

The Gospel of Matthew, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 25: Servanthood, Sight, and the Triumphal Entry

Matthew 20:17–21:11

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

What is doctrinally at stake in this passage is the very meaning of the cross and the nature of the kingdom Jesus came to bring. Three times now Jesus has foretold His death, and here He gives its deepest interpretation: He came “to give his life as a ransom for many” (20:28). His death is no tragic accident or political miscalculation; it is the deliberate, saving purpose of God, a ransom that purchases the freedom of sinners. Bound up with this is a complete redefinition of greatness. In Christ's kingdom, greatness is servanthood, and the King Himself leads the way by serving and dying. The Triumphal Entry then declares what kind of King He is: not a warlord come to overthrow Rome, but the humble King of Zechariah's prophecy, riding a donkey to a throne that turns out to be a cross.

This passage also presses hard on the formation of the student's heart. The disciples, even with the cross in plain view, scramble for status, and we are no different. Set against their blindness are two beggars who see clearly and cry out for mercy, a living rebuke to every disciple who follows Jesus while remaining blind to His true greatness and their own true need. The lesson aims to dismantle our hunger for recognition, to teach us to come to Jesus with the blind men's desperate, persistent faith, and to bow before the humble King who served us all the way to death.

So teach for both. Let your students grasp clearly that Jesus died on purpose, as a ransom, to set them free, and that He is the humble King reigning now rather than a political deliverer. And let them walk out willing to take the lowest place, to serve where no one notices, and to follow their Servant King in genuine humility and trust.

Question 1

Student Question:

For the third time Jesus tells the disciples plainly that He will be betrayed, condemned, mocked, crucified, and raised on the third day (20:17–19). Why does Jesus keep foretelling His death so specifically, and what does it teach us that the cross was not an accident but His deliberate purpose?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the striking fact that this is the third time Jesus has predicted His passion (16:21; 17:22–23; and here). Each prediction grows more detailed. This time He names the players, the Gentiles, and the specific abuses: He will be condemned to death, delivered over to be mocked,

flogged, and crucified, and raised on the third day (20:18–19). Jesus is walking toward Jerusalem with His eyes wide open.

Help students see why this repetition matters. Jesus is not stumbling into a trap; He is fulfilling a purpose. The cross is not something that happens to Him against His will but something He deliberately embraces. As He will say in this very passage, He came to give His life. The predictions establish that His death is intentional, foreknown, and chosen.

Draw out the doctrinal weight. If the cross were an accident or a defeat, the gospel would collapse. But Jesus foretells it precisely because it is the plan, the saving purpose of God woven through Scripture (Isaiah 53; Acts 2:23). He also foretells the resurrection every time, so that the cross is never the end of the sentence. Death and resurrection belong together.

Note the tragic irony for the teacher to set up: Jesus speaks of self-giving death, and the disciples immediately turn to self-advancement. Hold that contrast; it drives the whole first half of the lesson and prepares the way for the ransom saying at Q9.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross as the deliberate, foreknown purpose of Christ, not an accident (20:17–19)
- Jesus' death foretold throughout Scripture and embraced willingly (Isaiah 53; Acts 2:23)
- Death and resurrection always announced together (20:19)
- The sovereignty of God over the events of the passion

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus foretell His death so specifically and repeatedly?
- What changes when we see the cross as Jesus' deliberate purpose rather than a defeat?
- Why does Jesus always include the resurrection in His predictions?

Question 2

Student Question:

Even as Jesus speaks of His coming suffering, the disciples are preoccupied with rank and reward. Where do thoughts of your own status, recognition, or position crowd out attention to what Jesus is actually doing?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self question takes the disciples' stunning lack of awareness and turns it into a mirror. Jesus has just described being mocked and crucified, and James and John's mother kneels to request the two best seats in the kingdom (20:20–21). The timing is almost unbearable. Their minds are on thrones while His is on a cross.

Resist the urge to feel superior to the disciples. The aim is for students to recognize the same pattern in themselves. How often are we, even in church, preoccupied with our own standing, recognition, or comparison, while the deep things of Christ pass us by?

Help students name specific arenas where status-seeking crowds out attention to Jesus: at work, in ministry, on social media, in family. The hunger to be noticed, to be first, to be thought well of, is constant and subtle.

Point gently toward the cure, which the next questions will develop: a heart fixed on the self-giving Christ has less room for self-promotion. We become like what we behold. The more we gaze at the Servant, the looser status holds us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The persistence of pride and status-seeking even near Christ (20:20–24)
- Self-promotion as a rival to attentiveness to Jesus
- The need for honest self-examination about our motives (Jeremiah 17:9)
- Being transformed by beholding Christ rather than ourselves (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Discussion Prompts

- Where do thoughts of your status or recognition crowd out attention to Jesus?
- Why is it so easy to seek position even in the things of God?
- How does fixing your eyes on the self-giving Christ loosen the grip of pride?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus contrasts the rulers of the Gentiles, who lord it over others, with His kingdom, where “whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (20:25–27). How does Jesus redefine greatness, and why is this so different from how the world measures it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus responds to the disciples’ jockeying with one of the great kingdom reversals. He names the world’s pattern plainly: “the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them” (20:25). This is power as domination, greatness measured by how many serve you.

Then comes the reversal: “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” (20:26–27). Jesus does not abolish greatness; He redefines it. The path up is the path down. The great one is the servant.

Help students feel how radically this cuts against the grain. Every human society, and often the church, drifts toward ranking, status, and the love of being important. Jesus plants a different kind of community, where leaders serve, where the lowest place is the honored one, where authority exists to lift others rather than to dominate them.

Ground this in Jesus Himself, which the ransom saying makes explicit. He does not merely teach servanthood; He embodies it, serving all the way to death. Christian greatness is cruciform: it looks like the Master with a towel and a cross. This is the pattern for elders, teachers, parents, and every disciple.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The kingdom reversal: greatness defined as servanthood (20:25–27)
- The contrast between worldly domination and Christlike service
- Authority in the church exercised as service, not lordship (1 Peter 5:2–3)
- Christ Himself as the pattern and ground of servant greatness

Discussion Prompts

- How does Jesus redefine greatness, and how is it different from the world's definition?
- Where do you see the world's pattern of domination creep into the church or family?
- What does it look like for a leader to serve rather than lord it over others?

Question 4

Student Question:

True service usually means doing the thing no one notices or thanks you for. Where is Jesus calling you to serve in a hidden, humble way, and what makes that hard for you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question presses servanthood from concept into practice. It is easy to admire the idea of serving and never actually serve, especially in the ways that bring no recognition. The aim is to move students toward concrete, hidden service.

Help students understand that the truest test of servanthood is the unseen task: the work no one thanks you for, the help no one notices, the need you meet when no credit is possible. Anyone will serve when there is applause. The servant heart shows itself in the dark.

Name what makes hidden service hard. We want to be appreciated. We grow resentful when our efforts go unnoticed. We quietly keep score. The flesh recoils at the lowest place. Honest naming of these obstacles is part of the work.

Invite a specific commitment. Where is Jesus calling each student to serve in a hidden, humble way this week, expecting nothing in return? A behind-the-scenes task at church, a quiet

kindness at home, a need met without announcement. Concrete steps turn admiration into obedience.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hidden, unrewarded service as the test of a servant heart (Matthew 6:1–4)
- The desire for recognition as the chief obstacle to servanthood
- Serving as unto the Lord rather than for human praise (Colossians 3:23–24)
- Taking the lowest place in imitation of Christ (Luke 14:10–11)

Discussion Prompts

- Where is Jesus calling you to serve in a way no one will notice?
- What makes hidden service hard for you?
- How can you serve this week expecting no thanks or credit?

Question 5

Student Question:

The two blind men cry out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” and refuse to be silenced (20:30–31). What does their persistent, desperate appeal to Jesus teach us about faith and about how we are to come to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

As Jesus leaves Jericho, two blind men hear He is passing and cry out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” (20:30). Note their title for Him. ‘Son of David’ is a Messianic confession; these blind beggars see, with the eyes of faith, what many with working eyes do not. They know who is passing by.

The crowd rebukes them and tells them to be silent, but “they cried out all the more, ‘Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!’” (20:31). Their faith is persistent and undeterred. They will not let the crowd, the noise, or the embarrassment silence their cry for mercy.

Draw out what this teaches about faith. They come with nothing to offer, only need. They appeal not to their worthiness but to His mercy. They are specific, urgent, and persistent. This is how we are to come to Jesus: not cleaned up and self-sufficient, but crying out for mercy and refusing to be quieted.

Help students see the contrast Matthew is building. The disciples, who can see, are blind to Jesus’ true greatness and grasp for thrones. The blind men, who cannot see, perceive Him clearly and cry for mercy. Sometimes those the world counts least see Jesus most truly.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith as a persistent, undeterred cry for mercy (20:30–31)
- Coming to Jesus on the basis of His mercy, not our worthiness (Luke 18:13)
- The blind men’s confession of Jesus as Son of David, the Messiah
- Spiritual sight given to the humble who know their need

Discussion Prompts

- What does the blind men’s persistence teach us about how to come to Jesus?
- Why do they appeal to His mercy rather than their merit?
- How is it that those who could not see perceived Jesus more clearly than those who could?

Question 6

Student Question:

The crowd told the blind men to be quiet, but they cried out all the more. Who or what tends to silence your own crying out to Jesus, and how can you press through it this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes the crowd’s attempt to silence the blind men and applies it to the student’s own life of prayer and faith. The blind men had to push through opposition to reach Jesus, and so often do we.

Help students identify what silences their own crying out to Jesus. Sometimes it is discouragement, the sense that prayer changes nothing. Sometimes it is shame, the feeling that we have no right to ask. Sometimes it is the crowd of busyness, distraction, or the opinions of others who think such earnest seeking is excessive.

Honor the cost of pressing through. The blind men cried out all the more precisely when they were told to stop. Persistent faith often means continuing to seek Jesus when everything, inside and out, urges us to give up or stay quiet.

Invite a concrete response. Where does each student need to press through and keep crying out this week, refusing to be silenced? Naming the specific obstacle and resolving to push past it turns the blind men’s example into the student’s own practice.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Perseverance in prayer despite discouragement and opposition (Luke 18:1–8)
- Shame and distraction as voices that silence our cry to Jesus
- Bold approach to the throne of grace for mercy (Hebrews 4:16)
- Faith that refuses to be quieted

Discussion Prompts

- What tends to silence your own crying out to Jesus?
- When have you been tempted to give up seeking Him?
- How can you press through that this week and keep calling on Him?

Question 7

Student Question:

When Jesus asks the blind men, “What do you want me to do for you?” they ask simply to see, and He has compassion and heals them (20:32–34). What do their physical blindness and new sight reveal about the spiritual seeing Jesus longs to give, especially next to disciples who still cannot see?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus stops, calls the blind men, and asks, “What do you want me to do for you?” (20:32). It is the same question He asked James and John (20:21), and the contrast is pointed. The disciples asked for thrones; the blind men ask only, “Lord, let our eyes be opened” (20:33). One request is about status; the other is about sight and mercy.

Matthew tells us Jesus, “in pity, touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him” (20:34). The healing is immediate and complete, and note the response: they followed Him. Sight leads to discipleship. Those who truly see Jesus follow Him.

Draw out the deeper layer. Physical blindness and sight are, throughout the Gospels, a picture of spiritual blindness and seeing. The blind men’s opened eyes stand as a rebuke and a hope set right beside disciples who still cannot see what Jesus is about. The great need of every person is to have the eyes of the heart opened to see Christ truly (Ephesians 1:18).

Help students grasp that Jesus longs to give this spiritual sight. He has compassion. He stops. He asks. He heals. The same Jesus who opened blind eyes on the Jericho road opens the eyes of the heart to those who cry out to Him for mercy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Physical sight as a picture of the spiritual sight Jesus gives (20:32–34)
- The contrast between the blind men’s request and the disciples’ request for status
- Healing leading to discipleship: those who see, follow (20:34)
- The opening of the eyes of the heart as a great spiritual need (Ephesians 1:18)

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Matthew set the blind men’s sight right beside the disciples’ blindness?
- What does it mean that the healed men immediately followed Jesus?
- How is physical blindness a picture of our spiritual condition apart from Christ?

Question 8

Student Question:

It is possible to be near Jesus, even to follow Him, and still be blind to what matters most. Where do you need Jesus to open your eyes to something you have not been able, or willing, to see?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question presses the theme of sight into the student's own heart. The danger Matthew has been exposing is that one can be close to Jesus, even following Him, and still be blind to what matters most. The disciples are proof.

Help students consider the possibility of their own blindness. We can know much about Jesus, attend faithfully, serve actively, and yet have areas where we simply do not see: a sin we excuse, a person we despise, a pride we will not admit, a fear that rules us, a truth about Christ we have never let touch our hearts.

Note the two layers of blindness. Sometimes we cannot see; we genuinely lack understanding and need God to open our eyes. Sometimes we will not see; we are unwilling, because seeing would require change. Both need the touch of Jesus.

Invite the blind men's prayer. Encourage each student to ask, honestly, "Lord, let my eyes be opened," naming an area where they sense they have been blind. The same compassionate Jesus is ready to give sight to those who ask.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The possibility of being near Jesus yet spiritually blind (Matthew 13:14–15)
- Blindness that is inability and blindness that is unwillingness
- The prayer for opened eyes as a mark of humble faith (Psalm 119:18)
- Christ's willingness to give sight to those who ask

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you sense Jesus needs to open your eyes to something you have not seen?
- Is it a matter of not being able to see, or not being willing?
- What would it look like to pray honestly, 'Lord, let my eyes be opened'?

Question 9

Student Question:

Jesus says, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (20:28). What does it mean that Jesus gives His life as a ransom, what does this teach about why He died and what it accomplished, and how should the ransomed live in response?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest question of the lesson, the interpretive center of the whole passage: “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (20:28). Slow down and give this the fullest treatment. Here Jesus tells us, in His own words, why He came and what His death accomplishes.

Start with the word ‘ransom.’ A ransom (Greek *lytron*) was the price paid to set a captive or a slave free. Jesus is saying that humanity is held captive, enslaved by sin and its penalty, and that His life is the price that purchases our release. His death is not merely a noble example or a tragic martyrdom; it is a substitutionary payment. He gives His life in the place of, and for the benefit of, the many. This is the doctrine of redemption: we were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18–19).

Connect this to the whole sweep of Scripture. Jesus is consciously stepping into the role of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant, who “poured out his soul to death” and “bore the sin of many” (Isaiah 53:12). His death is the deliberate, saving purpose announced in the passion predictions. The cross is not Rome defeating a would-be revolutionary; it is the Servant King laying down His life to ransom sinners. This is why He could ride into Jerusalem humble and lowly rather than armed for war: His battle was against sin and death, and His weapon was His own self-giving.

Draw out what the ransom accomplishes and how it is received. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus purchases forgiveness and freedom for all who come to Him. In the churches of Christ we hold this together with the rest of the New Testament: the ransom is applied to us as we respond to the gospel in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ, where we are united with His death and raised to new life (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27). The price was paid once for all by Christ; we receive its benefit through obedient faith, and we continue in a faithful walk. We do not earn our ransom; we are bought by it, and therefore we belong to Him.

Finally, press the application Jesus Himself presses. The ransom saying is the climax of His teaching on servanthood. Because the Son of Man came to serve and to give His life, His people are to live as the ransomed: no longer grasping for thrones, but pouring out our lives in service as He poured out His. The proper response to being bought at such a price is not pride but glad, lifelong, self-giving devotion to the One who served us all the way to death. ‘You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God’ (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus’ death as a ransom, the price paid to set captives free (20:28)
- Substitutionary atonement: He gives His life for and in place of the many (Isaiah 53:12; 1 Peter 1:18–19)
- Redemption from slavery to sin and death through the cross (1 Corinthians 6:20)
- Jesus as Isaiah’s Suffering Servant fulfilling God’s saving purpose

- The ransom received through faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27)
- The ransomed belonging wholly to Christ and called to a faithful, self-giving life (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Jesus gave His life as a ransom, and what were we ransomed from?
- How does the New Testament say the benefit of His ransom is received and kept?
- Since you were bought with such a price, how should the ransomed live?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage, from the prediction of the cross to the humble King entering Jerusalem. Name one specific way Jesus, the Servant who gave His life a ransom for you, is calling you to follow Him in humility and trust this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this capstone to gather the whole passage, including the Triumphal Entry, and press it toward one concrete response. As you do, draw out what the entry into Jerusalem proclaims, since the questions have not yet treated it directly.

Jesus enters Jerusalem deliberately fulfilling Zechariah 9:9: "Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey" (21:5). Every detail preaches humility. He comes as King, yes, the crowds rightly cry "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (21:9). But He comes lowly, on a borrowed donkey, not on a warhorse leading a revolt against Rome. The crowd is right that He is King and wrong about what kind. He is the humble Servant King, riding to give His life a ransom, not to seize an earthly throne. His kingdom is the kingdom He will establish in His church, with Christ reigning from God's right hand.

Now invite transformation. The lesson has moved from the cross foretold, through the reversal of greatness, the blind men's sight, and the ransom, to the humble King entering His city. Press for the specific. A real answer might sound like, "I will take the lowest place in this ministry instead of seeking to lead it," or "I will serve my family this week without keeping score," or "I will ask Jesus to open my eyes to a sin I have been excusing."

Close in worship before the Servant King. The wonder of this passage is that the One who deserved every throne chose a donkey and a cross, and gave His life to ransom us. Lead your class to bow before Him, to lay down their grasping for status, and to follow their humble King in genuine service and trust, because He first served them all the way to death.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Triumphal Entry as the humble King fulfilling Zechariah 9:9, not a political revolt (21:1–11)
- Christ's kingdom established in His church, reigning now from God's right hand
- The integration of doctrine and a life of humble service
- Following the Servant King who gave His life a ransom for us

Discussion Prompts

- What kind of King does the Triumphal Entry reveal Jesus to be?
- What is one specific way Jesus is calling you to follow Him in humility this week?
- How can this class pray for you as you take that step?