How to Be Great in the Kingdom, Part 1
Matthew 20:20-25
2347

We return this morning to the twentieth chapter of Matthew, looking again at this marvelous, marvelous gospel which presents the majesty and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we're going to be looking this morning at verses 20 through 28 as a unit, though we'll take it in two parts, one this Lord's day and the second next. And we've entitled this particular passage in Matthew 20, "How to be great in the Kingdom...How to be great in the Kingdom."

To begin with just let me say that we live in a very proud and egotistical generation. People pushing themselves, promoting themselves. In fact, in my life time I can't remember a time when there was more acceptance of pride, more promotion of pride as a virtue. We used to read about the fact that during the time of the writing of the Bible, particularly in the Roman Empire, pride was exalted as a virtue and humility was looked on as a weakness. And I used to wonder how a society could come to that point, but I see now that that has occurred in our own society and may well be one of the marks of the demise of our society as it was of the demise of the Roman society. For no society can survive pride run rampant. The reason is this, that all of society depends on relationships; meaningful, on-going, supportive relationships. But when a mass of people are all committed to themselves and themselves alone, built into that is the disintegration of all relationships. And systematically that is exactly what is happening. All relationships in our society are falling apart, homes, friendships, all of them. All social inter-relationship is at a stress point because everybody is screaming for his own rights, everybody is consumed, it seems, with self-glory, self-esteem, self-promotion and pride. People who you would think would have the sense to sort of mask their pride, parade it as if it were a virtue: "I'm proud of myself in this...I'm proud to be this...I deserve more than I'm getting..." and on and on it goes. And we know, of course, are building a materialistic concept in the business world based on pride, self- promotion, success-motivation, build yourself up, get more riches, get more esteem. It's just...the whole thing is built on pushing yourself and ambition and all of these kinds of things.

And sad to say it's nothing new and also sad to say it's nothing new in the church. This self-promotion, self-esteem pride movement has found its way into Christianity. And people are now twisting the Bible to promote pride, self-esteem, self- glory, self-promotion, self-image building. There are even Christian quote/unquote "books" on how to make your body more beautiful and your face more beautiful. And I saw one the other day on how to get the wardrobe to match your skin color as if that was a spiritual issue.

We continue to build the case for self. And now justifying it by sweeping it into Christianity as if it were something successful. I think since about 1974 we've seen a growing cult of selfism beginning to burgeon in the church of Jesus Christ. And it needs to be dealt with, it is not really being dealt with because people basically don't want to hear those who confront that. But it needs to be confronted. We live in a Christianity now that thinks God's only design for us is to be healthy, wealthy,

prosperous, happy, satisfied, fulfilled and so forth. We know very little about sacrifice. We know very little of the pain of suffering. All we want to do is eliminate all that so that we can get on to self-fulfillment. We're consumed with the creature comforts, pleasure, vacations, travel, you name it, for the self-satisfying feeling that we get by fulfilling what we believe to be deep needs.

And in the process, we have begun to exalt pride. We've given place to pride, to self-fulfillment, to self-glory, to self-promotion. And we've begun to forget the whole subject of humility. People are not interested in that. There was a time in the church, you go back and there were many who were teaching and preaching on humility and there was a certain brokenness in the church. You look around the time of the Reformation, or the time of the Puritans and you find there was a dominant sense of brokenness, of contrition. There was a trembling at the Word of God. There was a humility, a meekness within the church that gave it great power. But now the church wants to be proud and fulfilled and indulgent and so forth. And it has fallen prey to flip-flopping the sin of pride and the virtue of humility and making pride a virtue and humility a weakness.

But the Bible is very clear about these things. The Bible speaks about pride very clearly. "A proud heart is sin," it says in Proverbs 21:4. "Every one who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord," it says in Proverbs 16:5. "And the fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride and arrogance." In fact, pride in Romans 1:30 is the mark of man's fallenness into a reprobate mind. In 1 Timothy 3:6, it says "Pride comes from the devil." In 1 John 2:16, it says it is a part of the world. And in 1 Timothy 6:3 and 4 it says it belongs to false teachers. So, pride is sin. It is an abomination. It is to be hated. It is an element of man's fallen reprobate mind. It is generated by the devil. It is part of the world. And it belongs to false teachers. Certainly shouldn't be a part of Christians' experience to pursue self-glory, pride, so forth.

In fact, the Bible says that God resists the proud, James tells us in chapter 4. In Isaiah 23:9 it says He brings the pride...the proud into contempt. In Psalm 31:23 it says the proud will be recompensed, that is judged. In Exodus 18:11, the proud will be subdued. Psalm 18:27, they'll be brought low. They'll be abased, Daniel 4:37. They'll be scattered, Luke 1:51. They'll be punished, Malachi says in chapter 4 verse 1.

But on the other hand, humility is a virtue in the Bible and is exalted as a virtue. And we all understand that biblically and we need to understand that in terms of our experience as well. Micah...I love Micah 6:8...it says, "What does the Lord desire of thee? But to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God." To walk humbly with thy God.

In Psalm 1:38-6(?) it says, "Though the Lord be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly." In Psalm 10:17, "Lord, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." Over and over, and I could read you dozens and dozens of Scriptures, God exalts humility.

One key verse, write this down somewhere, Proverbs 15:33, "Before honor is humility." Before honor is humility. The ones that the Lord lifts up are the humble. And that's why Colossians 3:12 says that we are to put on humility. First Peter 5:5 says we are to be clothed with humility. Ephesians 4:1 and 2, we are to walk in humility. Before honor is humility. A very important principle, beloved. Listen. If you ever desire honor from God, if you ever desire glory from God, it comes through the route of humility. Now this is contrary to our earthly philosophy where pride is ever and always exalted.

Now the lesson of honor through humility, of glory through suffering, we need to learn. And we're not alone. The disciples needed to learn it, too. And that is the essence of verses 20 to 28. They, too, sought self-glory. They were into the self- esteem cult, up to their proverbial ears. They were into self- promotion, self-glory, seeking to be somebody special, to be recognized, to be esteemed. They sought the high places. And the Lord needed to correct that. And He does correct that in this passage. Unfortunately He taught a lot better than they learned. And He has to reteach this lesson just a few days after teaching here on the way to Jerusalem.

Now remember that the disciples basically forsook all and followed Jesus. And they did so, I guess, with a modicum of genuineness. But in addition to their genuineness in following Christ out of love and admiration and salvation, they followed Him knowing that whatever they gave up now would be more than replenished when He entered into His Kingdom. And so, there was this sort of residual materialistic element in their thinking where they were eagerly awaiting the time when Jesus established His Kingdom and returned to them a hundred fold everything they had ever lost. And the Lord had even reinforced that promise in their minds back in chapter 19 verse 28 when He said, "In the regeneration, or the rebirth of the earth in the Kingdom, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, you will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone that's forsaken houses, brother and sister, father, mother, wife, children, land for My namesake will receive a hundred fold and shall inherit everlasting life."

So, the Lord had reiterated to them that there were some pretty powerful promises involved in following Him. A Kingdom to be inherited, eternal life to be inherited, glorious promise of reigning in that Kingdom as well as receiving a hundred fold of everything they had given up. Well, this sort of fed their materialistic bed. It wasn't intended to do that, but it did because that's really all they heard. That stuck in their mind like glue. When Jesus talked about suffering, they didn't get it, it went right on by. They weren't receiving that. He was throwing it, they weren't catching it. What they did catch was what He said about glory, what He said about honor, what He said about reigning, what He said about the Kingdom. They caught that and they never forgot that. But they didn't hear at all what He said about suffering.

And He has just finished, verses 17 to 19, in what is the most broad description of His death. He's talked about it already to them in chapter 16 and in chapter 17, and now in chapter 20 He reiterates for the third time that He's going to Jerusalem to die, to suffer. He's trying to balance their perspective. Yes, there is a Kingdom, but the way to the Kingdom is through suffering. Death then glory. Humility is before honor, as we said Proverbs 15:33 states it.

So, He kept telling them He's going to suffer, He's going to die. And He also had taught them a lot about their own suffering. In fact, in chapter 8 there was some would-be disciples and He said to those disciples, in effect, "Before you follow Me you ought to know this, the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head, though the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests." In other words, if you follow Me I can't promise you a thing, not even a place to sleep.

And He had also told them in chapter 10 that He'd come to bring a sword to set a person against his own family. And that if you weren't willing to lose your life, you shouldn't follow Him. And then in chapter 16, He told them again that what He expected out of them was that they take up a cross and follow Him and that meant death. So He told them to expect nothing of this world's goods, to expect to lose their life and to expect to die if they followed Him. So they got a lot of lessons about suffering--their suffering and His suffering--but it never seemed to compute because they were so honed in on

what would be their glory and greatness in the Kingdom.

And Jesus had emphasized humility in chapter 18 when He said, "If you come into My Kingdom, you come as a little child, you humble yourself." You must be as a child, you must deny yourself. That's the mark of a true follower of Jesus Christ. And He tried to get that message across to the rich young ruler by saying, "If you want to come into My Kingdom, then abandon everything you have and forsake it all and come and follow Me with nothing." And the man wouldn't do that. That was a pretty profound lesson about what it requires to come to the Kingdom-- humility, self-denial, abandonment.

In other words, they should have forsaken all, followed Jesus without ever asking what's in it for me. But they kept asking what's in it for us? What's in for us? In fact, back in chapter 19 verse 27, "What shall we have?" said Peter. "What shall we get? What do we get out of this self-abandoning thing?" Oh, the treachery of the human heart. Selfishness is incurable in this life. It only can be brought under control, it can't be eliminated.

And 1900 years later, we still suffer from the same kind of selfishness that the disciples suffered from. They should have understood their service to Christ to be a service of love without any thought of receiving anything. That's the humble heart, seeking no glory, no esteem, no honor, no promotion, no popularity. But not them. Jesus in 17 to 19, as you'll notice, talks about His death. And that seemed to escape them totally. They never even registered on that one. He talked about suffering and all they could think about was their own glory, their own self-glory. And it's the same today, beloved. Jesus is still talking about suffering. He is still saying, "Take up your cross." He is still saying there's a life to be given in suffering. There's still humility as the path to glory. He's still talking about that, go out and throw your life away in ministry, go and abandon yourself, give up everything you have in this world to do what Christ wants you to do no matter what the cost.

He's still talking like that and people are still missing that. And we're hearing the health, wealth, prosperity stuff that pads people's self-will, self-love. Little different. People today look at grace like a free lunch. They look at grace like a free ticket to the storehouse of divine goodies where they're suppose to check out anything and everything they want. And all God wants to do is make you healthy, wealthy, happy, wise, comfortable, satisfied and so forth.

Later on, even after Jesus taught them this lesson in chapter 20, they were in the upper room meeting and Judas was there betraying Him and Jesus said, "One of you will betray Me," and they were arguing about who it would be. And in the middle of all of that it says they were arguing about who was going to be the greatest in the Kingdom. They were at the very night of the Passover, at the Lord's table as He was telling them of His own death, betrayal and so forth, they still were debating about which of them was going to sit in the chief seats in the Kingdom. That's a very crass approach.

And I trust that none of us is approaching the Christian life like that, that none of us is looking at the Christian life as to what we can get out of it or how we can be better esteemed or more highly thought of or, as I say to young men, get a bigger church and be a more famous preacher and whatever. That's not what God's called us to. He's called us to humility. He's called us to suffer. In fact, in 2 Timothy 2:12 it says if we suffer with Him, we'll reign with Him. And after we've suffered a while, says 1 Peter 5, the Lord will make us perfect. And the sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be ours. As we suffer here, we're glorified there. If we seek glory here, we forfeit it there. And yet we are so twisted. John Piper wrote, commenting on the current self-love cult, "Today the first and greatest commandment is: thou shalt love thyself. And the

explanation for almost every inter-personal problem is thought to lie in someone's low self- esteem. Sermons, articles and books have pushed this idea into the Christian mind. It is a rare congregation, for example, that does not stumble over the theology of Isaac Watts who wrote, `Alas, and did my Savior bleed, would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?'" end quote.

People don't like that. In fact, one of the letters to the editor at Moody Monthly in response to the article I wrote on Schuller's book Self Esteemsaid, "MacArthur has become a victim of worm theology." That's not a popular thing in a day when men promote themselves. John Stott said this, quote: "A chorus of many voices is chanting in unison today that I must at all costs love myself." Paul Brownback(?) who tended Talbot Seminary after the military academy at West Point and now is the president of Citadel Bible College has written a helpful book on self-love on which he gives a good biblical evaluation. And in it he says this, "As we have noted, almost immediately the Christian public felt warmly at home with their new found friend, self-love has been easily incorporated into the mindset of evangelical Christians. All one needs to do to verify this is to walk into a Sunday-school class next Sunday morning and ask: Should a Christian love himself? He probably will discover quickly that the tide of opinion flows strongly toward a positive response," end quote.

It's true. Now that is not biblical Christianity. And neither is it historic Christianity. Augustine, writing in the City of God, said, "Two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself. The latter in the Lord."

And John Calvin wrote, "For so blindly do we all rush in the direction of self-love that everyone thinks he has a good reason for exalting himself and despising all others in comparison. There is no other remedy than to pluck up by the roots those most noxious pests, self-love and love of victory, this the doctrine of Scripture does. For it teaches us to remember that the endowments which God has bestowed upon us are not our own but His free gifts and that those who plume themselves upon them betray their ingratitude," end quote.

So, this is something that historical leaders of the church have dealt with and here it is again and we're facing the same kind of self-love cult. I don't know if you know this but they're changing the words in some of the hymns, some are. Removing lines like "Mine own worthlessness," or "My sinful self, my only shame." There's even a new magazine out called Selfwhich leaves little in doubt to its content.

Someone has, I think, well written that there's a new cross in evangelicalism today, it's a new cross. "The old cross slew men, the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned, the new cross assures. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh, the new cross encourages it. The old cross brought tears and blood, the new cross brings laughter. The flesh, smiling and confident, preaches and sings about the cross. Before that cross it bows and toward that cross it points with carefully staged historionics but upon that cross it will not die and the reproach of that cross, it stubbornly refuses to bear," end quote.

Now we need to reexamine then this whole idea of humility as a path to glory. And I think we can in this passage. Let's look at it right now. Two points, how not to be great--verse 20 through 25; how to be great--26 to 28. We'll take point one today.

How not to be great. Four wrong worldly ways to seek greatness are given in this; two by example and two by instruction of our Lord. And there are earthly means to greatness in men's eyes. And men pursue greatness through those means but they are not adaptable to God's Kingdom. Jesus said, "My Kingdom is not...what?...of this world." And the principles for the world's kingdom do not operate in His Kingdom. Here are the ways not to be great in God's Kingdom.

Number one, is political power play. Now the world will tell us if you want to get something it all depends on who you know, right? If you want to go up the ladder, you've got to get next to the people who've got the influence. And so in exceeding to places of prominence and glory in the world, political power play is a common approach. You manipulate people and circumstances to find your way in with those you want to get in with and they'll pull you to the top. As one pastor said some years ago, "Whenever I go to the convention for my denomination, I always get my hotel room next to the big wigs and I get in with them and that way I keep getting bigger and bigger churches." Political power play.

Let's look at this political power play in verse 20, "Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children," that's James and John, "with her sons, worshiping Him and desiring a certain thing of Him." Now it amazes me that this happens upon the heels of Jesus' explanation of His coming death. They seem to be absolutely indifferent to that. There's no comment given that they even responded to what He said in verses 17 to 19. The next scene on the road going up to Jerusalem from Jericho is the arrival of James, John and their mother.

By the way, Mark 10 is a comparative text, tells of the same incident in verses 35 to 41 and there the mother is not even mentioned. There it's James and John. So we don't want to get the idea that she was on her own, or that they were tagging along. They came as a trio. Matthew seems to focus on her. Mark definitely focuses on James and John. The request was bound up in the three of them.

And so, they come. And Jesus says in verse 21, "What do you want? And she said, Grant that these my two sons may sit the one on Thy right hand and the other on the left in Thy Kingdom." Now this is a proud act. They want the chief place in the Kingdom. They're seeking self-glory. They're seeking promotion, honor, esteem. They want to ride the throne. They want to be next to Christ so people can say, "Oh, look at those two fellows, look

how close they are to Christ. They must be the second and third most holy people there are." They really sought that kind of affirmation from people. They were bold. If you don't think James and John were bold, then read Mark 9 and Luke 9 and find out how bold they were. They were actually brass...brash, rather. Their names were "Sons of...what?...thunder." We think of them, I think, as rather passive sometime because Jesus speaks of John with such intimate terms of tender love. But they were brash and bold and forthright and even demanding kind of men.

And they came to Jesus in what is a political power play. They're playing on something that's very interesting. And I'll tell you what it is. Matthew, Mark and John tell us that when Jesus was being crucified, at the foot of the cross there were standing three women. And each of those writers, Matthew, Mark and John, give us the names of those women.

Matthew says there was Mary Magdalene, there was Mary the mother of James and Joseph and there was the mother of the sons of Zebedee. Mark describes the three women this way. There was

Mary Magdalene--just as Matthew said--and Mary the mother of James and Joses--just as Matthew said. And then, Salome which must then be the mother's name, the mother of the sons of Zebedee. So, Matthew just calls her the mother of the sons of Zebedee. And Mark gives us her name, Salome.

John says this: "There was Jesus' mother, His mother's sister, then Mary the wife of Cleophas and Mary Magdalene. So we know who Mary Magdalene is. We know Jesus' mother Mary. Mary, the wife of Cleophas must be Mary the mother of James and Joseph, Mary the mother of James and Joses, as both Matthew and Mark tell us. That leaves this other one who is called mother of the sons of Zebedee, Salome and now is called Jesus' mother's sister.

Now I hope you followed that. If you didn't, I'll sum it up in a simple sentence. The mother of the sons of Zebedee is the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. Now you understand the politics? It's who you know, right? They want to play on the affection of Jesus for His mother. And they want to use the thing that they had in their ace in the hole was they were His cousins. You see, their mothers were sisters. And so they come as those who think they have an in. And because they know somebody they can get where other people can't get. This is politics. This is leverage. This is manipulation.

And they wouldn't just come as cousins, they bring their mother because they want to play on the sympathy of Jesus and the compassion that He would have for the sister of His own mother. And she comes and says she worships, proskuneo, bowed down, knelt, treated Him like a king. And desire...desired a certain thing of Him. And she didn't tell Him what she desired, Mark 10 says she wouldn't tell Him. She wanted Him to promise to give it before she told Him what it was. That's very childish. Have you ever had your child do that to you? "Will you let me do it?" What? "I won't tell you, if you say you'll let me do it then I'll tell you. I'm not going to say until you say yes. If you say yes then I'll tell you. Can I?"

Well, our standard procedure in our house is we don't say yes to very few things. And we never say yes to things that we don't know. And so, she comes like a little kid. "Now, now would you say yes and then I'll tell you what it is?" That's a very childish approach. And it must have betrayed in her heart a little bit of...oh, I don't know... a little bit of doubt about the legitimacy of this. She wants something but doesn't really want to say what it is until He's committed to giving it.

It also betrays a tremendous ambition. They wanted this so badly that they actually wanted to corner Christ into promising something that they thought if He knew He wouldn't do. But it was common for kings to do this. It was a way you exalted the king, like Herod who said to the dancing girl who got John the Baptist's head, "I'll give you anything you want, just ask." It was a way that a king showed how far-reaching was his power to just say I'll give you anything you ask. And it was not uncommon and so she's playing to Him as if He were a king. She kneels, she bows, and treats Him with homage as to a king and then says, "Make me a grand promise, you know, that You'll do this,..." and thinking she could play upon His love of royalty and power and so forth. So it's very manipulative...very manipulative. Political power play.

Frankly, she's not asking for herself. She gets her glory through the honor that's given to her two sons. The exaltation of her sons would be the joy of that mother's heart. There is virtue here. She does show that she believes in the Kingdom, that's good. She shows that she believes Christ is going to do what He said He's going to do, bring His Kingdom. She doesn't doubt that. But apart from that virtue of coming to Christ and believing that He really will bring the Kingdom, there's no virtue in the request at all. It is very sinful. it seeks self- glory. We want to sit on your right and left hand in the

Kingdom. I mean, that is very brash.

Put it in your own mouth. You and your mother go to Jesus and say, "You know, of all the people who have ever lived, of all the people who have ever served God, we believe that we ought to sit on the right and left hand in the Kingdom." Now that's a very brash statement. That is a very brash statement.

You say, "Well, what in the world gave them the idea they should ask that?" Well, just think about it. They were cousins. They thought they had a certain intimacy. They were in the inner-circle, right? Peter, James and John, true? And they knew that Peter was always getting rebuked. I mean, he couldn't qualify. I mean, he was forever getting in trouble. It wasn't that they didn't think...that they didn't...they weren't any better than Peter, Peter just shot everything out of his mouth. They thought the same stuff Peter thought but kept their mouth shut so they looked more holy. Sometimes it is a virtue to keep your mouth shut and not open it and let people know what you're really thinking. Peter always seemed to get it coming out the mouth and he was rebuked. So they figure, "Look, we're in the inner circle, Peter's been disqualified by the many rebukes. It's got to be us, guys. So, let's get Mom, we'll go blasting in there. We'll get Jesus thinking He's a king and we'll get the whole deal going and then He'll promise this and we'll get to sit on the right..." Why do you want that? Because we want to be glorified. We want to be lifted up. We want to be exalted. We want the chief seats. It's really disgusting. And yet the church still suffers from those people who come in and want to be the diatropies(?), who seek to have the preeminence, who love the chief seats just like the Pharisees did in the...in the synagogues. They want the chief seats where they can sit above men and have them call them father and all that, as it tells us in Matthew 24...23, rather.

There's always that self-seeking. It's true in Christianity. People in the church who want to be known and esteemed and lifted up and they can even do it to receive an eternal reward thinking that's how you get that. But our Lord rejects political power play. He rejects it totally. That is not how you reach the place of blessing and honor in the Kingdom.

There's a second wrong road to honor. In verse 22 to 24, I call it audacious ambition. This is just mind boggling, this passage. "Jesus answered and said, You don't know what you're asking." Lady, you don't even know what you're talking about. You're asking for glory and what you don't realize is that the path to glory is suffering. You don't know what you're asking. You're saying I want my boys on the right and the...you don't know what you're asking. The highest places of glory are reserved for those who went through the deepest places of suffering.

People ask me that question from time to time. Who will be those who receive the greatest reward in heaven? And the answer is given in the Word of God. Those who suffered the most in life for the cause of Jesus Christ. Those who confronted the hostile world and paid the greatest price in self-effacement, in self- denial and dedication for His purposes, they will be the ones who receive the greater glory. And that is indicated to us as clearly as anywhere in 2 Corinthians 4:17. And I think it says it, it ought to be circled in your Bible. It's a very important passage. "For our light affliction," it says, "for our light affliction which is but for a moment works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

What is it that...what is it that leads to glory? What is it that builds a greater weight, a more exceeding weight of glory? It is affliction. So when we are afflicted, not...not physically, not afflicted with illness and so forth, not afflicted because of our carelessness or our sin, but when we are afflicted and

persecuted and suffer for the cause of the gospel, we are building up a greater inheritance of glory in eternity. So as we learned in the early part of chapter 20, all of us equally receive eternal life. All of us will be paid equally the same wage in terms of eternal life. And yet, somehow, mysteriously so, though we all inherit the perfection of Christ's likeness in eternity, all of us who believe no matter what our lives were like, there still is beyond that a weight of glory reserved for those who suffered the most for the cause of Christ in this life. Now I don't know how God harmonizes those, that's His problem.

But Jesus is saying you don't know what you're asking. "Are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?" In other words, if you seek to sit beside Me, I will be exalted because of My suffering and you would be exalted because of yours to that place. So, if you seek then to sit beside Me, you will seek the same suffering that I experience. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?

By the way, the Authorized version includes a phrase about baptism there that is borrowed from Mark 10:38 and does not appear in the Matthew Greek text at all. Though it does in the Mark text. We won't consider it here.

But He says, "Are you able to drink the cup?" Now the cup is an Old Testament symbol, it's an Old Testament kind of idiom that means to take everything in, to drink the thing dry, to drink it to the drops. That's the idea. Our Lord is saying, Are you able to suffer to the degree that I am, to drink the whole cup? It's reminiscent of Isaiah which talks about the cup of God's fury. Christ drank all of that. He drank all of that. Are you able to drink the whole thing? Are you able to take it all in to experience all of it? He calls it in Matthew 26:59, really the cup...it's the bitter cup, the cup of suffering.

So, He says could you fully suffer like I'm going to suffer? The point is this, beloved, He is going to be exalted to full glory because He went through such profound suffering. That's how God balances it. And because He suffered most, He is glorified most. And whoever suffers next most to Him will be glorified next to Him. And so eternal weight of glory is predicated on suffering. And if you seek then to find that place of eternal glory where you can exalt the Lord Jesus Christ forever in His presence, uniquely seated beside Him in some sense, you will find it not by political power play and not by audacious ambition, but you will find it by humility and suffering and an abandonment to self-denial and self-sacrifice for His sake.

Now these two guys were really stupid. At the end of verse 22, they said unto Him, "We are able." How dumb. They weren't able. That is excessive confidence. That's the audacious ambition. A lot of people think, "I can do it. I can do it." There are a lot of people who charge into a task and think they can do it. You know the old adage, "They said it couldn't be done, but he hopped right to it and by golly, he couldn't do it." And that's true in a lot of ways in the spiritual dimension. I think some of us have excessive confidence. If you think you can do it in your own strength, you can't. It's like Peter, you know, who said, "Well, everybody may forsake you, I'll never forsake you." And you know what happened? Before the cock crowed, he was denying the Lord.

And do you remember what happened? It tells us what happened to James and John like all the rest in Matthew 26:31 and 56. It says that when Jesus was taken prisoner, the disciples...what?...they fled. They couldn't handle it. They couldn't have handled that at all. No way. And so He says, "Lady, you don't even know what you're asking. Can they drink the cup that I drink? We are able, they say." Audacious ambition. You don't get your way up the Kingdom by boasting your self-confidence. You don't climb God's ladder of honor and glory by being a blowhard, overstating your capabilities, talking

your way in. Nor do you do it by manipulating, intimidating, political power play.

Well, in verse 23, ever the gentle Savior, He responds to them in a tender way. He says, "You shall drink indeed of My cup." You'll taste it. You'll never drink the whole thing. But you'll taste it. And He was telling them the truth. The time came when they were faithful. And you know James was faithful, wasn't he? Acts 12 says he was the first dying martyr. And John was faithful, too, and he was the first living martyr, exiled to the Isle of Patmos to spend out his life. They did drink of the cup. They couldn't have drunk it all as Jesus did, but they tasted that same cup. They knew the fellowship of His sufferings, if not the fullness of them. They came around by the power of the Holy Spirit. See, they never were able to handle this until after the Spirit came and infused them with internal spiritual strength.

So, He says - Well, you will, you will suffer. And so they will be glorified. We don't know where or how because He says in verse 23, "But to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give. That is to be given to them for whom it is prepared by My Father." He says I'm in submission now, I'm coming to suffer. I am emphasizing My submissiveness to the Father. He'll give that out. He is the one passing out the rewards. He is the one who gives the ultimate glory and it's His decision to whomever He has prepared that.

I've often asked myself who it is that will be the greatest in heaven. Who would be the most glorified? The only answer is the one who suffered the most, the one who is the most abandoned to self-denial, the one who is the most utterly selfless, humble, self-effacing believer who gave up everything to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ. That's who it will be. It won't be the one who sought it by political power play or audacious ambition. It won't be the ones who sat around the table arguing about who'd be the greatest. It would be those who were smitten with worm theology and lived it out.

Now then, we look at the teaching of the Lord in verse 25...24 and 25. Verse 24 is an interesting insight. "And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren." You say, "Well, it's a good thing some of them were spiritual." No, they weren't spiritual, they were mad because they got in there before they did. All you have to do is read Luke 22:24 to 27, they were all arguing about it. They were arguing about it at the last supper, days after this, arguing about who's going to be the greatest. They were mad at James and John for going in there instead of them. They were mad about it. Why? Because they sought the same thing. They sought the same thing.

And so, the Lord says I think I need to teach you a lesson. And He gives them two more wrong ways. Ways that men get greatness but not in God's Kingdom. The first is in verse 25 is dominant dictatorship...dominant dictatorship. Look at verse 25, "Jesus called them unto Him and said, You know that the princes of the pagans, the rulers of the pagans, exercise dominion over them." That word is a very interesting word, katakurieuo, it means to lord it over. They lord it over them. And this is dominant dictatorship. This is the world's way. Not only does the world seek greatness through its...its political power play and its audacious ambition, but the world seeks prominence by dominating as dictatorship.

We've seen it. Antiochus Epiphanes, the Caesars, the Ptolemys of Egypt, the Herods, the Pilates, the Hitlers, the Idi Amins, the Shahs and the whatever other kind of strange Ayatollahs and Gurus and dictators of the world. We've seen them all. They've been and gone and they keep coming. And they rule by their dominant dictatorship. They lord it over people. And that's how they get their greatness. One of the reasons that Africa is so susceptible to communist revolution and the real

reason for the unending foment in Latin America and Central America is because those nations are coming out of dominant dictatorships where the people were so utterly abused by the dictator who was in it for his own self-glory, self-promotion and self-aggrandizement and who filled his own coffers at the expense of the people that in the reaction against that, they have become fertile soil for communist agitators and infiltration who have stirred up the kind of chaos that leads to the progress of communism in their own...in their own style. So what we see is a reaction to dominant dictatorship which so marks the world.

But that's a style of leadership you find in a lot of places. You can find it in some businesses. You can find it in some churches where the man thinks he wants to dominate everybody, tell them what to think and how to act and what to do and control everything in their life. There are those Jim Jones of the world who start their strange movements...some of them more mainstream Christianity by far than he. But thinking to be great in the Kingdom by the dominance of their own role of position...I'm the pastor. I've heard that so many times. You can't tell the pastor anything, he tells you everything. That kind of thing finds its way in a lot of areas. That's why Peter says in 1 Peter 5, don't lord it over them. Don't be a katakurieuo. That's not our way in the Kingdom.

And then there's a final one. We'll call it charismatic control. Verse 25 says, "And they that are great," megalos, the chief ones, the leaders, "exercise authority over them." That's katexousiazofor you Greek students. Exousiazohas to do with authority down, it's to throw your weight around colloquially. And it is the idea of vaunting their power and it seems best to see this in the comparison also with the other passages as the power of personality. The dominant dictatorship is the power of position, this seems to be the power of personality. And so I call it charismatic control, the charm, the charisma, the wit, the verbiage, the ability to speak with glibness and so forth gives them a certain power to sway and move people. And there are people who achieve greatness in the world by virtue of their charismatic ability to control people.

This happens in the church, too. People with the charm and the cleverness. You ask yourself many times, don't you? How people can listen to certain preachers and certain teachers and ever believe anything they say? How is it that they can be sucked into all that stuff? Well, if isn't the fact that they are intimidated and dominated by a person, it may be that they are so enamored of the personality of the person and the person knows how to move people and what psychological tricks and gimmicks to use that they become victim, they fall prey to his trap.

I mean, you would...you would be amazed, I'm sure, to read some of the mail we get. We received a series of correspondence and did some counseling with a lady who was under a dominant dictatorship type church with a pastor who wanted to totally control her life. And it nearly drove her to suicide, razor blades, had slit her hands and everything. The Lord has brought her out of it and wonderfully delivered her. But the tremendous power that dominant dictatorship can have.

And then we receive those letters from people who are delivered out of the control of some guy who had them sort of the subtle ways of convincing them that he was of God and working with their emotions and whatever to draw them into the untruth of his particular style of leadership. It's all part of the world. It somehow gets dragged into the church, sad to say.

But if you would be great, our Lord is saying, don't seek it by political power play. Don't try to climb some ladder based on who you know. Don't seek it by audacious ambition. Don't overstate confidently your abilities. Don't seek it by dominant dictatorship. Don't just try to pull rank on people

and shove them around. And don't use your natural capabilities, your natural personality characteristics to manipulate and move people around. Don't do that.

If you would be great, learn the lesson that Jesus teaches in verse 22. That before honor is humility, that before you ever know the crown, you drink the cup. And that the way to be exalted is the way of humility, it's the way of lowliness. It's not seeking those things. But it's seeking to know God and to humbly walk with Him that allows God to lift you up. That's His way.

And that's what He says in verses 26 to 28. I'm going to close by just reading them and next week we'll study them.

It shall not be so among you. But whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant. And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your slave. Even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.

Let's bow in prayer.

Help us, Lord, to know that the example of leadership is Christ who gave His life, came not to take, came to give. Help us to find the path to greatness is the path of humility, brokenness, selflessness. Father, we bless Your holy name for teaching us this lesson again and reminding us that in eternity we shall inherit the same eternal life and yet there is a weight of glory, greater the suffering for Your sake in this moment of time, the greater the eternal weight of glory. We thank You that only God knows what He has prepared as reward for those who have been faithful.

Help us, Lord, to serve without asking what's in it for me. But to be willing humbly to give all a full effort for a full life that we may in that light affliction receive that eternal glory. All this that Christ may be glorified. Amen.

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