**Matthew 20:20-28**

I. The request of James and John (v. 20-23)

A. Their question does not come out of nowhere (see 19:27-28)

B. The blame doesn’t ultimately fall on the mother but on the sons themselves (see v. 24)

C. Jesus warns them of coming persecution (v. 22-23)

1. The “cup” was a common image for a person’s destiny or allotted share of joy and suffering in life. Jesus’ cup will involve suffering, and theirs will too if they are truly wanting to follow him.

2. They had a false paradigm for what leadership in his kingdom is all about. They were hungry for position, power, and greatness and were seeking to secure that behind the other disciples’ backs

3. The other disciples have the same perspective as them as evidenced by their indignation (v. 24)

II. Jesus’ Discussion with Disciples (v. 24-28)

A. Notice how hard it is for the disciples to fully grasp this radical paradigm shift of what true greatness looks like and how power is to be used in Jesus’ kingdom (see the three conversations Jesus has with his disciples in Mark 8:31ff, 9:31ff, and 10:33ff)

B. Jesus addresses our core human desires for greatness and power

1. Wanting to be great/first (v. 26-27)

a. We all have this craving to be great and to be recognized by others as great

b. We are constantly measuring ourselves up with others in terms of who is the greatest

2. Using our power to protect our power and keep others down (v. 25)

C. Jesus offers a radically different paradigm of what true greatness is (v. 26-27)

1. Be a “servant” (v. 26)

= table waiter

2. Be a “slave” (v. 27)

= first century slaves had almost no rights and had to live to please their master

3. Example: consider the servants in Downton Abbey

D. Jesus offers his own life as the great model and motivation for a life of service (v. 28)

1. Jesus’ life is a model of service

a. “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”

b. Every day of his life, Jesus lived to put others’ needs ahead of his own and to serve them

2. Jesus’ death was the ultimate model of service

a. “to give his life as a ransom for many”

1) Consider Jesus washing his disciples feet the night before he died (John 13). That event foreshadowed the cross where he would wash them spiritually, and it gave them a way of understanding the cross as a radical act of humble service to them

2) On the cross he was serving them (and us). The cross was the ultimate act of service. Jesus put their needs ahead of his own until it killed him

3. The cross is what can transform us from selfish people to selfless servants.

a) The cross is not just a model of service for us

b) On the cross we actually experience someone serving us in such an extravagant way. This fills us with grace and encouragement and humility and enables us to give our lives away in service and keeps that service from becoming resentful.

c) The call to serve should not be a guilt-producing call but rather a freeing call to abandon the worldly quest for greatness and to freely serve people.

**Discussion Questions**

1. In v. 26-27 Jesus addresses our core human desire to be great/first. Where have you experienced and pursued this desire to be great in your own life, and what has been the fruit of that pursuit?

2. What do you think of the idea mentioned on Sunday related to v. 26-27 that Jesus doesn’t deny or even oppose our desire to be great; he simply channels and focuses it in a new direction? Do you agree? What implications do you see in this idea?

3. We learned in this passage that Jesus came not to be served but to serve.  How does the specific image of God as a servant who comes to serve you affect you? What implications does that have for your life and your relationship with God?

4. What is one area of your life where you would like to pursue being a servant more intentionally (work, home, church, community, etc.)? How can you pursue that more joyfully?