

Title: Do you really know the cost? Pt.1
Text: Matthew 20.17-28
Theme: The price of following Jesus
Series: Matthew #97
Prop Stmt: If you presume that you can follow Jesus, you can't.

Basic communication is fraught with many pitfalls. You probably know people, like I do, who have a tendency to exaggerate. And since I tend to be more of a literalist, I get distracted in the conversation by the hyperbole. So, when I hear someone say, "*It was the worst moment in my entire life. I was so hot I thought that I was baking inside of a 400 degree oven.*" I start thinking, 'hmmm, I wonder if that was really the worst moment in your life, or if there were other times when you said the same thing and they were actually worse than this. I mean, how would you go about measuring what was the very worst moment. Besides, 400 degrees in an oven? Have you any idea of how hot that really is? No one could live in that. I mean, you were probably hot, but 400 degrees is so hot that if you really knew how hot it was, you wouldn't say what you just said."

There have been times when I have taken people literally only to find out that reality was quite different than their description. So, I have learned that certain people make things sound worse than what they actually are. So, I have to learn to listen with a filter. I have to filter what they say. But there are other problems with communication. Sometimes people will tell me the actual truth, and I do not want to hear it. I can be like guy who sticks his fingers in his ears and starts humming loudly in an effort to drown out the information that does not fit my reality.

Imagine that city officials have determined that your home is sitting over a major sinkhole. The ground is slowly sinking and at any moment the whole thing could give way. I am guessing you do not want to hear that. You can either get out of the house, or you can stick your fingers in your ears and hum loudly and pretend not to hear. In our text, Jesus is telling his disciples straight up, what is going to happen. Jesus does not exaggerate. Even when he uses strong language, it is because he is addressing a serious issue. Back in chapter 16 Jesus told his disciples that he is going to Jerusalem in order to die. Back then Peter jumped all over his case and began to argue with Christ and Jesus strongly rebuked him. Jesus was not kidding about this. Again in chapter 17, Jesus tells the disciples the same thing and this time they did not argue but were distressed. Now, here in chapter 20 he tells them again. (Map – Jesus final journey to Jerusalem) And yet, when we read this text, it seems as if the disciples all have filters on. They hear what Jesus says, but they do not believe him because it does not fit their reality. They had a different view (narrative) of following Christ. What Jesus says is not what they expected and therefore they refused to believe him.

Read Text:

What do you expect from Jesus? What do you expect to get from following Jesus? The pew forum released a study this week that says that those who identify themselves as Christians has reached a new low. There is nothing surprising about that. If you have

been a member here for any length of time you know that I believe that most of Christianity in this country is a fraud. It has been culturally convenient to be a Christian so many people identified themselves as one. It is no longer culturally convenient to be a Christian. It is now becoming culturally dangerous. When you do not endorse and promote culturally accepted vices, you can expect to be labeled as an intolerant hater and your career and job could be in jeopardy. There are certain businesses that Christians will have to get out of. The cost of following Christ is no longer theoretical. It is becoming reality. What that means is that you will find out what you really believe. You will find out, as Patrick used to say, “Who do you trust?” This text is addressing two related issues for people who are followers of Jesus. 1) What does it mean to follow? 2) What does it mean to lead? These are not new topics, are they? Why am I preaching on this again? Because Matthew recorded them again. Why did Matthew record them again? Because the Spirit of God directed him to write this. Why did the Spirit of God direct Matthew to write this? Because Jesus said this again. Why did Jesus say this again? Because the disciples needed to hear this again. They were hearing, but were not really hearing, just like some of you are hearing but not really hearing.

I’ve organized this sermon into two parts and two weeks: 1) The Exposition and 2) The Explanation. Exposition simply means to expose or to explain. So, let’s go through the text and make certain that we understand it this week and then next week we will look carefully at the implications of this. The bulletin outline has both points, but we will only get through the first one today.

1. The Exposition

A. Jesus informs his disciples again about his impending death. (17-19)

Jesus is very clear. The disciples know that they are walking toward Jerusalem. Jesus took them aside in order to speak specifically and intentionally to them. His language is not vague. He identifies himself as the Son of Man, something that he has done before (chapter 17), he is very specific about what is going to happen to him; delivered over, condemned, mocked, flogged and crucified. He is specific about who is going to do it. The chief priests and scribes will hand him over to the Gentiles. Jesus was saying, “I AM GOING TO DIE, REALLY SOON!”

B. The disciples are still blinded by their view of power. (20-23)

“Then” (v.20), as if no one heard anything that Jesus just said, the mother of the sons of Zebedee (James and John) asks Jesus if her two sons can be numbers 1 and 2 after him when Jesus takes the kingdom. They are not thinking that Jesus is going to Jerusalem to die, they think that Jesus is going to Jerusalem to take the throne. We are tempted to think that mama is trying to leverage her pull with Jesus to get him to commit to something that he otherwise might not do. Doesn’t this sound just like some manipulative power play? Isn’t this a picture of how people try to exert influence? Now, what is interesting is that in Mark’s account of this, he does not say anything about the mom and here in Matthew’s account, Jesus addresses his response to James and John. In other words, these boys put

their mom up to it. Mark doesn't mention her because in typical Mark style he gets right to the point. It was James and John who were angling for prominence and they were using their mom as a pawn in their plot. The response of the rest of the disciples underscores this. This disconnect is incredible and I am certain that James and John cringed with mortification every time they remembered this event. This is beyond embarrassing. James and John are so out of their depth, and what is worse, they have no clue. But, in true Jesus style, he does not mock them but he does seek to correct them although they do not appear to listen to him. He tells them that they did not know what they were asking. Beloved, do you see the point? If you want power, you do not understand leadership. If you want a position so that you will get some respect, you do not understand leadership. People will seek to acquire a title, even in the church in order to use that as a shortcut for respect that they hope to leverage for personal gain. And then to illustrate the very point that he just made that these guys did not know what they were asking for, he asks them if they were able to drink the cup that he was about to drink. And they both said that they were able! This question had two layers to it. On a general level, to drink someone's cup means to share in their life and their destiny. It means to entire into their life with them all the way to the end. These guys were writing a check from an account that could not cover it. They had no idea of what they were saying because they failed to hear what Jesus just said about his arrest, trial, flogging and death.

But the second layer to that question regarding the cup takes the issue to a much deeper level. When Jesus asked them if they could drink the cup that he was about to drink, he was referring to the cup of the holy, righteous and infinite wrath of God. As I have explained before, the Bible describes God has being fundamentally a merciful God. However, God's mercy does not minimize his righteousness. God is righteous. God is perfectly righteous. And therefore, our sin does more than bother God. Our sin arouses the justice of God. Sin grievously offends God. And while God loves to forgive, sin must be punished. God's wrath that has been aroused against sin is described as filling a cup and when Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane on the night of his arrest, he was given this cup to drink. I do not believe it was a literal cup, but a figurative expression of the wrath of God. He was the only one who could take the cup, which is why he is the only one who could die for our sins. When Christ took that cup he took upon himself every single sin of every single person who would ever believe on him.

You cannot handle your own sin, much less the sin of someone else. Neither could James and John. Their response of "We are able" is stunning! Jesus says, "you will drink my cup" and he is referring to the fact that they will indeed share in his life and destiny. He knows that they will at some point understand what they are blinded to right now. And, as it turned out, James was the first disciple to die. He was executed by Herod. John, on the other hand suffered torture and banishment and was most likely the last disciple to die.

C. Jesus uses his death as an example of leadership. (24-28)

The rest of the disciples are angry and they are angry at James and John (24). It does not appear that the rest of the disciples are angry because James and John and mama just completely ignored what Jesus had said, but it looks like they are angry because she

asked for something that each of them wanted and they are afraid now that James and John have an advantage over them. Jesus is within a few days of getting to Jerusalem and the disciples are still arguing over who is going to be the greatest in the kingdom! Go back to chapter 18.1-4 (read). The greatest in the kingdom is the one who humbles himself. Humility is not something that we pretend to do. For us, it is the fruit of repentance and an expression of love. For Christ it is the fruit of obedience to his Father and the expression of love. Christ is our example. He humbled himself. But the truth is, Christ humbled himself in a way that we can not match. When Christ humbled himself, he chose to take upon himself a reputation and treatment that was radically different than what he really was and is. When we humble ourselves, we are not lowering ourselves to a status that is beneath us, we are simply admitting the truth about what we really are. This is particularly clear in this text. Notice in verse 18 and in verse 28, Jesus refers to himself with the title, Son of Man. Do you know where that comes from? This title is used in Ezekiel where the prophet Ezekiel uses it to refer to himself, a man. It is also used in Daniel 7.

Read Daniel 7.9-14.

Son of man is used in the OT to refer to a human prophet (Ezekiel) and to a Divine King. Jesus is actually both. So, here is the Son of Man, the very One who will inherit from the Ancient of Days (the Father) the eternal kingdom that can never pass away, and will be given glory and worship from the entire earth and what does he do? The Son of Man submits himself to earthly authorities who will deliver him over to be condemned, mocked, flogged and crucified. This is a travesty of justice beyond anything that you can imagine. Jesus describes in v.18 what is going to happen to the Son of Man, and then in v.28 he provides his commentary on it. He came NOT to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

So, there are two things that I want to spend the rest of this morning focusing on: 1) I want you to understand the example of servant-leadership that Christ gave and 2) I want you to understand what Christ secured through his servant leadership. So, first of all, let's look carefully at this example. The disciples are walking along the road with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem where Jesus is going to die, and they, completely oblivious to this are in effect singing, "*Oh, I just can't wait to be king.*" Their idea of a king and their idea of leadership has been shaped and formed by their hearts and the examples of leaders they know. Jesus said, (v.25) "*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.*"

Notice what Jesus is doing. He is pointing out the examples of how the world views leadership, which is this: I use power to get what I want! Now, the truth is, I am not intrinsically different than any other human being. That is why we say that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. We are all sinners. We are all broken. We are all needy. We are all in need of God's grace. We are all human. That is reality! But, what happens when a human is placed into a position of leadership? So, often he/she acts (pretends) as if

he/she is no longer needy, broken, and human. Instead, we tend to PRETEND that we are indeed better than others and that we have rights and privileges that others do not have and that since we have a position of leadership that we have the right to be rude, corrupt, arrogant and smug. The truth is, all human leadership is, in a sense, pretend leadership. There is no such thing as a divine right of one particular race (like the Germans tried to argue) that is better than all other races. There is no divine right of a family to rule as a king. Rulers and kings are humans just like everyone else. Any position of leadership that you have has been temporarily vested to you by God and is to be stewarded as a temporary gift. But, most of the time, it seems, rulers pretend that they are actually better than others. The thrones they sit on are not eternal thrones. All human rulers will die, like everyone else and their bodies will decay like everyone else. In other words that are a bit cruder, they were all born with someone changing their diapers and if they live long enough, they will die with someone changing their diapers. The rulers of this world like to pretend that they are better than others and different. In their minds, they put themselves above others. That statement is the key to understanding the heart of the problem. Leadership can be a wonderful thing. Leadership is a glorious gift from God when it is exercised properly. The problem is that so often, people who are given a position of leadership put themselves above others, in their minds. Of course, you do not have to have a position of leadership to put yourself above others, in your mind. But, when you are given a position of leadership it can be a dangerous thing because we naturally have a sinful heart that wants to believe that we are better than others. So, if we are given a position of leadership, we are very tempted to place ourselves above others in our mind. And people who do this like to pretend that the rules do not apply to them. They like to think that they are indeed above others and get to do whatever they want. But, they are not REALLY different. Jesus says that we are not to be like them. *“It shall not be so among you.”* (v.26) Do not do this. Do not think like this.

If you want to be a police officer so that you can tell other people what to do, you are not ready to be a police officer. If you want to be a politician so that you can be noticed and be talked about, you are not ready to be a politician. If you want to be a teacher in the church, or be an elder or go into the ministry so that you will be respected, you are not ready for that. If you want to have a wife so that you can have someone who will clean up after you and make your meals and exist to make you look good, you are clueless about being a husband and are not ready to get married. If you are going to be a leader, you must take off your crown, and take up your cross.

Then Jesus uses himself as an example of what true leadership is to be like. I desperately want you to understand the servant-leadership example that Christ is setting up here. In contrast to the rulers and leaders in our world, Jesus really does have a position of authority. He really is a King. He is THE KING. He is God. He is Divine. He is intrinsically better. He really is perfect. He really is eternal. He really is wonderful. He really is all-knowing. He really is all-powerful. He really is all-present and immutable. But, what did Jesus do? He stepped down from that throne. His throne was reality. His throne was right. He stepped down from that throne and took off his royal robes and robed himself with humanity and then wrapped his humanity with the clothes of a slave. He took upon himself a reputation that was not really his. He took upon himself the

reputation of a weak, broken human. In fact, he even took upon himself the reputation of being a sinner who was condemned to die under the curse of God. When Jesus humbled himself, he truly stepped down.

Jesus is telling his disciples, and us, that we are to follow him. We are to step down. We are to use our positions of leadership as opportunities to serve. We are to use our gifts and strengths to care of those around us. We are to view ourselves as being on the same level as everyone else. But, notice this one very, very big difference. When Jesus humbled himself, he was taking upon himself a role and reputation that was really not his, and yet, for your sake, he chose to do it. When we, like Jesus, step down and humble ourselves and view ourselves as being just like everyone else, we are only accepting, surrendering to, and submitting ourselves to what is actually true. It really IS true that we are like everyone else.

We are often amazed when someone who is in a position of authority is a humble, meek, kind, approachable person and we want to act as if that is truly amazing! Beloved, it might be unusual, but what it is truly amazing is NOT that a broken sinner is admitting that he is a broken sinner. What is truly amazing is that the sinless Son of God stepped down from his throne and became the Son of Man and took your sin upon himself and died in your place, so that you could become a son of God and the bride to the King. When we humble ourselves, we are just stepping back into reality. We are just admitting what is already true. (END of CHART slides)

But, there is something more that I want you to see. I want you to understand what Christ secured through his servant-leadership. The humility of Christ was and is a powerful example of what true leadership is supposed to look like. But it is more than a powerful example. The role that Jesus stepped into became the means by which he secured our ransom. “...*the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

What is a ransom? A ransom is a payment that is made in order to secure the freedom of another. This ransom idea is seen in the book of Ruth, where Boaz makes a payment and secures the freedom of Naomi’s land as well as Ruth. Boaz is the kinsman-redeemer. We speak of Jesus as our redeemer because he was the one who paid the ransom. The same idea is also seen in the Day of Atonement ceremony in the Old Testament where a lamb was killed and its blood was poured out upon the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant in order to secure the redemption of the people from their sins for another year. The blood of a lamb, however could not pay for the sin itself, but could only postpone it. The death of lambs in the Old Testament was a picture of the Lamb of God who would come and offer his life as the ransom payment to God in order to secure our freedom from sin. The ransom was paid to God for the “many.” The many refers to every single person who would ever trust in Christ. The many does not refer to Satan or to his demons. The many does not refer to those who reject Christ. Those who reject Christ are not ransomed or redeemed, but instead will spend eternity under God’s judgment. There is no end to that because no human can pay for his own sin.

When I was about 7, my family was in Iowa visiting my grandparents. One evening we went to see my great uncle, who was, what I thought, a rather mean old man. During the evening, I got on his John Deere lawn-mower and began riding around the house. I decided to see how close I could come to his brand new Buick. On one approach, I panicked and missed the brake and ran the lawnmower into the side of the car and put a large crease in it. I panicked and ran for my life. It was not my shining moment. How could I, as a 7-year old pay for what I had just done? Not hardly, right?

Do you realize that when you sin, even once, that your sin is so offensive and so costly, that there is no way that you could ever pay for it, not even one. For you to say, "oh I'll pay for it" is infinitely more laughable and pathetic than me telling my great uncle that I could buy him a brand new car. There's no way. That is, there's no way that you can do it. But Christ did it for you. And he paid it in full. In order to receive that, you must humble yourself (that is step into reality) and admit the truth about your sin and trust in Christ. When you do, you become part of the family of God, where we are called to live in light of what is true about us. We are redeemed sinners. We have nothing to brag about, except Jesus.

Conclusion:

How can you help (serve) those whom God has placed under your influence?