

How To Do Something Great For God

Matthew 20-28, Mark 10:35-45

Good morning, men. Who was the idiot that scheduled me to be out of town five of the last seven days? Oh, that was me! Good morning. We will be looking into a text this morning that is so interesting because on four different occasions Jesus talks to the disciples about the pathway to becoming great. The first time was on a road in Galilee and we looked at that some time ago. It is actually in the book of Mark. We will be working out of Mark 10, but it is actually in Mark 9. In the chronological order of the gospels, it has actually been quite a while ago this took place. This is second occasion we will be looking at.

It is really interesting. I wake up in the morning with a joyful ache to do something great for God. I am going to guess that most of you do, too. Or if you don't, you want to get to that place. That is why you are here. I have been amazed at how quickly this godly righteous desire to do something great for God, how quickly that morphs into ambition – wanting to be somebody; wanting to make a name for myself; or wanting to be better than so-and-so, or wanting to be known to have a good reputation. This text today runs along that same line.

The title of the message is “How to Do Something Great for God.” We are going to look at the passage in Mark. This same story is in Mathew 20 and we will be looking in Mark 10. Let's start in Verse 35 and read this story together. “Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him.” James and John are two of the closest friends Jesus had. Think about your closest friends and who two of your very closest friends are; that is who these men are to Jesus. “Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we want you to do for us whatever we ask.’” Let's pause again. What? You have heard me say on many occasions there is a God we want and there is a God who is. They are not the same God. The turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the god or gods we want and start seeking the God who is.

THE SITUATION

This is an occasion where they have forgotten who the God who is, is and they are seeking the God that they want. We want you to do whatever we want to do. At this point, they seem to be more interested in what Jesus can do for them than what they can do for Jesus.

Verse 36. “‘What do you want me to do for you?’ he asked.” This is interesting, because Jesus tells us throughout the Scriptures that we can pray about anything. We can ask Him for anything and this is the assurance we have – if we ask anything according to His will we have the thing we have asked of Him. He encourages us to ask Him. It hasn't happened yet, but later in John 16, we will see that He promises that He will give us whatever we ask for in His Name. He hasn't done that yet.

Verse 37: "They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." Now, if you are an angry Christian, you are now angry at these men for being so terribly ambitious. But notice that this is not actually worldly ambition. They are not asking to become a letterhead partner in the organization. They are not asking for a lot of money. They are asking for the positions of honor in heaven, in glory. Also, to put this in context, Jesus has just recently told them that these men will sit on twelve thrones in heaven. It is not totally out of context. It is not really completely coming out of the blue. What they are saying is there are twelve of us on the thrones. Let us have the two best thrones. That is really what is going on. It is not really a pagan ambition, *per se*. But if you think about it, it really does have its roots in wanting to be somebody; in wanting to be a great person, instead of wanting to do something great.

Reading on, Jesus says in 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?'" What is this? What is this cup? This is the cup of the suffering. It is very symbolic in many places, in many cultures. They answered, "We can," and they meant it.

These are not men who were wanting something for nothing. These are men who are willing to pay the price and in fact, they do. In Acts we later learn that James was martyred. Herod had him killed with a sword. It is rumored that John, it is actually written, but not verified, that John was boiled in oil. These men were willing to literally to drink of the same cup of suffering. They said we can. "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.'" Notice He doesn't actually tell them no. He doesn't say, "You idiot! I can't believe you want to sit at my right and left hand." Absolutely not. He doesn't say that. That is because Jesus is doing what Jesus always does.

What I have found very difficult to do, traveling the last five days, going through crowds of animalistic people who were doing things that are bizarre, unkindly, selfish, coughing all over the place. "That's my seat. I had that seat. I was sitting there." Anyway, I am glad to be back home where we have some decent folk.

"These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." He just shows compassion, even though they are completely out of line, and completely out of whack, He does what He always does. He is patient. He is showing the fruit of the Spirit. He is the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. These are the fruits of the Spirit. Jesus does that. He has compassion on them, like they are sheep who need a shepherd. Not so with the others.

Verse 41. "When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John." They were ticked off, as would be a human thing to do. Jesus called them together and I am assuming here, I can't figure it out to be anything else, but the most likely thing is He called all twelve of them together. He is calling all the children together. The children are squabbling, so He calls all of them together, and He is going to do a little conflict resolution. How does He do His conflict resolution? Remember, these are His disciples. These are the people who are closest to Him. These are the people who get it about who He is. These are the people who have confessed their faith in Jesus. These are the men who have repented of their sins. These are the men who are growing in their faith. These are the men who have the integrity of the Gospel. These are

men who are already serving God. These are the men who are the fishers of men. They are having a little squabble, because there is a little misdirected ambition here. Mark 10:42-45:

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles [basically the secular leaders of the world] 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 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.

What is going on here? These men wanted to lead lives of significance. They wanted to do something great. A man's greatest need is his need to be significant, and to find meaning and purpose in life. He needs to make a contribution; to do something that will leave the world a better place. Every one of us in this room has that desire. It is put there by God. God has hard-wired us to want to make a difference. Men have the need to be significant.

I am going to go ahead and we will look ahead in what happens in John 14:12. Keep your finger here. Turn over to John 14:12. Jesus says you "will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." Jesus wants you to do great things He wants to make sure you do it as a servant and not as the master. He is the master and He wants us to have a certain attitude towards other people when we do these greater things. The temptation to want to be somebody is immense. It can take over in an instant, and it takes over every day. There is absolutely nothing wrong with wanting to lead a life of significance, but there are two ways to go about it.

One way is the way of calling. The other way is the way of ambition. Jesus calls us to lead a life of significance to do great things, as a servant of our Lord and Savior Jesus living a life of surrender. There is one man who wants to lead a life of significance and he is doing that out of the overflow of his relationship with Jesus. In other words, because he understands, because he grasps the significance of the gospel and the sacrifice of Christ and he has entered into the life with Christ, he is filled up to the overflow in his relationship with Jesus and he is so grateful for what God has done that he cannot wait to go and serve Jesus, as a matter of calling. Every man's calling also falls within these four big ideas; these four kinds of universal purposes or callings: to love God with all your heart soul, mind and strength, to love your neighbor as yourself, to go and make disciples, and then to take care of the culture.

You don't just have to go and lead people to Christ to lead Bible studies to do something great for God. Everything you do has the potential to be something great for God. You are tending the culture. You're work matters to God. Every vocation is holy to the Lord. Your work is not just a platform to do ministry, it is ministry.

You can go and be the most excellent salesman of radio advertising that the world has ever known and pursue greatness by considering yourself to be a servant; to serve other people.

Another man wants to do something great too, but as a matter of ambition. He wants to go and be the greatest salesman of radio advertising that has ever existed because he wants to make a name for himself in the community. He wants to be respected. He wants to make a lot of money. He wants to make sure that his kids are going to the right school so all his friends could

know. He thinks to himself if I can just make this many sales calls. If I could just get this many people to do what I want then I can make this much money and if I can just get my kids into that school, and if I could just get this kind of car, and just live in that kind of neighborhood, if I could get this position in the church, then I will have done something great.

And Jesus says, look, sitting on my right hand side or my left hand side, that isn't what makes a man great. Let me tell you what makes a man great. He says whoever wants to become great among you must become your servant – *diakanos*. *Megas* is great where we get the word mega. You want to be *megas*? Become the *diakanos*. Become the servant. Whoever wants to be first, *protos*, he must be the slave of all, *doulas*. A bond slave of Jesus Christ – not slave in the sense that we use slave, but a bond slave of Jesus Christ. That is the way.

That is the situation. The big idea today is this: **A man can make a real contribution once he gets over wanting to be a somebody.** Once you get over the idea of wanting to be a somebody, then you put yourself into the position to make a real contribution; to do something really great for God.

I just had to tell you. This desire to be a somebody is not something you are going to someday conquer and get over. When I say to be a somebody in the wrong way of being a big man in the eyes of the world.

I write books. I just finished a book and I wrote that book for all the right reasons. I wrote that book as a servant of Christ wanting to do something great for God. When I built buildings, I built building because I wanted to build buildings that would bring glory to God so whether it is secular or religious, it makes no difference. And yet, I must tell you that every single day at some point when I was writing that book, I would have a thought like, oh, this is good. People are going to love me. Or, you know, this is so good, maybe I can make enough money to take a vacation with my wife to Norway.

It turns at some point, because as Paul says in Romans 7:21, “When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” All the time. If you have walked with God for six months, six years, or sixty years – you will always find that when you would do good, evil is right there with you. That doesn't make you a bad Christian. But you need to be aware of that. You need to understand that your motives are never pure. If you will believe that and accept that it will keep you humble. The moment you begin to think that, you know what, I am there. Guess what? You just fell back.

There is a story that is very memorable to me. Larry Crabb, the great Christian counselor, said he was on the beach one day and under conviction for something. He was so repentant. He said he was on his knees repenting. He was filled with tears and just filled up with God. Then he had the thought – *oh, this is good. I can't wait to write about this.* You see what I am saying? When I would do good, evil is always right there with me. **A man can make a real contribution once he gets over wanting to be a somebody,** and understanding who we are and wanting to be a servant.

WHAT IS THE QUESTION THIS TEXT PUTS TO US?

What is the question this text puts to us? I have written down in my Bible study preparation worksheet that I use each week to help me stay on track when I am preparing. I have written down a statement: The most important thing that I can do for my men, that is you, is to help them change the core affections of their hearts. It is about what is going on in your hearts; the core affections of your heart.

If your core affection is ambition, that you want to be somebody, you want the big seat. If that is your ambition, then what I am hoping God will superintend to you through the Scriptures this morning, He will superintend to you a desire to answer the question that this text puts to us, in a way that leads to transformation in your life. The question is basically this: Am I willing to humble myself to serve, rather than be served? The way of the world is I am going to be great because I want to get people to serve me. I want to be great, so that people will give me adulation. In the kingdom of Christ, greatness is being a servant; a slave of all. Am I willing to be humble enough that I will prefer serving others rather than others serving me?

This shows up everywhere – as a boss, am I willing to serve my employees rather than figuring out how they can serve me? Am I willing to take responsibility to do the things that righteous employers do making sure that my employees earn a living wage, that they have the proper healthcare, and so forth and so on.

Or am I willing to be a servant as an employee? Am I willing to stop second-guessing my bosses all the time like I am smarter than they are? I have someone in my life, I won't mention his name but he is my brother, who used to and he is so much better now, but he used to constantly gripe about his managers. Always griping, like he was so much smarter. I said, if you are so much smarter, why aren't you the boss? But his attitude was so stinky that basically, he would tell you, he never kept a job more than six months until he was 50 years of age. There is the second-guessing, and then. If you are an employee are you willing to serve your employer by stopping all of the bad-mouthing? Running your employer down? These are practical ways that you can stop trying to be a somebody and make a real contribution. Stop running your employer down.

I remember the first loan I ever went for. It was a small loan and they told me no. I went back and I was really upset with them. But I got a piece of advice from a friend and he said if you like what you see tell your friends, if you don't like what you see, tell them. So I went back and I calmly explained to them. I got the loan. I wish hadn't given me the loan because it caused a big downward spiral of borrowing. Yikes. Benjamin Franklin said, "I will speak ill of no man, and speak all the good I know of everybody."

To be a servant as a husband. I remember being with a guy in California, who was driving me around when I was there speaking. He had married a woman that he didn't love. He had asked her to marry him, and before the marriage he realized he didn't love her but he felt it was his duty to go through the marriage. Now it was 15 years later, he was horribly miserable, and he wanted to know what to do. He was describing it. He was pretty depressed and by the time he was done I was depressed. I had no idea what to say, but I had these words formed in my mind so powerfully, through the Holy Spirit, and I said, I really don't have anything to suggest except the thought comes to mind to tell you "serve her." That is part of the marriage prayer. Serve her so she will love you more and we can bring you glory. Be a servant to your wife. Maybe you

don't like her that much right now. I get it. She probably doesn't like you that much now either. Serve her. Just serve her as a servant. Do the great thing and serve her, and you could make a real contribution to her.

How can you humbly serve your kids instead of having them serve you? Instead of having your children exist to bring you pleasure, why don't you exist to help raise them up in the fear and admonition of Christ? Be there for as many of their activities as you can. Maybe you don't make as much money because you take a couple hours off, but to be there for them so they don't grow up and you've heard my story over and over again, so they don't grow up like I did. So they don't grow up with a diagnosis of gross abandonment. That sounds so harsh because they were so sweet and they were great people. But they weren't there for me. They weren't. I ended up being the parent in the relationship in many ways. Be there for your kids. That is what it means to be a servant. That is what it means to be great.

Maybe in the church. Instead of sitting down Sunday morning and crossing your arms and saying pastor here I am, amaze me. Maybe you could go to your pastor or just figure out without even going to your pastor, instead of going to church so they can serve me, how can I serve there? Now, I'm preaching to the choir here and I see guys who are so committed everywhere. I am talking about as a boss, as an employee, as a husband, as a father, as a churchman. I get it. But this is the message of this text. No matter how much good you would do, you and I both also know that evil is always present right there with us. The flesh wars against the spirit, and the spirit wars against the flesh so that you do not do what you want.

I know what you want because I want it too. I want to do something great for God. The question this text puts to us is, are we willing to humble ourselves to serve rather than be served? **A man can make a real contribution once he gets over wanting to be a somebody.**

BECOMING A HUMBLE SERVANT OF JESUS

We are way out of time, but becoming a humble servant of Jesus. Galatians 2:20. This is kind of a way of just talking about how we can surrender and make Jesus Lord. The truth is that you cannot become a humble servant of Jesus. You are powerless to do that. But Jesus can do that in you. Jesus said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

We should say with Paul, Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Paul said of Timothy I have no one else like him for everyone looks out for his own interests. Jesus is saying look, don't do it that way. Be a servant. **A man can make a real contribution once he gets over wanting to be a somebody.**

Are you over it? Not quite over it? Let's pray.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we all want to be over this ambition of wanting to be a somebody. We all want to pursue our calling. Lord, You have wired us to want to lead lives of significance. You have told us that we are going to do greater things than you, but Lord, help us to make sure we do those for

the right reasons. Help us to be humble servants who want to serve more than to be served. We ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.