

THE
KINGDOM
IS HERE

matthew

sermon series

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OUR CURSE CRUSHING KING: MATTHEW 20:17-34

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This world is cursed, and, in a cursed world, people prioritize the wrong things. We saw this last week when the disciples prioritized a rich young man more than needy children (Matthew 19:13-16) and in Jesus' parable about how the world prioritized fairness above grace. We'll see that again today when James and John prioritize their glory when they ask for the seats at Jesus' right and left hand.

Although the disciples pursue the priorities of the world like comfort (Matthew 19:1-15) influence (Matthew 19:16-22), fairness (Matthew 20:1-16), and glory (Matthew 20:20-28), Jesus pursued something else entirely: his Father's mission. This mission was the task of defeating the curse and inaugurating new creation. Jesus pursued this priority, not the world's priorities.

In today's text, we'll see two perspectives on how Jesus accomplishes this mission. 1) He does it by being the *determined servant* (Matthew 20:17-19) and by being the *compassionate servant* (Matthew 20:29-34). Sandwiched in between these encounters is a story that contrasts with Jesus' mission starkly: John and James' request for glory (Matthew 20:20-28). Taken together, we see that God's glorious mission is accomplished through the *determined* and *compassionate servant*, and we sadly realize that often Jesus' disciples do not prioritize his mission.

I hope that as we walk out of today's service, we would be changed in two ways: 1) I want us to have peace and assurance and confidence in Jesus because he has accomplished God's mission. He is determined and compassionate to serve us. 2) I want us to be encouraged to embrace Jesus' mission, not this world's, by becoming even more determined and compassionate to live on mission for Jesus' glory.

So, with these hopes firmly in our minds, let's look at this passage together.

The Determined Servant King: Matthew 20:17-19

Jesus prioritized and accomplished the mission by being the *determined servant king*. We learn about this truth in Matthew 20:17-19 where Jesus repeats the idea of his future suffering and crucifixion in Jerusalem. Jesus has now repeated this theme at least three times in the gospel of Matthew: Jesus will be crucified in Jerusalem soon (20:17-19; see also Matthew 16:21-28, 17:22-23). First, I want us to see Jesus' determination in these verses. This fact is evident since Jesus goes to Jerusalem (20:17). His knowledge of what will happen in Jerusalem does not lead him to avoid it. The religious elite does not need to go out of the city to hunt Jesus down. Rather, knowing what will happen, Jesus marches straight to the city at the right time.

The gospel of Matthew can be divided geographically. Matthew 1-4 concerns details about Jesus before his ministry. Matthew 5-18 deals with his ministry in Galilee. Matthew 19-20 explains his ministry in Judea, and finally, Matthew 21-28 describes his ministry in Jerusalem. Thus, the very structure of the book traces his movement to the cross and the empty tomb. Jesus is determined to go to Jerusalem.

Second, Jesus is the determined servant king. This concept is amazing. Jesus is the King of kings and the agent of creation. He is the

Word that created everything (John 1, Colossians 1:15-22). Yet, he is a servant. In this fallen world, these words do not describe the same person – the king is, by definition, not a servant. He is a king. God's kingdom though is unlike this broken, cursed, and corrupt world. So, let's make sure we all understand here: our king uses his position and strength not as a platform to receive service, but as an opportunity to serve others!

This point is evident throughout Scripture. In Psalm 121, for example, the author describes the Lord as our keeper, the one who gives us shade on long journeys, who protects us, and who stands at the door of our house for our security! Imagine that. In the language of Psalm 121:6, the Lord stands at the doorstep of his people's home to protect us from danger. This is how the Bible describes our king in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Our King serves us: how shocking!

Now, let's not draw a deadly conclusion here. Our God is not a cosmic genie or Santa Claus who exists to serve our every desire. He doesn't exist for us, but we exist for him: to enjoy him and make much of his glory. He truly is the king: the all-powerful, all-knowing, gracious, and most glorious king. Yet, this same king does for us what we could never do for ourselves. You see, our sin separates us from God. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, they were exiled from his presence, kicked out of the garden of Eden. As history progresses, we learn that sinful humanity has only limited access to God, and this access is always dangerous because of our sin. Yet, Jesus came to this earth to bring us back to God by taking our sin from us. Jesus was punished for us, church family, so that if we trust in Jesus and turn from our sins, then our sins are gone, and Jesus' righteousness is given to us as a gift. Jesus came to serve us by dying for us.

Church family, Jesus is determined to accomplish his Father's mission.

The Glory Seeking Disciples: Matthew 20:20-28

Jesus' encounter with James, John, and their mother happens at a strategic time: right after Jesus announces his upcoming crucifixion and resurrection and right before he heals two blind men. This placement forces us to compare Jesus' priority with his disciples' priority.

The disciples return to the concept of kingdom greatness in verses 20-28. Jesus already addressed this topic in Matthew 18. There, Jesus taught his disciples that greatness does not refer to a privileged super-Christian but is a prerequisite for entering the kingdom. Kingdom greatness is illustrated by a child and defined by childlike trust. Moreover, kingdom greatness demands that we relate to one another as children, not rivals. We protect one another; we do not compete with one another. Although Jesus taught about this concept in-depth, the disciples still do not understand. This fact is evident in James and John's request for a privileged position and is further highlighted by how the other ten respond to this request: in anger (20, 24).

Now, let's remember the context here. Jesus has just announced how we will be condemned, delivered to death, mocked, flogged, and crucified in Jerusalem (20:19). Jesus will soon care compassionately for two blind men who are burdens to society (29-34). Sandwiched in between these two powerful perspectives of what Jesus prioritized – caring for broken people – we learn about two disciples who are captivated by elevating their status and achieving glory.

Our king responds as he often does to his misguided people. Jesus doesn't yell at them for their insensitivity, rebuke them for their selfishness, abandon them because of their sin, or express his

disappointment in their slowness to understand the nature of his kingdom. Rather, he teaches them again about kingdom greatness. He asks if they can drink his cup. They say they can (22), but they do not know what they are saying (22). Thus, Jesus teaches them more plainly. Kingdom greatness is not like the world's greatness. In the world, greatness is defined by one's ability to exercise authority over others for their pleasure (26). The kingdom of God is different. Kingdom greatness has already been described as childlike trust (18:1-5), and here it is described as service (26). Jesus is the prime example of service. His whole mission is about marching toward Jerusalem to make all things new (20:17-19), but along the way, he compassionately cares for the broken and rewrites their stories (20:29-34).

The Compassionate Servant King: Matthew 20:29-34

God's glorious mission is accomplished through Jesus who is the *compassionate servant king*. We learn about this point in verses 29-34. In these verses, we learn about two blind men in Jericho – a city 15 miles east of Jerusalem. These men hear that Jesus is coming so they yell to Jesus whom they address as the Son of David to have mercy on them (30, 31). Mercy for them is Jesus restoring their sight, and this is exactly what Jesus does. He touches their eyes, and they immediately see (34).

Let's notice first Jesus' compassion. Jesus' compassion is unexpected as made clear by the crowds who rebuke these blind men. There is stark parallelism in this encounter and Jesus' encounter with the children in Matthew 18:1-4. In both encounters, a needy person comes to Jesus, either children or blind men, and in both instances, they are rebuked. In other words, someone, either the disciples or the crowds, disapproves of the needy coming to Jesus. Jesus responds in both situations with tender compassion: he welcomes those rejected by society.

We do not know exactly why the crowds would tell the blind men to stop shouting for Jesus. This rebuke, however, is certainly evil since the crowds knew of Jesus' authority to heal them. Why weren't they championing them and even helping them to Jesus? We've seen others go out of their way to bring people to Jesus such as the friends of a paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8). Regardless of why they rebuked them, the function of this heard-heartedness is clear: it highlights the compassion of Jesus. The crowds desired for the needy to be turned away from Jesus, but Jesus was *compassionate* to help them (34). In other words, he felt the needs of the blind men and he did something about them!

Our king understands our needs more than anyone, and he does something about it. How glorious, indeed, is our king! He knows the needs of his people and he knows how to help them. Still, he not only knows how to help them, but he is also determined to help them. Now, let's see the glory of our king from this angle. Because of our king's compassion, the curse comes undone. Two men who were blind because of the fall had a taste of new creation as they experienced the pain, grief, and loss of blindness become but a faint past nightmare. Jesus' compassion makes the curse come unreal because he is our compassionate servant.

Structure

Let's say one more thing about the structure of this passage. Jesus speaks of his death in verses 17-19. Later in verses 29-34, he heals two blind men. In both instances, Jesus makes the curse come undone ultimately at the cross and in time with the blind men. This is Jesus' priority. Sandwiched between these two encounters is James and John's request for glory. An important question arises when we examine this structure: who's mission do we live for? Are we chasing

a life of comfort (Matthew 19:1-15) influence (Matthew 19:16-22), fairness (Matthew 20:1-16), or glory (Matthew 20:20-28) like the disciples? Or are we living on mission for God's glory like Jesus?

Let's be motivated to live like our king. Jesus' disciples did not get it, and sadly, too many we do not get it. We think of the church as just another institution of the world. A place to be served, a place to exalt ourselves, and a place to be comfortable. That, however, is wrong. The church is not about us but is about the glory of Jesus displayed in the joy of people being made whole again. Therefore, since we have been saved to participate in Jesus' mission, let's commit this week to show compassion to the broken. I want us all to do one compassionate thing for someone this week.

Church family, our king accomplishes the mission of bringing sinners back to him. Therefore, we should have peace, rest, and assurance. Jesus pursues our good despite us. Let me say that a different way: Jesus has saved us by wiping away our sins and giving us his righteousness as a gift because he is compassionate and determined to do so, not because we deserve it. Therefore, let's rest in the character of our king which is good news for us.

Prayer

God, help us to rest in your grace and from this rest, help us show your glory to the lost this week through our determined and compassionate care. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

