

The Way of the Cross To Servanthood

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Today is the first Sunday of Lent. Lent consists of 40 days of preparation to remember the crucifixion of Jesus and to celebrate his resurrection on Easter Sunday morning. During the six Sundays of Lent we will focus on what Jesus did upon the cross for us. We receive many blessings and benefits from what Jesus did upon the cross. Each week we will consider one of those blessings. Today we will see how the cross of Jesus sets us free to serve.

Mark 10:35-45

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

³⁶"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

³⁷They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

³⁸"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

³⁹"We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

⁴¹When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴²Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

I love to read about the disciples in the gospels. When I read about the things they say and do, I always feel like there is hope for me. Peter lies about knowing Jesus.

Thomas doubts the resurrection. James and John jockey for the best seats in heaven.

These are real people. They are stubborn and weak and arrogant. They are just like me!!

Have you ever prayed like James and John? "Lord, I want you to do for me whatever I ask!" I have certainly prayed like that. "Lord, here is my list of things I want you to do for me. You think you can take care of this list by Thursday at the latest?" I wonder how many of us would actually come out and ask Jesus to give us the seats of power in heaven? We might secretly wish for those prime seats in glory, but we would never come

out and ask for them!! James and John are the kind of guys who put their tongues in motion before they check with their brains. “Lord, let us sit one at your right hand and one at your left when you come into your glory.” If Jesus had said “OK, you are the first to ask, I’ll grant your wish,” I can see James and John immediately getting into an argument about which one of them should be on the right side of Jesus—the position of greater power. You got to love these guys. They are so much like us.

Jesus did not get sucked into their little power game. Instead he used it as an opportunity to teach them that the Kingdom of God is not about power and position. Jesus declared that he did not come into the world to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

The root word for ransom literally means to “unchain.” In New Testament times some persons owned slaves. A slave was considered owned or “chained” to his master. In order for a slave to be freed, someone had to pay a price or ransom. When the price was paid the slave was “unchained” from his master. He was set free from captivity.

Today when someone is kidnapped, the perpetrators send a ransom note. They demand a high price to set their captive free. Most often we hear of terrorists who kidnap someone for political purposes. They demand a high ransom like the release of many prisoners or the withdrawal of troops in exchange for the person who was kidnapped. If their demands are not met they threaten to kill the person.

Jesus said he came to pay the ransom for many—including you and me. Jesus knows that we are captives. We are in bondage, and we need to be set free from the chains that bind us. He came to pay the price for our ransom. He would pay the price by giving his life in our place upon the cross.

Unfortunately some people don’t realize they are in bondage. They say, “Maybe I’m a little unhappy” or “I don’t feel totally fulfilled.” But they do not regard themselves as being in bondage. “I’m free to do what I want.” The Bible claims that anyone who does not know

he is in bondage is bound with the tightest chains of all. Not only are they in bondage; they are in denial. And their denial prevents them from being set free.

According to the scriptures, we are all in bondage. We are captive to some master—something controls us. For some, “self” is their master. They are in bondage to themselves. They are constantly looking at themselves; constantly thinking about themselves. They are easily hurt. They always compare themselves to others and try to make themselves look good. They are easily shunned and feel left out. They brag on themselves and what they have accomplished. They put down other people. They need constant affirmation and applause. All of these are signs of a person who is in bondage to himself.

Other persons are in bondage to “idols.” An idol is anything in addition to Jesus Christ that we need in order for our lives to have meaning and significance. Whatever we put our hope in--our career, our physical attractiveness, relationships, family, money—is an idol. All of those things eventually enslave us. We have to have them or our lives are not complete. If I do not have this one thing then my life will fall apart. Therefore that idol holds me in captivity. I have to have it at all costs.

We are all either in bondage to self (something inside) or to an idol (something outside). Jesus came to pay the ransom. He came to cut off the chains that bind us. The ransom he paid was a high price. He called it “the cup.” In the Old Testament we find references to the cup of God’s wrath. God’s wrath is his anger toward that which destroys life as he intended it. Sin and evil destroy us. Our self-centeredness and our idols destroy us. They separate us from God who is the source of life. Apart from him we die. When Jesus drank the cup of God’s wrath, he took upon himself the consequences of our sin. He died in our place. He paid the ransom so we could be set free from bondage to sin and death. In the resurrection, he defeated the power of sin and death forever. The chains of evil that bind us were cut off. Now we are free from the need to serve ourselves and our

idols. We know that we are totally loved. Jesus alone is everything we need. He has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. He has done for us what our idols could not do for us. He has set us free.

What are we free to do? When we are free from the need to serve ourselves and our idols, then we are free to serve God and others. When we are totally focused on ourselves or our idols, we don't even notice the needs of others. When we are free, God opens our eyes and all we can see are the needs of others. Jesus talks to those with the eyes of a servant in Matthew 25. He says:

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ (Matthew 25:35-40)

These persons are shocked that they had done something for Jesus. They did not even realize it. Because Jesus had set them free from themselves and their idols, they were filled with love. Now they could see the needs of others and they could not help but respond out of love—because they were filled with love. They had freely received love so they could freely give it.

On the other hand Jesus described those who were still in bondage to themselves and their idols:

⁴¹“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵“He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

Persons who are in bondage to themselves or their idols do not even see people in need who are around them every day. Their failure to see and help those in need is evidence that they are still in bondage.

How about you? Do you find yourself jockeying for position? Are you still trying to get everyone to like you? Are you in constant search of affirmation or appreciation from others? Are you looking to be served? If so, you are still in bondage to yourself or an idol. You need to take a trip to the cross and ask Jesus to set you free from yourself or your idols.

When you are free you look for ways to serve others. You want to freely give the love that you freely received. Many of the ministries of this church have been started because of those of you who saw the needs of others.

Laurie Foster started Backyard Mission after she gave one of her junior high students a ride home from school. She saw the terrible condition of the house this family lived in and knew that she needed to respond. Now Backyard Mission has helped hundreds of people to have a dry and warm house.

Nick Parker heard the need two weeks ago to help provide homes for persons who could not afford it. He has offered to coordinate the work teams to build our next house for Habitat for Humanity. We need some folks to help him on the team. He needs someone who will recruit and schedule volunteers. Nick needs others to help oversee construction.

Laura Hopkins saw the need to provide eye glasses for those who could not afford them. She received training and started a ministry called 20/20 to provide for people to see.

We have team of persons who saw the need to feed the hungry. Every Wednesday morning they come up and give food vouchers to persons through our Good Samaritan

Ministry. Another team provides clothing for those who need them with our Clothes Closet Ministry.

Persons who saw the need to provide a place for homeless families with children started Family Promise. Other homeless shelters in town require families to split up. Family Promise keeps them together. Since the economic crisis, Family Promise receives 10 to 40 inquires a day for help. They can only help 3 or 4 families at a time. We need additional persons to help with this ministry.

On an insert in your bulletin called “No Boundaries” you can read about another group that has seen a need. We have several families who have persons with special needs. Currently there is no place for these persons to be cared for while their families worship. I want you to hear the story of one of these persons this morning. Julia Baugh is 17 years old and has been a part of our church family since she was born. But up to this point we have not had a place for her. I’ve asked her mom to tell us about what a special blessing Julia is.

VIDEO of Tracy and Julia Baugh

Do you see the need? Will you help us provide a place in our church family for Julia and other special needs persons? There are a variety of ways you can get involved. Please indicate how you would like to help on the insert and take it by the Missions table after church. If you would like to be contacted about one of the other ministries I’ve mentioned this morning, please stop by the mission table and fill out a form and someone from that ministry will contact you.

Have you been set free to serve? Jesus said, “If you have done it to one of the least of these you have done it to me.”