

## INTRODUCTION

I admit my humor is a little corny sometimes, but bear with me for a moment. See if you can answer these questions:

- (1) What do you call a chicken crossing the road? Poultry in motion.
- (2) What do you call a boomerang that doesn't work? A stick.
- (3) What do you call four matadors in quicksand? Quatro sinko.
- (4) What do you call cheese that isn't yours? Nacho Cheese.
- (5) What do you call a man who falls into an upholstery machine? Fully recovered.
- (6) How do you catch a unique rabbit? Unique up on it.
- (7) What do Eskimos get when they sit too long on the ice? Polaroids.
- (8) What do you call skydiving lawyers? Skeet.
- (9) What do you call a Christian who doesn't serve others? A contradiction. There's nothing funny about that.

This message is about how greatness in the Kingdom of God is determined by our level of service to others. In a race, there may be many runners, but first place goes to the fastest. In a few weeks at the Academy Awards, there will be many nominations, but there will only be one winner in each category, the one voted best by the 6,000 members of American Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences. One week from today the Steelers and Packers will face off at Cowboys Stadium in Super Bowl 45. Only one team can be awarded the first place prize of the coveted Lombardi Trophy. But in God's eyes, first place in the Kingdom goes to those who serve.

We've been examining the parables and miracles of Jesus in Matthew, but I don't want you lose a sense of where we are in the story of Jesus. At this point, Jesus is less than a week away from the cross. He's on His way to Jerusalem, and He knows what will happen.

Matthew 20:17-28. "Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!' Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. 'What is it you want?' He asked. She said, 'Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.' 'You don't know what you are asking,' Jesus said to them. 'Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?' 'We can,' they answered. Jesus said to them, 'You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.' When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.'"

Jesus predicted exactly what would happen in Jerusalem. In mathematics, the Law of Compound Probability states that the more details you add to a prediction, the more unlikely it is to come true. For instance, I'm pulling for the Packers next week, but I believe the Steelers have the stronger team, so I predict the score will be Steelers 24 and Packers 17. That's a common score, so there's a slight chance I could be right. But then if I went on to predict how many first downs each team will get, how many turnovers there will be, and what the total passing and rushing yards for each team will be, then the probability of my prediction being right becomes astronomically unlikely.

Jesus made eight predictions about his death and resurrection, and each layer of prediction becomes less probable according to the laws of chance. Mathematics professor, Dr. Peter Stoner calculated the probability of eight random predictions happening are 1 in 100 quadrillion (that's a 1 followed by 17 zeroes). Putting this into terms we can understand, take 100 quadrillion silver dollars put a red X on one of them. Then pile those silver dollars on the landscape of Texas: That many coins would cover the entire state of Texas to a depth of two feet. Then fly over the state in a helicopter and drop a blindfolded man into the pile of coins. The chances of him picking the one silver dollar with the red X on his first try is 1 in 100 quadrillion. But remember, Jesus didn't just fulfill eight predictions about His life and death: He fulfilled *dozens!* How can this be? The only explanation is that He is the Son of God, God in the flesh.

This series is called "Parable and Miracles." And although the Jesus' predictions are a miracle, we're going to focus on three parables. In our study, I've included the metaphors and analogies that Jesus used as parables. And in this passage Jesus used three powerful word pictures, and we're going to examine each one.

### **1. A CUP: Following Jesus means that we may suffer with Him**

Jesus asked James and John if they could drink the cup he was going to drink. They were clueless about the cup so they said, "Sure, no problem!" Then Jesus said, "You will indeed drink from my cup."

As Jesus and his entourage traveled toward Jerusalem, Salome, the mother of James and John made a strange request. She asked Jesus if her two boys could sit on the left and the right of Jesus when He came into His kingdom. You might say she was trying to make a "Salome sandwich" with Jesus in the middle and her boys as the bread!

Now before we're too harsh on Salome, let's admit she is just acting like a typical (or a stereotypical) Jewish mother. I know all moms can be protective, but Jewish mothers have a reputation for being the champions. Let me quote from the cultural dictionary on Wikipedia: "The stereotype of Jewish mothers general involves a nagging, overprotective, manipulative, controlling, smothering, and overbearing mother or wife, one who persists in interfering in her children's lives long after they have become adults." Some of you are thinking, "Gee I didn't know my mom was Jewish." Now, this is not intended as any kind of a criticism. Sometimes mothers, both Jewish and otherwise, smother their children a little too much with love. I have no doubt Salome just wanted the best for her sons.

So after Salome asked this favor of Jesus I can almost hear James and John saying, "Mom! Come on! Lighten up!" Salome envisioned an earthly kingdom with three thrones. She never imagined Jesus would usher in His kingdom from a cross with two thieves on each side.

When Jesus asked the question about the cup, James and John envisioned a golden goblet of wine reserved for royalty. But Jesus had another cup in mind. He was talking about a cup of suffering.

Let's fast-forward a few days. Jesus knows the time for his arrest, torture, and crucifixion is fast approaching. He is in the Garden of Gethsemane and the Bible says, "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'" (Matthew 26:39)

I've been to the Garden of Gethsemane many times and I have knelt and prayed at a place called the Rock of Agony where it is believed Jesus knelt that night. Luke 22:44 says He was in agony. He was in such agony that the Bible says drops of blood appeared on His forehead like sweat. As He looked into this symbolic cup He saw something so hideous that it stretched his nerves as tight as piano wire and caused His blood to freeze. He knew it was a cup filled with suffering. It was full of physical suffering. He had a human body that felt pain exactly like we do. He understands your pain. That cup was filled with emotional suffering. He knew a friend would betray Him and all of the others would abandon Him. He knows how you feel when you've been betrayed and abandoned. That cup was filled with spiritual pain. He knew all the guilt and shame of all the sins of the world would be placed upon Him. Beyond the emotional and physical pain, I think it was the thought of sin that made Jesus gag in repulsion.

It was a cup of suffering and Jesus knew James and John would one day drink from the same cup.

According to Acts 12, James was the first of the Twelve to die for Jesus. Herod Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great, who had tried to kill the infant Jesus, arrested James. Then he had a Roman soldier behead him with a sword. Can you picture James kneeling there? As the sword flashed through the air, I wondered if James thought about a cup. He gulped down the full bitter cup of suffering. But in the next instance, the cup became sweet because he was with his Master.

John was called upon to sip the cup of suffering more slowly. He had his first sip of suffering in Acts 5 where he was beaten for preaching about Jesus. Tradition tells us John was later arrested and the Roman Emperor Domitian tried to execute him by boiling him in oil. It's hard to imagine how painful that must have been, but John didn't die. God wasn't through with him yet. He was exiled to a prison on a small island called Patmos where he received a Revelation of Jesus that is the last book in our Bible. Any burn victim can understand the constant pain that must have been part of John's life. Two years after being there on that island, Domitian died and tradition says John returned to Ephesus where he later died at age 80. James drank the cup in one gulp, and John sipped his over a period of years, but Jesus was right—they both drank of the same cup from which He drank.

And we must understand we sometimes are called upon to suffer as a Christian. Some people make the same mistake Salome made. They think following Jesus leads to fame, position, wealth, and power. They are mainly in it for what they can get out of it. But suffering is a part of following Jesus. The Bible says, "If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." (1 Peter 4:16)

I man new-in-the-faith once said to me, "Now that I'm a Christian, this means the end of my problems!" I smiled and said, "Yep, it's the end alright—it's the front end of your problems!"

It's funny how sometimes a verse from the Bible just keeps hopping up so much that you know it's not coincidence. As I was preparing this message I had selected this verse, and on Friday morning, Coach Brad McCoy used this verse and then later that day a friend told me that this verse was their life verse. If you're going through a time of struggle and suffering maybe you need to pay attention here. What do you do when you are struggling and suffering? Here's God's answer. "Rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope doesn't disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." (Romans 5:3-4) God wants us to rejoice in our suffering? What's up with that? Everybody "Yes" to the hope but they say, "No thanks" to the suffering. But suffering puts us on the pathway to hope.

I've seen Michelangelo's famous sculpture, The David, in Florence. Someone asked him how he could take a block of marble and carve such a magnificent figure. He said, "I just cut away everything that didn't look like David." I can relate to that because God has been working on me for years cutting away everything that doesn't look like the David that Jesus wants me to be. He may be chipping away at you to remove everything that doesn't look like the person He wants you to be. He often does this by allowing us to experience suffering.

## **2. A RANSOM: Kidnapped by sin, Jesus is our only hope for liberation**

The second word picture is a ransom. Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to give his life as a ransom for many." A ransom is a price paid to release a captive or to return seized property. We are all familiar with the current problem with Somali pirates who are hijacking commercial shipping vessels and holding the crew and the cargo for ransom. Since 2008 it is estimated Somali pirates have been paid over \$100 million in ransoms.

The most famous kidnapping of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century occurred in 1932 when Charles Lindberg's 20-month old son was kidnapped. After a great deal of negotiation, a \$50,000 ransom was paid to a stranger for the return of the infant. But the child was never returned because he had been murdered shortly after the kidnapping. The kidnapper/murderer was later identified and arrested. It was one of the first cases where forensic evidence like handwriting analysis was used to solve the case. The perpetrator was arrested, tried and executed.

Spiritually speaking, we need to be ransomed because our own sin and disobedience has kidnapped us from our relationship with our Creator. But we can't pay the ransom.

Pastor John Piper comments on this verse by writing: "Our sin had, as it were, kidnapped us and

put us in a prison of our own making, far from God, in the chains of iniquity, under God's holy wrath, and powerless to free ourselves. One of the images the Bible uses for our liberation is ransom. A ransom had to be paid."

This idea of the need for a ransom is found in the Old Testament as well. The Bible says, "No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is never enough." In other words, we are unable to pay the price to ransom ourselves or any other man. But there is hope because it says in verse 15, "But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself." (Psalm 49:7-8, 15)

When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the ransom for our sins. Who received the ransom payment? Some people corrupt this beautiful doctrine by saying the ransom was paid to Satan, but nothing could be further from the truth. It's not like Satan had to be "paid off" to let us go. What happened to Satan on the cross was not payment, but defeat. So who received the payment? God the Father accepted the payment in the form of a sacrifice. Ephesians 5:2 says Jesus "gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Christ has set us free from the bonds and shackles of our sin. But He didn't set us free to do our own thing; He paid the ransom to set us free to serve Him. That leads into our next picture:

### **3. A BONDSLAVE: First place in the kingdom belongs to the one who serves others**

Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be first must be your slave." Jesus demonstrated the best picture of servanthood the night before He was crucified. The disciples were all sitting there with dirty feet waiting to eat the Passover meal. The job of washing feet always fell to the lowest slave. The disciples all felt they were too important to stoop to such a menial job. But Jesus took off his coat and grabbed a towel and went to each disciple and washed his filthy feet. Jesus wants each one of us to be willing to be a slave like that.

When I say the word "slave" what comes to your mind? If you're thinking about antebellum slavery in the South, forget that image. And if you're thinking about the horrible human trafficking happening around the world, forget that image. The word used here is *doulos*, which means a bonds slave. In many of his letters Paul identifies himself as a *doulos*, a bonds slave of Jesus.

In the Old Testament, a slave was under obligation to work for a master for six years, but on the year of Jubilee, the slave became a free person. However, if the slave had been treated well and felt like a part of the master's family, which often happened, they could volunteer to stay under the employment of their master. That's when they became a bonds slave, a permanent voluntary servant. According to Exodus 21 the master would take the slave to a wooden door or post and pierce his ear with an awl in front of the judges. The bonds slave would proudly wear an earring as a sign of loving commitment to their master. That's the kind of bonds slave we should be. There's even a Christian song that says, "Pierce my ear, O Lord, I pray; Take me to your door this day. I will serve no other god; Lord, I'm here to stay. For you have paid the price for me; with your love you ransomed me. I will serve you eternally; a free man I'll never be."

We may resist the Western imagery of being a slave, but a bondslave was someone who voluntarily surrendered to serve a master. So here's a good definition of a slave: **A BONDSLAVE IS A PERSON WHOSE ONLY INTEREST IS FULFILLING THE WILL OF THE MASTER.** And when you're a *doulos* of Jesus, you don't have to worry about anything. Your master will take care of you and you are free to serve Him. It involves absolute obedience to Christ, absolute loyalty to Christ, and absolute security in Christ.

The Apostle Paul knew what it was to be a bondservant. He wrote, "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." (Romans 6:18) "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible." (1 Corinthians 9:19) Paul was a voluntary slave of Jesus Christ and he served His Master by serving others for one reason, to win them to faith in Jesus Christ. One of the best kinds of evangelism is servant evangelism. It's where you show people the love of Christ by performing acts of kindness. And you always let them know you are showing them kindness because God has shown you kindness for Jesus' sake.

One of my favorite people, Janie Hogg, joined Jesus and her husband, Bob, in heaven this week. She had a great sense of humor and loved to write short funny four line poems, called Quatrains. For instance she wrote one entitled "Snakes." "Snakes are very slender creatures; With not many attractive features; But when they're absent I never wonder; If absence really makes the heart grow fonder." But the one she used to quote the most is my favorite. She might be in the hospital or feeling poorly and you'd ask, "How are you today?" She'd respond with one of her poems. "I feel like hell; I feel like hell; I feel like hell; Yes, I feel like helping someone today." I smile whenever I think of that. A slave of Jesus is someone who doesn't complain about how they feel; instead they are looking to help someone in need. And nine times out of ten when you help someone else you feel better yourself.

## CONCLUSION

Jesus said first place goes to those who are the slaves. You shouldn't be surprised because earlier in this same chapter Jesus said, "The first shall be last and the last shall be first." Let me tell you a modern parable about the kingdom of heaven.

One day Apple decides to give away free iPads at a certain time and place. You arrive and there's a long line, but you take your place at the back of the line. Then a security guard comes up and says, "Your place in line is determined by how wealthy you are and how important you are. Tell me how much money you have and how famous you are." You give him your story and he moves you up in the line or back, depending on your status. Finally after a lot of reshuffling of the line, everyone is standing in order of wealth and importance. You're thinking, "Gee, the people at the front of this line probably don't need a free iPad. They probably already have several. In fact, they have everything they need. But I don't really care as long as I get mine. "

Finally Steve Jobs comes out and stands in front of an 18-wheeler loaded with iPads. He has a bullhorn and asks, "Who wants a free iPad?" And everyone goes nuts. Then He says, "Okay, everyone here's what I want you to do. I want you to turn around and face the opposite direction." Then he hops into the 18-wheeler and drives it beside the line all the way to the back

of the line, which is now the front of the line. And he starts handing out the iPads to the least important and poorest first. Why? Because the last shall be first and the first shall be last.

Apple would never do that, but God does. The world has its own way of ranking importance. We think someone is really important if they have a lot of people working for them, running at their every beck and call. Take the President for instance. There are thousands who serve him, and all it takes is a call or a nod and they spring into action. But God has different standard. Let me express it this way: The world determines greatness by how many servants a person has; but in God's Kingdom, greatness is determined by how many people you serve. In God's kingdom, first place goes to the servants, to the people the world puts at the back of the line of prominence.

Even in the church, we sometimes have our own pecking order. But in God's final accounting, those who sing beautifully aren't first; and those who preach eloquently aren't first. Instead those who serve humbly are first. Because when we meet Jesus He won't "Well sung good and faithful singer." He won't say, "Well said good and faithful speaker." He will say, "Well done good and faithful servant."

## OUTLINE

Jesus used three powerful word-pictures:

1. A CUP: Following Jesus means that we may suffer with Him

*"You will indeed drink from my cup."*

"If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." *1 Peter 4:16*

2. A RANSOM: Kidnapped by sin, Jesus is our only hope for liberation

*"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to give his life as a ransom for many."*

"No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is never enough...But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself." *Psalms 49:7-8, 15*

3. A BONDSLAVE: First place in the kingdom belongs to the one who serves others

*"Whoever wants to be first must be your slave."*

"You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." *Romans 6:18*

"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible."  
*1 Corinthians 9:19*

**A BONDSLAVE IS A PERSON WHOSE ONLY INTEREST IS FULFILLING THE WILL OF THE MASTER.**

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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