

From Power to Service

Good evening, welcome to church tonight. If we haven't met yet, I'm Kyle Boyd, an elder here at Redemption. If you are new or visiting welcome, we are so glad you are here. I am filling in for our lead pastor James tonight, and excited to be with you all, continuing our Redemption Applied series. This is the first sermon I have preached here at Redemption. In fact, it is the first sermon I have ever preached....so good luck.

As a brief introduction, I've been coming to Redemption coming up on two years. About two years ago my wife Beth and I, along with our two kids moved to Denver from Seattle. We are still getting to know Denver, but we love the city, and excited to be a more of a part of everything that goes on here, and excited to be a part of what the Lord is doing in Denver. I am an architect here, I work at a local Denver architecture firm. If you'd like to talk after the service, I'll be right down front. I'd love to get to know you or talk about questions you may have.

I want you to know that I am up here as a sinner. I am not preaching out of a mastery of anything we are talking about, but rather looking to the Bible for the way to live, for the way to serve God, serve one another, and to serve our neighbors and city. The ideas are straight from scripture, not my own. So that's a little bit about me, and where I'm coming from up here.

I just have one announcement this week. As you may have heard, we have been looking for a new location to meet. We have narrowed down our search to the Berkeley neighborhood, and we are excited to start to get to know the neighborhood, the people there, in hopes of laying down deep roots and being great neighbors. We desire to be a benefit to Berkeley, so much so that everyone would be glad that we moved in, from the atheist college student to the retired Christian couple. Would you join us in praying for our transition as a church, but also pray that God would already be moving in the hearts of people in Berkeley.

We have been moving through this sermon series called Redemption Applied, where we are trying to start to lay the groundwork for what it means to be a part of Redemption Church Denver. We have walked through 3 spheres of church life - the first sphere our Hearts, the second sphere our Community, and the third sphere our City, Denver. We have been looking at the typical way our culture operates, and then looking at how the Bible would have us operate as a church, and set out the goals for what kind of culture we want to have at Redemption. Today we are wrapping up the City portion, next week James will be concluding this series.

Today we will be looking at Mark 10 and talking about how we, as Denverites, tend to view power, and then see the radical way that God calls us to view power.

In the context that the New Testament was written, that is, Roman life in the early 1st century, power, prestige and social status were THE currency of the day. Roman life was divided very starkly into social orders, people paid large sums of money to become Roman citizens to gain status. Roman citizens used their money to pay for public monuments, aqueducts, benefits for the poor, not for the good of the city, not for benefit of the people, simply to have their name, family lineage, and accomplishments listed for all to see. People who were seen as weaker, people with illnesses, disabilities, women, children, were seen as disposable. The father of each family had absolute rule over his household and children and slaves. If they angered him, he had the legal right to disown his children, sell them into slavery or even kill them. After birth, the midwife placed babies on the ground: only if the father picked it up was the baby formally accepted into the family. If the decision went the other way, because the baby had a defect, or she was a girl, or the family couldn't afford another mouth to feed, the baby was exposed – deliberately abandoned outside, sometimes picked up by another family to become a slave, sometimes left to die. This sounds insane, but this illustrates the kind of absolute power that a Roman man had, power over even who lived and died. Power at the expense of everything else in life.

This is the context in which Jesus entered the world. I think this context makes it that much more radical when Jesus says things like: I have come not to be served but to serve, the first shall be last. Or the apostle Paul, who was born a Roman citizen and was a premier Jewish leader before he met Jesus, says things like I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, which he wrote this from prison, and he did indeed lose all things. pray for those who persecute you. These ideas are counter cultural today, in Roman times they would be almost unthinkably different from the way society operates. Today we will be looking at Jesus' radical re-orienting of our views of power, status, reputation and how it shapes our lives as Christians, and our vision for the church. Before we do, let's ask him for help this evening.

Pray

Would you turn with me in your Bibles to Mark chapter 10, verse 32-45. Picking up the story in verse 32: "And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid." Let's pause there. Jesus, his disciples, and a crowd of followers are headed up to Jerusalem, where they are anticipating Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, finally overthrowing the Romans and assuming his rightful place on the throne. Everyone is assuming Jesus

is about to lead a political revolution. Some are amazed, some are terrified at this prospect. But Jesus is trying to explain to them that his plan is much different, much bigger and grander actually, than a political takeover.

Let's pick it up again, still in verse 32, "And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.""

This is the third time Jesus has revealed impending death and resurrection, in the book of Mark. The first in Mark 8, and then in Mark 9. Each time that Jesus makes this prediction, it is followed by the disciples hope for status, prestige, and greatness. And this time is no different. They don't understand what he means by foretelling his death and are chiefly concerned with their own place in the story. Their desire for power makes them callous to Jesus' reality of suffering on the cross. Earlier in Mark, Mark 9, Peter rebukes Jesus for talking about his own death, where here James and John find an opportune time to talk to Jesus with no one else around.

Verse 35: "And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

Haha! I think this is such ridiculous question to Jesus. They sound like my 3-year-old son: "Ok Dad, I want you to do something for me. You have to say yes" One thing I love about the Bible is how the disciples are portrayed as such idiots! Mark wrote this text about 30-40 years after Jesus' death, by that point, John and James had become pillars of the church. But here they look like toddlers!

And It is easy, from our point of view, to laugh at James and John. In fact, I think that's exactly what Mark wants us to do. But is this not exactly how we most often relate to God? "God, I want you to give me a good life." "Just keep me healthy." "Give me that promotion." "I'll serve you if you just grant me whatever I ask." Whether its power, or comfort, or safety, don't we often go to God as a cosmic vending machine? Just looking to him for granting our wishes?

Let's go back to our story. Verse 36: And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38 Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" 39 And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized,

40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” 41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

We get a glimpse into the disciples’ hearts and observe how they are seeking idols even while trying to be closer to Jesus. James and John are anticipating Jesus becoming a powerful king. They know their Jewish texts well enough to know that the Messiah will be ushering in a peaceful reign (which he will, but very differently than they think). They are guessing they are on their way to break the Jews free from Roman rule! And they want to make sure that they are rightfully honored as Jesus’ closest followers.

The 10 other disciples are also complicit - they are indignant at James and John. Clearly, they are indignant that they didn’t ask Jesus first or indignant that they may be left out of the inner circle. They are not indignant that James and John have approached Jesus with such self-centered motives. All of the disciples are jostling to be the best positioned. They know (or they think they know) that they are getting in at the ground floor. They see Jesus as their ticket to power, prestige and the good life.

I want to point out one more thing before we move on. Did you note Jesus’ response? “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” 36 And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?”

It is full of mercy, and service. Not, how dare you. Not get out of my sight. But first, what do you want from me?” Even in this question he is implying service towards James and John. Then “You do not know what you are asking.” James and John’s pitch to Jesus is so clearly self-serving. Yet Jesus is kind even in pointing out their errors.

And then, when all the disciples are bickering over who gets to sit next to Jesus when he overthrows the Romans, he reveals to the disciples the nature of how to live. He re-orientes their (and our) perspective on power, and privilege, and greatness. Let’s see what he says verse 42

“And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.””

This is flipping our worldview right side up. Human nature, in our sin, is wholly self-centered. But Jesus is saying that we must be other centered. Jesus, through whom all of creation was created, knows the keys to the good life. But we as humans, have distorted that way, and flipped everything

upside down. We, like James and John, are always on the lookout for ways to build up our own little kingdom. But Jesus is flipping our view right side up.

Note that Jesus did not tell the disciples not to pursue greatness. But rather he is telling us how to be great. Often, we think service means being a doormat to others. But service is: using our strength and resources for the good of others. I think that's a really helpful definition. Service is: using our strength and resources for the good of others. And this is where Jesus is saying true greatness lies. Not in seeking our own good. Not in amassing as much power as we can. True greatness come from a place of strength - but using that strength for the glory of God and the flourishing of others. And Jesus is the ultimate example of this service.

In Philippians 2:5-8, Paul writes "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Jesus, prior to being born as a baby on our earth, existed in perfect communion with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. He chose to leave that infinitely wonderful existence and come to earth, still fully God, but also fully man. And he came not as a king, but he was born in a barn, and shared his first bed with animals. He spent his ministry serving, not serving those who were above him, but women, children, the diseased and the sick. He served prostitutes, criminals, sinners. Do you remember the Roman culture we talked about earlier? Do you see the kind of life of service Jesus practiced?

But he didn't stop there, he also served the people who were oppressing and enslaving his people, he healed the daughter of a Roman centurion, he shared a meal with a tax collector - one of the most hated traitors to the Jewish people, as we saw last week, he crossed sacred religious lines in order to bring living water to Samaritans and Gentiles. Jesus was radical in his service.

This is what Jesus is calling us to. To serve as we have been served. Using our strength and resources for the good of others. This is not just serving once a month at the homeless shelter. Or just serving here at church. This is

a life dedicated to the good of the other. This means we must use our influence for service at all scales and spheres of our lives. We as Christians must serve in public offices, and at high ranking jobs in order to fight for justice for the poor and the marginalized, the refugee and widow. And we must serve at the most basic day to day mundane level of human interactions. In short, we must be like William Wilberforce and Dwight Schrute. The most unlikely pairing of sermon illustrations...

William Wilberforce was a British politician in the late 18th and early 19th century. After he converted to Christianity, he became one of the leading voices in fighting for the ending of slavery in Britain. Historians say this movement offered no economic or social benefit to the British Empire, or to Wilberforce personally. But he persisted, because of his belief in the innate value of every human life. After successfully abolishing slave trade in Britain, he continued to fight for the rights of African peoples by ensuring the enforcement of abolition and promoting abolitionist negotiations with other countries. Wilberforce, and many others, used his place of power and status in British parliament to serve others, others who were considered below his station and not worth defending by most of his culture.

Dwight Schrute is a character on the television show The Office. He is the assistant to the regional manager at the paper- and office-supply distribution company Dunder Mifflin. In one episode, Dwight briefly quits his job at Dunder Mifflin and takes a job at Staples. While he is gone, it's revealed that he has been watering the office plant and arranging the toys on his bosses' desk in a manner that made him happy, and generally doing things around the office that no one noticed - until he was gone. This is the kind of service we also must have as Christians, maybe small, maybe unnoticed, but when we leave a place, people notice and miss our contributions.

So, what does this look like at Redemption Church Denver? If you are a Christian and consider yourself a part of Redemption, then our hope is that you would find joy in serving. Serving with your skills, with your time, and with your money. And doing so here with the church, in your personal life, at your job, in your greater community.

This looks like Beau and Carolyn here at Redemption. Beau and Carolyn haven't been around Redemption for more than a year, but if you have been here longer than a few weeks, I'm sure you have been welcomed by them as you come in the door. Or if you have kids, I'm sure you have seen Carolyn downstairs caring for our children on Sunday. Pretty much from day 1 of them coming here, Beau and Carolyn have joyfully jumped in to serving.

Our service extends into our working life. We hope that some of you may intentionally enter in to vocations that directly allow you serve our community for 8 hours a day. This looks like someone like Becca Breen, who

works as a high school counselor, allowing her to serve vulnerable teenagers in our community. We need Christians to serve well as doctors, nurses, counselors, teachers, police officers, garbage men, Christians who will serve our communities sacrificially. We also need Christians as CEOs, in public offices, working as engineers and at tech companies, in banking, who are dedicated to serving and loving people and shaping our society.

This also could look like using the skills and talents you develop in your working life to serve others outside of your work. This could look like Matthew Hegarty, who works full time as an attorney, but donates some of his time to represent undocumented women.

Or maybe this looks like simply serving your city when you see a need. Like the Gossett's who are serving a huge need in our community through foster care, by providing a home to a child who has no other safe place to stay.

These are just a few examples of people I know, I know there are many others in our church who are similarly serving. But we desire to continue to build a culture where serving others is at the core of Redemption, both individually and corporately.

Our city is full of need, we as Christians should be stepping in to sacrificially serve our city. All we have to do to find opportunities is to walk down the street! We as Christians must be serving the oppressed, the marginalized, the widows, the homeless, those without a voice to defend themselves, the single moms, the elderly, the housebound. Picking up trash on the streets, serving on neighborhood boards, helping out at the PTA. Fighting systemic racism, fighting injustice, fighting sex trafficking, serving refugees, serving in foster care and adoption. Those are just a few ideas.

At Redemption we hope to build this culture not just by sending you out on your own to do these things, but also by serving together. We are working to develop a strategy where each Redemption Group would find ways to serve one another or others. We want to find ways to be meaningfully and lovingly stepping in to people's lives. The single mother in your apartment building. The elderly neighbor down the block. Your coworker going through a divorce. About a year ago, my wife Beth met a mom while at the park with our kids. They were new to Denver and didn't really know anyone here. We've struck up a friendship, and when they had their second child a few months ago, Beth created a sign up for people to bring them meals. And do you know who brought them meals? It was you, it was women of Redemption Church Denver, who had never met this mom, and it brought her to tears.

These are the kind of things that we want to become common place in our Redemption Groups. The only way this works is if we are engaging with

people in our lives in ways that acknowledges need, and then we are open to bringing those needs into our Redemption Groups. We have around 10-15 people in most Redemption Groups, if each of us are involved in just 5 people's lives that 60 people. Surely we can find someone to serve in 60 people!

As an elder board, we are committing to serving you. We want you to know that you can always pick up the phone and call us, if there is anything that you need. And we personally are working on growing in our service. If you are moving, or having a baby, or going through a crisis, we want to be there serving you. We are also serving you by praying for you, by name, each week. If you are a part of this church, then we commit to you, that there is an elder (probably one who you know well) who is praying for you.

Finally, as a church, we are working on a strategy where we give 10% of all tithe to the furthering of the gospel around the world, and in our city. This will include other churches and church plants, as well as non-profits, and even non-Christian organizations.

So, this is the kind of culture that we hope to work towards here at Redemption. I have a few questions that I think may be helpful in a self-diagnosis for you in serving:

When it comes to our church, are you on a service team, are you serving consistently, are you serving joyfully?

When it comes to your work, is your office environment a better, and cleaner because you are there? Is it a more joyful place? Think Dwight Shrute level. Do you think there are tasks that are too low for you to do?

If you are stay at home mom, or even just in your home life, do you seek to serve your children or your spouse in a way that is glorifying Jesus, or are you simply trying to get things done as efficiently as possible? Or if you are single, do you think of the ways that Jesus has deeply served you before doing your roommates dishes again/.

When it comes to your Redemption Group, what would it look like for everyone to come with someone in mind that was in a time of need, and you talked together about how to serve that person, and pray for them. Or what would it look like to make sure that you served that one person well in your Redemption Group, the one who didn't mention anyone that they know, because they are new to Denver and they literally don't know anyone. What would it look like to serve them by inviting them to coffee this week?

This is crucial for us to understand as Christians. To see how Christ calls us to serve, and to radically follow his lead. But if we just left it there, I think we may simply be burdened with yet a longer to do list or left with guilt over how incapable we are.

Like the Romans, we are still operating in a currency of power and prestige. While our society may not be as openly power hungry, or blatantly cruel to the weak, I think we can all agree that power still plays a huge role in each of lives, even if we are not politicians or CEOs. Philosophers and psychologists, both secular and Christian, have helped us to see that power may be a hidden motivation in a lot of what we do. Nietzsche popularized this idea: he suggests that we might look at someone gossiping and say the underlying desire is to exercise power over the group. Or look at a husband's anger toward his wife and see that he is just trying to show power and dominance, because he feels powerless at his work. Nietzsche despised religion because he saw it all as a power grab. Surprisingly, Nietzsche and Jesus agree much more than you might think on this point.

Jesus was kind and merciful to most he interacted with. But he went after the religious leaders of his day with a vengeance. And one of his points in doing so, is that even things that are apparently good may be done to gain power, authority or honor. Let's say you do something for your husband, or friend and he doesn't notice. You then get upset, which reveals that you were really doing it for yourself, for recognition. Or you make sure you always post that selfie from your time serving at the homeless shelter.

In fact, even more than Nietzsche, the Bible calls us to examine our hearts, and motivations. We should examine our motives for both our bad actions, but perhaps even more, our good ones. What are you hoping to get out of your relationship with God? Why do you serve others? Why do you forgive your enemy? Why are you here this afternoon? Do you do these things to promote your own agenda? To build your reputation? To look good before others? To gain power? When we, you and I, delve deep enough, I think we will often find our motives are shockingly self-centered.

Jesus' final statement in our passage today, I think is the key to our service. "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." We do not need just an example to follow, we need someone to turn our selfish serving into selflessness. The Bible tells us that there is no one who is without sin, meaning, that all of our hearts are bent and twisted inwards, towards our own glory. In Isaiah, Isaiah 64.6 he says, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags." Outside of Christ, our motivations when we serve are corrupted right from the get-go. Whether they are corrupted by serving so that others might see us and approve. That is using our strength and resources to impress others. Or serve so that we can gain power over the

person we are serving. That is, using our strength and resources to control others. Or they are corrupt because we are trying to earn our way to God and get him to owe us. That is, using our strength and resources to get to God. We cannot earn our way to God, because our hearts and our motivations are operating out of a sinful condition. All of our righteousness is a filthy rag. We do not just need an example to follow, because we can't. We are broken. We are in a condition in which we cannot remove ourselves without someone else's rescue.

You might have noticed that when I was describing Jesus' life of service, I left out the biggest way that Jesus has served us.

As I said a few minutes ago, Jesus radically humbled himself and came to earth to serve people who most considered unworthy. And he served people who most considered his enemy. But he didn't stop there. Jesus positioned himself perfectly to be condemned as criminal. By pushing the buttons of the religious leaders of his time in just the right ways, Jesus brought upon himself accusations of high treason, punishable by the death penalty through a torturous method called crucifixion. Why? To serve you and me. To pay our ransom. You see, we are enslaved ourselves in our own sin, in our own selfishness and corruption, where everything we do is centered around glorifying ourselves and rejecting God. We need someone to save us, to give us a new heart, to reorient our motivations. So Jesus "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Do you see how because Jesus has paid your ransom you are freed from bondage – freed from the need to seek power, reputation, affirmation, control, comfort, safety, money. And that freedom enables you to serve others with less concern for our needs. Not out of selfish ambition or out of obligation or duty but using our strength and resources for the good of others, joyfully, because we see how much Jesus has served you. And when you screw that up, when you examine your hearts after a day of sacrificial serving and realize that you were still serving for your own gain – the Gospel offers us fresh grace to cleanse our filthy rags! Again, and again and again! So let us run to him.

I will leave you with a few more questions of self-reflection:

If you are a Christian: Are you serving because of duty or self-centeredness? Or are you serving because you see how much you have been served by Jesus and joyfully want to see others served?

Non-Christian: Is this the conception of Jesus you have heard of before? One who asks you not to serve more but who serves you.