car parks have a guy with a high visibility jacket on and like a stick directing people on where to park.

You know? That's what he did. That's what he did. And the thing about this guy is we could look at that and go, oh, mate, that's great. Good for you.

That's good for you. And we could sort of think, you know what? Maybe that's the most he could do. Like that was kind of it for him, right? Like, hmm, he's not that smart. Hasn't got much to offer.

But he's got this one thing that he's found that he can do. That's not the case with this guy. This is a really good friend of mine. He's a pediatric oncologist. And in his industry, he's this godlike figure.

[18:15] But he went to the pastor and he said, what's the job you find it most difficult to get people to volunteer for? And the pastor said, the car park warden.

And he goes, great. I'm just, I'm happy to do that. I don't mind doing what needs to be done. So I think one of the things that stops us from serving, like Christ is calling us here, is we hide behind the gift theology.

We hide behind this idea, well, it's just not my gift. My gift is this. Therefore, I don't have to do, I don't have to do this thing down here. Someone else can do that.

It's beneath me. No. It shall not be so among us. Now, how does that all happen though, right?

We're moving to the last section now. How does that happen where people who are dominated by self-interest change? How do we change? Because of the message of the passion, the message of the passage here is, humanity can be selfish, but just with sheer willpower, we can be better and less selfish and more servey.

[19:31] Well, it's all over for us, isn't it? We don't have hope. And that's why this little section ends with the story of the blind men. That's why the story is here.

It's not just another, oh, look, by the way, Jesus can do cool stuff. Like, serious, serious, serious. Jesus does a miracle. And that's cool. It doesn't sit there in isolation.

It's trying to tell us something about this. Verse 29 to 34, they're heading down the road, Jesus and his crew, and two blind men yell out to Jesus, and the crowd tries to shut them down, but they're persistent, good for them.

And Jesus says, what do you want me to do? Christ said the same line to James and John's mother, actually, when they had their request. And what did James and John want?

Actually, what did they want? They wanted power. They wanted status. And what does this guy want? What do these guys want? They just want wholeness. They just want to be whole. And Christ heals them, and they start to follow him.

[20 : 31] So this story immediately follows the story of James and John. Why? Because the blind men represent what Jesus can do for those of us who are spiritually blind.

James and John were blind. And it was an awful blindness. And Jesus rescues us from that kind of blindness.

See, this movement from selfishness or self-centeredness to selflessness does not come from just willpower. It comes when Jesus heals our hearts, and Jesus can do that.

He's the great healer. He's the miracle worker. He changes us from the inside out. We want to be like these blind people, and we want to come to Jesus and ask for wholeness in the areas of our life that are predominantly driven by self-interest.

Remake us, Lord. Remake us like we were meant to be. We don't want to be people that spend our lives grabbing for power and position.

[21 : 41] We want to be people that look for ways to serve you and serve one another. This is what discipleship looks like.

Amen.