

Matthew 20 (Part 2) :17-28

Greatness in the Kingdom of God

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · April 18, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Verse 17 of Matthew 20 read along with me and 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 to him with her sons and kneeling before him she asked him for something and 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 and they said to him we are able and 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 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 lord it over them and 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 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many stop there please let's pray Heavenly Father we open our hearts to you God because we are utterly dependent upon your Holy Spirit for light revelation and understanding so we come to you Lord that we might receive from you this day guide us in understanding in Jesus name we pray amen as you can see there are two things going on in this passage the first obviously is this statement that Jesus makes to his disciples of his impending arrest crucifixion and ultimate resurrection the second is this request made by the the mom of James and John asking Jesus to do something special for them and the first one kinds of sets the stage for the second but Jesus begins in verse 18 again here and says you know he brings the twelve together and he says we're going up to Jerusalem and and you know at that time the Son of Man will will be and then I want you to notice I want you to notice the order of things that he lays out he begins by saying that he will be delivered over to the chief priests now he was done that that happened by Judas's hand here's Judas he's in the twelve he's one of the twelve right now and and and and Jesus says the Son of Man will be delivered

into the hands of the chief priests and he was Judas did that he kind of just you got to wonder if there's any just moment of conviction or whatever going on in his heart but then he goes on and he says next he will be condemned to death by the religious leaders but the problem is the religious leaders wouldn't have any ability to carry out that death sentence and so they would then have to and Jesus predicts this in order they would have to deliver him over to the Gentiles to the Romans and they were the ones who held all the power in Israel at that time and he said that he would be mocked he would be flogged and he would ultimately be crucified and it is amazing to me this is the exact order of the events that go on here in the latter part of this gospel he tells it exactly as it's going to happen and and the clarity of of all of that in the perfect order that he gives it is amazing enough but my what might be even a little more remarkable is the fact that the disciples don't respond they don't say anything it's like it just kind of went in one ear and out the other and in fact that's essentially what happens Luke records this very same event and makes this commentary note that I'll put up on the screen here for you from Luke 18 it's a he says but they understood none of these things this saying was hidden from them and they didn't grasp what was being said I gotta tell you when I was a newish Christian I remember reading this passage and thinking why why God would you hide something from them that Jesus just told them I mean didn't he tell them so they would understand and yet it says it was hidden from them and I remember thinking that seems oddly contradictory you know but I've come to understand I don't believe this is God hiding this from them I believe it was hidden from them because of what is actually going on in this passage that we're reading these guys are so fixated on the things of the world being the hot shot being you know the top dog being great and so forth that it just it just it's a blinder it causes a blindness to their understanding of the Word of God and you know this is not uncommon you guys you know you guys remember the the parable of the sower that Jesus told about the seed that went into different areas of ground and and how what happened to that seed some of it didn't even get into the ground some of it germinated but got choked out and you remember what choked out some of the weed it was it was the cares of this life the the worries of this world the things that are just kind of all part of worldliness well these guys are so worldly at this point thinking about who's gonna be the greatest getting mom you know to go and talk to Jesus and ask for these places of honor they are so focused on what is important to the world that they are just literally blinded and cut off from understanding the Word of God and people there is a connection for you for there for you and I you know although I I I'm I hope and pray that all of us in this room are Christians I actually know better but the point is as believers we can be deadened to the Word of God by worldliness worldly thinking worldly focus worldly desires we think like the world we were raised in the world you know I mean I was raised in the world until I was about 25 years old when I really gave my heart to Jesus and and you know so I had like 25 years of learning and I learned it well you know I learned how to be a worldly

person and I learned how to think like the world and I learned what success how success was defined in the world I learned it very well and I and I not that I became a success but I learned what constituted success and I and I I learned what was important to the people of the world you know money and sex and you know and power and all you know I learned it well yeah and I bought into the whole nine yards just like probably many of us here in this room have and then what happens we come to Jesus you know we get saved and suddenly we're just we're literally birthed into another kingdom with a whole different set of priorities a whole different set of you know right and wrong and good and bad and sweet and sour the whole nine yards just changes on us just like that you know the problem is we're still living in this world and much of what we've learned from the world we take with us and and and and much of what we have embraced in the world we continue to embrace even in the kingdom of God and that's why you see Christians running after money and you see Christian Christians running after pleasure and that's why you see Chris Christians running after power and position and stuff like that are does it mean they're not Christians no not necessarily I mean I God knows the heart what it means is there's still all this worldliness that's there and that is so much there that it is crowding out the conviction and the power and the wisdom of God's Word in their lives and that's why you can sit and talk to a Christian and speak the word to them it's just like just right you know over the head because worldliness is just so you know just blanketed you know the whole receptor capability of understanding what what God is is saying at the time and so forth and that's that's what's going on with these guys they're they're worldly thinking and is further illustrated as I already said by this this thing that James and John do which is told us in verse 20 and verses following it says that they they actually got their mom and they probably didn't have to work long to convince her you know I mean what mother doesn't want to see her boys do well you know what I mean and so it's like mom he'll probably take it better if you talk to him about this thing we've already kind of you know blown it talking about this stuff around him and every time we bring it up he kind of rebukes us but you know you're a woman so just why don't you just kind of go and just speak sweetly and and and in fact it's interesting if you read this story in one of the other gospel accounts what she did was she came up to Jesus And she said I'm gonna ask you for something and I want you to give it to me Yeah, it's like okay, does it say idiot right across here sort of a thing if anybody ever does that to you You know, I'm gonna ask you something and I want you to say yes If you say yes Just forget it just I mean Jesus was smart enough to say what And she says my boys. I want you to advance my boys James and John he called them the sons of thunder He says I want she says I want you to give them a position of honor Let one of them sit on your right in your kingdom And let the other one sit on your left in your kingdom the two greatest places of honor and You have to appreciate the moxie of this lady to even Suggest such a thing, you know, I mean, it's like wow lady you got guts But I really I really love the response of Jesus because I think it's an

important thing for us to really get into our hearts He comes back and he says you don't even know what you're asking and you know that statement probably defines a fair share of our prayers I mean of the things that we pray about the things that we lift before the Lord we pray about things and by the way Let's face it. We give God advice all the time It's kind of like, you know, she's doing she's saying listen, I'd like to Bring my boys here and I'd like to nominate them for the places of honor I think they're good candidates and she's basically kind of giving him advice I think this would be a good choice on your part to advance these guys to these positions and We do that in our prayers all the time we we don't pray and just you know We should we should be saying Lord, you know, I want your will and whatever your will I want your will Let your will be done. That's the way we were taught to pray, right? Let your will be done not as I want but as you want let that be done That's the way we should amend our prayers Not that we shouldn't ask Bible says you have not because you ask not so go ahead and ask but then we come back and we Say but Lord According to your will may it be done, right?

No, that's what we're supposed to do, but you know 90% of the time we're basically giving God advice God. Here's the deal This is what's going on. And this is what I think you should do about it And I think I've probably got my you know, I'm think pretty dialed in on this thing. So that's what I'd like you to do Thank you. Amen Goodbye, and then we get all upset when things don't happen Just the way we wanted them to boy God sure didn't come through for me and all the while if God could speak to your heart about probably that 90% of your prayer Time he'd be saying you know what?

I love you to death, but you don't even know what you're asking You know you you're coming up with all these things that you you're advising me on but you don't really even understand the implications the long-term effects of the things that you're praying for ultimately people we pray to a sovereign all-powerful all-knowing God and if we had just a glimpse of What that means? I mean if he if he Allowed us for just a moment to kind of get a glimpse of his sovereignty and the perfection of his understanding We would just kind of go Yeah, whatever you thinks good. You know what? I mean? It would be kind of like one of those I trust you Let your will be done.

That's probably all we pray for the rest of our lives. You know God, whatever your will is I want that Because you are so perfect you are so good You are so wonderful and you see things that I can't even begin to see you you understand the perfection of the Implications of anything that I might pray and desire and want and so you know what God? I don't want to pray anything that's out of your will and and and so on and so on and so on and you know Okay, so he says to Basically the boys he says you don't even know what you're asking because they're face it. They're the ones who put mom up to it and Then he asks this question We're in the middle of verse 22. He says are you able to drink the cup?

That I am to drink and they said we are able It's probably the biggest lie recorded in the whole of God's Word And because they don't have a clue what it means as far as they know drinking the cup of the Lord probably means riches and glory and they're like We can and and I think the word is clueless that we're looking for here for some reason in my mind I have this picture of Pippin in Lord of the Rings Fellowship of the ring where they've just he's just made the decision to go along with Frodo and Sam to take the ring back to Mordor and Everybody's all excited and the Fellowship of the ring and Pippin's like great now. Where are we going? Clueless right just doesn't know but anyway the cup that Jesus is talking about Is obviously the cup of suffering it's a cup of sorrow and If they knew that they probably wouldn't get in line To sample it or to to to taste it in any way But he says to them and they I don't know if later on they came to I Don't know not care for the response that Jesus gave but later on They probably thought a little bit about that statement. He made when he said you will drink of it you will and they did I Don't know if you're aware of it, but James was the very first of the Apostles to lose his life Not the first Christian first Apostle He lost his head Herod Agrippa took it off and Quite delightedly did it as well Which always kind of weirded me out too because you know James I James died really early on I mean like the church was barely born and walking and James died and What always weirded me out about that was that James was not only one of the twelve. He was one of the three Do you know I mean of the twelve there were three of them that Jesus took in places He didn't take the other nine He took the three Peter James and John up on the Mount of Transfiguration took them into places where he was healing and doing special things and and they had a closeness to the Lord that the other nine Didn't have didn't enjoy and and I always wondered about that and I thought Jesus you must have known that he was going to be The first to die and to die in fact really really early on in the whole process So why did you invest yourself so much in this man who you knew was not going to be there very long You know, it's bound up in the wisdom and mystery of God, but the point is James Tasted the bitterness of that cup and So did John, you know church history is a little undecided on how John met his physical end some people believe that He lived actually a long life and died of natural causes.

However Suffered a lot during his year and was persecuted greatly for his faith in Christ Others believe that he was in fact martyred for his faith We know for sure is that when he wrote the book of Revelation he was in exile Roman exile on the island of Patmos and essentially incarcerated on an island And kept from the general population because of his faith so we know that both James and John experienced the bitterness of that cup and and and and and yet They considered it a privilege It was a privilege to them It was an honor You guys remember in the book of Acts? The whole the the disciples are hauled up out in front of the Sanhedrin Because they're preaching in the name of Jesus and they're threatened within an inch of their lives You know if they continue to do this and finally they didn't really know what else to do

And so they just decided they were gonna beat him And send them on their way so they did Check check this out Acts chapter 5 This is then they left this talking the disciples then they left the presence of the council look at this Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer Dishonor for the name isn't that amazing they literally walked away from getting a beating Thanking God and rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer you see it's a privilege It's a privilege I'm not sure it could be understood fully as a privilege except but by those who maybe go through it Even in your life whenever we decide we're going to identify with Jesus Christ. There's gonna be some kind of you know Backlash that comes against us from the world from society at large It doesn't mean that it's not backlash because you're being obnoxious or stupid or something like that It's backlash because you're living for Jesus it's because you're identifying with him in the way you live and And and and it's not even the things you say You know It's the way you live and it's always gonna cause that Paul wrote to Timothy his second letter to Timothy and and and he said Basically that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ. Jesus is going to experience Persecution but notice the key to that is Desiring to live a godly life, you know What that means is is that you and I can be Christians, but we can kind of just cut out the godly part You know, we can say okay. I got my fire insurance, whatever.

I'm going to heaven and but I'm gonna live like the world Well, you're not going to invite any persecution into your life at all But if you determine in your life, you are going to live for Jesus I am going to I'm gonna live for him and I'm going to identify with him in the way. I live Persecution will come in fact for Paul. It was something he longed for it sounds crazy I know but it was something he longed for you know, even with with the situation with Said I Happen to know that many times people have come to his wife and said why did he go back? Because you know that wasn't the first time Said was arrested It's the first time he's ever been that long Incarcerated but yeah, he'd been kind of roughed up by the Iranian authorities in the past and and he knew he knew I mean Back years ago when we were praying for him up in Garden Valley He and nag me, you know the Lord was speaking through the prayers of what we were saying and God was talking about how he was going to use these guys to do incredible things and bring You know a clarity to what he was doing there in Iran and even in my own heart I'm kind of thinking yeah, but don't but dude don't go back It's that same attitude that the the the disciples, you know when Paul was on his way back to Jerusalem you know the Lord was speaking prophetically through people and that Paul was going to suffer when he went back to and they said so they Said don't go Don't go Remember one of the guys who had a prophetic gifting took off Paul's belt and bound himself with it and he said so also the man who owns this belt will be bound by the Jews and turned over to the right and there and There are pleading with him Paul. Don't go don't go and he says guys.

You're breaking my heart I'm not only ready to go. I'm ready to suffer. I'm ready to give my life for Christ It was a longing of his heart and it's hard to understand but look what he wrote to the Philippians This is this is a wonderful passage. He says I want to know Christ I want to know the power of his resurrection. I want to know the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings I want those things in my life.

You see that's what Paul is saying, and it sounds odd to you and I why would you why? Would you invite that? Why would you say I want to experience that? Paul wanted to share that cup with the Lord It's crazy but he wanted to I Want to know the fellowship the connectedness with Jesus of Sharing in his sufferings and Paul got his wish by the way At one point at the end of one of his letters He said let no man give me any trouble because I bear on my body the marks of Jesus He knew the fellowship of sharing in the suffering of Christ And That fellowship is essentially being likened unto Christ and becoming a societal throwaway I mean, we're seeing it in our culture right now here. We are coming up to Christmas We are the we're the few who still bring Jesus into the whole Christmas equation But more and more and more in our culture what's happening?

They're kicking Jesus to the curb, aren't they? They don't want they don't want they're not gonna go even Priest and they're not even gonna want to call it Christmas because you have Christ in there You don't want to you don't want to do that our Cute little story my precious little granddaughter my middle granddaughter Olivia lit. We call her Livy do she's just She's she's delightful she's She's not the sharpest knife in the drawer, but she's delightful and I mean I love her to death But we were I read a book Their mom wanted me to read a Christmas book to them Which I read to her when she was a little girl and she said would you read it to my kids and I said sure Well, we couldn't get together. They live in Meridian. They couldn't we couldn't get together that much So we read it over the internet.

I actually did a you know a video Chat and so I read the book to them that way and so I when I finished the book I was asking him so what did you like about the book and they're telling me and stuff and and and it was a book about learning what the meaning of Christmas was all about and and I Said yeah, they kind of learned that Christmas, you know that that it's a it's all about Jesus, isn't it? And Livy she's so sweet. She goes Yeah, I can't believe that Jesus's birthday just happened to be on Christmas It's like how weird is that You know, I Told her mom about that and she just howled, you know, it's like Oh Livy do you know? But you know, but but that whole idea of Christ in Christmas is slowly You know being being pulled out and now we're just saying happy holidays and so forth we're not even talking about Jesus anymore and and expect that to continue to go that way because Jesus is systematically getting kicked to the curb because They don't want him around guess what that means guys Let's put two and two together here means they don't want you around either And that's just the fact of the matter You and I in

the eyes of the world are unclean it's like it's something you throw away and That is the essence of this incredible passage that I've loved for so long in In the book of Hebrews that I want to show you here this morning It's from Hebrews chapter 13 and the writer of Hebrews says this He makes a correlation with the Old Testament sacrificial system For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places By the high priest as a sacrifice for sin, they're burned outside the camp Do you guys know that they would take the blood from the animal and they would sprinkle it against the altar and use it for The sacrificial system, but you know the carcasses of those bodies when it wasn't a whole burnt offering They took the carcass and they took it outside the city gates and they burned it there. Do you know why outside the city gates?

Because that's where unclean things took place if member in the Old Testament Leviticus stuff like that if you had like a Issue of blood or you have a running thaw or you even got mold or something like that You have to many times you'd have to go outside the city gates either for a day even if you touched a dead body or sometimes a week or even longer and and there would be this purification period and then After which you'd be able to come back into the city, right? Because outside the city gate is unclean unclean Defiled you with me so the writer of Hebrews is making this connection and he says even though they use the blood of the animals in the sacrificial system the Bodies are taken outside the city gate where they're burned and he says so and here's the connection in like manner Jesus suffered outside the city gate in order to Sanctify the people through his own blood and then I love this statement. Let us Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear his reproach In other words what the writer of Hebrews is saying is let's join him in the place of rejection Because our Savior is the one who was prophesied 700 years before he was born in the book of Isaiah as the one who would be rejected by men a man of sorrows Acquainted with grief and The writer of Hebrews says that's where he is He's outside the city gate. He's in the place that the world considers unclean So he says let's go to him Let's get out of our comfort zone, let's get out of our warm Comfy cozy environment and let's go to Jesus outside the city gate and let us identify with him there Let us live for him there. Let us be considered in the eyes of the world Defiled so be it and let us bear also his reproach That's not one of those warm fuzzy messages you probably came to church to hear But this is what the Bible is saying to you and I about living For Jesus and so forth and then here in the middle of verse 23 as we just kind of wrap up Jesus responds You know, he says to sit at my right hand or my left hand is not mine to grant Given to the father so forth kind of makes you wonder who is gonna sit there, right?

Because he doesn't say oh nobody's gonna sit at my right and left He just says those aren't those positions aren't mine to grant there for the father to grant and you know So immediately my brain being

the weird kind of massive gray matter. It starts going. Well, I wonder who it is And so you start going through the Bible you're going well could be You know, he's kind of named these I have this sneaking suspicion And of course, I don't have any more insight on this than you do, but I have this sneaking suspicion When the Feast of the Lamb takes place We're gonna see Jesus sit down at the head of the table and there's gonna be someone on his right and on his left and we're Gonna look at them and we're gonna go. Yeah, huh? Who's that and we're not gonna know you know why Because the last are gonna be first Isn't that what Jesus said?

It's probably gonna be somebody we never heard of never got their name in lights never wrote a book It was probably somebody who just spent their entire life on their knees and no one knew and they're first because in the kingdom of God the last become first and the first become last It's just that it's kind of the way their role anyway, so Jesus now pulls the disciples aside. He says to them verse 25. He says guys guys guys He says, you know, you watch the Gentiles, you know how they do things, you know They like to lord it over each other and crack the whip and make life miserable for anybody who's under him You know, that's the way of the world, don't you and he says Gentiles here, but he might just as well said world He might have said guys, you know how people in the world consider authority. It's something to be imposed upon others It's something to be dictated and and and used and it's a power thing and you understand that But guys, that's not it's not the way it goes in in the kingdom of God It's not the way I want it to go with you guys. In fact, this is where he says in verse 26 Whoever would be great among you must be your servant And whoever would be first among you must in fact Be your slave and then I love this last statement he says 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 of course that word ransom just boom just pops out and you think okay Does that word mean what I think it means?

I mean, I know what it means in kind of like if somebody was like kidnapped I understand the concept of like paying a ransom to get somebody back Does it mean the same thing here and the answer is yes, it does It refers to a payment made to get somebody out of captivity same thing so Jesus says for even the Son of Man came not to be served but to Serve and to give his life as a ransom for many and boy I tell you, you know right there right there He sets himself apart from the world. He says Guys, I didn't come to be served. I I came to serve but you know in the world Being served isn't that fun? Have you ever have you ever been served? I mean, I'm sure you've been served to some degree by somebody at least at one time.

It's such a trip and It's it just it makes you feel special when somebody's like waiting on your hand and foot You know, it's probably one of the reasons we like to go out to eat in our culture as much as we do It's

like fun having somebody come and bring your food to you, you know, then they clean up after you You don't have to do the dishes for heaven's sake, you know, it's pretty sweet Sometimes I can take you by surprise. There was a time when Sue and I We got this this deal to go and stay in this hotel across Puget Sound We were living in Seattle at the time and Sue worked for this seafood restaurant chain as the executive secretary to the president So she got all these they love to kind of be hot shots and just give her his their credit card go here Go have a weekend on us and sort of a thing and we took advantage of it, you know Whatever we could and so we took our two kids who were really small at that time And we we went got on a ferry and went across the sound and went to some town And we stayed at a you know, a pretty nice Hotel, I had never ever been in a hotel where they like took your bags up to your room Ever in my life, I mean most of the places I've ever been to you drive up to your door, right? that's the kind of places that I've been to and and this place you walk in and there's a lobby and There's a guy that meets you and he's like, can I take your bag? I'm like why what huh? Just keep your hands off it, but you know, but no, he's one of these guys so he you know, they take our bags and he gets in the Elevator with us and take he's telling us all about this place right and then he opens our room for us You know and then and then we walk in and he starts telling us all these things and then at the end He says will that be all?

Now I found out later. He was waiting for a tip. I Had never tipped anybody in my life The only restaurants ever been through had a drive-up window and and this was like this was like this was brand-new So he's like will that be all and I was like, you know and Then he so he started telling me more things about the room in the hotel and then he says will that be all I said Yeah They did it a couple more times and finally he just got frustrated left And as soon as he walked out Sue said to me, I think he was waiting for a tip You're kidding you get they get money for telling you things, you know And so so open to this whole new world of service, you know It's like these people are here to serve you and wait on you hand and you know, that just feels wonderful Doesn't it? But it's not the way the kingdom of God works We serve we follow the example of the servant who Said this this is recorded in Luke's Gospel the 22nd chapter And he says listen Who's greater the one who is at the table being served or the one who is? Serving that person at the table.

Is it not the one who is at the table? Sure, that's the greater person in the eyes of the world, but he says listen. I am among you as one who serves I Not only wanted you to see this verse or verses. I wanted you to Understand when Jesus said this He said it at the Last Supper He said it just a few hours before he was arrested and carted off and nailed to a cross I Am among you as One who serves I know how fun it is to be served I know how wonderful it is to have people wait on you hand and foot. I understand that but as a Christian you are identified with me now and My reproach has become your reproach and it is a privilege

and my heart of service Has now translated to you and will now become your heart of service to others
That too is a privilege and that is how we are to live in this kingdom this upside-down kingdom Called the
kingdom of God.

Amen You