

LIFE GROUPS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE



Study of **MATTHEW**

SEPT | **LARGE PRINT**

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LIFE GROUPS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE



Study of **MATTHEW**

SEPT. 6 | **LARGE PRINT**

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THE TRANSFIGURATION

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

MATTHEW 17:1-13

SEPTEMBER 6, 2020

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: SIX DAYS AFTER PETER'S CONFESSION OF CHRIST AT CAESAREA PHILIPPI, JESUS TOOK THREE OF HIS DISCIPLES TO A MOUNTAINTOP WHERE HE WAS TRANSFIGURED BEFORE THEM.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: JESUS' MOUNTAINTOP TRANSFIGURATION PROVED THAT HE IS GOD'S SON, THE PROMISED MESSIAH.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: WITH THE CROSS LOOMING AHEAD, THIS BRIEF GLIMPSE OF JESUS AS THE LORD OF GLORY ENCOURAGED THE DISCIPLES TO CONTINUE FOLLOWING JESUS TO JERUSALEM.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Brainstorm a list of characteristics or descriptions of worship.
- 2 What are some of the key aspects of corporate worship at First Woodway?
- 3 On the other hand, what are some ways we worship when we are outside of the walls of our church?

Worship is central to our lives. Through worship, we celebrate and reflect on who God is and what He has done for us. Worship also gives a public declaration of God's glory, and it is a way we can encourage one another in our faith. If we are not connecting to God in worship, then we will have a hard time connecting other people to Christ and community.

UNDERSTANDING

The disciples were with Jesus at Caesarea Philippi when He asked them about their views of His identity. Peter gave the correct answer that Jesus was the Christ, but Peter rejected Jesus' teachings regarding His suffering and death. Six days after the experiences at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus took three disciples who were especially close to Him—Peter, James and John—to a high mountain.

> READ MATTHEW 17:1-4.

- These verses describe Jesus' transfiguration, which means transformation. What stands out to you from this scene?

- What did Jesus' physical transformation signify?

On this mountain Jesus was transfigured, or transformed, before Peter, James, and John. They saw Jesus in His divine glory as His face shone and His clothes became as white as light. In Scripture, the color white often symbolized purity. Light often is associated with God and His presence (1 John 1:5). The three disciples saw Jesus as they had never seen Him before, and they responded to Him in worship.

- Compare Mark 9:2-6 and Luke 9:28-33 with Matthew 17:1-4. What additional information about the transfiguration do these Gospels reveal?

- What was the significance of Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus?

After Jesus' physical appearance changed, the disciples saw Moses and Elijah with Jesus. Moses received the law from God at Mount Sinai, and Elijah was a significant prophet in Hebrew history. These two leaders represent the Old Testament law and prophets. The presence of these figures reminds us of Jesus' relation to the old covenant. Jesus, fully God and fully man, was the fullest revelation of God, but He built on the revelation already available to God's people in the Old Testament. Matthew did not report what Jesus, Moses, and Elijah discussed, but Luke recorded that they were discussing Jesus' coming "departure" or death at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). The Greek word translated "departure" in Luke 9:31 is the basis for our term "exodus."

- What was Moses' exodus experience? What was Elijah's (see 2 Kings 2:11)?

- What would Jesus' exodus entail? How did it compare to what Moses and Elijah accomplished? How does it make Him worthy of our worship?

What Moses and Elijah began and waited hundreds of years to see was about to happen. To them, Jesus represented promises kept by a faithful God. Moses led God's people on the exodus out of physical slavery. Elijah experienced a personal exodus out of this world on a flaming chariot. Jesus' exodus was greater than both of theirs. He died, was resurrected, and then ascended to heaven. Through this work He provides all of us with a way out of spiritual slavery. Jesus' exodus is our means to salvation and eternal life with Him.

- Read verse 4 again. What did Peter's statement reveal about his experience in the presence of God?
- Why is it easy for us to want to stay in our "mountaintop" moments, times when we are worshiping in the presence of God? What is the danger in doing so?

We sometimes describe moving spiritual experiences and times of worship as "mountaintop experiences." Peter didn't miss the greatness of this mountain-top moment. In fact, he loved the encounter so much that he wanted to build tents and stay there forever. As meaningful as such experiences are, they are not the norm. Moving back into the routine of everyday Christian living and serving may be difficult, but it is necessary. Staying on "the mountain"—or choosing only to connect up without also connecting out and in—is an abandonment of the ministry to which God has called us.

- What was your most recent mountaintop spiritual experience? How has that experience prepared or motivated you for service?

Such mountaintop experiences can help prepare us for difficult days ahead. Jesus soon directed the disciples to go down the mountain. There they found a crowd and a man who needed Jesus to heal his demon-possessed son (Matt. 17:14-16). Moving from a meaningful mountaintop encounter with the Lord to service in a world that needs our ministry is essential for Christ's followers today.

> READ MATTHEW 17:5-8.

- Why do you think God voiced His approval of Jesus in the presence of the three disciples?
- Compare Matthew 3:16-17 with Matthew 17:5. What is different and what is the significance of that?

As Peter was making his offer to build shelters, a bright cloud enveloped the three disciples. Many times in the Old Testament a cloud represented God's presence among His people. A voice from the cloud repeated the message God had spoken at Jesus' baptism. The heavenly voice at Jesus' transfiguration stressed not only that Jesus is God's Son (see Ps. 2:7) but also that God loved His Son. The voice then commanded the disciples to listen to Jesus.

The disciples had heard Jesus preach and teach, but they did not always comprehend what He was saying. God instructed them to pay closer attention; what Jesus said was absolutely essential to their faith and their future ministries. The implication is that they were to do whatever He told them. Likewise, listening to God must be an essential part of our worship.

- What do you learn about worship from the disciples' response to God's voice?

- What evidence in your life demonstrates that you regard Jesus as preeminent?
- How often and how well do you listen to Him?

Think about spiritual mountaintop experiences you have had and how these influenced your life. Our mountaintop experiences should not be ends in themselves but should lead us to obey “the Lord of glory.”

> READ MATTHEW 17:9-13.

- Why do you think Jesus forbid the disciples to speak about His transfiguration until after His resurrection?
- Read John 1:14 and 2 Peter 1:17. What can we infer about the impact of the transfiguration on John and Peter?

Jesus' transfiguration had given these disciples a glimpse of Jesus' glory. As the group moved down the mountain, Jesus told them to keep quiet about what they had seen. Following God's timetable in sharing what Jesus revealed to His disciples was essential. Eventually His followers could talk openly about Him, but in the short term they did not need to broadcast the transfiguration experience. They did not have the full picture. They had yet to witness His suffering on behalf of sinful humanity, His dying, and His being raised to life. After seeing all of those events, they could tell everything they had heard and seen on the mountain.

APPLICATION

- How has our discussion of worship challenged you today?
- What insight do we gain for our own mountaintop experiences from the disciples' response to the transfiguration?
- Are you worshipping God daily? What is one practice or habit you can try this week to make worship a more natural part of every day?

PRAY

Thank God for His work on the cross and for the joy that is found in responding to His work in worship. Ask Him for forgiveness if you have placed your focus on anything other than Him. Pray that we would be individuals and a church body that worships as a means of connecting people to Christ and community.

LIFE GROUPS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE



Study of **MATTHEW**

SEPT 13 | **LARGE PRINT**

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THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

MATTHEW 18:21-35

SEPTEMBER 13, 2020

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: JESUS TOLD THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT TO EMPHASIZE THAT HIS FOLLOWERS SHOULD PLACE NO LIMITS ON THEIR FORGIVENESS.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: BY FORGIVING OTHERS, CHRISTIANS DEMONSTRATE THE FORGIVENESS, GRACE, AND LOVE OF GOD.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: IN CHRIST, GOD HAS FORGIVEN US MORE THAN WE WILL EVER BE ASKED TO FORGIVE OTHERS.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 What is something you have done to another person that required an apology?
- 2 How long a period of time elapsed between the time of the grievance and the apology? How hard was it to apologize?

Forgiving others is difficult. Any time we seek to forgive someone else, we take a cost upon ourselves. But that's just what God did when He forgave us; He took the cost of forgiveness upon Himself in Jesus Christ. When we understand the extent of how much we've been forgiven, we will be willing and able to extend that forgiveness to others.

Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant helps us take a good look at our relationships and attitudes and, if needed, motivates us to forgive others as He has forgiven us.

UNDERSTANDING

> READ MATTHEW 18:21-27.

- What do you think Peter expected Jesus to say when he asked if someone should forgive a brother seven times?
- What did Jesus' answer reveal about Peter's motives in asking the question?

Perhaps Peter had accepted Jesus' teaching about the shepherd's compassion for the lost sheep (vv. 10-14) and suggested he was ready to generously forgive fellow disciples seven times. The number seven represented completeness and far surpassed the rabbis' teachings to forgive three times an offender and the offense.

Clearly, Peter thought he was being generous in offering to forgive more than double the rabbinic instruction. However, Jesus dramatically increased the number of times one should forgive, and indicated a person should not keep track of offenses but should forgive without limits. He didn't mean we should withhold forgiveness starting with the 49th or 491st offense.

- If applicable, share about a time when you were in a situation where you felt that forgiving someone might be the same as enabling them to continue to wrong you. How do you think Jesus would handle that situation?
- Why is it so important that we keep on forgiving? What happens when we do not forgive?
- How has God's forgiveness in your life motivated you to be more forgiving?
- How would you describe the servant's response to the king's decree?

Swallowing his pride, the distressed man fell facedown before the king and begged for mercy and patience, promising to do the impossible—to pay back the full amount, a promise he almost certainly couldn't keep.

- What would you be feeling if you were the servant? Has there ever been a time when you felt like that? Has someone ever greatly forgiven you?
- How did the king answer? What did the king's response reveal about his character?

Jesus' account of the king's response must have startled those listening. He blindsided the disciples, including Peter, with His next statement. Having established the servant's action and the king's right to be repaid his money, the master of that slave had compassion on the man, released him, and forgave him the loan. This was certainly not business as usual! The king not only would not sell the servant and his family into slavery; he no longer would require repayment of the debt.

> READ MATTHEW 18:28-35.

- How did the second servant respond when the first servant came for collection?
- What would you expect the first servant to do? Why?

No doubt those hearing Jesus tell this story recoiled with anger at the insensitive, hard-hearted reaction of this man. How could he be so cruel, so hypocritical? Such action should stir the ire of any logical person. It especially touches believers and reminds us that because God has forgiven us so much, we too must forgive. Any sin against us is small in comparison to our sins against God. The least a person who has received God's mercy can do is to offer mercy to those who ask for mercy. We must never forget that refusing to forgive others offends God as well as the person we won't forgive.

- Why do you think the first servant lacked mercy and forgiveness?
- What do you think leads you to lack mercy and compassion?

After being forgiven, the servant went to a second servant who owed him money, 100 denarii, and began to assault him. He owed 100 day's wages. The second servant fell on the ground and pleaded with the same words the first servant had spoken before the king. However, the first servant did not relent; he did not forgive or show mercy. Instead, he had the second servant thrown in jail. The first servant failed to understand the forgiveness he had been given by the king.

- How did the king respond upon hearing the actions of the servant he had recently forgiven?
- How did this parable emphasize Jesus' point about forgiveness?

Jesus' warning was to make sure believers understand that the heavenly Father expects those He has forgiven to forgive. God wants His people to mirror His mercy.

All God's children must be careful not to betray our Father's forgiveness by refusing to forgive others. Jesus made this very clear in the Lord's Prayer when He said we should pray, "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

> READ MATTHEW 6:12-15.

The Lord's Prayer was Jesus' explanation of how to talk to God. As such, it is almost entirely focused on the character and activity of God. The only portion of the prayer that deals with a human action is the reference to forgiving those who wrong us. It's a necessary response to the character and action of God.

- Why do you think Jesus chose forgiveness as the only subject in the Lord's Prayer where He emphasized people's actions?

- According to Jesus, what is the true motivation for forgiveness? How is that different from most people's motivation to forgive?
- Why is it so important for us to practice forgiveness? Why is it so difficult?

Jesus emphasized forgiveness because it, above all else, demonstrates that a person understands what God has done for them. Giving forgiveness is being like Jesus. Our motivation for forgiveness is rooted in what God did, specifically in the death of Christ which forgave us our sins against God.

APPLICATION

- When is the last time you felt overwhelmed by the mercy God showed in forgiving you? How can you make that a more frequent part of your life?
- Do you need to forgive anyone right now? What is keeping you from extending forgiveness?
- Do you think forgiveness is easier the first time or the 100th time? Why?
- What is one practical way our group can show God's grace to our community?

PRAY

Ask God to open your eyes to the beauty of His forgiveness and grace yet again. Thank God that at the right time when you were still a sinner, Christ came to bring forgiveness. Pray that God would help your group become like Him as you forgive others.

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Study of **MATTHEW**

SEPT 20 | **LARGE PRINT**

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THE IMPOSSIBLE THAT'S POSSIBLE

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

MATTHEW 19:16-30

SEPTEMBER 20, 2020

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: AS JESUS JOURNEYED TOWARD JERUSALEM AND THE CROSS, A MAN ASKED A QUESTION ABOUT GAINING ETERNAL LIFE. JESUS' ANSWER DISMAYED THE MAN, AND HE TURNED AWAY. JESUS THEN DIA-LOGUED WITH HIS DISCIPLES ON THE SUBJECTS OF THE RICH ENTERING GOD'S KINGDOM AND THE REWARDS OF FOLLOWING HIM.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: WE ARE CALLED TO BELIEVE BOTH THAT CERTAIN THINGS ARE IMPOSSIBLE FOR US AND THAT NOTHING IS POSSIBLE WITH GOD.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: GOD HAS MADE WHAT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US POSSIBLE THROUGH THE LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Share a story about a time when you found yourself in an “impossible” situation that left you completely dependent on God.
- 2 What did you learn through that experience?
- 3 How has that story shaped your relationship with God and the way you have lived since then?

We all find ourselves at times feeling like we can't handle whatever is going on in our lives. God knows we feel this way, and in His Word He teaches us what we should do when we find ourselves with more than we can handle.

UNDERSTANDING

> READ MATTHEW 19:16-22.

- Read Luke 18:18 and Mark 10:17 from the parallel accounts of this story. How does this man compare to the rest of the people following Jesus?
- What is your impression of the man who came to Jesus? How would you characterize his attitude?

The parallel Gospel accounts of this story can be found in Luke 18:18-30 and Mark 10:17-31. Luke identified the man further as a ruler, and Mark described his approach to Jesus. In contrast to the often sick, elderly, and poor people who followed Jesus and sought His healing and hope, the man was a rich young ruler.

- What made the man's question in verse 16 strange?

The rich young ruler told Jesus that he viewed himself as having been good, moral, and religiously diligent all his life. However, in spite of his best efforts to please God, the man knew that something was missing; he did not have eternal life. He felt so strongly that he humiliated himself in his desperate attempt to find out the answer.

- Look again at verse 21. Why did Jesus make such a difficult demand?
- Do you find Jesus' response uncomfortable? Why? How does Jesus' response compare with your general ideas about salvation?
- In spite of Jesus' demands of the man, could eternal life be gained by selling everything? Why? What good will selling his possessions do?
- Is it possible for us to obey the command Jesus gave the man? What is the lesson for us?

On the surface, Jesus seemed to be saying the man could earn eternal life by keeping the Commandments. Although we know that salvation is received only by grace through faith, not by works (Eph. 2:8-9), our works are a lot easier for us to measure, and we all have a tendency to try to impress God. Contrary to how it sounds, Jesus wasn't saying that selling his possessions would earn him favor with God. He knew this young ruler's heart and that what stood between this man and a relationship with Him was the priority of his possessions and his personal identity. He earnestly wanted the man to commit himself to God wholeheartedly.

- In Mark 10:21, Mark wrote that Jesus loved the man before He commanded the man to take that drastic step toward following Him. Why is this significant?
- Do you believe Jesus loves you even before you follow Him? Do you ever feel He is judging your performance—that He'll love you more if you do better?
- How does your perspective of good works change when you learn that you already have God's acceptance through Jesus?
- How would you describe people who live consistently in the truth that Jesus' love for them precedes anything they might do for Him?

When we put the love of God after the command, we wind up bitter and frustrated of what we have to give up. But Jesus loves us first, and it makes all the difference. The command to sell everything and follow Jesus is not to merit Jesus' love, but to respond to it. Jesus' command was rooted in His love. In essence He was saying, "You will not experience the full joy of trusting in God until you come to me empty handed, poor in spirit," like the little children in Mark 10:13-16. The command of Christ is for the man to put himself in a situation where he is completely dependent on God.

> READ MATTHEW 19:23-30.

Jesus' voice must have rung with disappointment as He addressed the disciples after the young ruler went away. Always aware of teachable moments, Jesus did not let this opportunity pass without sharing two important principles: 1) God's ability to save; and 2) the sacrifice and reward of following Jesus.

- What is the point of the camel illustration Jesus used?
- What was Jesus trying to impress on the disciples when He spoke of the “possible” and “impossible”?

A camel was the largest animal in Palestine, a needle the smallest object. A camel passing through a small opening was a commonly used metaphor for impossible events. While it's true this relates to our salvation as it is only possible by divine miracle, it also paints a picture of the difficulty of experiencing the power of God's kingdom on earth. Still, that power is available to all who place their faith in Jesus.

Jesus used the illustration of something that was impossible from a human perspective—a camel going through the eye of a needle—to emphasize that wealthy people had extreme difficulty in choosing to follow Him. To come to Christ, one must recognize one's personal need and then be willing to trust one's life to Christ.

- How do Jesus' words in 23-26 impact our understanding of “saved by grace”?

The greatest gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, something that is impossible for us to attain apart from God's help. The rich ruler sought this but walked away from it. Such wonderful quality of life begins the moment we accept Christ and will be enjoyed throughout eternity with God.

- What price does every follower of Jesus pay to follow Him (vv. 27-30)? What rewards do they receive in return? In the grand scheme of things, does the reward exceed the costs? Explain.
- Your identity is not found in a sum of your “whats” but in a who. What is Jesus asking you to “go, sell” (v. 21)? What are the “whats” distracting you from your true identity in Christ? How can we support you as you strive to be obedient?

Peter asked the question that was likely on each of the disciples' minds. Would their sacrifice in following Jesus be worth it? Jesus made it clear to the disciples, and He makes it clear to us, that whatever we sacrifice for the sake of following Him will absolutely be worth it in the end. Though we may not, and often will not, see the immediate rewards of following Him in this life, He has promised that the first will be last and the last will be first in His kingdom.

APPLICATION

- When God unleashes His power of salvation in a person's life, what changes?
- What threatens or discourages your faith in God's ability and desire to bring about change in your life?
- What would you say to people who believe God's grace can't provide forgiveness for their sins? Do you ever feel that way yourself?
- What can you do this week to keep the reality of your spiritual transformation present in your thoughts? How might your week look if you do?

PRAY

Thank God for the simple truths of His gospel message and the confidence we can have in our salvation. Pray that in the midst of your roles that encompass family, work, and social contacts, you will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to spread the good news of the gospel by living in obedience to God and by sharing the gospel with others.

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SEPT 27 | **LARGE PRINT**

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THE GREATEST WILL SERVE

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

MATTHEW 20:17-28

SEPTEMBER 27, 2020

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: THE DISCIPLES STILL HAD NOT LEARNED JESUS' LESSONS REGARDING GREATNESS AND HUMILITY IN THE KINGDOM. THE EVENT IN MATTHEW 20:17-28 PROVIDED ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR JESUS TO EXPOUND ON THE NEED FOR HUMILITY AND SACRIFICIAL SERVANTHOOD IN THE KINGDOM.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: JESUS' FOLLOWERS ARE TO SERVE AS HE SERVED.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS SERVED IN THE GREATEST WAY POSSIBLE BY GOING TO THE CROSS FOR US.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 What is the dirtiest job you have ever done? Would you be willing to do it again? Why or why not?
- 2 Describe a time when someone served you in a profound way, doing something for you that you did not want to do yourself. How did that make you feel?

We live in a culture that constantly encourages us to “look out for number one,” to put ourselves first, and to do whatever it takes to get ahead. We value the idea of the self-made person. We like to think that we are self-sufficient, and that we don’t need the service of others. If we are honest before God, however, none of us got to where we are solely by our own efforts, and there have been countless people around us who took on lesser roles to serve us in getting there. Before going to the cross, Jesus did just this. He willingly took on a lesser role and modeled humility for His disciples.

UNDERSTANDING

When two of Jesus’ disciples sought places of personal advantage, He gently denied their requests. He also taught the body of disciples that true greatness in His kingdom is measured by sacrificial service to others.

> READ MATTHEW 20:17-23.

- What was the irony of the request of James and John’s mother following Jesus’ words in verses 17-19?
- What stands out to you about the difference between Jesus’ words and the mother’s request in these passages? What are some ways we miss the point of Jesus’ work in our lives and in the world?

The mother of James and John was not likely acting on her own here. James and John seem to have been guilty of maneuvering for status and rank within the kingdom of heaven. Their mother respectfully bowed down to Jesus, preparing to make a formal request, and when He invited her to make it, she asked. Her reference to Jesus' kingdom was to its ultimate, triumphant fulfillment.

- What in the mother's request showed that the disciples' view of the Kingdom was different from that of Jesus?
- Of what was she ignorant? What do you think kept her from seeing this truth?

James and John's vision of the kingdom was different than what Jesus had in mind. The person on a king's right hand was his second in command, and the one to his left was third. The woman and the two disciples were assuming that greatness in God's kingdom was based on status, rank, power, and authority. They also made the mistake Jesus warned against in Matthew 19:30–20:16: They sought to influence God's bestowal of reward.

- To whom did Jesus respond in verse 22?
- Why do you think Jesus spoke to the sons and not the mother?
- How might promoting our personal interests for personal gain cause issues in a church body?

Although the woman knelt down before Jesus, her heart was filled with ambition, not submission. No one in this scenario came to Jesus with a selfless attitude, but instead they came seeking their own personal desires. Jesus responded directly to the brothers, not to their mother. In

Mark's parallel account of this incident (Mark 10:35-45), the mother's role is omitted altogether. This strongly indicates that the two sons had arranged for their mother to make the appeal on their behalves. Sometimes we hide our ambition and appear to be disinterested by having someone else promote our cause.

- In order to share in Jesus' kingdom, what "cup" must the disciples share with Jesus (see vv. 18-19)?

- What does this teach us about God's expectations for His children?

Jesus confronted the disciples' misunderstanding by alluding to the fact that the path to such authority lay in the same kind of suffering He would undergo. By asking for the positions of greatest authority, the disciples were asking for the most bitter cup of suffering. Jesus alerted them to the connection between great authority and great suffering by asking, "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" The two answered, "We can." These two disciples were prepared to follow Jesus. But it is unlikely that they understood that Jesus was speaking of His death on the cross (20:19). A cup was often associated with judgment (Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17-18).

> READ MATTHEW 20:24- 28.

- What was the reaction of the other ten disciples when they heard about this request?

- What does this reaction suggest about what was in their hearts?

- How could their attitudes stand in the way of serving one another and others?

During this discussion, the other ten disciples had not been present. Apparently, the matter was reported to them when they rejoined the group. They were indignant when they learned about James and John's request. They resented the two brothers and were displeased that James and John had sought special privileges for themselves. Ironically, the reaction of the ten revealed much about their own hearts. Earlier, the disciples as a group had asked Jesus, "Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18:1). If they all had not desired the top places for themselves, perhaps the ten would not have been so angry with the brothers. If we have a heart for selfless service, we will be eager to seek the best for others, even if doing so means that we do not obtain any measure of recognition.

- What contrast did Jesus set up between the Gentile kingdom and God's kingdom?

- What did Jesus say about true greatness?

- How does that compare with the way "greatness" is typically defined in our culture today?

In the unbelieving world, it is assumed that power and authority define greatness. The rulers and high officials were examples of worldly greatness. The way they demonstrated their "greatness" was to lord it over others and to exercise authority. Jesus did not criticize authoritative or hierarchical structure, but rather the "strutting." Such behavior is born out of insecurity and pride. The person who "bosses" others around is likely trying to prove to himself that he is as great as he hopes. However, as Jesus teaches here, the person who is truly great, by heaven's definition, is the one who chooses an attitude of submission to others in the family of believers.

- How did Jesus model this new way?

Jesus could provide no better model for the type of sacrificial service that defines Kingdom living than Himself. Here He used the title “the Son of Man” to avoid the use of the pronoun “I,” which might have been construed by the disciples as boastful. Although Jesus came with every right to be served, His purpose was to serve others. He gave up His rights and took on a responsibility He was not obligated to take. This responsibility would extend ultimately to our eternal souls, purchased by the sacrifice of His life as a ransom for many. We need to redefine greatness according to Jesus’ teaching.

- Jesus’ words in Matthew 20:20-28 are as counter-cultural today as they were in Jesus’ day. What does this say about the condition of the human heart and our natural assumptions about service?

What happens when, for Jesus’ sake, we shift the focus from ourselves to others? Among other things, we do not insist on things being done our way. We are not always demanding our rights. We do not have to be first in line. Instead of criticizing, we try to help. We give of our resources to others.

APPLICATION

- Based on today's reading and discussion, what do you conclude it means to thrive in service? Why is this such an important part of learning to thrive, rather than just survive?
- As you are challenged to actively serve as a vital part of First Woodway, how might you keep your motives for serving in check?
- What are some specific gifts God has given you that you may not be currently using to serve God or to serve others, both at First Woodway and in our community? How can we as a group intentionally encourage and pray for one another with this effort?

PRAY

This week, pray specifically for opportunities to serve. Thank God for Christ's ultimate example of service: giving His life for our sake. Pray that we would reflect on the gospel daily and serve others in response to what Christ has done for us. Ask Him to reveal to us our pride and selfish ambitions, that we might lay those things aside for the sake of His glory.