

2020 New Year

EVEN THE SON OF MAN

Mark 10:32-45

Key verse 10:45

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In Confucian culture, the goal of life is '立身揚名' (Iepsin Yangmyung) which means to become successful and famous in the world. This is not only the case in Confucian society but also for most people. In the past, we also lived with such a value system. We regarded being on top, having power over people, and exercising authority to be great success. The disciples of Jesus in this passage had the same perspective on values. Jesus teaches the disciples how they should live. Through this passage may God help us to learn about true greatness. May the Spirit of God convict us so that we may deeply accept this teaching and obey it.

Look at verse 32. "They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him." At that time, Jesus was preaching the word of God traveling around the eastern region of the Jordan. Jesus was on his way up to Jerusalem. This was the last journey of his life. In Jerusalem he would be crucified for the sins of the world. Jesus' heart must have been heavily burdened. Yet in order to obey the will of God Jesus boldly journeyed to Jerusalem. The disciples sensed something would happen and were astonished. Those who followed were afraid.

On the way, Jesus talked to the disciples for the third time about his upcoming suffering. Look at verses 33, 34. "'We are going up to Jerusalem,' he said, 'and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.'" Unlike the first and second prediction, Jesus revealed that the location of his suffering was to be Jerusalem. Also the details of his suffering were so precise and concrete as if these verses had been recorded after his crucifixion. As Jesus said, he would be betrayed and handed over to the Roman authorities by the Jewish religious leaders. They would humiliate Jesus, mocking, spitting on him, and flogging him. They would kill him on the cross. Yet, Jesus said that he would rise again in three days. His suffering and death would not be the end. There would be a glorious resurrection. For this reason, his death would be a glorious death.

Why did Jesus repeatedly tell them about his death and resurrection? Firstly, it was because Jesus wanted their hearts to be prepared. So, when Jesus was crucified, they would remember what Jesus had said and believe in him. Secondly, it was because Jesus wanted the gospel of his death and resurrection to be planted in their hearts.

Through hearing Jesus' words, the disciples should have been assured of his final victory. Yet as soon as they heard Jesus' words, they plugged their ears saying, "What did you say? I did not hear that!" They were dreaming their own dreams. We can see what their dreams were through James and John. Look at verse 35. "Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came

to him. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.'" Wow! They were very brave. "Do for us whatever we ask!" It was like asking Jesus for a blank check. They wanted to sit at Jesus' right and left in his glory (37). We can know the ranking of leaders in North Korea from their sitting order at the people's supreme assembly. In a recent assembly of North Korean leaders, Kim Jung Eun's sister sat in the front row, next to him. People assumed that his sister's rank went up and she became more powerful. Likewise, James and John wanted to sit right next to Jesus. Matthew's gospel tells us that they even brought their mother to Jesus for their request (Mt 20:20).

Yet Jesus asked them whether they could drink the cup Jesus was to drink and be baptized with the baptism Jesus was baptized with (38). What did the cup and the baptism refer to? They referred to walking the way of suffering and death like Jesus. Without a second thought, the two disciples said that they would do so: "We can." They must have thought the cup or the baptism meant a kind of suffering any founding contributor of a new kingdom would have to bear. Jesus bore with them and said, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared" (39b, 40). Jesus predicted that they would surely drink the cup and be baptized as he was. As Jesus said, later, James would become the first martyr among the twelve apostles, and John would suffer in exile on the island of Patmos, outliving all the other apostles. Yet even though they might live such lives, the question of who would sit at Jesus' right or left was up to God the Father.

The other disciples did not know about James and John approaching Jesus to make the request. Yet when Jesus loudly replied to them everything was revealed. What was their response? Look at verse 41. "When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John." The ten disciples became indignant at the two. They must have said, "Wow! You are cunning! We know that you are Jesus' relatives. But you can't use your personal connections. Here in our country, you should prove your own ability!" Not only was the top disciple Peter upset but also Bartholomew who had normally been quiet. All the ten became very upset. What did it mean? It meant that all of them had a strong desire to sit at Jesus' right and left. All of them wanted to be great. So, Jesus taught them about true greatness and the right attitude in following him.

First, those who serve others are great. Look at verse 42. "Jesus 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.'" In those days, the rulers of the Gentiles lorded it over the people. The high officials exercised authority over them. Their principle for applying the law was "as I please" or "it depends on my mood." The disciples knew their unfair and unjust rule. Meanwhile, when they saw the Roman soldiers absolutely obeying orders, they realized the power of the rulers. They saw that their life or death depended on a ruler's thumb. If a ruler pointed his thumb up, a prisoner was released, but if he pointed his thumb down, he was put to death. The disciples hated such an arbitrary power, but in their heart, they also desired to get such power and rule over the world.

Yet what does Jesus tell them? Look at verse 43a. "Not so with you." What does this mean? This means that even though people like to lord it over others and think doing so is great, the disciples should think differently. That is, their value on greatness should be different from that of the world's. What value system should they have? Look at verses 43b, 44. "Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be

first must be slave of all." A servant is one who, from a lowly position, attends on people. A slave is the possession of a master and has no freedom. A slave serves all kinds of things for the master. Of course, Jesus' disciples were not slaves. Yet if they lowered themselves to be like slaves and served others, they would be truly great and regarded as being first.

"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all." At first when we hear this, we may think that in order to be acknowledged by others and eventually become great, we have to first serve others temporarily for the time being. We think that if we sacrificially serve others, as time goes by, people will eventually realize that we are humble. They will exalt us in due time. So, we may think, "O.K. Right now I will serve. I will humbly serve many people and establish a great ministry. Later, all people will respect me." Yet Jesus does not mean that! Jesus means that even though we are not slaves, if we humble ourselves and serve others, such a life of serving itself is great! Jesus means that those who serve others are first in the sight of God.

Why then is such a life of serving so great? It is because to humbly serve others is the most difficult thing to do. In order to serve others, we need an extraordinary inner character and faith. Without such character and faith, serving like a slave is next to impossible. There was a Roman general. He defeated many enemies and conquered fortresses. Once he entered Rome in a triumphal procession. In short, he was a hero. Yet even though he conquered strong enemies, he could not conquer his own emotion and temper. When his pride was hurt he blew up, exploding with anger. However, he soon regretted it saying, "Oh, why can I not conquer my anger! I am always defeated by my temper." Indeed Proverbs 16:32 says, "Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city." The greatest man is not one who conquers enemies. It is one who controls his heart and overcomes himself. The person who is extraordinary in his humility, meekness, patience, and love, and serves others is truly great.

Brother Lawrence, in the 17th century, was not even an ordained monk, but a brother in a Carmelite monastery in Paris. He never traveled abroad or studied in a seminary. He was a cook in the monastery. He was always frying eggs, washing dishes, and cleaning up the kitchen. In a lowly position he served the monks as he might serve the angels of God. He demonstrated a great example as a man who possesses the heavenly kingdom and walks with God, but serves in the kitchen. From God's point of view he was a great man. In history, Jesus was the greatest. He did not get upset. He did not retaliate. Even on the cross he prayed for those who were mocking and killing him. He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34).

The truth that the one who serves is great can be found among us. Normally, children are not able to serve others because they are immature and self-centered. In order to serve others, one must overcome self-centeredness, and have a mature character. God sees that point. A mature inner character! The disciples of Jesus did not strive to overcome themselves and grow into men who could serve others. They struggled for a position. They thought that a higher position would make them great. Yet Jesus says that what makes a man great is not his position but his character. Yes, Jesus teaches us that one whose inner person is great is truly great. May God help us to deeply accept this teaching and grow into men and women who humbly serve others.

Second, Jesus came to serve. Look at verse 45. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be

served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus clearly said that the Son of Man did not come to be served. Jesus is, in very essence, God the Creator. He is holy, glorious, and worthy to receive the praises, worship, and service from all angels and human beings. For Jesus to be served would be absolutely natural. Yet Jesus said that he did not come to be served but to serve. Yes, he came and served all kinds of people. He served a paralytic who was sick with his sin. He served tax collectors who betrayed their own people for their selfish ambition. He served a man with an evil spirit in the region of the Gerasenes. Jesus bore with and served his disciples who were full of worldly dreams and a competitive spirit. He served the stubborn and unrepentant Pharisees patiently.

As spiritual shepherds we serve students and co-workers. Yet when we continue to serve, after a while, we become impatient. At times we become upset thinking, "I have served this far. How much more should I serve? Let them serve me!" Yet think about Jesus! The whole purpose of his coming to this world was to serve! That was his goal of life. Whether people recognized his service or not did not matter to him. While serving people Jesus was full of joy because serving was the reason why he came. This is true. If the purpose of your life is to serve, you do not care about other's recognition. You do not even need to hold on to Mark 10:45 as your key verse and struggle because to serve is the goal of your life. If we do not have such a clear attitude, we soon end up feeling a sense of loss. We soon want compensation. We want to be recognized and respected. When those things are not given, we lose peace in our hearts. Yet Jesus came to serve. Only to serve! And he lived for it.

Even though we may serve others, we have nothing to boast about in ourselves. Think about Jesus! Our service for others is nothing! Have you sacrificed so much in order to serve others? Think about Jesus! Jesus cannot be compared with us—the holy God with sinful human beings. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The King lived as a servant. No matter how much we may sacrifice and serve, before him we are speechless. We have nothing to be proud of in ourselves before him. May God help us to imitate Jesus' beautiful life of serving. Even though we are serving, may God help us to confess that we are just unworthy servants.

Third, Jesus gave his life. Look at verse 45 again. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Notice the last part of this verse: "to give his life." While Jesus served people, he served them with the spirit of giving his life. And finally, he gave his life for them. As for us, after we meet Jesus as our Lord, we stop chasing after worldly things. We live lives that seek spiritual things. We study the Bible and pray. We invite students and serve them. Some of us serve as a fellowship leader or a chapter director. We raise disciples. We encourage them to live for the kingdom of God. Our daily or weekly routine is full of spiritual or religious activities. So, the misunderstanding we easily come to have is: "Since I am heavily engaged in spiritual works, I must be following Jesus well." But in many cases, when we examine the deep motives of serving our Bible students and co-workers, we find that we are not following Jesus but still following our own ambitions. Even though we humble ourselves to serve others, and struggle hard for the work of God, we find that we do all those things for our own fame and reputation. We strive for our self-achievement and self-glory. Rather than desiring to give our lives, we find that we still work hard to save ourselves. We struggle not to lose but to keep, sustain, and exalt our lives. In a sense, in Jesus, we still live exactly the same old lives we used to live in the world.

Jesus warned the disciples against what the rulers of the Gentiles were doing; lording it over and exercising authority over the people. But don't we, as spiritual leaders of God's people,

lord it over and exercise authority over others? The difference may be only this; worldly people use secular, political means but we use spiritual, religious means. Even though we claim that we are Jesus' disciples, in fact, we are living with a worldly value system if: we are upset when our own opinion or authority is undermined, or we get angry when our pride is hurt, or we struggle to secure a higher position, or we are sensitive to our title and fame. Jesus served not to save his life. He came to give his life! And yes, he gave his life for us. As a result we received amazing grace. As those who received his grace, may we live lives that only glorify God, and give our lives as Jesus did.

Before this word of God, I am speechless. I claim that I am a spiritual shepherd for God's flock. Yet I find myself always striving to save my life rather than giving it up. Even though I teach the Bible, I have always been conscious of my physical condition. When I felt tired, I became so passive and did not teach the Bible with my whole heart. I repent of my lack of heart in serving students and other co-workers. Lord, help me to realize that I am an immensely indebted sinner, and somehow pray that I may not struggle to save my life but give my life for your people.

How then, can we live such lives? How can we curb our pride? How can we give up our selfish ambition and live as slaves of all? It seems impossible for us to do that. How can it be possible?

First, we must remember the grace we received from Jesus our Lord. Not only should we remember his grace but also renew it every day. Through Jesus' serving, we have received the best gift in the whole world we could ever imagine. We no longer serve in order to receive anything more. We have already received all! When we think about the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life we received through Jesus, it is odd to desire anything else in this world. If we do so, are we not ignorant of what kind of grace we have already received? When we remember and renew the grace of Jesus we can live lives to serve and to give our lives.

Second, we must pray so that we can follow Jesus' footsteps. Prayer has an awesome power. It is the channel through which we receive God's grace. When we pray, God provides us with all the necessary grace that enables us to live such lives. God will surely give us our heart's desire to serve as slaves and to give our lives for others. He transforms our inner characters to be humble, sacrificial, and beautiful like that of Jesus. How beautiful and glorious our Lord Jesus is! When we think about him, our heart is filled with thanksgiving, joy, and praises to him. We are fascinated by his beauty. Before we rejoice because he has done something for us, or before we are saddened because he has not done anything for us, we must pray that we may know Jesus' preciousness, his beauty, majesty and glory. We must pray that our heart may be filled with the desire to know him and to be found in him. May God grant us a desire to imitate Jesus' life and to serve and give our lives for others.

Lastly, what then does it mean practically to serve others? Whom should we serve? In short, we should serve anyone who needs our help. Our brothers and sisters, our needy neighbors, husbands and wives, parents and children, in particular, teenagers and college students whom we pray for. We should serve each of them, one by one, as we serve Jesus. Mother Theresa's memorial hall is in Skopje, Macedonia. I saw her journal there. In her journal, these words were written, "Jesus is the helpless I help, the beggar I welcome, the lepers I wash, the drunkard I guide." She said, "I served Jesus in the poorest of the poor in Calcutta."

In conclusion, Jesus came to serve like a slave and to give his life. Because of Jesus' serving, we received forgiveness of sins and eternal life. We do not need anything more. May we give thanks to Jesus and live lives that serve others, and give our lives. May God help us to accept one wandering student to serve with all our hearts. May God bless us, by humbly serving each other, to grow into a loving spiritual community! Amen!