

## Did You Come to Serve? [Slide 1] Matthew 20:20-28

Why did you come today? Did you come to get answers to some questions you have about God or the Bible? Did you come to receive some encouragement for a difficult situation you are facing? Did you come because you wanted to find some peace from something that is troubling you? Did you come because you are lonely and want to find some friends or a friend? Did you come out of duty because this what you are supposed to do? Did you come because you were curious to find out what it is like here? These can all be good reasons to come to church, but what about week after week? What keeps you coming back weekly?

Today we begin a three-week sermon series that I have entitled: Improving Your Serve. One of the six purposes of the church and of each Christian is service. God has called us to serve. In fact, God has revealed that service is the pathway to greatness in his Kingdom.

I watch to see who shows up to serve and who doesn't. I watch who shows up at church work days. I noted who stayed to help us put up Christmas decorations in the church last December and who didn't. I saw who helped out in Hurricane Harvey relief efforts either by mucking out houses, making meals, working at distribution centers, filling sandbags, or helping with the Prescott team. Often it is the same people, the ones who come to serve.

This morning two types of people will walk into Wal-Mart. The first group is the consumers or customers. They are coming in to get what they need or want. They will pick items off the shelves that are of benefit to them and then they will leave. The second group to enter Walmart are the servers or the Walmart employees. They come to assist the consumers to obtain what they want or need.

Essentially two groups of people walk into a church. The first group is there to find something they want or need. The second group is composed of those who have come to assist the first group to find what they want or need. To which group do you belong?

Now, granted, each of us needs to eat, so there are going to be times we go to church to consume. We do need some truth. We do need some encouragement. We do need some friendships, but if Jesus is the owner of the church and you have entered his service as his disciple, what do you think he has hired you to do: to consume or to serve? What did Jesus come to do?

I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Matthew 20:20-28. Matthew is the first book in the New Testament. Matthew 20:20-28

[Slide 2] Let's begin with verses 20-21. Read. The sons of Zebedee are James and John, two of Jesus' twelve disciples. John is the one who ended up writing the Gospel of John and the three letters of John at the back of your New Testament. James and John come with their mother to make a special request of Jesus. Matthew records the mother's words and from Matthew's account you get the impression that mom does all the talking, but when you read Mark's account of this same incident in Mark 10:35-45 you find out that James and John also talked to Jesus and made the request. So, putting the two passages together, James and John were willing participants along with their mother and all three pressed Jesus with the request to let James and John sit at Jesus's right and left hand in his kingdom.

Jesus is the king, so to sit at his right and left hand in the coming kingdom is to sit in the two places of greatest honor. We can't prove it, but there is a possibility that the mother of James

and John is actually Jesus' aunt on Mary's side. This would explain why she feels comfortable enough to approach Jesus with this request. Jesus, being her nephew, should be willing to elevate the position of her children and his own cousins.

If you're like me you probably view mother and sons as being a little brash and probably insensitive, because this request comes soon after Jesus told his disciples that he was going to be crucified and raised in three days. But if we can for the moment lay aside the enormity of the request and just focus on the fact that they were coming to Jesus to get something, then their actions look disturbingly like our own. How often do you and I come to Jesus to get something: a prayer answered, a blessing, comfort? They came to get position and honor, but the key is: they came to get not to give.

[Slide 3] Jesus is actually kind and gracious in his response. He tells them that he does not have the authority to grant their particular request, only the Father has that authority, but they should realize that the price of honor and position in God's Kingdom is suffering. Suffering precedes honor and position. Let's read verses 22-24. Read.

Jesus does not criticize James and John for making the request. Perhaps he considered it a compliment that they wanted to be with him or that they were so convinced he was the Messiah that they would make this request. He is certainly kinder to them than the rest of the disciples were. What he questions is whether they understand the price of being associated with him and that places of great honor are rewarded to those who have suffered much. Two Scriptures that talk about suffering coming before glory are Romans 8:17 and Rev. 3:21 that I have listed on your sermon outline.

The cup Jesus refers to is a figure for suffering. In Matthew 26:39 Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane that if possible for the Father to let the cup pass by Jesus. He is referring to his approaching arrest, beating, and death. In all four Gospels Jesus refers to the cup he must drink. In John 18:11 Jesus said to Peter, "Read."

Jesus assures them that they will drink the cup of suffering, but only the Father will determine the seating arrangements in the Kingdom. James was martyred. John was exiled to the Island of Patmos. They both did drink the cup of suffering.

The lesson for you and I to learn is to not be so eager to gain glory in God's Kingdom or to aspire to the highest position unless we're willing to pay the price of suffering that comes with it.

[Slide 4] Jesus then explains that the path to greatness, the one that usually will entail suffering, is the path of servanthood. Let's read verses 25-27. Read.

In the world system leaders typically use their power and position to elevate themselves and put others down. You need to listen to only a few tweets to know that is the case. In the pagan world of the first century, humility was regarded as a vice, not a virtue. In contrast, God's kingdom operates under different principles because God rewards different behaviors. God rewards and elevates those who serve. Those who voluntarily serve others to the extent they are almost like a slave, are the ones who are greatest in the Kingdom of God.

What this means is that you and I probably will not know the greatest Christians of this generation because most of the time they serve in obscurity. They are not the ones headlining a major conference or speaking into the cameras, but the ones without fanfare or much recognition go about their service.

[Slide 5] If you are going to become like Jesus, then you have to become a servant. Jesus set himself as the example in verse 28. Read.

When Jesus came to the Earth, he did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. His death was his ultimate act of service. His death was a ransom on

behalf of many. He paid the price of our sin by his death. He paid for many, but not all because not all believe in Jesus and receive the benefits of his death, but many do.

Jesus' whole life was one of service and verse 28 in many ways perfectly summarizes his life. Jesus did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. This verse is the source of my sermon title: Did you come to serve? That is the question we can ask of almost any endeavor: Did you come to serve? When you go to work, do you go to serve? When you go to school, do you go to serve? When you go out in public, do you go to serve? When you come home to your family, do you go to serve? When you come to church, do you come to serve?

[Slide 6] So, let me step on toes by exploring what it means to come to serve. First, servants are willing to sacrifice. Suffering involves sacrifice. Serving others requires sacrifice. So, how many of you would be willing to sacrifice your relaxed Sunday morning by getting here at 8:30 AM to pray for the worship service, for our guests, for the SS classes and ABF's? I know the present answer to that question. I wonder if the answer will change next Sunday. How many of you are sacrificing by being involved in regular community service? How many of you have sacrificed your time to be a mentor? How many of you are sacrificially giving to the Lord's work where you actually have to forego some things in order to give to the Lord? How many of you are not involved in any ministry of the church? Did you come to serve means "Did you come to sacrifice?"

Often sacrifice comes in small installments. Fred Craddock in an address to ministers said this: Read p. 37 Garden book. Servants are willing to sacrifice.

[Slide 7] Servants are also the ones who help even when they feel uncomfortable. They are willing to sacrifice their comfort and security. So, you feel uncomfortable working with children or Junior High or the elderly and that is why you don't serve them or visit them? Since when is comfort a determining factor in what God is calling you to do?

I am going to make a distinction here between comfort and giftedness. I do believe that God wants us to serve in our giftedness, but not necessarily in our comfort zone. For about seven years now I have been leading a children's after school club at TW Ogg and mentoring fourth graders. I would say that the age group I feel least comfortable working with is children, but that is who I have been serving. Why? Because I felt this was a strategic ministry initiative that God wanted me to do. I'm still ministering in my gifts of teaching and leadership, it is just not with my preferred age group.

How many times do you automatically eliminate a group of people to serve because you don't feel as comfortable or as drawn to that group? What God wants from us is faith. Where is faith most developed, when we are in comfortable situations or challenging situations? Wouldn't you "think that God might at times purposefully call you into uncomfortable serving situations because that is what will cause you to most depend upon him? The next time you are provided with the opportunity to serve in what for you would be an uncomfortable setting, don't immediately blow it off because it is uncomfortable. Ask God if that is what he wants you to do. True servants are willing to go wherever God sends them. They are willing to get uncomfortable.

[Slide 8] Finally, servants let the needs of others dictate their decisions. How do you decide what time to arrive at church? Do you ever think, "Maybe a guest or even a regular might arrive early before Sunday School. I should be there to welcome them and talk to them so they won't feel odd or out of place." Do you ever think like that? Do you purposely take less than you want at the potluck meals to make sure the ones behind you have enough? Do you put things back where you found them so the next person who needs it doesn't have to hunt for it? Do you leave

your friends to go talk to that person who is standing alone? Do you even look around for people standing or sitting alone?

[Slide 9] None of us is going to match Jesus Christ in terms of coming to give rather than coming to get. I'm sure we all want to get something from our involvement in church. It would be hard to give and not get anything, but we are not called to be consumers. We are called to be servants.

Following Christ means that I come primarily to give rather than to get.

I must say that our capacity to give is related to how much we have received from Jesus. The more we receive grace and joy from Jesus, the more it can overflow onto others. Jesus himself said, "Come unto me you who are weak and heavy laden and I will give your rest." Salvation is necessary in order to become an overflowing servant because when we trust in Jesus Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit who fills us with the goodness of God and enables us to serve others in a life-giving way.

Jesus spoke these words to his disciples who had already chosen to follow Christ. In short order Jesus would send his Holy Spirit to fill and empower them so that they could serve as Jesus did. Without Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, the kind of service I have described is not really possible. If you don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ, that needs to be your starting point. You need first to trust in Jesus as your Savior and submit to him as your God.

However, most of you listening to me have chosen to follow Christ. This is part of what following Christ looks like. It means to come to serve rather than to be served. Let's pray.