

## **UPGRADING ONE'S SERVE!**

Mk 10:35-45

*Mack/Cheri*

*As a mother was preparing pancakes for her two young sons, Bryan and Wilbert, they began to argue over who would get the first one. Not wanting to miss a teachable moment, the mother said: "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake.'" Bryan quickly turned to his younger brother and said, "OK - Wilbert - You be Jesus!"*

I'm making an assumption that while this church is saturated with servants, each of us can ratchet up our servanthood quotient. The trouble is that our default setting is selfishness, not other-centeredness. In order to upgrade our serve - we must seek the Savior and follow the model of the Master Christ. You and I have been redeemed for a reason. Another way to say it - is that we've been saved to serve and mobilized for ministry. As we gather, upgrade and grow - we can't help but GIVE and go!

### **4 Ways to Become a Servant**

As we come to our text today - we'll see that we're more like those first disciple-followers than we care to admit. If we want to live differently than the disciples did - we must incorporate four attitudinal-actions.

## **• 1. MONITOR OUR MOTIVES.**

When we go back to Markan account, amazingly, these two disciples ask for a blank check from Jesus - *“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”* They want Jesus to say, ‘yes’ even before He hears what they want. They’re treating Jesus like a Genie who will grant them their wishes. Before we get too hard on them, don’t we often do the same when we are demanding towards Him? Some even use “name it and claim it” language as if just declaring what we want will make it so. Listen. Instead of saying to the Savior, “We want you to do whatever we ask of you,” we should be praying something like this: “We want to do for you whatever YOU ask of us.”

In v. 36 - Jesus asks them to put their request into words in order to reveal their own self-centered selfishness: *“And He said to them, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’”* They’re ready with their rehearsed request in verse 37: *“And they said to Him, ‘Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.’”* The word “grant” can be translated as, “bestow.” One translation puts it like this: “Bestow to us at once!” To sit at the right hand is the highest cabinet position and the seat on the left hand is just below that.

Now, before we get too tough on these two guys, Jesus did say in **Matthew 19:28**: *“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.”* They got that part right but their methods were messy because their motives were all mixed up. One theologian comments, *“Jesus spoke about a cross, but they were interested in a crown.”* It’s really easy for our motives to get out of whack. James and John wanted - proximity, position, power and prominence. They wanted to be the closest to Jesus and they wanted to be higher than anyone else. If we want to upgrade our serve, we must first learn to monitor our motives.

• *Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to have pure motivation?*

As best we can, we need to get our reason for serving straightened out. Let’s not serve to impress others or to try to gain favor with God. The world says, *“Actions speak louder than words”* - while the Word says, *“motives speak louder than actions and words.”* I came across a quote by Paul Miller that messed with me: **“The great struggle of my life is not trying to discern God’s will; it is trying to discern and disown my own.”**

When faced with their mixed up motives, Jesus asks a question to reveal what they were thinking: *“What do you want me to do for you?”* A truthful answer to this same question can help you and I - monitor our motives. [Here are some related questions to ask - when you’re not sure about your motivation:

- *“What is it I want?”*
- *“Why am I doing this?”*
- *“Who am I serving here?”*
- *“Who do I want to impress?”*
- *“Am I doing this for God’s glory or for my own good?”]*

It’s helpful to remember that kids learn the most through the losses in life. Character is built through stress, not success!

## • 2. PREPARE FOR PROBLEMS.

After they make their bold and brash request, Jesus responds rather bluntly in v. 38: *“You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”* He’s really saying, *“You don’t have a clue what you’re asking.”*

The word “cup” was a symbol of suffering/affliction/tribulation. To “drink” means to take something deep inside. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed in Matthew 26:39: ***“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*** The cup stood for God’s wrath and judgment. At its core, baptism means, “to be identified with by being fully submerged.” The idea here is that Jesus is about to be fully immersed in intense suffering.

On top of all the physical pain - Jesus is also about to experience the undiluted wrath of His righteous and holy Father as He takes the sins of the entire world on his shoulders. This doctrine is called “penal substitutionary atonement,” meaning that Christ died on the cross as a substitute for sinners. God imputed the guilt of our sins to Christ, and He, in our place, bore the punishment that we deserve. This was a full payment for sins, which satisfied both the wrath and the righteousness of God, so that He could forgive sinners without compromising His own holy standard. This doctrine is at the center of Christian faith and practice but - in recent days has been attacked on Twitter by a Grammy-nominated - Christian musician as something “evil” and or “horrific” that God would mandate blood sacrifice for sin. Here’s his exact quote: **“That God needed to be appeased with blood is not beautiful. It’s horrific.”**

Romans 3:25-26: ***“Whom God put forward as an appeasement by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness...so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”***

It’s interesting that Jesus uses the two words that we use for the ordinances – the cup (communion) and baptism. Incidentally, Jesus is not talking about being “sprinkled” with problems but being fully immersed in extreme and excruciating pain. Unbelievably, both James and John answer this pointed question with complete confidence in v. 39, ***“We are able.”*** I think they were a bit too eager in their response. Jesus reinforces this when He says: ***“The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.”*** They wanted glory but Jesus tells them to get ready for some grief and to prepare for some problems.

While we don’t always know in advance how much we’re going to suffer, we do know that if we’re serious about following Christ and serving Him wholeheartedly - we will face difficulty - AND I KNOW THAT’S RIGHT. **Philippians 1:29:** ***“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.”*** James didn’t suffer long because he lost his life as the first of the twelve to be martyred (**Acts 12:2**). John lived to be about

95years old but his life was filled with difficulty, culminating with his banishment to the island of Patmos. James was executed and John was exiled.

My Friends - if you're serious about serving, then get ready to suffer. You might be taken home early like James or you may battle a long time like John. To "*drink of the cup*" has reference not only to suffering, but refers to remaining faithful to the end. This phrase was understood to mean - to drain the entire cup until it was emptied. While you can't beat kingdom service, it will not always be easy. If you're serving in a ministry right now, chances are that you've already experienced some difficulty. If you haven't yet - keep on living - you will. We've done a disservice by promising that the Christian life will be trouble-free and by promoting ministry as simple and a piece of cake. It will cost you to serve Christ! Are you willing to pay the price? In v. 40 Jesus says, ***"But to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."***

### **3. ELEVATE OTHERS FIRST.**

After monitoring our motives and preparing for problems, the third way to upgrade our serve is to elevate others. In case you're wondering how the other ten felt when they saw that James and John were trying to grab

the power positions, look at v. 41: ***“And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.”*** I bet Peter must have really been torqued since he was also part of the inner circle and was considered the spokesman!

The word “indignant” means, “to be greatly afflicted and sorely vexed.” It would be fair to say they are fired up and fried up! They were really mad that these two were using their mommy to get special treatment and they weren’t going to give up the top spots without a fight. They weren’t appalled by their lack of understanding of true servanthood; they were upset that these two got to Jesus first. The spiritual attitude of the ten was not any better than that of the two.

- *Have you ever noticed how easy it is to be angry at the sin we see in others, while we indulge in the same ones ourselves?*
- *Why is it that we condemn in others what we excuse in our own lives?*

Listen to what J.D. Grear said about anger - I jumped on RightNow Media and wrote it down: ***“Most of our anger is selfish anger. Someone does something to us and we get back at them. Another kind of anger is loving anger, which brings healing to someone.”*** That’s

intriguing to me – that means anger can be retaliative or it can be redemptive.

When a spirit of competition and jealousy enters a fellowship, there is always fallout and retaliation. A desire to get ahead leads to others being left behind. Selfishness always results in dissension. When we think only of ourselves, community breaks down and unity is replaced with division and backbiting. AND GOD IS NOT THE AUTHOR OF DIVISION! I love what Jesus does next in the first part of v. 42: “*And Jesus called them to him...*” That’s exactly what needs to happen when there is tension and strife. We need to come to Jesus - together. When Jesus calls them to Himself - He does so with tenderness and familiarity. I picture Him calling a huddle and saying something like this, “My Friends, gather in. Let’s form a tight circle. Get a little closer so you can hear what I’m about to say.”

He knows their default systems are set on selfishness and so he calls them together. He doesn’t take the two brothers aside and blast away, nor does he slam the ten for being indignant. He simply brings them back to community and then gives them a lesson in how differently things are to run in His kingdom.

There is a sharp contrast between the servanthood philosophy of the Savior and the world system they were swimming in: “...*You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and*

*their great ones exercise authority over them.*” The world’s way teaches that we should spend all our energy to get to the top and then when we get there we can boss others around. When Jesus reminded them that seeking power was a “Gentile” or “pagan” practice, He was in essence telling them they should not operate this way. Rabbis often used Gentile illustrations as negative examples.

*The German Kaiser was one of the most recognized figures of WWI. After he died, his valet said this: “I cannot deny that my master was vain, he had to be the central figure in everything. If we went to a christening he wanted to be the baby, if we went to a wedding he wanted to be the bride, if we went to a funeral he wanted to be the corpse.”* **Because he was self-centered, he wanted to be the center of everything...we have similar desires in our own hearts.**

v. 43 begins with a rebuke as Jesus reframes their understanding: ***“But it shall not be so among you...”*** A Christ-follower must not operate this way. The meaning here is: ***“It shall not be,”*** or ***“It must not be.”*** In the family of God there is only one category of people: servants. Notice the rest of this verse and v. 44: ***“But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.”*** This was a counter-cultural and radical teaching for Jesus to define success in terms of servanthood.

The word “servant” is the word used for table waiter and is the root of the word for deacon “diaconos”. It literally means, “*one who waits on and serves others.*” The word “slave” refers to those who are owned by another and is completely subservient to the wishes and demands of the master.

Let’s think through the difference between a servant and a volunteer. A volunteer picks and chooses when and even whether to serve. A servant serves no matter what. A volunteer serves when convenient; a servant serves out of commitment. Someone said it well: “The servant does what he is told when he is told to do it. The volunteer does what he wants to do - when he feels like doing it.” My Friends, Jesus didn’t recruit volunteers; He redeemed us to be servants! Someone posted this...

*Lord I want to do what you ask*

*In the way that you ask*

*For as long as you ask?*

*Because you asked!*

I like the motto of the California Conservation Corps: “Long hours, hard work, low pay.” Interestingly, this is how they recruit millennials...and it’s very effective. Here’s the principle: **If we want to become truly great then we must give up personal rights and serve others.** Jesus is saying something like this: Consider everyone as someone to be served

and consider everyone to be your master. We must take opportunities to serve because we are obligated to serve. Remember that the true test of whether you're a servant is to consider how you respond when you're treated like one. Jesus defined a servant's job description in **Luke 17:10**: *“So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”*

#### **4. EMBRACE THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS.**

Jesus does not just shake up our self-centered motives and tell us to prepare for problems. He also challenges us to elevate others. And, in case we're wondering how to do this, He offers Himself as the perfect role model. Look at v. 45: *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* This verse is really the summary of the Gospel of Mark – Jesus is Servant and Savior. He served the needs of others and then demonstrated the ultimate act of servanthood when He gave His life as payment for our sins, so that we can be set free.

Let's unpack the word “ransom.” This was the price for redeeming or freeing slaves or prisoners. Thankfully, we no longer have slavery in our country, but actually, we do. It's called “sex trafficking, divided

politicking, mass incarcerating, mis-educating, racial and economic profiling, police victimizing, - ISMS promoting, religious worshipping, etc. - it takes place right here in this community.

The image of the word “ransom” is of slaves being offered on the marketplace and someone paying the price to set them free. There are three words for ransom in the New Testament.

- Agorazo = “to purchase a slave”
- Exagorazo = “to purchase out”
- Lutroo (this is the word here) = “to release or set free”

Jesus gave His life voluntarily and vicariously, meaning that what He did was for us, instead of us, in our place. **1 Timothy 2:5-6: “*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all...*”**. He paid the price and in exchange, we are set free. We give Him our rottenness and in exchange, He gives us His righteousness. That’s the GREAT EXCHANGE!

Jesus has fixed our wrongs by covering our sins. And in exchange He has given us everything we need. I encourage you to invite someone! This could be our motto: Everyone invite one! Here are four challenges.

1. Serve whenever you can.
2. Serve wherever you can.

3. Serve whoever is in need.
4. Be willing to do whatever it takes.

I remember when I went on a mission trip to Lusaka and Kasaba Bay, Zambia, Africa before I left a friend told me these words - **“Do what you can...with what you have...where you are.”** And that just might mean - letting someone else - have the first pancake. Who’s willing to upgrade their serve to be like Jesus?