

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.” ³⁶ “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. ³⁷ They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” ³⁸ “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” ³⁹ “We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰ 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.” ⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 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. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 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.”

WHAT IS THE GOOD LIFE?

1. It is **NOT** LIVING FOR YOUR AMBITIONS
2. Jesus LIVED THE GOOD LIFE FOR US
3. The good life of a Christian is to SERVE OTHERS
4. We will enjoy THE GOOD LIFE OF HEAVEN

Tucson, Arizona--aaahhh, the good life! Almost never does a day go by that you can’t be out on the golf course or hiking or out enjoying a picnic lunch. The days all seem to be beautiful. People from all over the country take advantage of that and come down to stay with us during the winter months—which they’ll be doing soon! The good life is here...in our weather.

Or maybe the good life has to do more with security, knowing that you’ve got enough to get by, that you won’t have to do without. Maybe the good life has got more to do with money and the security it provides.

Actually, maybe having family...or that special someone...or a nice group of friends that you can count on. Perhaps that’s really what the good life is about—people.

Oh, what about stuff? You know—a nice house, maybe a pool to relax in, a nice garden, a great car or maybe a cabin getaway in the mountains. Maybe it’s the things that we acquire over the years which reveals the good life.

Man, if you could have a little of all that stuff rolled into your life—then you’d be looking at the good life for sure!

Or would we? It seems as if something is missing there. If something seems missing, then maybe we’re looking at the wrong “good life.” Maybe there’s more to living THE GOOD LIFE. If you’re willing to listen to Jesus today, he will teach you what living THE GOOD LIFE is really all about.

James and John, two of Jesus’ closest friends, needed Jesus to teach them. Their ambition moved them to make a bold request of God’s Son (Matthew’s gospel tells us that their mother was even involved in presenting this to Jesus!): **“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”** (That Jesus even tolerated that question, which is really more of a statement, is a testimony to his patience and willingness to teach!)

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked.

“Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

You see, much like you and me, James and John had some ambition, some desire and drive for a thing that they really wanted. But theirs was not limited to things in this world, like many of us strive for. What these “Sons of Thunder,” as Jesus called them, prized were positions of honor and power in heaven! You heard that the other disciples were angry and offended by their ambitious request. Perhaps they remembered that Jesus had already been through this with all of them, teaching them to have humility and squashing talk about being the greatest in God’s kingdom.

You notice that their request didn’t sound much like a humble prayer. No, there is a sort of determination there. You and I may, without thinking much about it, actually live our lives in a similar way—we’re not asking what *God* wants for our lives, but are concerned with what *we* want for our lives. We have an image of what the GOOD LIFE is, so that’s what we pursue. And so our drive for what we want may not be well-balanced with God’s will for us.

We may strive to have the best, closest family so we do all sorts of things to make that happen, but they end up being very worldly things, giving little concern for biblical direction that would steer us toward family devotions, bedtime prayers, Sunday School or youth group, proper discipline, weekly worship as a family and a host of other things.

If it’s money that we strive for, we might ask God to bless us with a job and pray for our retirement plans and investments to do well, all while our offerings skimpy and we have little concern for the church’s needs.

If it’s power and influence that we want in business or community or even at church, we may not treat other people well—or only treat them well if it benefits us, forgetting all the instruction God gives about being selfless, putting others first, being loving and patient and kind.

You don’t have to look at presidential candidates to see ambition gone wrong and a pursuit of a GOOD LIFE that isn’t so good in God’s eyes. We are guilty too—just like James and John. The GOOD LIFE is NOT LIVING FOR YOUR AMBITIONS.

But James and John had another big problem in all of this—they did not fully understand who Jesus was and what he was doing. They certainly weren’t applying Jesus’ teachings to their lives in this sin-charged moment.

Here too, we can be enough like those disciple-brothers, so let’s think about Jesus for a few minutes. These are the words Jesus spoke to his disciples, literally right before James and John asked their question: **“We are going up to Jerusalem...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.”** (Mark 10:33-34)

But let’s back up even farther and consider what led up to this cup of suffering and death Jesus would drink. Let’s examine Jesus’ life and see that he really did LIVE THE GOOD LIFE. Jesus had taken his disciples aside and was teaching them as he often did. He took advantage of many situations so that he might teach others. He was a teacher and a preacher of God’s Word. That certainly is a noble thing and it is a GOOD LIFE of sorts. But there’s more.

You heard Jesus call himself the “Son of Man.” Jesus consistently used that name to refer to himself, and no one other than Jesus used that name. He used the name Son of Man as the equivalent of Christ or Messiah. It’s a name though that reminds us of Jesus’ humanity—that he was 100% human. The Bible says that Jesus shared in our humanity (Hebrews 2:14). We know he had a body and a soul like every person. His actions were human—crying, getting hungry and thirsty, sleeping, suffering and finally dying. The Bible leaves no question as to whether he was true man or not. The big difference between Jesus and the rest of us is that Jesus was ***tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15)***. Jesus lived a *perfect* life—a perfect human life, never sinning against the commands of God. That truly is a GOOD LIFE, isn’t it?! But there’s more.

He was also true God—100%—so he knew all that would happen to him. He knew what sinful people would do with his GOOD LIFE. He knew that even though he had never done anything wrong his whole life, never ever went against God’s commands, he would be unfairly accused and tried in both religious and political courts, abused, and then killed. If you or I get blamed for something we didn’t do, we become very defensive. If someone goes around telling people that we said something when we really didn’t, we get angry. Sometimes our sinful natures flare up and we retaliate because, “*It’s not fair!*” Well this whole course of events that lay in front of Jesus wasn’t fair either—and therein lies the specialness of his GOOD LIFE.

He knew it wasn’t fair for him to have to take the blame and the punishment for the whole world’s sins. But he did it anyway out of love for you and me and to save us from sin and eternal death. From birth to death, JESUS LIVED THE GOOD LIFE FOR US.

This seemed to go over the heads of James and John when they asked for these positions in heaven: **“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”** In other words, could they endure the suffering Jesus would endure and the death he was about to die? **“We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 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.”**

The focus needed to shift from what James and John wanted, or what they could do, to JESUS’ GOOD LIFE lived and sacrificed for sinners.

There’s also no point in talking about how we also are to live a good life, if we don’t first talk about Jesus and his GOOD LIFE. It is only in trusting Jesus’ GOOD LIFE and death and resurrection that you and I find forgiveness for the times we think and act like James and John did in that moment, when our priorities are screwed up and we are focused on the wrong goals.

When we find forgiveness in Jesus, the way we live our lives becomes a response to what we see in his. And that’s the only way anything we do becomes pleasing at all to God. Today Jesus teaches us that THE GOOD LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN IS TO SERVE OTHERS.

James and John were thinking only of themselves. Jesus taught them that we are called to think of others and to put them first. It wouldn’t be long before Jesus would get down on the floor of an upper room and wash the disciples’ feet, showing himself to be a servant and teaching them to do the same. He told them to follow his example of serving others, thinking of them first, acting in a way that helps them. That’s the GOOD LIFE of a Christian.

It's interesting, people who enjoy the GOOD LIFE, humanly speaking, become the example Jesus uses. He speaks of rulers and high officials. They, by all appearances, have the GOOD LIFE! They have power and authority over other people. They make the rules, most often have the wealth, and control other people, lording their position over them. We still see that today in some of our "public servants" who sometimes give the impression that they are the ones to be served. So we get what Jesus is saying. But we must also listen to what he says next: ***Not so with you.*** It may sound like Jesus was saying that you are not supposed to be like that. But the way he said it was more firm—"It is not so with you." Not "*Christians shouldn't be that way,*" but "*Christians are not like that.*"

If you want a description of how the GOOD LIFE is to look, the way a life pleases God, listen to Jesus: ***...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 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.*** According to Jesus, a great person serves others. A first-place kind of person is one who acts like a slave to others! Remarkable, isn't it?!

Our sinful pride hears that and says, '*That's dumb; I'll never do that!*' But shame on us if we listen to that sinful nature and our love for the Savior doesn't overcome it! LIVING THE GOOD LIFE means that we respond in love for Jesus and his GOOD LIFE...and his death on the cross...and his resurrection on Easter. LIVING THE GOOD LIFE means that we, because of Christ, willingly serve others just as Jesus did. We look at him and his life and see how he loved and served us—and there's our motivation! THE GOOD LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN IS SERVING OTHERS—it is the only proper response to the love of Jesus.

I could give you a long list of things you could do to serve others, but do I have to? The truth is that if you and I adopt the attitude of selflessness and humility that Jesus lived and taught, we'll find so many ways to serve others! No list this morning would be exhaustive and checking particular things off isn't what Jesus is after. He's looking for a change of heart that truly looks to serve other people as we serve him. When we change our minds to think like Jesus thinks, we will LIVE THE GOOD LIFE OF SERVING OTHERS.

And WE WILL ALSO ENJOY THE GOOD LIFE OF HEAVEN—an *eternally* good life! That's a promise from God based not on how well you served others, but on how well Jesus served you. The pressure is off because we are not checking off boxes on a list of things we did for other people. Nor are we graded on how *well* we served others throughout our lives. WE WILL ENJOY THE GOOD LIFE OF HEAVEN because Jesus served every sinner and did it with perfection. Before we have the opportunity to serve our Savior-God in heaven, we serve him here. And we do that by being like him, serving others.

May God help you see the opportunities to do so.
May Jesus' example give you the desire to do so. And
May the Holy Spirit move you to actually do so! Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.