

J.J.

BE GREAT

Matthew 20:20-28

Matthew 20: 20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

21 "What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

22 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

23 Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

24 When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. 25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

ANNOUNCEMENT

Soon, there will be one official communication channel for the church. Vicky is coordinating this.

Speaking of communications,

INTRODUCTION

Who received this yesterday?

"TORNADO in this mobile coverage area. Take immediate cover in a basement or interior room if weather threat approaches."

I know most of us, if not all, immediately believed this message because it came from a reliable source.

Now, there's also a message from the most reliable source regarding an impending event.

Revelation 22: 12 "Look, I am coming soon!"

In connection with this, in the same book, knowing that He is coming soon, this is one of the most free-ing verse that I've ever read.

It's in Revelation 2 when the Lord was writing to the church of Ephesus. This church was doing all the right things.

Revelation 2:1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Now, this is the verse that freed me.

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.

Interestingly enough, here's the original word for "against"

Etymology: against, somewhat against (KJV), "kata" (we get the word, catastrophe, catapult, catalyst), it's a preposition which means "in, on" or against, **but it also means "down"**

This means, everything that you're doing church is up there but this is something that's pulling you down... *You have forsaken your first love.*

You might ask, why did this free me?

It's because it made me realize, it doesn't matter if the world has something against me or even if, I myself, have something against me...**just as long as our Lord Jesus doesn't have anything against me. And what is that one thing, you forgot why you're doing this.**

Our Lord is saying, everything that you're doing in the church, for my name is because of our relationship...It's because of our love for one another.

My brothers and sisters who are loved by our Lord Jesus Christ, if we remember and remind ourselves, why we're doing this, sacrificing time, being persecuted, suffering, serving Him, **here's the result:** Look at what Peter wrote :

1 Peter 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

So it doesn't matter what people says something against you or if you have something against you (we are our own worst critics usually) but if the Lord has nothing against us because we continue to nurture that "love" relationship with Him, then that's the only thing that counts.

STORY : John Kenneth Galbraith, in his autobiography, A Life in Our Times, illustrates the devotion of Emily Gloria Wilson, his family's housekeeper: It had been a wearying day, and I asked Emily to hold all telephone calls while I had a nap. Shortly thereafter the phone rang. Lyndon Johnson was calling from the White House. "Get me Ken Galbraith. This is Lyndon Johnson." "He is sleeping, Mr. President. He said not to disturb him." "Well, wake him up. I

want to talk to him." "No, Mr. President. I work for him, not you." When I called the President back, he could scarcely control his pleasure. "Tell that woman I want her here in the White House."

I remember the quote that I read before:

"I am a servant of many but have only one Master."

Doesn't that give you freedom? PRAISE THE LORD! And this is connected with our series on Servanthood, Part 2 of "Be Great"

PRAY

So how can we 'BE GREAT' in the Kingdom of God.

So let's see how our Lord unfolded this.

BE GREAT!

Last week: We talked about POSITION of greatness they were asking for.

Today, we'll discuss The PATH to greatness according to our Lord Jesus Christ

The PATTERN of greatness we should follow.

Review:

I. THE POSITION

Matthew 20: 20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

21 "What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

We know that in the Eastern tradition, being in the right hand is a position of power.

That's what the mother of James and John wanted.

And why would they have the audacity to ask Jesus about this?

We have studied last week, that the **the mother of Zebedee's sons, James and John was Salome who is the aunt of Jesus and James and John are practically, the first cousins of Jesus Christ when he became man.**

This is the reason why THEY HAD THE AUDACITY to ask this request because in their eyes, they were relatives.

Now, the reason why James and John asked this position of power from Jesus is because they think they deserve it because of affinity.

But what Jesus saw was the motivation in wanting that position. They wanted the position for recognition and power – which to them is equivalent to greatness!
And the other disciples also wanted that position of power.

How do we know that? Look at the reaction of the other disciples.

24 When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. (same words also used in Mark 10:41)

How do we know that?

- First, if you're not really interested in the same position, why would you even get bothered by it if someone else wants it.

Second, look at the other passage in Luke on the same story:

Luke 22:24 A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Jesus did not rebuke James and John and even the disciples in wanting to be great.

The problem is their idea of what it means to be great.

Let's look at Matthew 18: 1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

2 He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. 3 And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

It's those who are humble, one who knows they cannot offer anything is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

First, let's define the word "great"

Etymology : great "megas" something that takes up space, large, abundant. When it comes to rank, has power, esteemed highly...

Risking the danger of oversimplification, it's something or someone who is important (someone who is seen)

Illustration: All of us wants to be important, in short, someone who has impact. That's why some people have self-esteem or self-confidence issue because they think they are not important or what they do does not have impact.

- **That's why we feel good when we receive an award** – it's because we feel important or what we did has an impact.

- **Or when we get promoted** – we feel important
- **Or the owner or the CEO of the company** comes and there's a lot of you in the room and he calls you by name – it feels good because we feel important.
- **Or even the simple things like your children telling you**, “You're the best dad in the world” or “You're the best mom in the world.” We feel that we're important or we made a good impact in their lives.

But the emphasis is: ***Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.***

Again, the child hasn't done anything or cannot offer anything. He is being taken care of by the parents simply because he/ she is their child.

In short, the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is someone who realizes that they are important in the eyes of God because God already sees them as important.

AND THE BIBLE IS BURSTING WITH HIS WORD REMINDING US HOW IMPORTANT WE ARE TO HIM!

Let me give you a glimpse on how important you are in the eyes of God.

Zechariah 2:8 for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye.

Personal Testimony: I wasn't a Christian yet during that time and someone gave me a cassette tape of a sermon of David Jeremiah. He was talking about his battle with cancer at that time. I was half listening in the car but then he mentioned this verse in Zechariah and I asked myself, “Who is this God that calls me “the apple of His eye”? I believe that started my journey on wanting to know more about His Word.

Ephesians 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will

We are so important in God's eyes, look at what our Lord said,

Luke 12: 6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. 7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Ice-breaker: Now it doesn't mean if you don't have hair anymore, you're not important.

Remember also, the importance of names – CEO calls your name, you feel important. I remember one time, I approached Choi and I said to him, “Thank you Choi”. He was surprised that I know his name. But look at this :

Isaiah 43:1 But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

You might say, “Pastor, that’s Isaiah”. You want to know that God really knows you by name. As a follower of Christ, Jesus knows our name...the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

*John 10:3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, **and he calls his own sheep by name** and leads them out.*

But you know what is the proof that you are so important to God’s eyes?

*John 3:16 **For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life***

Again, it’s not what we can offer or what we did that makes us important in God’s eyes. He sees us as already important. WHY? Because right from the start, we were made in HIS OWN IMAGE AND LIKENESS (Genesis 1:26)

Now that we know that we are already important in God’s eyes, the passage we are studying is can we be great while we’re on this world.

II. THE PATH

So what is the path to greatness?

Three Things : Suffering, Servanthood and Selflessness

- **Suffering**

*22 “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. **“Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”***

“We can,” they answered.

*23 Jesus said to them, **“You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant.***

First, our Lord was saying to James and John, you think being great, being significant means having power and authority and having a position, “*You don’t know what you are asking,*”

That’s why He said,

“Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”

What does this cup mean? REMEMBER, CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT.

He just explained to them in previous verses 18 and 19

*18 “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. **They will condemn him to death 19 and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified.** On the third day he will be raised to life!”*

Our Lord is saying, will you be able to stand the insults, the pain and the death that I will go through?

James and John replied that they can.

But look at this. One of the things that the exegete does or one who interprets the Bible accurately, should look at words.

*22 “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “**Can you drink THE cup I am going to drink?**”*

“We can,” they answered.

*23 Jesus said to them, “**You will indeed drink from MY cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant.**”*

What our Lord is saying, “Can you be insulted, persecuted, undergo pain and die like what I’m going to experience?” **THAT’S THE CUP! THE CUP OF SUFFERING!**

James and John said, “yes”

But now Jesus is saying, “you will indeed drink from MY CUP” MY CUP OF SUFFERING. Listen carefully, He is saying to them, **YOU WILL SHARE IN MY SUFFERING... BECAUSE OF ME, PEOPLE WILL INSULT YOU, PERSECUTE YOU, MIGHT GIVE YOU PAIN AND EVEN KILL YOU.**

What OUR LORD JESUS is saying, do you want to be great? THEN ARE YOU WILLING TO SUFFER BECAUSE OF MY NAME!

John 15:20 Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

Allow me to give you some statistics regarding persecution based from last year 2025

- More than 388 million Christians face high level of persecution and discrimination because of their faith in Jesus Christ.
- 4,849 Christians were murdered because of their faith last year
- 3,632 churches were attacked last year

In Nigeria alone, there were already 52,250 Christians that were killed since 2009.

There are underground churches in China

Illustration: There was this story of Jinyi’s husband in China who established an underground church and it was mostly young people, mostly college students and some young adults, they were sitting in a circle singing familiar hymns, their Bibles open in front of them on the carpeted floor. They closed the windows and the room was dark because of the floor-to-ceiling curtains so no one would see them. There were about 100-plu students in the room. As they were about to listen to the message, suddenly the Chinese police

officers in black uniforms swarmed the room, all of them were arrested but released later after 24 hours but the husband of Jinyi was sentenced to three and half years in prison.

Jinyi has two children and she's now a single parent. She asked for support from other churches but was rejected. She started to question God.

But still she persevered. She conducted one-on-one meetings with several young people to encourage them. And now several of those young people are now leading small groups and gathering in different homes. Jinyi's ministry now includes 10 underground small groups with a total of 70 young people even in the midst of persecution.

https://www.opendoorscanada.org/featured-story/underground-christians-china/?_gl=1*1xq8o5g*_up*MQ..*_gs*MQ..&gclid=CjwKCAjwyOzSBhBTEiwAmxvJ-qne_L3hmlrpPEJV8NR2Bi2teyJoOCybuKMqyJchtyM6ivxZxYFPoBoCCzUQAvD_BwE&gbruid=0AAAAAqrFB1s5AZYZvxjhM6pn6Cq75ERps

Illustration 2: And remember about those Coptic Christians who were beheaded by radical Islamit terrorist group ISIS where they were kidnapped even enticed to recant their faith but they did not. And they were paraded in the Libyan beach. They were beheaded there and their beheading is not the ones you see in movies. They have knives and not machetes, and they cut their heads with knives. Some of them were seen mouthing before the beheading “Lord Jesus Christ”

Illustration 3: Let's bring it closer to home. **Zak was so on fire** for the Lord in high school at St. Thomas Aquinas, that he was known as “The Jesus Boy” but he was isolated and ridiculed by some of his classmates.

Jett was always sharing the Gospel at work that she has been reported several times to H.R.

Do we want to be great? Then expect suffering as a Christian.

Note : We do not want it. We do not look for it. But expect that suffering for His name is part of our heritage here on earth.

Romans 8:16 For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. 17 And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. (NLT)

Philippians 1:29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him,

2 Timothy 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

As A.W. Tozer wrote: “To be right with God has often meant to be in trouble with men.”

BUT NOT ONLY THAT If you are a truly follower of Christ, you are already a target of Satan and his cohorts.

Remember Paul, He was able to go to the “third heaven”. But God allowed suffering in his life.

2 Corinthians 12:7 Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Expect this if you are serving Him or if Satan sees that God is going to use you. But as our Lord says, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*

That’s why Paul adds:

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Illustration: I learned recently, Charles Spurgeon who is called the prince of preachers and who was used mightily by God to save and encourage a lot of souls suffered from depression. Look at what he wrote :

Quote : *“I have suffered many times from severe sickness and frightful mental depression seeking almost to despair. Almost every year I’ve been laid aside for a season, for flesh and blood cannot bear the strain, at least such flesh and blood as mine. I believe, however, the affliction was necessary to me and has answered salutary ends.”*

Very Important: As I mentioned last week, if God wants to use you, He will have to break you... Why? SO THAT YOU WILL KNOW THAT HIS GRACE IS MORE THAN ENOUGH!!!

There’s still much more to say but let me end with this...

Suffering for His name is part of being His followers, that it comes with a reward...BUT NOT ONLY A SIMPLE KIND OF REWARD...Look!

*Matthew 5: 11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 **Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven,** for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

*Luke 6: 22 Blessed are you when people hate you,
when they exclude you and insult you
and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man.*

*23 “**Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.** For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.*

You will not only have a reward BUT GREAT IS YOUR REWARD IN HEAVEN.

Remember earlier, Jesus said,

*23 Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from **my** cup,*

And then I showed you earlier that But here’s what He is bringing when He comes back.

*Revelation 22: 12 “Look, I am coming soon! **My reward is with me**, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.*

And those who suffers and then endures because of His name will have the greater reward because you are great in the eyes of the Lord and what a privilege to be called His servant.

PRAISE THE LORD !

S.G.D.