

As you are locating Matthew chapter 20, I’m reminded of the fact that it’s Sunday and so, we all know that later today then...there will be a lot of football being played. In fact, I want to show you a picture of a football player and ask you: What is he doing?



He’s celebrating! That’s Odell Beckham, Jr. of the New York Giants and he’s celebrating after he just scored a touchdown. OBJ is known for his outlandish celebrations and one of them cost him some pretty big bucks earlier this year.

You know the players and teams are trying to come up with more and more creative ways to celebrate after a touchdown. Last Sunday, as a matter of fact, the Pittsburgh Steeler players played a game of hide and seek after a touchdown...



You’ll see the player with his head down (counting) while another player goes to hide behind the goalpost. Wow! I wonder what will be next?

Now, times sure have changed...you see...I’m old enough to remember the days when a player scored a touchdown and simply handed it to the referee. I’m pretty old!! But, we live in a very egotistical generation. It seems everything is about self-promotion and “look at me.” We live in the age of the “SELFIE.” We have “selfie-sticks” to help us with getting our own pictures. I love this selfie stick with this guys macbook...

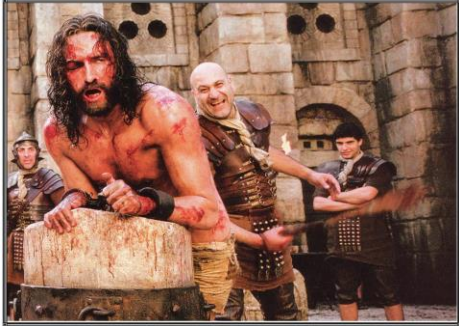


That’s hilarious!

It seems everyone wants to be seen. We want the world to see us and we have all kinds of

social media platforms to do that with! Look at me! Look at me! Look at me! In fact, today...it seems more and more people are not only promoting themselves, they shout and protest... "Give me my rights! I want my rights!" And that's shouted from the rooftops! There's very little sacrifice for the betterment of the other person or the team...it's all about me...look at me...hear me...exalt me...

Well, this attitude permeating our culture today is the exact opposite of what Jesus Christ taught while He was here on this earth. The attitude of the 21st century is the antithesis of His attitude, because this is what Jesus did...



He didn't say, "Look at me..." He said, "Follow my example." And what was that example? Suffering! Sacrifice! Humility! Have we forgotten the words of Solomon who says in the Proverbs: "Humility comes before honor!" No! We want the honor! Forget the humility!

Well, if that's how we choose to play it out...Jesus taught that person will never be great in His kingdom. But, the person who is willing to be humble, willing to suffer, willing to sacrifice, that person will be great! This morning we're going to flesh out what it means to be great as we look at the teaching of Jesus on "How to be a Great Christian."

Matthew 20:20-28

²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. ²¹ And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." ²² Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." ²³ He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." ²⁴ And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. ²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus said, "I came to serve, not to be served." Jesus saw Himself as a servant. Oh, that we could follow His example today and become servants...humble...kind and sacrificial instead of listening to the chorus of the many voices chanting in unison, "At all costs...love yourself...please yourself...exalt yourself!"

You know it's not been that long ago that there was a big argument by those who print hymnals who decided to change the words of the beloved Isaac Watts' hymn, *Alas and Did*

My Savior Bleed... It happened with the printing of the Baptist Hymnal in the 1991 edition. Do you know the lyrics? Here's the first verse:

Alas! and did my Savior bleed
And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For sinners such as I?
[originally, For such a worm as I?]

Watts said, "Worm" in 1707. What happened to the worm? Oh...I know...it might hurt our self esteem as we do our celebration dance on Snapchat! You know what I think I might do? I know...I might start a protest: RETURN THE WORM!

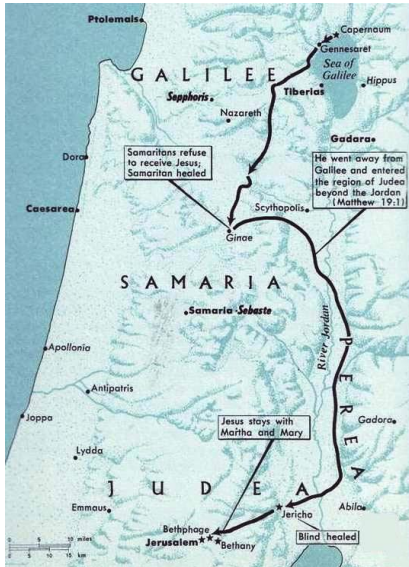
No I'll tell you why they took out the worm, it's because we JUST can't talk about ourselves that way! No way!! It might crush our fragile self-image. We might have to go to our safe spaces and get out our crayons... Oh...just call us all...snowflakes! No...call us worms!!!

And that's the point! We must humble ourselves to come to Christ! We become so burdened with our sin and the fact that we stand broken before Jesus...yes...it's that mindset and that attitude that brings us to a place where we can finally admit "Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?" Because you see, if we'll have that kind of attitude, we can be saved...and then we'll be able to sing (AT THE TOP OF OUR LUNGS) the Chorus of Isaac Watts' hymn:

Chorus:

At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away,
It was there by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day!

What a joy! And you see, dear people...in order for any of us to know that kind of joy...Jesus had to go to the cross...and that's where He was headed. You'll remember our map...



Jesus has gone through Perea and he's coming into Jericho. He's only about 12 miles from Jerusalem now. He's had massive crowds following Him and there's a throng of people headed to Jerusalem for the Passover season, (as we saw last week). But, now Jesus stops and pulls His Apostles to the side to tell them once again about HIS SUFFERING and the details of His upcoming death. And it's after this somber reminder, that the mother of James and John approaches Jesus to ask a favor.

Matthew 20:20

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something.

She's come very politely and she's come kneeling...but, she's not alone... Her sons are with her...James and John. Now, this tells me something...women were in the entourage going to Jerusalem with Jesus, because we see here that James' and John's mom was one of them.

I guess I wonder, and certainly, we'll never know...was Zebedee, James' and John's dad with them as well? We're not told in the Gospels...but, nonetheless there is a large entourage coming down from Galilee for the Passover... In fact, I'll say this...if you read Acts chapter 1, you'll find that after Jesus ascended back up to heaven after His resurrection, He told His followers to return to the large home with the upper room in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit to come...this included NOT JUST THE APOSTLES, but also Mary and the other women, which I believe included James' and John's mother.

Acts 1:14

14 All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

So, this lady, obviously loved Jesus and was following Him too... In fact, she would end up at the cross (Matthew 27:56) and at the empty tomb (Mark 16:1)...in fact...did you know that we know her name? Mark's Gospel records her name as "Salome" in Mark 15:40. And some scholars say that Salome could have actually been a sister to Mary, the mother of Jesus, (John 19:25). Now, we can't be 100% sure of this...because you have to make some inferences about the passage in John...but, nonetheless, if this were to be true, then Salome would have been Jesus' Aunt and James and John would have been first cousins to Jesus. How about that?

So her comes, (potentially), Aunt Salome and she kneels before Jesus with her sons at her side...
And Jesus responds...

Matthew 20:21

²¹ And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."

Now, I want you to notice the word "say," in verse 21. That word in the Greek means "command." Whoa! Here's this lady commanding Jesus to seat her sons at His right and left hand in His kingdom! Wow! That's bold! Perhaps now we can see where James and John got their nickname. SON'S OF THUNDER. I think I know now who the THUNDER was in the family. It was Salome! This is bold and brash! But, it's also a statement of belief...

Belief...yes...because they took Jesus at His Word when He said there would be positions of authority in Heaven.

Matthew 19:28

²⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Salome believed this and in essence said: "Great...all 12 of your Apostles are going to sit on thrones...well...put my sons beside of you!" How does Jesus respond?

Matthew 20:22

²² Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able."

Jesus addressed all three of them when He said, "you" (in the plural). **Jesus was kind, but firm**... In effect, saying: "You don't grasp the enormity of what you're asking." And they didn't. They didn't understand the cup. The cup. That's the cup that Jesus would sweat drops of blood over (in the Garden of Gethsemane). Can you get that scene in your mind...



"Father, if it could be your will...let this cup pass from me." What cup! The cup of God's wrath the cup of separation that had to be poured out because of sin! Jesus, and ONLY Jesus could drink that cup...because He was the perfect, sinless sacrifice. Yet, they ignorantly answered, "Yeah we can do it."

That reminds me of the smug confidence of Peter, who said, "I'll go to my death with you Jesus." Yeah right...the rooster crowed... Peter was like OBJ dancing in the end zone. Look at me... I've got this!



No! That's not how it works if you are going to play on Jesus' team. You're not brash and cocky and pounding on your chest. You're not boasting and self-confident! No, they had forgotten Jesus' teaching with the child in His lap, when they were in Capernaum and Jesus had said...

Matthew 18:4

⁴Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

"Humbles himself" Jesus has been teaching about...humility...taking up a cross...denying ourselves...but, the disciples have been thinking about a throne and a crown.

Well, Jesus is going to set them straight... And He says something we're apt to run right past, if we aren't careful.

Matthew 20:23a

²³He said to them, "You will drink my cup..."

"MY cup," not God's cup. There is a difference. You see, only Jesus could drink the cup of God's wrath, no sinful human being could do that...it had to be a perfect, sinless sacrifice...only Jesus could do that BUT as disciples of Christ, Jesus says, "You will drink my cup."

What's He talking about "My cup." It's the cup of suffering. We will all drink from "Jesus' cup" if we choose to follow Him in this sin-fallen world. We're going to be misunderstood, misjudged, mistreated and maligned and that creates suffering. In fact, do you remember what happened to James? He was beheaded.

Acts 12:1-2

About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.² He killed James the brother of John with the sword.

According to early Church Tradition, John eventually would be arrested in Ephesus by the Romans where they would try to boil him to death in hot oil, but miraculously it didn't phase him...eventually he would be exiled to the island of Patmos where he worked as a slave in the mines. Yes, they drank of the cup of Jesus' suffering and so will we... Jesus said...

John 16:33

³³I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Listen, we don't suffer for Jesus just because we say we're a Christian on our profiles on social media. No. We suffer when somebody calls us out on social media for our stand as Christians

regarding the carnality of the world. It's when we're made fun of by people who call us fools for believing in Jesus and His teachings. It's when we lose friends and maybe even our job because we refuse to bow to the world's definition of right and wrong, which is completely upside down. It's when we stand when no one else is standing! That's the cup of Jesus! And Jesus said, "James and John...you will drink from that cup."

Church family, Those who will receive the places of greatest honor in heaven are those who were willing to suffer the most here on earth! Never forget that! The Apostle Paul said it this way:

Philippians 3:8-11

⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

So you see, Church Family...as we return to Matthew 20...unless you think Salome, James and John were the only guilty ones...they weren't. The other 10 were guilty too...

Matthew 20:24

²⁴ And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers.

What were they mad about? Simple...they wished they had gotten to Jesus before Salome did. Remember, all the apostles...all 12 have been arguing about who's the greatest in the Kingdom ever since they left Caesarea Philippi months ago. So, what did Jesus do... He called a meeting...

Matthew 20:25-26

²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

Jesus said, "No! We don't do things like the world." That's what He meant by saying, "Gentiles." He said, "They Lord over you with power and dominance." But, Jesus said, "NO! It's not going to be that way with me." You see, following Jesus means that THE WAY UP IS DOWN. It means we don't go beating our chest and say, "Look at me!" It means, if we want to be great, we bend down...we grab a towel and a basin and wash feet...



Jesus would do that in just a few days in the upper room when no one else would perform that menial duty of being a Deacon. What? Yes, no one would be a deacon...a servant...**that's the word Jesus used at the end of verse 26... "Diakonos."**

You see, that word was a common word for that day. It's a word that's been Christianized, but the word "Diakonos" was used in Jesus' day in the common vernacular to describe a menial worker. It literally meant, "throw the dirt." It described a worker who got their hands dirty. For instance, if you were rich, you would have a *deacon* to clean your home, wash your clothes, tend your animals, etc. Deacons serve...that's the word Jesus used to describe what His kingdom looks like. But, He goes one step further...

Matthew 20:27

²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,

You know VERY WELL what that word for "slave" is...we've talked about it many times. It's the Greek word, "Doulos" and it means, "Bondservant." It means you are not your own. You are bought at a price by a master and even though he's set you free, you choose to stay with him. That's what it means to follow Jesus...we become a slave...a doulos, a bondservant to Him.

And that's why we call Him: "Master," "Lord." Why? Because He paid the LUTRON...

Matthew 20:28

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus paid the LUTRON, the ransom! What's a ransom? **It's the price put on someone's head to rescue them.** What's the LUTRON for our rescue? What was the payment made by the Master...



DEATH...that was the price! Death! Jesus left His throne in heaven and came to earth to be the Deacon...the servant, who died for us...

You see, Salome in just a few days would go to Calvary with Mary...and she'd see this...



...she'd see a cross...not thrones on that skull-shaped hill. She saw crosses. She saw suffering. She saw death! She saw the example of what we must be... Hear the words of the Apostle Paul...

Philippians 2:3-11

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Listen: Those who want to be great, must be willing to be humble...those who want to be like Jesus must be willing to suffer. It's been said, "On this earth...scars, not crowns are the authentic marks of a disciple Christ."

As we close, I simply ask: What is it costing you to follow Jesus? What sacrifices are you making to follow Christ? What pain? What suffering? What discomfort? If these adjectives don't describe your life...could it be that it's more about you than Jesus?
