

Greatness and Preeminence in the Kingdom

📖 Matthew 20:17-28

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📅 June 29, 2016

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We've been out of the Gospel of Matthew for two weeks so let's review a little. Matthew has arranged his gospel according to a specific structure of narrative followed by discourse. We know this because he uses the same Greek phrase five times. That Greek phrase is *και εγενετο οτε ετελεσεν ο Ιησους...* and is translated "When Jesus had finished these things..." It is like a divider and what it divides is one narrative-discourse from the next narrative-discourse. There are five narrative followed by discourses and the final section is narrative only. The first of these was Matt 1:1-7:28 and we titled this *The Presentation of the King*. This covers His birth, His presentation to the nation by John and so forth. The second was Matt 7:29-11:1 and we titled it *The Credentials of the King*. It covers His miracles and teaching which evidences that He is the King and His offer of the kingdom is a legitimate offer. The third was Matt 11:2-13:53 which we titled *The Informal Rejection of the King*. This is when the leadership reject Him and the kingdom offer and decide to kill Him. The kingdom at this time goes into postponement. The fourth was Matt 13:54-19:1 which is titled *The Withdrawal of the King*. It depicts how the King now began to train His disciples for the period of postponement during which He will build the Church and also to prepare His disciples for His death and resurrection which is a pre-requisite for the Church.

That brings us to the fifth narrative followed by discourse in Matt 19:2-25:46. This fifth section we've titled *The Formal Rejection of the King*. The narrative of this section charts the increasing opposition of the leadership to Jesus as He continues to train His disciples and prepare them for the crucial events to come in Jerusalem. At the conclusion of this narrative Jesus will give His greatest eschatological discourse, *The Discourse on Kingdom Coming*, which many of you are anxious to get to. Understand that because the kingdom's arrival in history is contingent on Israel's repentance and Jesus offered the kingdom to that generation but they did not repent but instead crucified Him, then what the discourse at Olivet is sketching are the conditions that one future generation of Israel will face that will bring them to repentance resulting in them calling upon the Lord to return and establish the kingdom. There is nothing in the coming discourse about the Church. Jesus has predicted the universal and local church but Matthew is about the King and His kingdom and the church is only mentioned as a preparatory stage during the interadvent during which those who respond become sons of the kingdom to come. So the discourse will reveal conditions that show the kingdom is ripe for arriving in history and that

ripeness is described by unprecedented disturbances in the heavens above and the earth beneath. So the big argument that Matthew is making is that Jesus is in fact the Messiah, even though His kingdom is not here, and the reason it is not here is because that generation of Israel did not repent. But in the future God will send devastating conditions that will cause Israel to repent and then the kingdom will come. So in the meantime Jesus is training His disciples for the Church age and preparing for His cross work.

Three weeks ago we studied the details of Matthew 19:27-20:16. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. This is it folks. He is going up to die for the sins of the world. In 19:27 Peter took his cue from Jesus statement to the rich young ruler in 19:21 that if we leave everything and follow you what will we have? Treasure in heaven. But Peter wanted to know exactly what that treasure would be. In 19:28 Jesus answered that in the regeneration, which is the kingdom, the kingdom is a renovation of the entire universe. So in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the glorious throne of David, Peter and the other apostles will be rewarded with twelve thrones and govern over the twelve tribes of Israel. Besides the twelve, in 19:29, all who make sacrifices for Jesus' name's sake will receive a hundred fold as much, and will possess a high quality of life in the kingdom. But 19:30 is a stiff warning to the disciples. What they were asking was not proper. Consequently, many who are first in this life will be last in the kingdom to come and vice versa. In 20:1 Jesus used a parable to illustrate. The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. In 20:2, after some haggling he made an agreement with the laborers for a denarius for the day. In 20:3 he went out and hired another group about 9 am. In 20:4 they made no agreement but only trusted that the landowner would give them whatever is right. In 20:5, 6 and 7 the same thing happened at noon, at 3 pm and at 5 pm. The important point between these groups is that only one group, the first group, insisted on an agreement, whereas the others simply trusted that the landowner would give them what is right. In 20:8 the landowner called the foreman and instructed him to pay them their wages. The strange thing is the order that he instructed him to pay them. Begin with the last group first. Obviously he wanted the first group that made the agreement to see how much the other groups got paid. And this was to be a lesson. Now in 20:9 the last group got paid a whole day's wages and so the earliest group must have been doing the math and realizing that they would receive 12 denarii since they worked 12 times longer. But then they saw the next group and the next group and they all received one denarius and so they saw their earnings dwindling. 20:10 indicates that they still expected to receive more. But in the end they too only received a denarius. In 20:11 they got mad at the landowner and in 20:12 they made their argument. But in 20:13 the landowner said to them, did you not agree with me for a denarius? That was the agreement and that is what you were paid. As for me, I wish to give the man who worked one hour the same as you who worked twelve hours. In 20:15, is it not lawful for me to do what I want with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous? So the last shall be first, and the first last. That's the teaching.

Now this parable has bothered a great many people who are quite naturally repelled by the idea that the landowner would pay those who worked 12 hours the same as those who worked one hour. But that is missing

the point. A parable, while drawing from events that are related to real life, is not necessarily true to life. You should not let that incongruity bother you. The point of the parable is simply to illustrate one major idea. That idea is that the landowner, who represents God, is generous and therefore it is unnecessary to seek to make an agreement with Him up front in order to be guaranteed a certain compensation for service in this life. Instead it is simply enough to know who He is, that He is a good and generous God, and hence He will reward us more than we deserved. And because some believers do not serve in this fashion, but insist on making an agreement with God for their service, it is for this reason that they will be last in the kingdom. The reverse is also true; it is because other believers come to Him simply wanting to serve Him because of His goodness that they will end up first in the kingdom. The lesson is that the disciples needed to simply trust in the character of God, that He is good and therefore there is no reason to seek a set return from Him, He will give them more than they deserve. So the primary teaching of the parable is that God is generous. The secondary teaching is the proper attitude in service in light of the God who is generous. Only tertiarily do we think about rewards and we are to do so in light of the benevolence of God.

We come tonight to Matt 20:17-19. Here Jesus further fulfills His prophetic office and prepares His disciples for the coming events in Jerusalem. In 20:20-28 we see another desire to acquire privilege and position in the kingdom. In 20:29-34, the healing of two blind men who then follow Him.

We start with Matt 20:17-19. This is a prediction of the formal rejection that is coming in Jerusalem. He had already been informally rejected in the Galilee in Matthew 12. But the final and formal rejection was still to come in Jerusalem, the city of the King. The setting is large caravans travelling from the Galilee to Jerusalem for Passover. They followed the traditional route on the east side of the Jordan. Along the way Jesus had blessed the little children teaching that faith alone was necessary to enter the kingdom and humility was necessary to greatness in the kingdom. He also tried to convict the rich young ruler of his need for a righteousness outside of himself, something the rich young ruler never grasped. And finally along the way He had just corrected the attitude of His disciples toward great reward, they needed to trust God's goodness and not seek to know what they would receive. By verse 17 they have forded the Jordan River and entered into the city of Jericho.

It's important for harmonizing the gospel accounts here, particularly as it relates to the location of the healing of the blind men at the end of this chapter, to understand that archaeology has uncovered two Jericho's at the time of Christ. I have a map showing residential Jericho (Jericho 1) and municipal Jericho (Jericho 2). These Jericho's were two miles apart. The problem is that one account has Jesus healing them as they left Jericho and the other as they approached Jericho. And there were attempts to explain this but archaeology comes to our service here showing that there were two Jericho's and so we understand now that both accounts are correct. One has Him healing them as He left residential Jericho (Jericho 1) and the other as they approached municipal Jericho (Jericho 2).

The Matthew account, in 20:29, has Jesus leaving residential Jericho and on His way to municipal Jericho which was along the road up to Jerusalem. So as verse 17 says He is **about to go up to Jerusalem**. This will be His final ascent. He went three times annually ever since He was born so over 100 times but this is the last time. Now the road between Jericho and Jerusalem is the well-known desert highway known as the *Ascent of Adummim*. Residential Jericho is 800 feet below sea level and Jerusalem is 2500 feet above sea level, so it is a steep, 13-mile highway He will ascend.

In 20:17 it says **He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves**. So just before the ascent He took them aside. Why did He take them aside? To do two things; first, to further fulfill His prophetic office and second, to prepare them once again for what is going to happen to Him in Jerusalem. First let's take up the preparation for things to come. **And on the way He said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.** They needed to be spiritually and mentally prepared for the horrifying reality of His suffering and death and be assured of His victorious resurrection. This is not the first time He had tried to prepare them for these things. The first time was 16:21-23 in Caesarea Philippi. On that occasion Peter rebuked Jesus. The second time was 17:9 and 12 at Mt Hermon. Their response was to avoid the issue and ask questions about Elijah. The third time was in 17:22-23 in the Galilee. Their response was one of deep grief. Now we come to the fourth time in 20:18-19 and their response in Matthew is not stated. The parallel in Luke 18:34 says "the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said." They did not understand what He was talking about. Why did they not understand? Because they were not believing. That is always why someone is not understanding. Unbelief blocks understanding. Walvoord said, "Putting these passages together, it seems that the disciples had a foreboding that the trip to Jerusalem was dangerous, but they could not bring themselves to believe literally what Jesus was saying."¹ The principle is that understanding requires that we are believing the Scriptures and if we are not believing then we are walled off from understanding. What Scriptures were they not believing? The OT Scriptures that predicted the death of the Messiah. What Scriptures predicted the death of Messiah? Gen 3:15, the seed of the woman would suffer a mortal wound. Isa 53:5, Messiah would be "pierced through for our transgressions...crushed for our iniquities...Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers...He" would be "cut off out of the land of the living." There were these Scriptures and many others which revealed that Messiah would suffer, die and even be raised, a passage like Ps 16:10 predicts the resurrection, "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay." And when John the Baptist came he used the sacrificial language that Jesus was the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. But they were not believing these words of God and so when Jesus stated here what would soon happen in Jerusalem they did not understand what He was saying. If you want to understand more Scripture, you have to believe the portions of Scripture that right now you don't want to believe. That is the only way to more understanding.

Now what He reveals about His death in 20:18-19 is not the first explanation but it is the fullest so far. Toussaint said, "The program of Christ's death is outlined more fully here than previously."² Here we find two new pieces of information that He had not spoken of before; first, the handing over of Him to the Gentiles and second, the His death would be by way of crucifixion, the most horrible way to die. These are predictions of the future and therefore made in order to further fulfill His prophetic office. Messiah was to be prophet, priest and king. It is important to understand how these offices are fulfilled. The offices are to be fulfilled successively, not contemporaneously. In His first coming He was a prophet, He predicted many things to come, as here. At His first coming He also offered Himself as king. But He was rejected by that generation of Israel and so was never enthroned. Instead He was crucified, raised and ascended to sit at the right hand of the Father on the Father's throne. Now in heaven He is fulfilling the office of priest where He ever lives to make intercession for us. In the future, when Israel repents He will return at the Second Coming to fulfill the office of king, ruling from David's throne. So Jesus is prophet, priest and king but He fulfills these offices successively and not contemporaneously. His prediction of His suffering, death, and resurrection was part of fulfilling His prophetic office during His first coming.

Let's look at the prophecy in 20:19, **Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem.** They already knew this. It was the time of year for Passover. What they did not know, even though they had been told, was that Jesus was **going up to** be the Passover Lamb. It's important to point out that Jesus knew that He was going up to be the Passover Lamb and it did not deter Him from going up. J. Vernon McGee said, "Let's ponder the significance of this. He went there deliberately to die for you and for me. That is something to think about."³ He knew and went there for me and for you. He came to die on the cross for the sins of the world and we maintain that this does not for one second make illegitimate the kingdom offer, that the kingdom was genuinely offered and if they would have repented the kingdom would have come, but entrance into the kingdom is only through the cross and as the plan of God worked out we discover that the cross was the positive result of a negative choice of Israel.

Look at the gobs of information predicted in these two short verses. **The Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes.** Once more He uses the title **Son of Man** for Himself. This is the most common title Jesus used of Himself, using it more than 80 times in the Gospels. It stems from Dan 7:13-14 where one like a son of man came up to the Ancient of Days and received an everlasting kingdom. It is a title that relates to Him being the God-man who is qualified to rule the kingdom to come. Then seven things are predicted of the God-man who is to come in His kingdom. First, before the kingdom can come He is to **be delivered to the chief priests and scribes.** The Greek word translated **delivered** is *παραδομι* and means "to be betrayed." And who betrayed Him? Judas, though at this time Judas is not known to be the betrayer, in time he would betray him for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave, that is to say, of someone worthless. Judas ultimately considered Jesus to be worth no more than a worthless slave. Second, he will be betrayed **to the chief priests and scribes.** This is the Sanhedrin, the ruling counsel of Israel. It was composed of 71 men who were predominately Pharisees, though the high priest was a Sadducee and presided as president, along with other Sadducees. Judas would betray

Jesus to this ruling council. Third, the council **will condemn Him to death**. They would put him through a series of trials and through these trials the verdict would be **death**. Fourth, because the Jews could not carry out a death penalty they would **hand Him over to the Gentiles**. The **Gentiles** are the Roman authorities and chiefly Pontius Pilate. The Roman authorities could carry out a death penalty. This is the first revelation that He would be turned over to Gentiles. So what we begin to see is that the responsibility for the crucifixion lies not only with the Jewish leadership but also with the Gentile leadership. Fifth, the Roman authorities would **mock and scourge** Him. This refers to the beatings and the mockings He received. Sixth, what the Roman authorities would do is **crucify Him**. This is the first revelation that the way of Jesus' death would be by crucifixion. Of course, there was Deut 18 and Ps 22 which predicted some of the details of his death, but the concept of crucifixion as the Romans practiced it was not in existence when those predictions were made. We'll deal with crucifixion itself when we get there. Seventh, and finally, the victorious note is that **on the third day He will be raised up**. Jesus cannot come in His kingdom before He is raised. He must be put in the grave but He could not be held by the grave. Ps 16, the grave could not hold Him such that He underwent decay because the grave is the penalty for sin and Jesus had no sin. So He would be crucified not for His own sin but the sins of others and **raised up**. Note this would happen **on the third day** and not the fourth day. In other words, Jesus was not in the tomb for a literal 72 hours. In Jewish thought any part of a day is considered a whole day. Jesus would be in the tomb part of Friday, the first day, all of Saturday, the second day, and part of Sunday, **the third day**. **On that day He will be raised**. And even though all of this was clearly stated the parallel in Luke 18:34 says the disciples did not understand these things. And the reason? Because they did not believe what the OT Scriptures taught about the Messiah's work. So then to understand we must believe.

Now I make a note that these two verses contain the gospel because there are so many distortions of the gospel. When I express the gospel I always include two elements; the Person of Christ and the Work of Christ and I like to tie these together. As for His Person, I break that down into two components that make up His one Person; He is God and He is man. You have to have both. And the title here, **Son of Man**, refers not just to His humanity, but also to His deity and the fact that they are united, unmixed, yet inseparable in one Person. Then as to His Work, again I break it down into two components that make up His one Work; He must die and He must rise again. If you just have His death you don't have the gospel because a dead Savior is no Savior. So you must also have the resurrection. So here we have the gospel; the God-man died and rose again. You must have that to have the gospel. What I am saying is that there are many false gospels that are not the gospel. For example, the gospel is not believing in Jesus for eternal life, nor is that the saving message as the Grace Evangelical Society is now saying. That is not enough. It doesn't tell me anything about the person of Jesus or the work of Jesus. It only tells me what I must do, believe, and that is correct, but it does not give me enough content to believe in order to be saved. The content of Jesus' person must be believed to be the God-man and His work of death and resurrection must be believed. If I don't include those things and I only say believe in Jesus for eternal life, then I have said nothing more than the Mormon's and Jehovah's Witnesses say. And they are not saved. So that is not specific

enough. Nor is the gospel the work Jesus did in His life. This is the view of Lordship Salvation and Reformed theology. Jesus did live a sinless life but His life did not make atonement for our sins. Atonement is only in His death. I don't have to believe in His life. I have to believe in His death. His sinless life, of course, was a prerequisite for making atonement for our sins on the cross, but it did not make atonement for sins. There are so many ways to distort the gospel and you have to ask people what they believe. You shouldn't give them any answers; you should simply let them articulate it on their own. And what you are listening for is they believe, apart from any works including repentance, confession of sin, commitment of life, saying a prayer, apart from any and all of that just faith alone in Jesus' Person, that He is God and man and Jesus' work, that He died and rose again. If anything is added to that or taken away from that, it is no longer the gospel and it cannot save. They are dead in their transgressions and sins!

Now we come to 20:20 and here we go with the greatness issue again. And if anything is 20:20 in 20:20 it is that these two disciples were not seeing with 20:20. These men still had a long way to go to becoming great in the kingdom. **Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him.** Walvoord said, "The unwillingness of the disciples to face the reality of Christ's suffering and death is illustrated in the next incident, in which the mother of James and John, the wife of Zebedee, came to Jesus seeking favors for her sons (cf. Mk 10:35-41."⁴ What he's pointing out here is that they didn't want to face the reality of what was coming. They wanted a kingdom without a cross; glory without suffering. They didn't want to talk about the cross so they changed the subject back to the kingdom. How many times does that happen when you proclaim the gospel? They change the subject to something else. That means they don't want to hear it. It may surprise you to know but the disciples didn't want to talk about it either. How many people want a kingdom without a cross? A lot. All the cults, all the -isms want that. So here comes the mom, actually all three of them came and **bowed down** before Him but Matthew says it was **the** mom who makes **a request**.

In 20:21, Jesus **said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left."** What did she understand? That He had authority because she said **Command** it. But what did she not understand? That Jesus did not exercise His authority autonomously, but only with respect to the Father. The positions of **right** and **left** were the two privileged positions. Why she is asking this is because Jesus had already revealed in 19:28 that when He came in His kingdom all twelve of them would sit on thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel so now she is simply requesting that her sons sit on the two most privileged thrones.

In 20:22, **But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able."** Because Jesus addressed James and John rather than the mother we know that she was requesting on their behalf. The parallel in Mark 10:35 says that the sons asked. So Jesus goes and speaks directly to them rather than her and the first thing He says is, **You do not know what you are asking.** In other words, you are ignorant. Walvoord said, "How little they knew what they were saying."⁵

The second thing He says is, **“Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”** What does it mean to drink the cup? Literally it referred to drinking a cup of wine that had been poisoned causing death. Figuratively it referred to coming under the wrath of God that caused death. In Isa 51:17, 22 Judah drank the cup of God’s wrath when the Babylonians invaded and destroyed Jerusalem and God revealed that they would never drink the cup of God’s wrath again. What Jesus is saying is He is about to come under the wrath of God in their place. Constable said, “I take it that God meant that He would not punish them as He had because He would provide the Servant to drink the cup of His wrath for His people. They would not have to suffer in the future as they had in the past because God would provide a Savior who would suffer in their place.”⁶ This is the concept of substitutionary blood atonement. Substitution means to take the place of. Jesus would take their place. He had just revealed this would be by crucifixion. Rather than the nation Israel coming under the wrath of God Jesus would come under the wrath of God on their behalf. They deserved death, He would taste death. And note that he says **I am about to drink**. The verb *μελλω* here means “near in time.” He was only about a week from the crucifixion. We are only in Matt 20:22 and the book is not complete until Matt 28:21 so what does the vast majority of Matthew’s gospel focus on? The final week of Jesus. Almost a third of Matthew deals with the death, resurrection and appearances and from that you can see the significance of these events.

At the end of verse 22 they answered His question, **Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink** with the statement, **“We are able.”** Clearly they did not fully understand what Jesus had said about the substitutionary nature of His death but Jesus **said to them** in verse 23, **“My cup you shall drink.”** This is a prophetic statement. Jesus is continuing to fulfill His office of prophet because there was a sense in which they would drink the cup. They would be martyred due to their association with Him. The record of James’ martyrdom is captured in Acts 12:1-2, “Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.” The record of John’s martyrdom is not captured in the NT but we know from Rev 1:9 “I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” Afterward it is widely thought that he did suffer a martyr’s death. So they would drink the cup by suffering persecution and martyrdom at the hands of those who opposed Jesus.

In 20:23 Jesus continued saying, **but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.** Jesus did have authority but He only exercised His authority in the service of the **Father**. As such Jesus could not grant their request. It was not His **to give**. And even such a request of the Father would have been an inappropriate request. As Pentecost said, “Christ’s reply revealed that positions and rewards in the kingdom will not be granted in response to personal ambition or private requests. Rather, positions will be assigned as rewards for faithful service rendered to Him.”⁷ Even Christ’s own position as King in the kingdom would not come to Him because He asked the Father for it, but rather because of His faithful service even unto death. Since His position in the kingdom would be a reward for His

faithful service to the Father then their positions in the kingdom also would be assigned in response to their faithful obedience to the Father.

Now you observe that the disciples had still not grasped the point that faithful service now precedes being great in the kingdom to come; that suffering precedes glory. Earlier they discussed amongst themselves which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom and Jesus used the example of a child to teach them that the one who will be great is the one who reckons to himself no position or status demanding the service of others but is himself the servant of all, encouraging fellow servants and not competing with them. Then Peter asked Jesus what there would be for them since they had left everything and followed Him. They desired positions of privilege and greatness in the kingdom. Even the mother of James and John has tried to persuade Jesus to give her two sons the top positions in the kingdom. Barbieri noted that "...the disciples continued to discuss, even to the point of the Lord's death."⁸ They had the wrong attitude.

On this occasion, in 20:24, **And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers.** As wrong as their attitude was, why did the others become **indignant**? J. Vernon McGee said, "It was because *they* wanted the places at His right and left hands!"⁹ They equally had the wrong attitude. They saw the brother's request as an attempt to gain an advantage over them in acquiring the highest positions. They probably wished they had thought of it first. Pentecost said, "All had secretly coveted the positions that James and John had sought for themselves."¹⁰ We see now that it was not just the two but all twelve who aspired to the first places. They were competing with one another for positions of honor and privilege in the kingdom. Here is an important lesson; believers are not in a competition with one another. We are on the same team and should be helping one another, not striving against one another.

In 20:25 **Jesus** seeing that they had not yet learned the lesson of humility **called them to Himself** to teach them one of the greatest lessons in all of history. He **said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."** In verse 25 Jesus moved from something they already knew to something they did not know. He said, **You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.** To Jews it was a well-known fact that Gentiles promote themselves in order to try to move up in position so they can exercise authority over others. They knew this because they lived in the times of the Gentiles under Gentile dominion. That is the way that Gentiles think. Jesus said in verse 26, **It is not this way among you,** that is not the way you should function. You should not try to promote yourself so you can move up to higher positions. Instead, **whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave.** Interestingly, two different words are used here for **servant** and **slave**. The word **servant** is *διακονος* and refers to one putting himself in the service of another for some activity.

The word **slave** is *δουλος* and refers to one putting himself in permanent servitude. If one wants **to become great** he is to be a **servant** in his activity. But if one wants **to be first** he **shall be slave** permanently. Toussaint says, "A great lesson is taught by this incident: greatness comes by humility. It is most interesting to note the progression in the Lord's instruction. Greatness is dependent upon being a "servant" (*διακονος*) of others but primacy comes from being a "slave" (*δουλος*) of others."¹¹

In verse 28 a comparison is made and the example laid down to follow. **Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.** The **Son of Man** again, is Jesus' kingly title as the God-man who is to inherit the kingdom to come. He is to serve in the highest position in the kingdom, He will be the King. But even the King **did not come to be served, but to serve.** And if this is the way it is then He is the ultimate example and we are to serve as He served. That is the way to great position in the kingdom.

Jesus then revealed the ultimate service that will pave the way for Him acquiring the highest position in the kingdom, **to give His life a ransom for many.** The word **ransom** is used only twice in the NT, here and in the parallel of Mark 10:45. The Greek word is *λυτρον*. Moulton and Milligan who wrote the lexicon that interacts with all the ancient papyri and ostraca to show how the word was used in common usage and would have been understood said, "Deissmann (*LAE* p. 331ff.) has shown how readily our Lord's Saying in Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45, the only passages where *λύτρον* occurs in the NT, would be understood by all classes in view of the popular usage of the word in connexion with the purchase-money for manumitting slaves."¹² The word manumit means to set free from slavery. What Jesus came to do was set us free from slavery. We are enslaved to our sin nature which is our master. As unbelievers we follow and obey its lusts because as slaves we do not have a will of our own but our will is swallowed up in the will of the master, our sin nature. Jesus would set us free from the mastery of our sin nature by giving **His life**. No one would take **His life** but He would lay it down on His own initiative. This is the greatest act of service and consequently the Father will give Him the highest position in the kingdom: David's throne with rights to rule and reign over the whole world. Note that **His life** was given **for many**. The Greek word translated **for** is *αντι* and refers to substitution. Toussaint says, "This is seen not only from the meaning of the preposition, but also from the context." A. T. Robertson said, "There is the notion of exchange also in the use of *αντι* [*anti*]. Jesus gave his own life as the price of freedom for the slaves of sin. There are those who refuse to admit that Jesus held this notion of a substitutionary death because the word in the N. T. occurs only here and the corresponding passage in Mark 10:45. But that is an easy way to get rid of passages that contradict one's theological opinions."¹³ In view then is the substitutionary nature of Jesus' soon cross work. Of course, only those who believe receive the benefit of freedom that comes on the basis of the cross work. Romans 6 is the chapter that picks up this language in the slave-master analogy to clarify that Christ paid the price to release us from the power of the sin nature over us so that sanctification can proceed. We were slaves of sin and just as a slave does not have a will of its own but his will is swallowed up in the will of the master so as unbelievers our wills were swallowed up in the will of our sin nature. We were obligated to obey the sin nature. However, because of what Christ accomplished, as believers we no longer are bound to the sin nature and do

not have to obey its lusts. Of course, we still have a sin nature and it still tries to assert its authority as master but positionally it is no longer our master and we are no longer required to obey. We are now slaves of righteousness and this slavery is really freedom, freedom to live righteous lives as we walk by the Spirit of God. So what Matt 20:28 tells us is that Jesus gave His life to accomplish this. This act of service will qualify Him to take the ultimate place on David's throne in the kingdom to come. Our positions in His kingdom will be based on our faithful service.

Having completed the exposition there are several important notes to make relevant to Matthew's argument as well as positions in the kingdom. First, Jesus never challenged the mother and her two son's concept of the kingdom. They expected that the kingdom was still future and that Jesus would sit on the glorious throne of David and rule from the city of Jerusalem. This is the doctrine of premillennialism. Premillennialism means that Christ will come a second time before the thousand-year kingdom to establish it. The idea of amillennialism is that there is no more millennial kingdom than there is now. The kingdom has already come in a spiritual sense at the first coming and all who believe enter into this spiritual kingdom and we should not expect an earthly kingdom in the future. If that were the case, then Jesus should have used this opportunity to correct this mother and her sons but did not. The idea of postmillennialism is that the king will come after the millennial kingdom has been established through the conquering of the gospel. The Bible never says that. Premillennialism is the true doctrine. It comes out of God's original creation purpose for man to rule and the unconditional covenants.

Second, the disciples would enter the kingdom but they were not prepared to enter it with greatness. They kept on wondering about and asking about and competing with one another for positions of greatness in the kingdom. They had not yet learned the lesson of humility which is the primary characteristic which leads to greatness in the kingdom.

Third, the King gave his strongest teaching on greatness in the kingdom in this pericope. Before He had used a child and a parable to illustrate humility. This time He used Himself. Giving His life as a ransom for many is the supreme example of humility and how greatness in the kingdom is acquired.

Fourth, the Person of Christ is highlighted in this pericope. Plummer wrote, "To be great is to be the servant (*δίακονος*) of man; to be first is to be the bond-servant (*δουλος*) of many; to be supreme is to give one's life for many." What is really going on here is we are being taught how to live. Life is about serving others and Jesus showed us that as a tremendous revelation of His Person.

Fifth, the Work of Christ is highlighted in this pericope. Christ had just revealed that He would be killed by crucifixion. On this occasion He went further and revealed what the crucifixion would accomplish. His life given on the cross would be a ransom for the many. The preposition points to the substitutionary nature of His cross work. The ransom points to being set free from the power of sin and further, entrance into the kingdom.

Toussaint says, "Thus the King makes a great revelation of the work which He shall accomplish on the cross. His death will provide the means whereby the many shall gain entrance into the kingdom."¹⁴

¹ John Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p 150.

² Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 232.

³ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels (Matthew 14-28)*, electronic ed., vol. 35 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 87.

⁴ John Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p 150.

⁵ John Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p 150-151.

⁶ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Is 51:22.

⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 363.

⁸ Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 66.

⁹ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels (Matthew 14-28)*, electronic ed., vol. 35 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 89.

¹⁰ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 363.

¹¹ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 234.

LAE Light from the Ancient East, by Adolf Deissmann. English translation by Lionel R. M. Strachan. London, 1910 and 1927.

¹² James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 382.

¹³ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Mt 20:28.

¹⁴ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 235.