

## Do You Want to Sit Next to Jesus? – Matthew 20:17-28

Pastor Colin Rieke – March 26, 2017

<sup>17</sup> Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, <sup>18</sup> “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death <sup>19</sup> and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!” <sup>20</sup> Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. <sup>21</sup> “What is it you want?” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.” <sup>22</sup> “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” “We can,” they answered. <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, 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 by my Father.” <sup>24</sup> When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. <sup>25</sup> Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

If you could have dinner with any three people, whether they’re still alive or have been dead for a long time, who would they be? I’m sure many of you have heard that question before, maybe you’ve even been asked that yourself. Maybe you know your three people, maybe you don’t. It’s a hypothetical question that gets you to think, who you would like to have dinner with. A person can go in any number of directions with this question, from having dinner with a supermodel or a star athlete, perhaps a famous person from the past like Martin Luther or Martin Luther King. It’s a question with which you can have a lot of fun.

I don’t know if James and John, the sons of Zebedee from our gospel this morning were thinking about this question when they approached Jesus with their mother, but we do know one person that they would have liked not only to have dinner with, but to sit beside him when he came to reign in his kingdom, and that person was Jesus. Now it’s easy when we take a look at James and John’s request to have the same reaction as the other 10 disciples – indignant and angry. How dare they be so bold as to make such a request! But I don’t want you to think that way. Rather I want you to think if you would have made a similar request. Because who of us wouldn’t want TO SIT NEXT TO JESUS.

If I were to ask the question “DO YOU WANT TO SIT NEXT TO JESUS?” I think all of us would answer affirmatively. I think each and every one of us would want to sit next to Jesus. Because just imagine what that would be like? To be able to sit next to Jesus and ask him any question you want. To be able to sit next to Jesus and see the nail marks in his hands. What a privilege it would be to sit next to Jesus. And did you notice in that gospel account, Jesus never said to James and John, “No you can’t sit at my right and my left.” He never said to the other 10 disciples that sitting beside me is a bad thing to ask for. But rather this entire account is about sitting next to Jesus, and what it takes to be able to do so. So I ask you again, DO YOU WANT TO SIT NEXT TO JESUS?

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While Jesus never told James and John that they couldn’t sit next to him, while he never told the other disciples it was bad to want to sit next to him, he did tell them that they didn’t know what they were asking, and he did tell them that they didn’t know what it would take to sit next to him. So that we might not repeat the same error of the disciples, it would be good for us to understand what it would take for us to SIT NEXT TO JESUS. To do that, let’s review part of the account.

**“Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. ‘What is it you want?’ he asked. She said, ‘Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.’ ‘You don’t know what you are asking,’ Jesus said to them. ‘Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?’ ‘We can,’ they answered. Jesus said to them, ‘you will indeed drink from my cup, 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 by my Father.’”**

A major point to bring out about this section is that James, John and their mother, didn’t know what they were asking of Jesus. They didn’t know what it would take to sit next to Jesus. And so Jesus gave them a challenge, if you will, of what it would take to sit next to him. **“Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”** he challenged them. Oftentimes in the Bible, the Bible uses this picture of a cup as some sort of suffering or trials that needs to be gone through. Jesus was asking, “Can you go through what I am about to go through? Can you endure the suffering that I am about to undergo?”

James and John envisioned they could. And how similar is that to us? How often do we feel like we are able to accomplish more than we can, how often do we bite off more than we can chew. So I can’t blame James and John for thinking they could do this. But surprisingly enough, Jesus tells them that they will drink his cup, they will go through, at least physically the suffering and persecution that he would go through. Although at this time, they didn’t know what that would all entail. And at the time they would go through this suffering, their attitude, and their motivation would be completely changed.

Jesus went on to describe what it would take to sit at his side, he went on to describe what it would mean to follow him and be his disciple. **“You know the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.”** Disciples of Jesus are not to act like the world around them. Disciples of Jesus are not to act like the world around us. The world around us, of which we are a part is very self-seeking. And if you said that you didn’t have a selfish bone in your body, I would call you out on it.

You may not be a ruler, you may not be a high official, you may not even be in a job that grants you authority over others, but that doesn't mean you don't have that desire. That doesn't mean you don't promote your ideas, your position, your perspective as superior to others. It's part of the sinful human nature that we've inherited. And it exposes itself every time you attempt to force your views on someone else, it exposes itself every time you get upset with someone else like a spouse or a child when they don't see your point of view, it exposes itself every time you put the needs of yourself before the needs of others.

It is this attitude that is in conflict with everything that being a disciple of Jesus is all about. Because on the one hand we want to be a disciple of Christ, we want to follow Christ, but then on the other hand, we still want others to respect us, we still want to have things our way, and we still want to be great. And in our mindset, we think we can have both, but that's not what Jesus is saying. We cannot serve and follow Jesus and serve and follow and serve our own inclinations. Being a disciple of Jesus means not following our own inclinations, but serving him and serving others. Not only does Jesus call for our service to them, he calls for us to become slaves. This is what it takes TO SIT NEXT TO JESUS. To give up any thought of self, and look out first and foremost for the needs of others.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I take a look at my life, I see a whole lot of selfishness there. I see a whole lot of wanting to be great – be a great pastor, be a great father, be a great husband, so that I could be seen as great in those areas. I see a whole lot of times where I have gotten frustrated because people just don't see what I see, they just don't get what I get, they don't appreciate everything I'm trying to do for them. For all those times I've tried to be a servant, for all those times I've tried to be a slave to others, there are far more times when I have not acted in that way.

(2)

This is what leads to us hopefully realizing we can't do what Jesus wants us to do. It hopefully leads us to realizing that we can't drink the cup that Jesus asks us to drink. All this should bring us to our knees in repentance and sorrow, because we don't have what it takes TO SIT NEXT TO JESUS. But our actions were never really the focal point anyway. Our actions never really mattered. Because Christianity has never been about what we have done for God. But rather about what God has done for us.

SITTING NEXT TO JESUS has nothing to do with what can accomplish, but has everything to do with what Christ has accomplished. Which is why the very first verses of our gospel account this morning are so important. **"Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!'"**

We would never be able to sit next to Jesus if he did not accomplish what he set out to do. It's rather interesting that the title in many Bibles of that short section is "Jesus predicts his death." And while that's in there, a more apt description of the section is "Jesus predicts his life." Now why would Jesus go through all of this? He would go through all of this for us. He would go through all of this to serve us, to become our slave so that we might become free. This is what Jesus' entire life was all about,

serving us. Not serving us so that we could indulge in our sinful pleasures, but serving us so that we might SIT NEXT TO HIM IN HEAVEN. He said as much at the end of our gospel account, **“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

Jesus' life as a ransom for many is what allows us into God's kingdom. Jesus' life as a ransom for many is what motivates us to not only follow him, but to imitate him. The purpose of our imitation is not to replace what Jesus has already accomplished, but to replace the selfish attitude in our hearts. This is why we are to act in service to others, this is why we are to put the needs of others before ourselves. This is why we set aside those things important to us, and focus on what is important to him – that is his Word, and bringing other people to his Word. This is why our lives ought to look a little bit different than those around us. It's not just that we love other people, but that we love all people, in a way they've never experienced before.

We may enjoy thinking about with what three people we would enjoy having dinner. Perhaps we may even have an opportunity one day to meet one of those people. But it doesn't matter who those three people are, it doesn't matter if you'll get to sit down to dinner with them or not, one thing that we can have absolute confidence in is SITTING NEXT TO JESUS. We can have confidence that we WILL SIT NEXT TO JESUS in heaven because of what he has done. This is not a matter of pride, this is not a matter of selfishness, because SITTING NEXT TO JESUS is something that we want for everyone. So this is a matter of grace – God's grace to us. Amen.