

## “THE KEY TO THE HEART OF A CULTURE”

Matthew 20:18-28

### INTRODUCTION

1. If you’re a sports fan, you know this has been a crazy week. First the U.S. soccer team actually won a game in the World Cup before it was knocked out by Ghana.

Then two tennis players at Wimbledon finished the longest match in the history of professional tennis which lasted over 11 hours and was played on three different days.

Then the NBA draft was held to determine the future of the best college players in the country. But the draft was dwarfed by the speculation about where LeBron James is going to play basketball next year.

But maybe the craziest story of the week was the rumor New York Knicks basketball team made plans to host an elaborate meal for LeBron at a high-end location in downtown Manhattan next Thursday, July 1<sup>st</sup>, the day he becomes a free agent. The tentative plan is for the Knicks to host LeBron and his friends for a large dinner party catered by a celebrity chef. This is just the first of what is expected to be many attempts to sign the most coveted free agent in professional basketball.

All this is similar to what LeBron went through when he was 18. Shoe companies like Reebok, Adidas, and Nike chartered private planes to fly him and his friends around the country in order to get him to sign a multi-million dollar deal with them.

2. Now don’t misunderstand...I’m a big basketball fan. I hope LeBron re-signs with the Cleveland Cavaliers and leads them to a championship. But all this attention on LeBron is typical of the culture in which we live.

How many of you would like to be invited to a high-end restaurant in Manhattan which overlooks a great view of the city in order to sign a contract worth millions and millions of dollars? Who wouldn’t like that? You see, we live in a culture that appeals to our own selfishness. Advertisers insist that we can have whatever we want, whenever we want it, however we want it.

Eg. Burger King-Box of fries-You have the right to what you want, exactly when you want it-we may be the king-but my friend are The Almighty Ruler.

3. All this stands in stark contrast with the words of Jesus that are the focus of our attention today. If you have a copy of the Scriptures, I encourage you to turn to the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew. Today we want to examine three counter-cultural ideas that will help us deal with thinking of a world that’s dominated by self-centeredness.

eg. Did you ever get bumped from a flight as you headed for the last leg of a long trip? Did you ever place an order in a restaurant and not get what you ordered? Did you ever go to buy something on sale only to discover later that the fine print in the flier said that your item wasn’t on sale after all? Did you ever order at a coffee shop...and not get what you asked for?

We’re told that we live in a service-oriented culture...but all it takes is for something to go wrong with our service and ...look out! So the words of Jesus challenge us to server-not to be served. They stand in stark contrast to the attitudes that prevail in our world.

Let’s pick up the story in verse 17:

*“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.’” (Matthew 20:17-21)*

Now here’s the first lesson about serving in a self-centered culture...

## **1. WHEN WE SERVE OTHERS, WE REJECT OUR OWN INCLINATION TOWARD SELF-CENTEREDNESS.**

When you think about it, Jesus dropped a bomb on His disciples in this story. By this time, they’d been with Him for three years. They’d seen Him heal the sick and raise the dead. They’d listened to Him teach in a way that was unlike any other teacher. Suddenly, something strange happened.

Jesus predicted that He would be betrayed, condemned, beaten, and killed at just the right moment. My guess is the disciples didn’t know what to think. Stunned!!

About that time, a woman, named Salome, ignored what Jesus has just mentioned, and said, “Hey Jesus, when you set up your kingdom, can my boys have the best seats in the house?”

Now her sons happened to be James and John. They were pretty close to Jesus. So she does what a lot of moms would do, she notices their dedication and says, “How about a little pay back for my boys? Could they sit on your right hand and left hand in your kingdom?”

Don’t misunderstand...I don’t think Salome was a bad mom. I don’t think she meant to be self-centered or misguided. She had no clue what she was really asking for her sons. She just did what came natural to her and to most of us. She asked for the best seats.

Do you know what? Most of us want the same thing...we want a little more power...a little more influence...a little more position...a little more prominence...a little better seat.

We want bigger SUVs and nicer homes and comfy-er couches and flatter flat screens. We want the best teams for our kids and the best clothes and the best education that money can buy.

We want to do our jobs and leave work on time without being asked for much extra.

Our inclination is to live self-centered lives. We like it when people serve us and treat us with favor. Anybody here not like that?

D. L. Moody once said it like this: “The measure of a person is not how many servants they have, but how many people they serve.”

You see, what Jesus taught is upside down thinking in our culture. He taught that the way up is the way down. He emphasizes over and over again. Here’s the principle...If we think of ourselves less—we’ll automatically think of others more. And that’s a radical way to live in our

world. Rick Warren-not teaching to think less of ourselves but think of ourselves less.

So what I want to do for just a moment is help us get really practical with this idea of serving others. Could I offer some suggestions that will help you evaluate your own inclination to self-centeredness?

- Look at your schedule for the next week

How much of it is about you and how much of it is about others? Just do a little analysis. What could change in your life that would make you more oriented toward serving others?

This week almost 300 teachers and helpers served children during Vacation Bible School! It was amazing! According to my estimate our workers volunteered over 10,000 hours combined in the name of Christ...just for VBS!!

Here's another practical suggestion:

- Make a list of seven serving ideas for the next week

Develop one practical way to serve others every day. You might start by doing the dishes at home or taking somebody else to lunch or helping to watch somebody's kids or a thousand different things.

Maybe you want to sign up to help volunteer on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July to help serve our community during the fireworks celebration by passing out water or helping with children's games. Just choose this week to start serving others. It's amazing what God will do if we'll choose that lifestyle.

I love what Helen Keller said long ago, "I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to

accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble." -- Helen Keller

When we serve others we reject our own inclination toward self-centeredness. There is another principle out of this story...

## 2. WHEN WE SERVE OTHERS, WE ALSO REVEAL THE IDEA OF THE GOSPEL

Let's read on in this story.

*"'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." (Matthew 20:22-24)*

Did you catch the question Jesus asked? "Can you drink the cup I'm going to drink?" Basically He was saying to His followers...You don't have a clue what I'll experience when I suffer and die for your sin. "I'm going to surrender all of my privileges as God and give up my life so that you can receive something you could never deserve."

Do you understand that's the Gospel? Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came to earth in a human body, gave us what we could not give ourselves. He fully paid for our sin through His death on the cross. He offers us a gift we don't deserve...The forgiveness of God.

I love these words in 2 Corinthians 8:9:

*“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9)*

The Prophet Isaiah says it like this:

*“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:5, 6)*

Eg. In the Hanan Province in China, there is an orphan home for orphans who are both deaf and mute. Every message in our world says to them: “You don’t matter.”

Max Lucado’s children’s book, “You are Special,” was translated into Mandarin and made available to these orphans. The book tells the story of Punchinello—a wooden person in a village of wooden people. The villagers had a practice of sticking stars on the achievers and dots on the strugglers.

Punchinello’s wooden body was plastered with dots. Then he met Eli, his maker, who affirmed his value: “I made you, and I don’t make mistakes.” When Punchinello heard these words, his dots began to fall off.

A missionary described what happened when these abandoned orphans read this story for the very first time. He said, “At a certain point, every orphan started crying. These children had been abandoned and considered valueless by their natural parents because they were born “broken.” When the idea came through in the story that they are special simply because they were made by a

loving Creator—everyone started crying—including their teachers.”

Do you understand today that you and I are broken apart from what Jesus has accomplished for us through His death on the cross? He offers to us what we cannot provide for ourselves and that’s very good news! And that’s the heart of the Gospel! He invites us to believe and receive what He’s done—John 1:12.

Through His death, He offers us what we will never deserve! When we serve others, we reveal the idea of the Gospel. When we serve others, we reject our own inclination toward self-centeredness.

And there is one more counter-cultural idea that comes out of this story...

### **3. WHEN WE SERVE OTHERS, WE REFLECT THE IMAGE OF JESUS**

Look at these next words:

*“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 become 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 to give his life as a ransom for many.’ (Matthew 20:25-28)*

Eg. This is some of what John Wesley had in mind years ago when he said: “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, and all the places you can, and all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can...” Why? When we do, we show others what Jesus is like!!

Paul wrote this to the Philippians:

*“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”*  
(Philippians 2:5-7)

Now here is the deal folks...if Jesus came to serve...and He invites all of us to follow His example...shouldn't our lives be characterized by serving others?

In other words when people who have yet to find Christ think of Christians, they ought to think of servants. Sadly that's often not the case! You know the perception our culture has of Christians? In many places it's not good.

Eg. In fact, in a book called “Unchristian” author, David Kinnaman, writes that those who have yet to find Christ “think Christians no longer represent what Jesus had in mind, that Christianity in our society is not what it was meant to be...for many people, the Christian faith looks weary and threadbare.”

Do you know why? I think it's because we've lost the heart of serving!

That's why every Saturday during the school year we invite you to be a part of 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturdays. Over the months, men of our church have spent hundreds of hours on construction projects for under-resourced families in this community on 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturdays. We've visited nursing homes and passed out groceries and raked leaves and delivered Christmas trees. Do you know why we're doing that? Because we want our church to be known as the church that serves people like Jesus has served us.

Eg. That's one of the reasons our high school students spent a week in South Bend conducting a soccer camp for under-resourced children. That's why 17 young adults are in southeast Asia visiting our orphans homes today to express the love of Jesus to children without a mom or a dad.

Eg. That's why we have a ministry called “Sowing Hope.” Thanks to all the volunteers 61 children from Sowing Hope attended VBS this week.

Eg. Recently I read about a group of salesmen who were late for their flights at the airport. They ran through the terminal and brushed against an apple stand, and the apples went flying everywhere.

Without stopping or even noticing, they managed to get to the gate and boarded the plane before it left. That is, all but one of the salesmen.

He saw what happened to the apples and felt so bad that he went back to help the young lady operating the apple stand. He knew he would miss his flight, so he called his wife to make sure she knew he would arrive on a later flight.

He went back to the area where the apples spilled and found that the young lady operating the apple stand was totally blind. Tears were running down her cheeks as she hopelessly tried to get the apples off the floor as the crowd in the terminal pushed passed her.

The salesman knelt down and began to help. He put the apples in the correct baskets and set up the stand for business. As he was doing this, he noticed that many of the apples were bruised, so he set them aside in another basket. He pulled out a \$20 bill and gave it to the girl. He

said, "I'm the one who knocked over your apples, please take this money and forgive me."

As he turned to leave, the confused young girl called out to him and said, "Sir. Sir. Are you Jesus?"

My friend, when we serve in the name of Jesus Christ we reflect who He is to others.

## CONCLUSION

1. You'll see this logo in many places around our ministry. Do you know why we use this logo? Because we believe that if we've really experienced the grace of God in our lives, we'll look for ways to serve and to give to others. We'll look to help others find the grace that changed us.

So as we close this morning I'm going to ask you to take an inventory of your life. Ask yourself this question:

How much is my life about me and how much of my life is about others?

Now as we close I'm going to ask everybody in this room to take the Communication Card and I want you to turn quietly to the back and look at the card as you bow your head.