

LENT 4 – 2008

Matthew 20: 20-28

Repeatedly we find on the pages of Scripture God's encouragement to humility and service. Salvation from sin and eternal death came from humility and service. Sin always tries to get us to embrace self-promotion. Sin, in fact, never really succeeds at lifting self up. It only destroys self. Sin always lies. Sin has a one hundred percent failure rate at making anything better for oneself, but always claims self-betterment.

One the pages of the four Gospels also, one sees Jesus often teach and encourage the twelve in humble service. Our text is one of those places. Humble service is a difficult thing to practice.

But

To Be Christ-like Is to Be a Servant.

The Son of Man came to serve. Of all the many Old Testament names for the Promised Savior, the one Jesus used most is the lowliest, the Son of Man. That title, from Daniel 7, emphasized that Jesus was the Promised Savior, the eternal Savior, the Savior for all nations, the One honored by heaven, and yet emphasizes the Savior's connection to us poor sinners.

Jesus came to us. He knew our need. He knew we would never be able to get ourselves to Him. He wanted us to be with Him, though. Jesus knew it was sin – sin with its focus on selfism – that had shut the door to heaven in our faces. So, He came from the glories of His Father's presence to this very sinful, dying world.

Jesus came to serve. He did not come to be served. He is God and deserved to be served, but again, sin would make it impossible for the sinner to serve his/her Creator. So Jesus came and served for us, in our name.

As far as Jesus was concerned, our Lord did not see Himself as the point of His coming. Satan tried to get Jesus to focus on Himself. Satan said to Jesus, 'Use Your divine power to change a few rocks into bread to satisfy Your hunger.' (Power for self-advantage) No stones became bread!

Satan tried to get Jesus to use His privileged relationship with God the Father in a diving leap from the very top of the temple. Satan suggested such a stunt would really get the attention of people, too. No one got to witness such a leap of unbelief. Satan promised to give Jesus all the glory, all the glitter, all the fame, and all the money and power of the world if Jesus would now in front of the devil. Instead Jesus ordered the devil to get lost and taught us to worship on God.

Jesus came to serve. He served His Father's will, of course. If you want to see the will of God behind the Commandment that says, "Honor your father and mother," see it in the eternal attitude of the Son for the Father. Both are the one true God. There would be no difference in that. We see the distinct, different persons of the Father, Son, and Spirit in their everlasting relationships. The Father sent His Son. The Son came. The Father gave His Son. The Son gave Himself in service, even to the point of death, death on a cross.

Jesus came to serve the many. How many? As many as needed to be ransomed. How many needed to be ransomed? All sinners needed to be freed from the kidnapping of sin, death, and Satan which we foolishly believe is freedom. How many are such fool sinners? All have sinned and fall short of God's glory – all people.

Jesus came to serve, to ransom all of us undeserving, unendearing, self-obsessed sinners. He did this serving to the point of death, even death on a cross. Remember it was sinners who eagerly assisted in getting Jesus on that cross.

James, John, and mom came to Jesus one day. Jesus had just told the Twelve that He was going to Jerusalem where He would be betrayed, where He would endure a Jewish kangaroo court, Gentile injustice, much cruel and mean mockery and abuse, from Jews and Gentiles, scourging and crucifixion. That is when James and John's mother asked Jesus to give her two sons the top positions under their Lord in His kingdom.

They did not have a right view of that kingdom. They viewed it as entirely like every other kingdom and political entity on earth. They did not have a clue, therefore, of what it would mean to drink from the cup Jesus was about to drink. They would learn soon enough. James within about ten years would be executed because of his connection to Jesus and John would suffer much.

The two certainly would have liked to serve Jesus. They surely wanted to serve Jesus, work for Jesus full time.

They did not make the connection between humbly serving Jesus and serving everyone else, too. Remember, the Son not only served the Father. He served all sinners, all people.

The other ten were no better. The only reason they were upset with James and John is that James and John made the move on the top positions ahead of them. So, Jesus sat down with all twelve and taught them again.

Jesus wants greatness in His kingdom! In fact, our Lord wants every citizen to be great. He would like to see every one of them, every Christian, be first.

That will not work at all following the worldly model. With the worldly model only a few can be great and technically only one could be first. Only a few can rule, can exercise authority over the many.

Jesus says His kingdom is to operate differently. Greatness is to be measured in service, specifically in serving others. First service is to our Lord Jesus, but we are also to serve all others before ourselves. Let each one be first in willingly, because we want to, making ourselves slaves of all others. This is the opposite of enslaving others.

This takes strength, strength only Jesus Christ can supply us. Was service easy for Jesus? Look at that cross and answer that question. Some of the ones He was serving delighted to see Him on that cross. Jesus kept serving them anyway. The sin for which the Father punished Jesus was our sin. Jesus suffered and died for our sin. When we serve, not all whom we serve will understand what we are doing to be of service. They may resist and reject our service. But only service can help.

There are a thousand specific applications of this Christ-given principle. Even for a congregation this principle needs to be followed as we try our best to serve our Lord Jesus with His Gospel for all people. Are we ready to help one another do this? Or shall we destroy ourselves as each one stakes out his own position of honor? Jesus served us. Jesus gave His life for us. Let us faithfully follow Him. Amen.