

Better than the American Dream—Part 4

Matthew 20:17-34 - NCBC, March 28, 2021

Main Point: **Jesus gave His life so you could follow Him instead of your self-serving desires.**

- Jesus gave His life to fulfill God's rescue plan, not our earthly dreams (17-19, 28)
- Jesus gave His life to trade cups with us, not serve our upward mobility (20-23)
 - The cup of God's just wrath against sin (Ps 75:8; Is 51:22)
 - The cup of God's gracious salvation (Ps 16:5; 116:13)
- Jesus gave His life to model servanthood, not worldly greatness (25-28)
- Jesus gave His life to give mercy to the desperate, not thrones to the greedy (29-31)
- Jesus gave His life to meet our greatest need, not our self-serving desires (32-34)

Application: **Ask Jesus for what you need most—His death and resurrection applied to you!**

Opening Announcements:

- **Easter Invite Resources.** Please take advantage of all the resources offered to help you extend an invitation for someone to join you in celebrating Jesus' resurrection this Easter Sunday.

- Please plan to join us for a special Good Friday Worship Service this Friday, Apr 2nd, at 7pm here at NCBC.

<<In Christ Alone>>



We can be so thankful that our inheritance is Christ alone! Please continue your worship now by opening God's Word to **Matthew chapter 20.**

I again welcome those worshipping online or in our Extra Precautions Chapel. For those online, please use the links alongside the livestream for fill-in-the-blank sermon notes, the preaching manuscript, and children's coloring pages.

As we enter into this Easter week together, it is fitting for us to consider this last part of Jesus' teaching to his disciples as he's walking towards the cross and preparing to enter Jerusalem during Passover week. Today is Part 4 of our message entitled, *Better than the American Dream*, for ever since Jesus left Galilee in **Matthew 19 verse 1**, Jesus has been teaching His followers that life in His kingdom is far greater than any earthly ambitions they have for themselves.

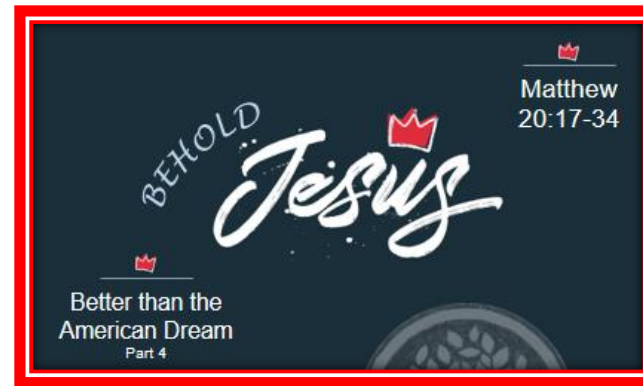


Chapter 19 started with strong teaching about no fault divorce and singleness...emphasizing that the kingdom of heaven is far greater than any dream of a big family and fulfilling marriage. Then Jesus taught His kingdom is superior to any dreams of independence, self-sufficiency, financial wealth, or religious respect. Living under Christ's rule is far better than getting ahead of others in this life.

So notice what Jesus is doing as He's walking to His death. He's calling His disciples to set their minds on things above, not things of this earth. He's calling His disciples away from selfishness, and towards a worship of His supremacy. And as we learn today,

Jesus is calling us to desire God Himself more than anything else, and see that life in His kingdom is far better than merely using God as a means to our own ends.

Do you ever do this? Do you ever try to use God to help you get what you want outside of Him? Do you ever try to get God to work for you? O dear friends...may God's Spirit use His Word this morning to help us all,



Behold King Jesus! Living in submission to His Lordship is far better than any American Dream!

So please stand as I read **Matthew 20:17-34**, in the English Standard Version:

17 And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, 18 "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 19 and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. 21 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." 22 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." 23 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.” 24 And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. 25 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. 26 It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

29 And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. 30 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!” 31 The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” 32 And stopping, Jesus called them and said, “What do you want me to do for you?” 33 They said to him, “Lord, let our eyes be opened.” 34 And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.

This is the reading of God’s Word.

Let’s Pray Together.

What do you want from Jesus? What do you pray for when you pray? What do you find yourself asking God for more than anything else in your life? What do you want from King Jesus?

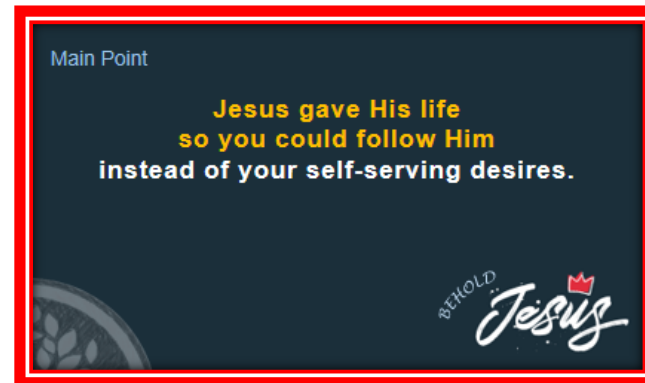
I ask, since this exact question was repeated twice in today’s Scripture. In both **verses 21 and 32**, Jesus asks the same question, “What do you want?”

The first time Jesus asks this question, he asks it to a mom and two men who are *spiritually* blinded by selfish ambition. The second time Jesus asks, “*What do you want me to do for you?*”, he asks two men who are *physically* blinded by sin’s curse.

The first request is left unanswered, but the second is immediately answered in Jesus’ compassion and power.

Which causes us to wonder, “What do I want from Jesus?” Or more specifically, “Am I wanting what I should be wanting from Jesus?”

You see, here’s Jesus main point:



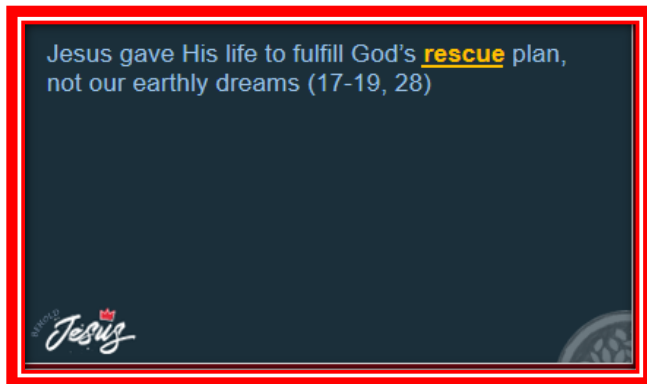
Jesus gave His life so you could follow Him, instead of your self-serving desires. Jesus is not simply a means to our own selfish ends.

This text makes it clear: Jesus and His disciples were all walking towards Jerusalem together, but with two

conflicting obsessions. Jesus was walking towards a sacrificial death that would set us free from sin's curse so we could joyfully follow Him. But the disciples thought they were walking towards a glorious throne¹ where all their self-serving desires would be fulfilled by God on their behalf.

Loved ones, we must learn from both sets of blind men in this passage today. Has our selfish ambition blinded and intoxicated us to think that God is somehow our servant? Do you want something *from* Jesus more than you want to know and follow Him?

As we walk through this Scripture, we'll see 5 counter-cultural reasons Jesus gave His life for us. And in the process, I'm praying God's Spirit will align our desires with His kingdom priorities for our greatest eternal joy!



First in **verse 17**, Jesus gave His life to fulfill God's rescue plan, not our earthly dreams.

¹ C.f. Matthew 19:28

² Matthew 12:40; 16:21; 17:22-23

³ Matthew 26:47-56

⁴ Matthew 27:57-68

⁵ Matthew 27:1-14

Never forget this church – even though you and I certainly benefit from God's rescue plan, salvation is about God and His glory before it is ever about us!

So here's Jesus going up...meaning they're walking uphill towards Jerusalem, and the closer they get to Judea the more excited Passover pilgrims join them, and so in **verse 17** Jesus pulls his disciples aside, and gives the most detailed prediction of His upcoming death and resurrection.²

Look, don't forget what's going to happen when we get to Jerusalem.,

The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes³that's the ruling Jewish court of the Sanhedrin...and they will condemn him to death⁴ and deliver him over to the Gentiles⁵ ...that referred to Pilate and the Roman Government who alone had the authority to carry out capital punishment at this time... to be mocked⁶ and flogged⁷ and crucified,⁸ and then He will be raised on the third day.⁹

Jesus is staring His destiny squarely in the face. He's fully aware of every painful detail of His pending sacrifice. He knows *when* His death will happen, and He knows *how* it will happen with shame, torture, piercing and suffocation, and He uses the language of necessity here:

⁶ Matthew 27:29, 31, 41

⁷ Matthew 27:26

⁸ Matthew 27:33-50

⁹ Matthew 28:1-20

The Son of Man *will be delivered*. It must happen. Because it is God's sovereign will to rescue many sinners through His substitutionary ransom payment.

If you write in your Bible, you might underline the title, "Son of Man" in both **verse 18** and **verse 28**. *Son of Man* comes from **Daniel 7:13-14** as the victorious title for God's King sent to reign over the earth at the end of time.

"Son of Man" is a victorious title for Jesus being fully God and fully man who reigns from a glorious throne, just like was mentioned in **chapter 19:28**, who will be served by everyone. So when the disciples hear the title "Son of Man" they are thinking about the One everyone serves.

But Jesus radically says in **verse 28**, *the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve...* and so I ask you, who was Jesus serving when He gave His life for sinners? Yes, Jesus served sinners by dying in their place. But the first object of His service was God Himself, was it not?¹⁰ Jesus gave His life first to serve His Father,¹¹ in glad submission to His eternal plan to bring Himself glory through the merciful salvation of undeserving sinners like you and me.

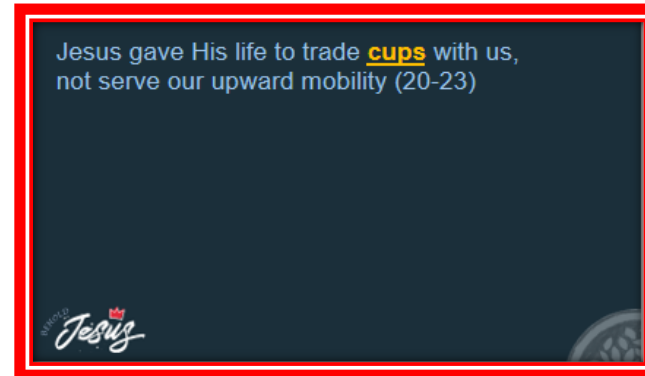
Therefore, please remember, Jesus gave His life to serve God's rescue plan, not our earthly dreams. Your salvation is first about God, before it is ever about you. God is the one who required, planned, and executed Jesus' sacrifice,¹² and God is the one who raised Jesus from the dead three days later as our eternal Savior and Lord!

¹⁰ John 4:34; 6:38-40

¹¹ Matthew 26:39; John 12:27; Hebrews 5:7-9

¹² Acts 2:23-24

Now as Jesus is reminding his disciples what He is going to do for them in Jerusalem, **verse 20** introduces us to some Momma Drama, as we learn that,



Jesus gave His life to trade cups with us, not serve our upward mobility (20-23)

It seems Momma Salome,¹³ who is also an aunt to Jesus,¹⁴ heard nothing after the "Son of Man" reference. **Mark 10:35** makes it clear James and John were behind this whole thing... but in **verse 20** Momma asks Jesus for a favor.

Jesus had just finished telling His disciples all that He was going to do for them in **verses 18-19**, but in His divine patience, He asks her plainly in **verse 21**,

What do you want?

And she answers, Remember that part about 12 twelve thrones back in **19:28**? Well, I have two boys – one named "Lightning" and one named "Thunder" and I

¹³ Matthew 27:55 and Mark 15:40

¹⁴ John 19:25

simply want you to promote them to the seats of highest honor in your kingdom.

Jesus replies in bewilderment in **verse 22**,

You do not know what you are asking. You're out of your mind. You're so intoxicated by selfishness that you're blind to the spiritual reality at hand.

And so He looks right at James and John and asks,
Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?

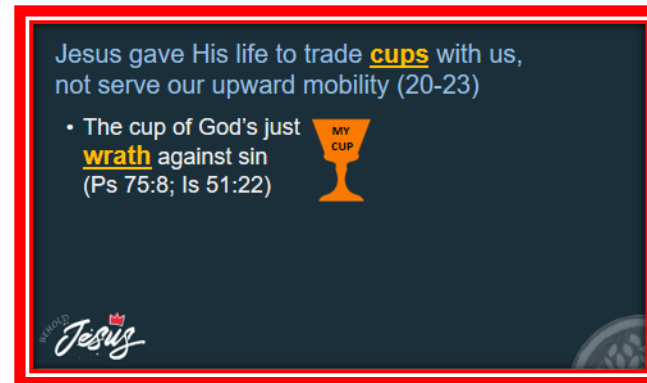
To "share a cup" in Jewish thinking means to share one's life or destiny.

So the boys reply, Sure, *we are able* to share in your destiny! Crowns...thrones...servants...honor...sign us up!

And Jesus responds, *You will drink my cup... but* you're asking for something the Father only gives to the ones He has prepared.

Now pull the bus over. We need to understand the rich Old Testament background behind these two cups here.

You see, in **verse 22**, Jesus is referring to:



The cup of God's wrath against sin. Throughout the Old Testament, God describes His righteous anger against the wicked as a cup¹⁵ that sinners will be required to drink for all of eternity. Sin's destiny is always judgment!

So picture a cup that is boiling over with the holy fury of God against your sin...and you notice this cup has your name on it. It's your destiny to drink! A cup of God's just anger that all your own sins have stored up for you to drink for all of eternity.

Now picture the second cup that is mentioned in the Old Testament:

¹⁵ Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17, 22; Jeremiah 25:15-29; 51:7; c.f. Matthew
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The cup of God's salvation. Psalm 116:13 speaks of drinking from *the cup of salvation* and calling on the name of the Lord.¹⁶

So don't miss this: Our sins filled our cup, or destiny, with God's wrath. But Jesus is going to give His own life as a sacrificial substitute to ransom souls.

In other words, Jesus gave His life to trade cups with us! Jesus went to Jerusalem's cross to drink my cup, and give me His destiny of perfect shalom or righteousness with God forever!

Verse 22 - James and John, are you able to drink the cup of God's wrath against your sins? No. But **verse 23** - by my doing, you will indeed drink *my* cup – the cup of salvation – for I'm giving my life in order to trade destinies with you!

Isn't this wonderful, church? What more could we want from Jesus than His trading destinies, or cups, with us? Jesus drinks our death, and we in turn get to drink deeply and freely from His life! This is amazing grace!!

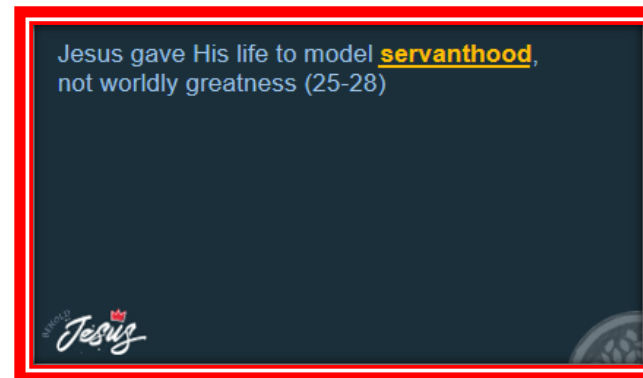
¹⁶ C.f. Psalm 23:5; 16:5

O sinner, wake up from your selfishness! Stop seeing Jesus as merely a path for your own upward mobility!

Those of us who love Christian ministry please listen. Following Jesus is never a means to self-promotion. If you are trying to use Christian ministry to stroke your ego, or build a business, or secure your future – repent! Put the glory of God back into the center of God's salvation, rather than your own selfish ambitions.

Repent of believing that your selfishness will eventually satisfy you if you just keep drinking from its broken cistern long enough.¹⁷ Jesus gave His life to trade cups with us, not serve our upward mobility.

Now **verse 24** makes it clear the 10 were very upset that James and John thought of asking for a higher honor first, and so in **verse 25** Jesus gathers all 12 disciples around him again to emphasize,



He gives His life to model servanthood, not worldly greatness.

¹⁷ Jeremiah 2:13

Jesus says in **verse 25**,

You know what greatness looks like in the world:

Roman rulers and great people in the world's eyes are those who control others and have lots of people available to serve their every whim.

In other words, the world says the more people serving you, the greater person you are.

But it shall not be so among you. Not in my kingdom, Jesus says.

But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you, must be your slave.

This is simply a restatement of the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.¹⁸

Servanthood is the only path to greatness in God's kingdom. It's not about how much you take from others... spiritual greatness is about how much you give to others.

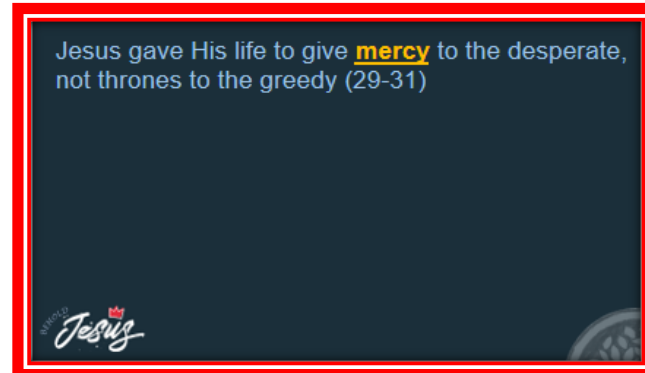
Don't race past the strong words Jesus uses here. Can you think of a more lowly position than a slave?

Jesus is saying, if you disciples really want to be great... become a slave to your brothers and sisters. Follow Jesus' example... for Jesus gave His life to model servanthood, not worldly greatness!

Dear Christian... we may be used to God calling us servants or slaves. But how do we react when someone "below us on the org chart" dares to treat us like one?

Jesus words here are strong and life-giving if you are humble enough to receive them. Give your life away for others' eternal good... for this is the essence of kingdom life and eternal joy which is modeled by our King Himself.

Now in **verse 29** the scene changes as they begin traveling west through Jericho, on their final approach up the last few miles of elevation towards Jerusalem. By this time in their journey, the Passover pilgrims had swelled to a large crowd traveling together with Jesus. And in this scene, we learn another surprising reason Jesus was going to Jerusalem to die.



Jesus gave His life to give mercy to the desperate, not thrones to the greedy.

Now whenever large festivals like Passover drew near, it was common for beggars to sit along the highways and take advantage of the increased traffic.

¹⁸ Matthew 19:30; 20:16

So notice in **verse 30**... there's two blind men begging by the roadside, when all of the sudden they hear that Jesus is in the crowd that is passing by them!

So they immediately cry out,

Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!

“Son of David” was a Messianic title... it was an expression of faith that Jesus indeed was the promised Messiah in fulfillment of God's promises to King David.¹⁹

Although these two men were physically blind by sin's curse, they had the eyes of faith to see Jesus as God in human flesh – the One who alone had power to heal blindness and remove iniquity.

And so they cried out for mercy!

But all the religious pilgrims...on the way to the holy city with their Messiah... they rebuked these two men. Shush! Jesus can't be bothered right now by you good-for-nothing sorts. He's going up to Jerusalem to be installed as King! He doesn't have time for those who have been cursed by blindness.

O church...are we like the crowds here? John Calvin said that “it is often the case that those who should be helping us to Jesus are instead blocking us from Him.” After all, the crowds thought Jesus was about to give them their ultimate desire: freedom from the Romans, and a restoration of the Jewish state.

But listen friends, Jesus gave His life to bring undeserved mercy to the desperate, not thrones to the greedy.

So in **verse 32** Jesus stops and asks,

What do you want me to do for you?

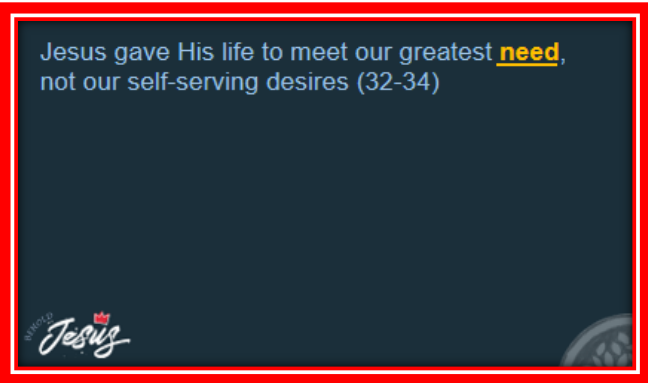
And they didn't ask for power, or for privilege... but simply for mercy. They knew they didn't deserve to be set free from sin's curse of blindness. But they believed it was good and right to call upon the mercy of the Lord.

Are you desperate for God's mercy? Repent from any lie of your self-reliance that believes somehow you've been able to make God your servant, and that He now owes you anything. Jesus came to save sinners... will you admit you need His mercy today?

Some here might say well, I needed God's mercy years ago when I first got saved...but now that I've matured into such a grand specimen of Christianity, I think I'm doing just fine for myself. Fool!

Stop trusting your works or your ministry or earthly prosperity... and cry out today for Jesus' mercy!

¹⁹ 2 Samuel 7:8-16



Jesus gave His life to meet our greatest need,
not our self-serving desires (32-34)

Jesus gave His life to meet our greatest need, not our self-serving desires. Our greatest need is for God's mercy, not some realization of our own selfish ambition!

Now it's interesting to compare the request of the two blind men in **verse 33** with the request of the two blind men in **verse 21**, isn't it?

The two men in **verse 21** wanted an honorable seat, while the two men in **verse 33** wanted a healed sight.

The first wanted God to make them great...the second just wanted God to make them whole. The first wanted God to remove the competition, the second the curse of sin.

What do you want from Jesus?

The first believed that they deserved such an honor.²⁰
The second knew they could never deserve to see...but they called upon the mercy of the Son of David, for God's

²⁰ Matthew 20:22

²¹ Hebrews 4:15; c.f. Isaiah 53:3-5

²² Isaiah 35:5; 42:7; 61:1; Luke 4:18; c.f. Matthew 11:5

Word had promised that the Messiah was touched by our infirmities,²¹ and able to bring sight to the blind!²²

Can you see the contrast between how these two groups of men answered the same question from Jesus?

What do you want me to do for you?

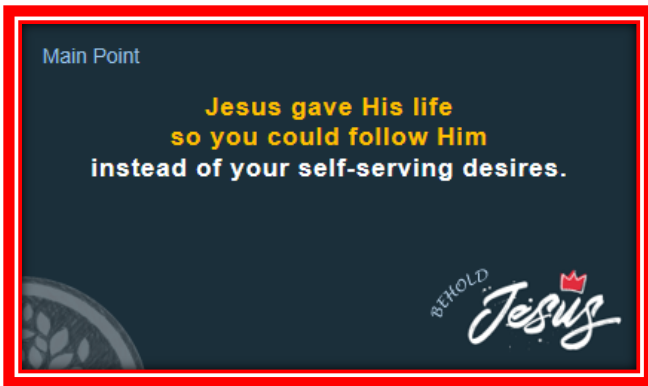
The spiritually blind boys back in **verse 21** asked, and did not receive, because they asked wrongly, to try to get their own self-serving desires.²³

The physically blind asked God for their greatest need – that they would be cured from sin's curse of blindness. (After all, remember the Jews commonly believed physical blindness was a Divine curse for sin.²⁴) And we know they were sincere in their cry for mercy and freedom from sin's curse, for after our Lord mercifully healed them, what did they do? They followed Jesus!

In other words,

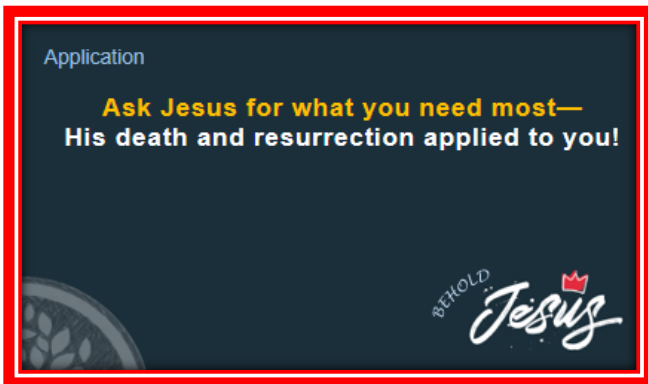
²³ James 4:3

²⁴ C.f. John 9:2



Jesus gave His life so you could follow Him, instead of your self-serving desires. Obedient submission to His Lordship is the only way a human soul can be satisfied for eternity.

So let me close our meditation on this Scripture by urging each of us to,



Ask Jesus for what you need most—His death and resurrection applied to you!

Every single one of us here today is truly desperate for God's mercy in our life – whether we are conscious of it

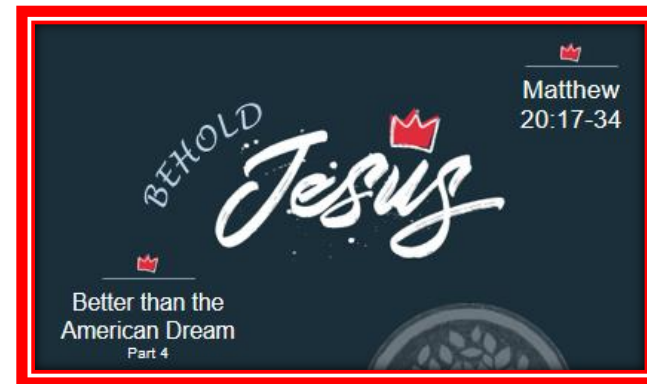
²⁵ Psalm 16:11
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or not! And the one thing that is most needful for us to ask of God...and yet is the most unlikely thing that we would ever ask...is that Jesus would die in our place. That His sacrifice would count for me.

O friend...ask God to drink the cup of wrath that your sins have stored up for your eternal destiny...and cry out for God's mercy that you might drink deeply today from His cup of salvation!

Today Jesus asks, *what do you want me to do for you?*

And may the humble cry of all of our hearts be, "*Lord, please have mercy upon me!*" Please let the benefits of your cross be mine. Please give me what I could never earn or deserve... for only when I drink of your cup will my soul ever be satisfied in the fullness of joy forever!²⁵



Let's pray.

<<Jesus Your Mercy>>

Now before we pray our benediction, I want to share an update on our pastoral search process. As you know, last weekend Blayke Weatherford was here leading our music, and meeting with our leaders and volunteers. We are so thankful for all the prayer support and encouraging feedback we received this week regarding Blayke and our search process.

We are very thankful for our candidating process here. It is very thorough, and rightly careful. We believe our process with Blayke worked very well, as both his strengths and his weaknesses were accurately demonstrated through his weekend visit. Publicly, you got to see some of his strengths on Sunday morning, and privately, we got to see some of his weaknesses in our various interactions on Saturday.

And while we have made a sweet friend in Blayke and we are so thankful for his eager desire to be developed and equipped into an Associate Pastor role, our elders all came to the united decision this past week that our Director of Music Ministry position is still too large of a step for Blayke to assume at this time. So we have released Blayke from our consideration.

Please pray for Blayke, as this decision was really difficult for him to hear this week. Blayke was very impressed with you all, and you all did an amazing job rolling out New Castle hospitality for him during his visits. We love him, and regret that this isn't God's will at this season, and are trusting God's providence as we continue to wait for His provision for our church family in our search.

And speaking of God's providence, please keep praying

fervently this week for God's will to be done in our search. For Blayke left on Sunday, and on Monday we received a new application from a brand-new candidate that looks very promising for us. For the sake of integrity, we held back this new application from our elders until they had decided on whether we should proceed with Blayke or not. So to be clear, only 3 of the 12 elders even knew there was a new application when they decided it was right to release Blayke. So even if this new candidate doesn't work out, we are convinced it was God's will to release Blayke at this time.

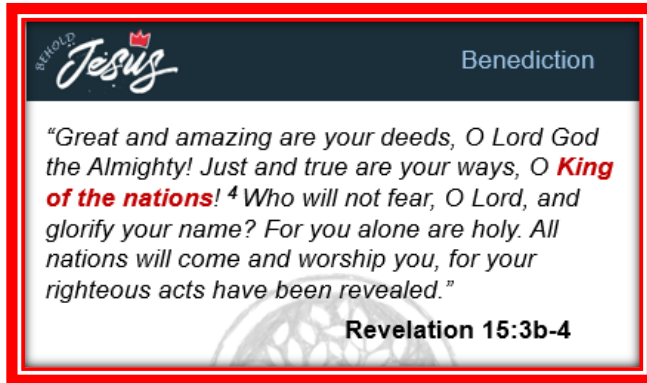
But in God's kindness to us, church, we do have a very promising new applicant that our search team and our elders are now considering. Normally, we wouldn't share this information with you so early in the process. But we are all very excited about this new candidate, as it seems at first impressions to be the type of brother we've been seeking all along for the last 3 years. So please pray for God's grace and mercy to continue leading our elders and the search team, and we will keep you posted as things continue to develop in the coming weeks.

And of course, we will not be initiating any relationship with a search firm until we have come to a decision on this new candidate.

If you have any questions about our search for an Associate Pastor of Music and Worship, please feel free to reach out to any of our elders anytime. We appreciate all your prayers and support as we continue to trust God's perfect leading through all of this.

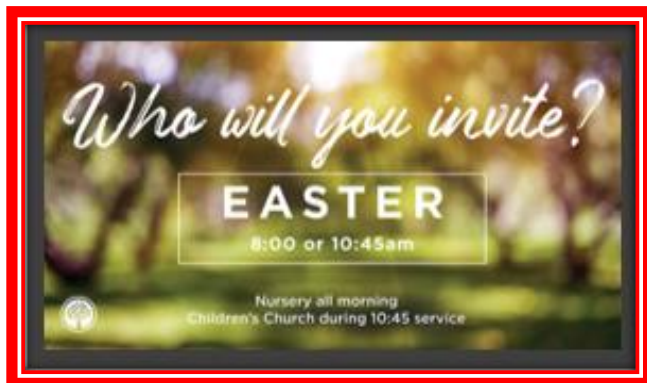
Now please stand, as we pray our benediction together,

Let's pray our benediction together:



Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.
Revelation 15:3b-4

Looking forward to seeing you all Friday Evening for our Good Friday services, here at 7pm!



Recommended Resources on Matthew 20:17-34

- Psalm 11:6; 75:8
- Isaiah 51:17, 22
- Jeremiah 25:15-29
- Daniel 7:13-14
- Matthew 19:28; 26:39, 42
- Mark 10:32-52; 14:36
- Luke 22:42
- John 13:14; 18:11
- Philippians 2:6-11
- James 4:3
- Revelation 14:10; 16:19; 18:6

- <https://www.gsflo.org/blog/whatdoyouwant>
- <http://www.fbc.org.ky/audio/march222009am.mp3>

- *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Leon Morris
- *The Cup and the Glory*, Greg Harris

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Review Matthew 20:18-19. What details did Jesus already know about how He would give His life as a ransom for many? Why did Jesus keep repeating this prediction to his disciples? (c.f. Mt 12:40; 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:28)
2. Compare Mt 20:17-28 to 20:29-34. What question is repeated? (vv. 21 and 32) Why the different titles used for Jesus? What's different about the two sets of two men's requests to Jesus?
3. Read Matthew 26:39, Psalm 75:8, and Isaiah 51:22. What cup is Jesus referring to in 20:22? Then read Psalm 16:5, 23:5, and 116:13. What cup is Jesus referring to in 20:23?
4. Review Matthew 20:24. Why were the ten so angry with James and John? What should we learn from the twelve's blatant self-focused dismissal of vv. 18-19?
5. Review Matthew 20:25-28. Compare worldly leadership to Christ-like leadership, or servanthood. How do you react when someone "beneath you on the org chart" treats you as a "slave"? Why is this offensive to you? How does Jesus' teaching and example call us to change how we approach any leadership in our home, church, marketplace, or community?
6. Review Matthew 20:30-33. What do you pray for when you pray? Do you pray more for mercy or upward mobility? Do you pray more to see God or His gifts? Would the answer to your prayers increase or decrease your dependence upon Him?