

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 25: Servanthood, Sight, and the Triumphal Entry -- Matthew 20:17-21:11

They were on the road now, climbing toward Jerusalem, and Jesus knew exactly what waited at the top. He took the twelve aside and told them plainly: the Son of Man will be handed over, condemned, mocked, flogged, and crucified, and on the third day He will be raised (20:18-19). It is the third time He has told them, and still the words seem to slide off. For right on the heels of this somber announcement comes a mother kneeling before Jesus with a request, and two disciples angling for the best seats in the kingdom.

The mother of James and John asks that her sons sit at Jesus' right and left in His kingdom (20:21). The other ten are indignant, not because the request is unworthy but because they wanted those seats themselves. So Jesus gathers them and turns the whole world's ladder upside down. The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over people, He says, but "it shall not be so among you" (20:26). Greatness in His kingdom is not measured by who is served but by who serves. And then He says the words that explain His whole mission: "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (20:28).

As they leave Jericho, two blind men hear that Jesus is passing and begin to cry out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" (20:30). The crowd tries to silence them, but they only shout louder. Jesus stops, asks what they want, touches their eyes, and they see. It is a quiet, beautiful picture set right in the middle of the journey: the disciples who can see still grasping for status, while two blind beggars see clearly who Jesus is and cling to Him for mercy.

Then Jerusalem. But the King does not come on a warhorse with an army. He sends for a donkey and a colt, and rides in lowly, fulfilling the ancient promise of Zechariah: "Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey" (21:5). The crowds spread their cloaks and wave branches and shout "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (21:9). They are right that He is the King. They are wrong about what kind. He has not come to lead a revolt against Rome. He has come, humble and lowly, to give His life as a ransom for many.

Group Discussion: Right after Jesus foretells His own suffering and death, James and John's mother asks for the best seats in the kingdom (20:17-21). What does it reveal about the disciples, and about us, that thoughts of status rise up so quickly even in the shadow of the cross?

Personal Reflection: Jesus said that greatness in His kingdom belongs to the one who serves. Where in your life are you still quietly seeking to be served, to be recognized, or to be first, and what would it look like to take the lowest place instead?

Read Matthew 20:17-21:11

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?

8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Philippians 2:5–11, Christ emptying Himself, taking the form of a servant, and being exalted by God; Isaiah 53:4–6, 10–12, the Suffering Servant who pours out His soul as an offering for many; Zechariah 9:9, the humble king coming mounted on a donkey; Mark 10:45, the Son of Man giving His life as a ransom; 1 Peter 2:21–25, Christ leaving us an example and bearing our sins in His body.