

**Serving & Sacrificing**  
**DWJD - Week 9**  
**Matthew 20**  
**11/06/22**

Tim. Pastor. **Matthew 20. Pray.**

### Counter-Cultural Christianity

**Have you ever noticed just how revolutionary and counter-cultural the way of Jesus truly is?**

**Consider these contrasts:**

- In a world of endless entertainment, the way of Jesus is an invitation to silence and solitude.
- In a world of noise and distraction, the way of Jesus requires paying attention.
- In a world of speed and hurry, the way of Jesus is patient and slow.
- In a world of radical individualism, the way of Jesus is about a community.
- In a world of digital detachment, the way of Jesus is about embodied presence.
- In a world obsessed with external image, the way of Jesus is about the inner life.
- In a world of casual commitments, the way of Jesus is about covenant faithfulness.

It's no wonder that Jesus would pray something like this for his disciples in **John 17:15 - 15 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.**

There have always been ways, throughout history, that our three spiritual enemies - the pulls of our hearts and the current of the world and the temptations of the devil - run directly counter to the ways of discipleship to Jesus.

They may take different forms and nuances and shapes in different times and different places but the thread is still the same - the way of Jesus is always counter-cultural.

And our practice today is one of those areas that is maybe the most clearly so:

**In a world of power, self-advancement and rising to the top, the way of Jesus is about sacrificial service to others.**

**Here's our practice for today - Serving & Sacrificing.**

That is the way of Jesus. That is what we are called to - a life of doing what Jesus did in learning to lay down our lives in sacrificial service to those around us.

### Matthew 20 - Walkthrough

Turn with me to Matthew 20:17ff...

#### Matthew 20:17-28

**17 And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, 18 "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death 19 and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."**

Now, just to set the scene for you - we are on the way to the cross. We are heading there, the very next chapter of Matthew - Matthew 21 is the triumphant entry into Jerusalem that kicks off holy week - the final week of Jesus' life before the crucifixion.

We are in the thick of it right here and Jesus says to his disciples, for the 3rd time in the book of Matthew - I'm going to be killed.

I'm trying to warn you guys, I'm trying to help get your mind around this - you think the Kingdom I'm ushering in is one of glory and power and exaltation - and it is - but it is not going to come about the way you think it is.

**The way to glory in the kingdom of God is through death.**

I'm going to be condemned by the Jewish leaders and then mocked, flogged (beaten), and crucified by the Romans. Do you understand the way of Jesus is the way of suffering leading to life?

Based on the interaction he's about to have, probably not:

**20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons (James and John), and kneeling before him she asked him for something.**

It's important to understand this is not a random person coming up to Jesus out of nowhere. This is a woman named Salome, and her two sons are James and John. And it's likely based on what we read elsewhere in the gospels that she is actually Jesus' aunt. So there's family ties here, relational history here - she's coming to Jesus, Savior of the World but also her nephew, with a request on behalf of her sons, his cousins.

**21 And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."**

This is not a crazy request - Jesus had just told them a little while earlier that when he sits on the throne to rule and reign that his disciples would also sit on twelve thrones around him. So it's not totally absurd for her to ask for them to sit on thrones, she just wants the closest chairs.

In that time in a king's throne in a throne room, the thrones went from most important to least important, so the closer you sat to the king, the more prominence and recognition and status you had. So she's asking that in this future Jesus is promising, that her sons would be the most recognized, most exalted, have the highest prominence over all of the other disciples.

**22 Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?"**

Jesus, as he so often does, shifts the focus. When addressed with a question, Jesus often shifts it and asks a new question or makes a new statement to get to the heart of the matter. It's not about the place of prominence - can you drink the cup I'm about to drink? Meaning - can you walk the path of suffering and sacrifice that I am about to walk?

Can you drink this cup? Can you lower yourself all the way to sacrifice and service? Can you become the least among the others?

**They said to him, "We are able." 23 He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."**

Yep, you'll suffer (which is true, James is the first of the disciples to be killed for the faith and John is exiled onto an island for the remainder of his daylives), but I can't tell you if that means you'll sit on the right hand and left, that's God the Father's call, sorry fellas.

**24 And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 26 It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

**The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.**

The kingdom of God is an upside down kingdom. The first are last, the last are first. The greatest in the kingdom of God are the lowest - those who give their lives away in sacrifice and service to others.

**And this is important, notice what Jesus says - "whoever would be great among you must BE your servant."**

**Jesus is not simply talking about action, he's talking about identity.**

That those who are great in the Kingdom of God are not those who simply do serving acts, but those who take the very identity and posture of a servant. Those who wake up in the morning - and their bent towards everything facing them that day echoes the heart of Jesus - I am here not to be served, but to serve.

- When they go to work and everyone around them is stressed, and their to-do list is ever increasing - **I am here not to be served, but to serve.**
- When they come home, and their spouse isn't giving them the attention or affection they desire - **I am here not to be served, but to serve.**
- When their roommate doesn't wash their dishes for the 15th time that week - **I am here not to be served, but to serve.**
- When the kid won't stop screaming their head off, or keeps disobeying, or needs the 8th diaper change that hour - **I am here not to be served, but to serve.**

**It's an all-of-life identity. Which is part of what makes it so countercultural.**

Our world has categories for acts of service - serve at the food pantry, do some community service, help out a friend in need - that's all stuff anyone, Christian or not, can do - what makes the way of Jesus so countercultural is that it's an all-encompassing identity.

**Because, one of the chief idols of our day is the idol of autonomy.**

- Auto meaning self
- Nomos meaning law
- **"A law unto yourself."**

You submit to no one. You submit to nothing. You are Lord. You call the shots. No one gets in your way, right? This is the cultural current we're swimming in. If you want to serve or sacrifice for someone else, great. If you don't, not feeling it today, just not your vibe or you don't like that person, that's fine.

And it's not just that - life is about me. Time is about me. And I run my own life. It's not just that that's what you can do, but it's that's what you should do.

It's the promise of the good life. The good life comes from revolving things around yourself. Putting yourself first. That's where life comes from. That's where joy comes from. That's where the good stuff is.

And what Jesus is going to make abundantly clear in this passage is that that is just...not...true.

### **The kingdom of God is an upside down kingdom.**

- In the Kingdom of God, those who want to save their lives, will lose them.
- Those who want to be great, must become servants.
- Those who go last, will be made first.
- Those who give up their lives in love for God and love for others - are the ones who will have the truest and deepest joy available in Christ Jesus.

### **The way of Jesus is not the law of self, it's the law of love - love for God and love for others.**

He's inviting us not just to be willing to act with sacrificial service, but to actually **be a sacrificial servant**.

#### **Pastoral Encouragement**

Now, let me pause here and be really really clear about something before we turn and talk about how this applies into our lives → **I am actually coming into tonight pretty deeply encouraged by our church.**

You serve. You just do. The vast majority of you give time and resources and talents and gifts trying to see us become more and more of a Jesus-centered family on mission with Him.

- More than half of our church gave up 4 hours on a Saturday to pass out candy to kids at our Trunk or Treat.
- Over the course of 2022 an average of 90% of our church served in some capacity on a Sunday at least 1x/mo.
- And that's just stuff I can put data on, that's not to mention all the stories I hear of the way you all show up for one another, care for one another, step in and serve and love another.

We unashamedly ask a lot of our members - and we have no intention of stopping that any time soon because we want you to follow Jesus - and so many of you time and time again step up to the plate, lay down your life, and serve like Jesus.

So I don't feel like I, at least right now in the life of our church, need to come in here and get all riled up to try and convince you to serve in some way, shape, or form - so many of you are already doing that.

Instead what I want to do as I try to take Matthew 20 and cross the bridge into our lives is give some nuance and some teaching around some specific dangers, or pitfalls, or issues that I'm concerned about even as you are serving.

#### **Four Questions about Serving from the Life and Teachings of Jesus**

And I want to do that with 4 questions. 4 questions out of the life and teachings of Jesus to just sort of help you, with the Holy Spirit, take stock of where you might have some blind spots or be failing to live fully into your servant identity.

##### **1. Are you willing to serve "that person"?**

The way of the world is to “watch your circle”. Watch who’s in your tribe - don’t surround yourself with negativity or people who bring you down. I’ll help them because they’re my friend, but that person - no not that person.

**I’m constantly shocked reading the gospels about how in the life and ministry of Jesus it seems like no one is exempt from getting served.**

- He stops to try and teach and instruct the religious leaders.
- He spends a ton of time eating and drinking with “tax collectors and sinners” - showing hospitality and welcome to those society rejects.
- He heals the families of rich politicians and poor beggars.
- He serves a Samaritan woman on her 5th marriage.
- I mean the Roman soldier who comes to cut off his ear, Jesus stops to put back on.
- And the guy who ends up betraying him for 30 pieces of silver he does the lowest job in the house and washes his feet.

Jesus serves anybody and everybody - which is great news for the gospel, amen?

**But also deeply convicting for me when I think about who I am willing to serve.**

**So let me ask you - are you willing to serve “that person”? Whoever “that person” is for you - are you willing to be a servant to them?**

- Maybe for you it’s those of a different background than you, or a different socioeconomic class, or those who you feel like - well I can’t really help them because I can only help those who help themselves.
- Maybe for you it’s that really annoying guy in your Community Group. If anyone else asks you to grab coffee so they can share what’s on their heart you are a ready and listening ear, but *that guy*. That guy is awkward and he rambles and he talks too much and you don’t have time that.
- Maybe for you, “that person” is your spouse. You’re eager and ready to serve the minute a friend asks you for something, but it’s like your spouse there’s just a barrier and it’s hard for you to even want to give them the time of day sometimes.
- Maybe for you, it’s that enemy. The one Jesus would tell you to do good to and bless and love even though they hate you.
- What’s your “just not”? I’ll serve! Just not with kids. I’m willing to serve others, just not that person.

If the identity of a servant is meant to be our whole life postured and ready to sacrifice for others, as long as there’s people on our “that person” list, there’s sanctifying work for the Spirit still to do.

## **2. How much are you willing to suffer?**

Look back at v26...

**26 It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave...**

Now servanthood and slavehood was not nearly the same as it is in modern history - for a number of different reasons - but it was still not a prominent position. It was a position of hard work and labor and toil and pain. And Jesus says in the Kingdom of God - that is the type of posture we are to take, just like the Son of Man.

For Jesus, serving and sacrificing is risky. It costs Him something.

- He's harassed by religious leaders constantly throughout His life.
- He's betrayed by one of His closest friends who He has spent years serving.
- His sacrificial servanthood eventually goes all the way to a gruesome and horrific death.

**Moving Furniture.** And I don't know about you, but for me - my sacrificing and serving always has a limit. Like I'll go up to a certain point, even a little bit past the edge of comfortable - I'll even say this because I'm a good Christian and a pastor - I'm even willing to be slightly inconvenienced (sarcasm). **But never do I sacrifice like Jesus.**

Especially my schedule. My life lives and breathes by my calendar. And I make plans 2 weeks in advance. And if you inconvenience that, or you ask for my time, I wish my heart posture was like Jesus.

Man this week - my neighbor asked me on Monday if I could help him move some furniture around on a Wednesday. And my first thought was not - "yes, an opportunity to love and serve like Christ." My first thought was - "no way man. I have too much stuff going on. I've got my schedule for the week." Now, could I make it work? Absolutely. Move a few things around, get up a little bit earlier that day to finish up some work projects - small inconveniences in the grand scheme of Christ and His Kingdom - but my heart is so turned inward all of the time.

And the scary part is I can serve just enough, and when it's convenient enough, or I can find a way to serve that's easier and more convenient and more suitable to my comfort level - that I can live a life that looks like a serving life, without ever having to have the "sacrificial" adjective on it.

I wonder - do you find yourself doing that too? Stopping before it gets uncomfortable, or gets too sacrificial?

And what's sticky about this is that discerning what that line is takes wisdom, community and the Spirit. Because it changes with life seasons and life responsibilities. I've lived through single no kids, married no kids, 1 kid, now 2 kids. I've had crazy stressful jobs of regular 60-70 hours/week and very easy low hours jobs where it's strange if I hit 40 - the threshold of sacrifice towards various things changes and shifts with seasons - so what's sacrificial for one might not be sacrificial for another.

**But here's what I also know – no matter what season of life I'm in I've always wanted to stop right at the point of inconvenience.**

**Spiritual Practices.** And if I can just push this one a little bit into your life - don't let doing some good spiritual practices be an excuse for not doing other good spiritual practices. Are you tracking with me?

I want desperately for our church to be a church that does the practices of communion with God - prayer, Bible reading, sabbath. But if we're not careful - our list of spiritual practices we enjoy and are willing to do can slowly become more like spiritualized versions of self-care, and not a means by which God shapes us to look more like Jesus in love of God and love of neighbor.

I'll say it even more clearly - practice the sabbath. Please. You get a 24-hour period to rest and commune with God and His people. What a gift. But don't let your newfound love of Sabbath be an excuse to never have to love and serve the people of God. Jesus was interrupted by people needing ministry, needing healing 7 times on the sabbath and he stopped for every single one and helped. You know who got mad at him for it? The religious leaders.

Don't guard your sabbath more than Jesus did.

### **3. Are you serving from love or for love?**

In other words - what's your motivation?

**28 Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

Jesus came to serve. Why? Well what do the Scriptures say?

- **John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world..."**

- **1 John 4:10 - In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

**Jesus came serving and sacrificing not to win our love, but to give us His.**

He didn't need us. He wanted us! But He didn't need us. He doesn't serve for validation. He had all the validation He needed from God the Father. God the Father declared over Him at His baptism before He did a single act of ministry - ***you are my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.***

Some of us (and I say us, because this is me) - because of our wiring and personality, because of our family of origin or past trauma or whatever it may be - we run ourselves into the ground serving and sacrificing for others, and we do it because we think we have something we need to earn or achieve - we need someone to value us and validate us.

But no matter how many sacrifices we make or how much we serve, if we are doing it for love and not from love - ultimately it's self seeking and self-serving. We're doing it to fill up what is lacking in us, not what is lacking in them - which is the point of serving.

**And serving for love instead of from love is not the way of Jesus** - Jesus didn't get up at the last supper, take off his robe, grab a bowl of water and a towel, kneel down and wash his disciples' crusty, muddy, poopy feet thinking - "I hope they love me now. I hope they like me. I hope they see how valuable I am. I hope they approve of me and want me around."

Jesus serves **from** love, not **for** love. If Jesus' served **for** love, we'd all be in trouble – because we're never going to love Him like we should! That's the good news of the gospel!!

But listen to me - if that's you - serving for love instead of from love - please hear me on this...**the answer is not to stop serving!** We think the answer is - well in order to stop looking for approval and validation from others I need to stop serving them. That's not it!

**Pastoring.** Listen to me, every day I wake up with the temptation to serve you and pastor you so that you'll like me and tell me I'm doing a good job. And there's a lot of deep rooted insecurities in there for me. Don't come up after the sermon and tell me I'm great, that's not what this is about. I'm just saying - every single day I have to put to death my wrong motives in serving you **for** love, rather than **from** love.

But the answer for me, and for you, is not to quit. Not to stop serving. Not to just say - well I don't want to need you so I'm not going to serve you.

The answer is to go after Jesus. Go after the gospel. Get alone with God on my face daily asking Him - Lord, will you remind me of what is true? Will you declare over me in Jesus what you declared over Jesus - That I am a beloved Son. Deeply loved by You regardless of how much or how little I serve today - so I can be free to serve others?

Dave Harvey - "Because Christ's righteousness has been transferred to me, all the time and energy I once squandered trying to be liked or praised or to achieve something to validate my existence can now be re-directed toward doing things for God's glory. I no longer live for approval; I live from approval."

Really simply if you want to know if you're serving from love or for love – how do you respond when you serve someone and they don't recognize it or express appreciation?

**Are you willing to serve "that person"?**

**How much are you willing to suffer?**

**Are you serving from love or for love?**

#### **4. Is Jesus worth it?**

Do you ever find yourself asking that question? Is Jesus worth it? Is this worth it? I feel like I'm doing so much.

- I don't want to have another discipline conversation with my toddler.
- I don't want to sit on the phone for 30 minutes with that crying friend.
- I don't want to show up early to the gathering to watch kids in that sauna of a basement.
- I don't want to go Wed night after Wed night after Wed night and engage with people and hear their sin and tell them the gospel.
- I don't want to engage my spouse emotionally.

I'm just tired. Can I please stop? Is this really worth it?

I ask myself that question all the time. All the time.

And the story the Spirit keeps bringing me back to over the past few months, I actually shared this with our board a few weeks ago during our meeting, is **Matthew 25 - the parable of the talents.**

Jesus tells a story to illustrate the kingdom of God. It's like a master who has 3 servants. Gives one 5 talents (money), another 2 talents, and another 1 talent. And he comes back and the first one has turned the 5 talents into 10. The 2nd has turned 2 talents into 4. But the last, he buried the 1 talent he was given, so when the master shows up all he has to give him is 1 talent.

And there's this line that I just can't get out of my head. The master, who represents God in the story, says it to both the one who turned 5 into 10 and 2 into 4. It says this,

**Matt 25:21 - 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.'**

What a line! I want God to declare that over me → well done, good and faithful servant. No sweeter words could I ever hear when I stand in eternity before Jesus. Well done, good and faithful servant. But there's one more sentence the Master says which has been ringing in my ears...

**Enter into the joy of your master.'**

**It's going to be worth it.**



There's joy on the other side of the sacrifice. There's God-given joy on the other side of the suffering. It's going to be worth it. Maybe not here, maybe not now, maybe not this side of eternity - but one day we'll stand before Jesus and we'll see His radiant face - the one who gave his life in sacrificial service for us - and it will all be worth it.

- No sacrifice for the kingdom of God will be wasted.
- No act of service, regardless of how seemingly small and insignificant will be wasted.

**It will all be worth it because Jesus is worth it.**

### Practice for this Week - The Next Right Thing

**Are you willing to serve "that person"?**

**How much are you willing to suffer?**

**Are you serving from love or for love?**

**Is Jesus worth it?**

Our practice for this week is a serving and sacrificing audit. It's on the website - you'll work through each of these questions in prayer with the Spirit - letting him convict you and confront you and encourage you.

And then it's going to end with a really practical step pushing you to do what we're calling **"the next right thing."**

I think when it comes to serving and sacrificing, we can get so bogged down in wanting to do the big and the flashy - but our challenge for this week is to not let your inability to do everything keep you from doing something.

I am really excited about what might come out of us learning together to do small acts of sacrifice.

**Communion – \*\*The sacrificial servant He calls you to be, He has been for you.\*\***