

Kingdom: A Journey Through Matthew

Miraculous Mercy

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MIRACULOUS MERCY Matthew 19:16-20:34

As we prepare for our time in the Word, this is obviously a special day. And it's rather fitting that we would start this morning with a text that describes Jesus' interaction with children. So I have invited my wife to join me up here. This faith family has walked through quite a journey with us. Six years ago we came here, just starting a process of adoption after years of infertility. And you journeyed with us as we brought our first son, Caleb, home from Kazakhstan. Caleb is now 6 years old. We came back from Kazakhstan in March of 2007, and on Mother's Day of that year, we shared with you that, to our surprise, Heather was pregnant. And that December, the Lord brought Joshua into our lives. He is now 4.

Soon thereafter, we started an adoption process from Nepal. This ended up being a failed adoption process as that country shut down to adoptions in the middle of that process. Heartbroken, the Lord redirected us to China, where last December, we came home with our little girl, Mara Ruth, who is now almost 2. So 6, 4, and 2. And a couple of months ago, Heather and I were talking on the phone about some things the kids had done and how going from 2 to 3 was quite an adjustment. And we were talking, but then I had to get off, and I told Heather I was going into a meeting.

So I went into a meeting and ten minutes into that meeting, I got a couple of calls in succession from Heather, which is a signal that something is going on. And so I answer the phone in the meeting. I said, "Are you okay?" She asked, "Are you in a meeting?" I said, "Yes, I just told you I was going into a meeting." And she said, "Okay, I'll call you back later." But then she said, "I'm pregnant." And all of the sudden, our conversation about going from 2 to 3 went from 3 to 4. I dropped to my knees. Same song, second verse, right? Brothers and sisters, do not try to explain this to us physically, emotionally, relationally, or any other way. This is sovereignty. The Father to the fatherless has graciously taken us around the world to a son from Kazakhstan, a son from Birmingham, a daughter from China, and now (Lord willing) another son or daughter from Birmingham, each of whom we cannot imagine life without.

So be praying for us and for my precious wife. And I've asked Heather to lead us in prayer today for women/sisters all across this faith family. Every Mother's Day, we take time not just to acknowledge and pray for mothers in our midst, but for all of our sisters, from the youngest to the oldest, from single to married. We want to thank God for the unique ways He has designed you for His glory. And we want to pray for you, that the Lord would bless each and every one of you and every single situation or circumstance you represent. So in just a second, I'm going to invite every girl, every woman in this room to stand. And men, this is an opportunity for us to give glory to God and appreciation to these women for God's unique gifting in their lives. So clap, yell, scream, holler, give it up for God's grace in the women in our midst. And then we're going to pray for them. Sound good? All right, ladies, from the youngest to the oldest in this room, will you please stand, and we want to honor you this morning.

Okay, if you have Bible, and I hope you do, turn with me to Matthew 19. In light of only getting to twelve verses last week, we have extra ground to cover in both Matthew 19 and Matthew 20. So we are going to read stories this morning about children and a rich man and workers in a field, and we're going to hear a mother's request for her sons. And then we'll see two blind men healed.

One Over-Arching Truth ...

And as I studied all these stories this week, it was clear that they all tie together (quite well, actually) under the banner of one over-arching truth. So let me give it to you from the start: Salvation is a free gift of divine mercy totally devoid of human merit. Maybe another way to say that: Salvation has absolutely nothing to do with human merit and absolutely everything to do with divine mercy. Salvation is impossible without the mercy of God, and I want to show you this morning how this is good news. And I pray that today some of you for the very first time will be struck by God's miraculous mercy. And for the first time today, you will receive the mercy of God toward you in Christ. And I pray that for those of you who already know the mercy of God in Christ, that you will be reminded today to live your life based on divine mercy, not based on human merit.

The Little Children and the Rich Man ...

So let's read these stories and unpack this truth. Matthew 19:13: We'll read the first two stories and see how they go together.

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." And he laid his hands on them and went away.

And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then

will we have?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

All right, the little children and the rich man. In each of the Gospels where the story of the rich young man is told, it is always preceded by this picture of Jesus gathering children around Himself. And there's a clear correlation here. There's a reason why these stories are always back to back in the Bible. Because in one story, you have Jesus receiving people. And then in another story, to our surprise, you have Jesus rejecting people. In one story, you have Jesus receiving children that the disciples thought should be rejected, and then in the next story you have Jesus rejecting a man whom the disciples thought should be received.

One primary truth from this correlation ...

So see one primary truth from this correlation in this contrast. On one hand, Jesus receives the humble. It's what we talked about two weeks ago when we saw similar imagery. *"Whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 18:4). The kingdom belongs to the humble, not the haughty. If you are proud before God, arrogant before God, know-it-all/do-it-all before God, then you will miss the kingdom of heaven.

This leads right into the next story, where we learn that Jesus rejects the proud. This man thought that he could gain eternal life. "What good deed must I do?" And we miss the point of the passage if we think, "Well, if he would have given away all his riches, he would have earned eternal life." But that's not the point. Look deeper than that. There is a heart condition here; he has a haughty heart. This man is not coming to Jesus humbly, willing to do whatever Jesus says, give whatever Jesus asks because he trusts Jesus. If that was the state of his heart, then he would gladly sell his possessions and give to the poor when Jesus told him to. But his heart was proud, clinging to his possessions, and he walked away from Jesus. And frighteningly, Jesus let him go. And the whole point is verse 24 and 25 and 26 is, *"It is easier,"* Jesus says, *"for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."*

Now some preachers have said that this is a reference to a tiny side gate leading to the city of Jerusalem called "the eye of the needle" and in order to get a camel through it, you would have to take any load off the camel, bring it to its knees, and squeeze it through. The only problem with that explanation is it's not true. There's no record of such a gate until at least the 9th, some say the 19th, century. And I point that out because that explanation misses the point of the passage. The point is that it's not just hard for this man to enter the kingdom of heaven; it's impossible! It's impossible for man to do anything to enter the kingdom of heaven.

So the disciples ask, "Who can be saved?" And Jesus looked at them and said, *"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* We need God to do the impossible! Salvation has absolutely nothing to do with human merit and absolutely everything to do with divine mercy. Salvation is a free gift of divine mercy totally devoid of human merit. So throw aside human merit and thrust yourself upon divine mercy like a humble child, not like a haughty rich man. That's the primary truth in this correlation.

Many secondary truths in these illustrations ...

Now there are many secondary truths in these illustrations. In other words, aside from this primary truth, we see other truths that are taught all over the Bible that are illustrated in these two stories. We know, for example, and we see emphasized here that children are important to the heart of Jesus. In Matthew 18, we saw that Jesus referenced physical children as an illustration of His spiritual children. But notice here in Matthew 19 that they are not merely an illustration. Jesus is laying His hands on them and He's praying for them because they're important to Him. And His example here (this illustration) beckons us to do the same. We need to care for children, to nurture them in every way, particularly spiritually. J.C. Ryle said:

Let us draw from these verses encouragement to attempt great things in the religious instruction of our children. Let us begin from their very earliest years to deal with them as having souls to be lost or saved and let us strive to bring them to Christ. Let us make them acquainted with the Bible as soon as they can understand anything. Let us pray with them and pray for them and teach them to pray for themselves. The seed sown in infancy is often found after many days.

Moms and dads, strive to teach your children to know God. Pray for them, over them. Teach them His Word and show them His ways. Family worship is worth it.

And church, may children be important to us. Thank you to every brother and sister in this room who takes time on Sunday morning or Sunday evening or at other times to invest your life in children in this faith family. I am so excited about some things that are developing as we've been working toward how we can most effectively pass the gospel on to the next generation; some ways that we can intentionally strengthen parents and mobilize the entire church to maximize strategic moments in children's and student's lives. Hopefully, some of which you'll hear more about in the coming few weeks.

And not just our children, but I praise God for the ways you as a church have cared for other children around the world. For the last few years, you have given sacrificially so that children in poverty who were dying are now living. And not just living, but thriving. As we've worked with Compassion International in places like India, you have shown through your life in Birmingham that children are important to the heart of Jesus around the world.

Children are important to the heart of Jesus, and children are safe in the arms of Jesus. I mentioned last week that Matthew 19:13-15 are verses that I refer to when someone asks me what happens to a child who dies in infancy, or maybe even before infancy in a miscarriage, or maybe at a young age before that child is able to grasp the gospel. Do children who die go to heaven? I remember soon after I came here preaching a funeral for a precious 1-year-old little girl. And I know that this day in particular is tender for moms who have miscarried and moms whose children have died. And when it comes to what happens to children who lack the ability to grasp the gospel before they die, this is an area where Scripture doesn't speak clearly, in the sense that we don't have a passage where Jesus says, "Some of you may wonder what happens to children who die without an ability to grasp the gospel. Well, here's the answer."

So it's not spelled out like that in Scripture, but I do believe Scripture gives us a good reason to trust that such children are safe in the arms of Jesus. And I point to three primary reasons for that: One, God is gracious and merciful and good (Genesis 18:25 tells us He always does what is right). He longs for all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). And He cares particularly about children (Matthew 19:13-15). Now this alone is insufficient

to say that children go to heaven, for not all people go to heaven. But we're starting with the reality of a good and gracious and merciful God who cares particularly for children.

Then second, the Bible seems to express confidence that believers will see young children after death. After losing his own young son, David worships God and says, "*Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me*" (2 Samuel 12:23). Then David comforts his wife with that hope. Here, Scripture expresses confidence and a comfort that parents who themselves trust in God's salvation will be with their children again.

Then third, the Bible seems to indicate that young children are held to a different measure of accountability before God. Now some people have referred to an "age of accountability" – a certain age when a child becomes accountable before God for his or her sin. But that's not what I am talking about. In Scripture, we see that God holds us accountable for judgment before Him based on a couple of things. First, we have an understanding of right and wrong. Romans 2:14-16 says that we have a moral law written on our hearts so that all people everywhere know good and evil, right and wrong. However, Deuteronomy 1:34-39 speaks of "*little ones...your children who do not yet know good from bad.*" The children in Deuteronomy were not held accountable for the disobedience of the Israelites in their day, and as a result, even though God had cursed the Israelites because of their disobedience, the children were able to enter the Promised Land.

The second criteria that affects our standing before God in judgment is found in Romans 1:18-21. There we see that God has revealed His glory to all people and we stand before Him with no excuse because all of us have rejected His glory. However, if a child is unable to know His glory, to perceive it, because a child does not have the physical ability to recognize God's revelation, then that separates young children from us. They are not "without excuse" (Romans 1:20). Therefore, they will not be judged in the same way we are judged.

Now this doesn't mean that young children stand innocent before God. The Bible is clear that we all have a sinful nature at the core of who we are; no one is innocent (Ephesians 2:3; Romans 3:9-20). A child does not learn to sin; he or she expresses the sinful nature that is inherent in all of us. Therefore, anyone who is saved from God's judgment is saved because of God's grace in Christ. Colossians 1 says we are only reconciled to God through Christ.

So we put all this together and we conclude that God's Word seems to teach that young children who die stand before God with a different measure of accountability. However, they still need the grace and righteousness of Christ attributed to them in some way. And so, based on the goodness, mercy, and justice of God, the love of God toward children, and the confidence Scripture seems to give to believing parents that they will see their children after death, we believe that God attributes grace and righteousness from Christ to them.

How does He do this? In a way that is known only to God in His infinite wisdom. But these are the reasons, based on Scripture, that I would say children are safe in the arms of Jesus. And again, it all goes back to our main point: This is gift not of human merit, but completely of divine mercy. So those are two secondary truths from Jesus and these children.

Now a few secondary truths from Jesus and the rich man. We've talked about these before, so we'll go quickly through and let them land personally. We are the wealthiest people to ever walk planet earth. So this story of a rich man and how riches kept him from the kingdom of heaven is huge for us. Jesus' call to salvation demands radical surrender. Make no mistake about it: Salvation is not an invitation to pray a prayer. Salvation is a summons

to lose your life, to let go of everything you have and everything you are in surrender to Jesus. This is what it means to be a Christian.

Now remember, there are two common errors in this passage. On one hand, some people universalize this passage, saying that every follower of Jesus should sell everything they have and give it to the poor. But we know this is not true based on what we see in the rest of the New Testament. Not every disciple of Jesus is absolved of possessions. Even these disciples, as we learn, still had homes or boats or means of support. So this passage doesn't mean that a Christian can't own private property or possessions.

So you may breathe a sigh of relief at this, but before you do, let me remind you of the other error. On the other hand, we often minimize this passage. If this passage illustrates anything, it illustrates that Jesus does call some of His followers to sell everything they have and give it to the poor. And the reality is that Jesus could call any single one of us to do the same. One commentator said: "That Jesus did not command all his followers to sell all their possessions gives comfort only to the kind of people to whom he would issue that command." People say, "Well, the rich man just needed to be willing to sell all of his possessions," but that's not true. If that's what Jesus had meant, that's what Jesus would have said. Jesus said not, "Be willing to sell everything you possess." He said, "Go, sell, give to the poor, and come, follow me." Five commands in one verse: "Go, sell, give, come, follow". These are not options for this man to consider, but these are commands for this man to obey. Don't dilute the call of Christ. His call to salvation demands radical surrender of your life.

Second truth illustrated in this story: We must realize the dangerous, deadly nature of desire for possessions. We are accustomed to thinking of wealth only as a blessing. But see here that wealth is often a barrier. Wealth was a dangerous, deadly force in this man's life. And this is the way materialism works. It's Paul in 1 Timothy 6 saying, "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction...through craving [for riches, people] wander from the faith and pierce themselves with many pangs." Desire for possessions will damn you, the Bible says. The desire for possessions plunges people into ruin and destruction.

And that's just the desire for them. What about people whose lives are filled with them? Hear the warning, wealthy brothers and sisters in Birmingham: You put your heart in the things/stuff/possessions/wealth of this world, and it will destroy you. And the whole time, you will think that you are okay. Run, don't walk -- run from the desire for riches and the love of money. Run as fast as God's mercy will enable you to run. We must realize the dangerous, deadly nature of desire for possessions.

Also, we must understand our use of money and possessions in the context of redemptive history. See how the disciples were shocked here, and remember that we cannot merely base a theology of wealth on the Old Testament alone. I can go to place after place after place in the Old Testament where God promises material blessing for spiritual obedience -- patriarchs, people of God entering the promised land, kings and so on. But when you get to the pages of the New Testament, material reward is never promised for spiritual obedience. Never. Craig Blomberg said, "The New Testament carried forward the major principles of the Old Testament and intertestamental Judaism with one conspicuous omission: never was material wealth promised as a guaranteed reward for either spiritual obedience or simple hard work...Material reward for piety never reappears in Jesus' teaching, and [in fact it] is explicitly contradicted throughout."

That was revolutionary, scandalous even, in Jesus' day, and it is revolutionary/scandalous in the church today. God's plan in Christ through Christians is not to display His glory through higher standards of living than rest world. God's plan in Christ through Christians is to spread His glory through the radical sacrifice of our lives for the rest of the world. We must understand our use of money and possessions in the context of redemptive history.

And finally, Jesus' call to salvation guarantees radical reward. Go, sell, give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven! Yes! Jesus is not calling this man away from treasure, but to treasure. There's a tinge of self-serving motivation here, isn't there. Go, sell, give everything you have, and get something better! What are you going to live for? Short-term pleasures you cannot keep or long-term treasure you cannot lose? Don't miss the reward in Christ because you want more stuff in this world. Don't miss Christ; He's better! Forever! Talk about a wise investment, a hundredfold return both now and in an eternal inheritance. Jesus' call to salvation demands radical surrender and guarantees radical reward.

The First and the Last ...

And so he closes with this statement: "*Many who are first will be last, and the last first,*" which leads right into a story that illustrates the first and the last. Matthew 20:1 says,

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' So the last will be first, and the first last."

God's grace is surprising ...

This is a simple story where the guys who worked one hour got the same wage as the guys who worked 12 hours. And the point is clear: God's grace is surprising. Clearly, this story is not about people getting what they deserve. We think it should be, and that's why we recoil at a story like this. "This is not fair," we think. And these workers thought the same thing.

And that's the point. Salvation is not fair. God's grace is not based on fairness. If God dealt with us according to what we deserve, we would be damned. It's that quote I shared at

Secret Church from D.A. Carson: "Do you really want nothing but totally effective, instantaneous justice? Then go to hell." But in God's mercy, He surprises us. He does what we would never expect according to what we could never earn.

That's the point: We are not saved because God owes us salvation for something we have done. We are saved because God gives us salvation despite everything we have done. Salvation is a free gift of divine mercy totally devoid of human merit. Are you seeing this? God owes us nothing, yet He gives us everything in Christ. Mercy!

God's grace is sovereign ...

God's grace is surprising, and God's grace is sovereign. He has the right to dispense His mercy as He pleases. Who are you, O man, to tell God how He should dispense His mercy? We have small minds and small ways, and God's grace is wonderfully surprising and gloriously sovereign.

His grace is surprisingly and sovereignly expressed in the sacrifice of His Son. Verse 17: *"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.'"* In His mercy, God ordained the murder of His Son for the sake of our salvation.

Twelve Proud Disciples ...

But the disciples aren't getting it; they're not getting any of it. And it's evident in the verses that follow. Matthew 20:20 says,

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up 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?" They said to him, "We are able." 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."

Okay, moms, probably not the best example on Mother's Day in this text. A mom representing the prideful hearts of her sons, asking for promotion in Jesus' kingdom. And we know it's not just their mom making the request here because when Jesus responds, He looks at the sons and speaks to them. It's why in other Gospel accounts, the mom is not even mentioned. Jesus addresses their pride, but not just theirs, because the other ten disciples were indignant when they heard this. Doubtless, this was not because of their humility, but because of their own pride.

Why Jesus came ...

So Jesus addresses these twelve proud disciples with words that are loaded with meaning, culminating in that last verse. Underline it, verse 28: "*The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" So starting with that verse and working our way back a bit from it into the verses that precede it, we see why Jesus came. He came to suffer. The title Jesus uses for Himself here – "the Son of Man" – signifies how He came to identify with us as men and women, not only in our lives, but in our suffering, for our sin, in our death. In this passage, Jesus talks about the cup that He will drink, a cup of suffering. He has just prophesied that He will drink down the wrath of God due sin and sinners. Jesus came to knowingly, willingly walk into the jaws of suffering and death on our behalf.

He came to suffer, and He came to save and give His life as a ransom. The Greek word used here is "*lutron*". This is a payment to release someone from slavery. It's a word we would use today to associate with hostages, and that is the point. We are slaves to sin, slaves to ourselves, slaves to death, and He gave His life so that we might be free: Saved from sin, saved from ourselves, and saved from death. How is this possible? Because of that word "for" – He came to give His life as a ransom "for" many. That word literally means "in place of."

Jesus came to suffer, He came to save, and He came to be our substitute. Oh, feel the wonder of this. Jesus came and gave his life as a ransom – as a payment – instead of or in the place of those He would save. And the picture is you and I stand under the weight of our sin and under the wrath of God, deserving death, and Jesus took our place. Jesus took your place. Jesus became your substitute. This is the great and glorious gospel. Not just that Jesus died for you, but that He died instead of you. You deserved to die, and Jesus came to take your place! Oh, thrust yourself upon His mercy! If you have never trusted in His mercy trust in His mercy today!

He came to suffer, He came to save, He came to be our substitute, and based on this, He came to show us how to live. And so He tells His disciples to be servants, to be slaves of others. Don't be like worldly rulers, lording authority over them. Love people by serving them. When Jesus tells James and John, "You will drink my cup," He is telling them that they too will lose their lives serving others. Obviously, they will not experience the cup of suffering Jesus experiences on the cross, but their lives as His disciples would be about sacrificial service to others that would lead to their suffering. James would one day be beheaded, and John would be exiled as a prisoner on an island. Kingdom greatness is expressed in sacrificial service.

But that is not all in this text. One more reason Jesus came, and it's really at the center of all the others. Don't miss it because it's the most startling of all. Jesus came to serve us. Now this seems simple, but ponder this for a moment. The word for "servant" here is what we use to get the word "deacon". It literally means to wait on tables. This is Jesus saying that He wants to wait on you. Jesus did not come to be served by you; He came to serve you. Jesus did not come to be helped by you; He came to help you. Jesus did not come to be waited on by you; He came to wait on, to serve, you. He came to be our servant, our help, our slave. No religious teacher talks like this; this is lunacy! Jesus did not come as some potentate whose personal whims are to be catered to by lowly servants. He came to be the lowly servant of us. This is Jesus telling His disciples then and His disciples today that He does not want us to serve Him; He did not come to be served. He wants to serve them – to serve us. He is saying, "In my relationship with you, I will be the servant. I will serve you. I will work for you."

What this means ...

Now what does this mean? Step back and think about this. Jesus is saying, "I came to serve you, not to be served by you." What does this mean? Well first and foremost, this means that Jesus is our servant. It's that simple. Brother or sister, Jesus is your servant.

Now in order to understand what Jesus does mean here, we've got to make sure we also understand what Jesus does not mean. When the Bible says that Jesus is our servant, this does not mean we tell Jesus what to do. He's not our servant in that way. This is what James and John were trying to do: "Give us what we want." And Jesus was not their servant in that way. And He's not our servant in this way. When we think of Jesus as our servant, this is not Jesus responding to our every bidding. That would be a perversion of the picture Jesus is giving us here.

Instead, when Jesus says He is our servant, this means Jesus gives us what we need. So pay attention real close here, because what I'm about to say is absolutely key to your understanding Christianity. Jesus has just told James and John that they are going to suffer, that following Him is going to involve radical sacrifice of their lives in service to others. He has just given them a radical call to discipleship. But don't miss it: This radical call to discipleship is accompanied by a radical promise of service. And Jesus says to these disciples, "What I am calling you to do is not natural." It is not possible on your own. To renounce the ways of this world and to give your life as a slave in this world, you cannot do this. But I am here to serve you, and to give you everything you need to live this out.

So don't miss this: Salvation is all of divine mercy, none of human merit. That applies not just at this point of salvation, but at all points. Now, that you are saved, you live off of divine mercy. And you serve out of the overflow of divine mercy in your life. Your whole life is based on mercy, not merit. So, moms, you've got the toughest job in the world. Nurturing children, loving children -- do you have the strength and wisdom necessary for such a task? No! But Jesus does, and He gives it to you as you trust in Him. And mothering is based not on human merit, but totally on divine mercy. Do you see it?

Now apply that to everything in the Christian life. Jesus promises to give us what we need as our servant on a daily, moment-by-moment basis. Oh, I talked this morning with a brother whose wife just passed away, and I told him, "Jesus is there to serve you." When Jesus leads us into difficult places or calls us (rich young man) to do difficult things, He enables us to do what He calls us to, because He is our servant.

Well, what about Paul? Paul says in the New Testament that we are servants of Jesus. The Bible talks about us serving Jesus. So aren't we His servants? Yes, no question. We are Jesus' servants. The Bible definitely talks like this. But don't miss it – don't miss what this does not mean. This does not mean that Jesus needs our aid, that Jesus needs our help. When we talk about ourselves as servants of Christ, we often either explicitly or implicitly think of Jesus needing our help, or of God needing our help. But I want to remind us of Acts 17:25: "*God is not served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything.*" God is Almighty, and He needs no support. We cannot service Him. He never gets tired, He never gets hungry, He never gets lonely. He does not need us; we need Him.

So what does the Bible mean, then, when it says we are servants of Jesus? Well, this means that we submit to Jesus' authority, that He reigns over us as Lord and King and Ruler. And this is the beauty of the gospel; put it all together. The Lord and King and Ruler over the Universe, the One who has all authority in all the universe – He has stooped to serve you.

How we respond ...

So how shall we respond? We trust Jesus to serve us because Jesus' service to us enables our obedience to Him. Every time Jesus calls us to do something, it is His way of telling us how He wants to serve us. When He calls us to give up everything we have, it is His way of telling us that He will serve us in the process. When He calls us to sell possessions and give to the poor, it is His way of telling us that He will serve us in the process. When He calls you to trust Him in the middle of a dark valley, He also promises to serve you all the way through that valley. When He calls you to love your husband or to love your wife even when times are tough, it is His way of saying that He is going to serve you in the process to make that possible. When He calls you to love your kids through a difficult situation, He also promises to serve you in that difficult situation. When He calls you not to one, or to two, or to three, but to four kids that you never could have imagined, it is His way of saying that He is going to serve us in the process. Everything Jesus commands you to do is a call to trust Him to serve you in order to make it possible.

Oh, brothers and sisters, let this transform your Christianity. Christ is at every moment serving you -- at every moment. He came two thousand years ago to serve you, but not just two thousand years ago. Today He is serving you at this moment. Even now, He is opening your ears and your eyes to His Word, leading and guiding and directing and empowering you. Trust Jesus – at every second – trust Jesus to serve you!

And as you do, as He works in you, serving you, empowering you, moment-by-moment, then we exalt Jesus by serving others. As He serves us with His power and His love and His mercy, then our service to others demonstrates His sacrifice for us. Nothing is more clear to this world of Jesus' service to us than our service to others. "*By this will men know that you are my disciples, when you love one another.*"

Two Blind Men ...

So these stories of mercy then wrap up with a story of two blind men. Matthew 20:29 says,

And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" And stopping, Jesus called them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.

Boldly confess your need for His mercy.

These are stories of children who in their humility could see Jesus, and a rich man who in his riches could not see Jesus; a story of disciples who in their pride were struggling to see the love of Christ. These stories are now capped off with two men who, based upon confession of faith in Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of David, were brought from darkness to light. And the call of Matthew 20 is clear: Boldly confess your need for His mercy.

Oh, if you have never trusted in the mercy of God, if you have never turned from your sin and thrust yourself upon the mercy of God, I implore you to do that today. Throw aside your pride, and say, for the first time in your life, "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me." Become a Christian, knowing that His call demands radical surrender, yet guarantees radical reward.

And then Christian, do the same thing! Every moment of every day, boldly confess your need for His mercy. Ask Him, trust Him to serve you.

Humbly believe in His power to do the miraculous.

Boldly confess your need for His mercy, and humbly believe in His power to do the miraculous. Humbly believe in His power to save you. Humbly believe in His power to serve you, to enable you to do what you could never do based upon human merit, but what you can absolutely do based upon divine mercy.

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