

People love to keep up with their favorite celebrities. All the attention paid to wealth and fame has created a massive culture of celebrity. Most of us probably have a story about meeting a famous person. My brush with celebrity was when I met the famous actor, Dick Van Dyke, in the men's restroom at LAX. While waiting for an open stall, I thanked him for his acting and explained my family especially enjoyed him in *Mary Poppins*. He said, "Thank you young man." And we went about our business. I was so excited to get back to my friends and tell them about my brush with fame.

For some reason, it seems just knowing about the happenings of famous people make us feel a little more important and a little more substantial. Perhaps we also suffer a little bit from celebrity envy.

One of the problems with our hearts is we tend to blur the differences between celebrity and hero. We confuse the marks of a celebrity such as fame, wealth, good looks, and power with the marks of a hero such as devotion, loyalty, and courage.

It's been such a tough week here in California. And as we track the fires, we can see the confusion between celebrities and heroes, when we hear more about fires burning certain celebrity's homes, than we hear about the thousands of heroic firefighters, and first responders who are right now sacrificing and risking their lives for their neighbors around Paradise and Thousand Oaks. However, some of the celebrities are using their celebrity status to get the word out about what the firefighters need.

As we track the horrible shooting in Thousand Oaks, we can see the confusion between celebrities and heroes when the top story on one news feed was about an actor who told reporters that he had once thrown his own birthday party at the dance bar. The tragic loss of another celebrity's niece in the shooting was also mentioned, but little was said about the police officer who rushed in and crouched in front of a young girl to shield her from the hail of bullets. This heroic police officer gave up his own life that night to save a young woman he had never met. This is a hero.

In the passage we are about to look at, we will see the disciples have a bad case of celebrity envy, and it nearly kills their fragile community. We will see the marks of a true hero. Here is the deal: Our celebrity worship reveals our cultural values. But acts of heroism reveals God's Kingdom values.

Our story as told by Matthew begins with Jesus reciting (for the third time) the details of his impending death. It's a terrible list of cruel acts placed on Jesus for the specific intention of causing him to suffer. But by enduring these acts, he defines heroism and reveals kingdom values.

### **Jesus Displayed Kingdom Heroism through Suffering**

**Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" Matthew 20:17-19**

Jesus is about to make his final trip to Jerusalem. He was likely outside the ancient city of Jericho about 14 miles from Jerusalem. Jericho's elevation was 1000 feet below sea level, and Jerusalem's elevation was 2000 feet above sea level. Jesus, God with us, the Son of God, will be handed over for judgment not for his sins, but for ours. This is Jesus' third prediction. What is new here is the specific role of the Gentiles and the nature of Jesus suffering. He was to be mocked, flogged, crucified, and maybe the worst, betrayed. The details match the Roman practice of execution. Roman law said that a Jew could not execute their own criminals.

Jesus is assuring the 12 that his violent death would not be a tragic and cruel accident of history. But that Jesus would be part of God's plan and every possible kind of suffering that culture could inflict upon a man – mental, physical, and emotional would be placed on Him in the coming days leading to him being nailed alive to a cross to die a criminal's death. After being raised up on that cross, and then declared dead, and placed in a tomb, on the third day he would be raised to life.

The disciples should have stopped in their tracks on that road, because they had just heard about the road their Lord was voluntarily going down. And it was to be the ultimate act of serving. We have seen suffering as the first mark of kingdom heroism; now we see serving as the second mark.

### **Jesus Displayed Kingdom Heroism through Serving**

The 12 should have been devastated about what their Lord was about to go through. They should have been shocked, and puzzled over what he said was about to happen. Instead, they are

scrambling for the best seats in the house. Actually, it all began with James and John's mother.

**Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." Matthew 20: 20-21**

In other words, mom asks Jesus to put her boys on the Forbes list of famous people. The request is not only bad timing after what Jesus had just said, it also exposed the human heart. In the midst of Jesus' tragic news, the disciples were still stuck on themselves wanting status, power, control, admiration, applause, and success. Jesus was telling a story of how he would restore the world, and they were trying to position themselves to win a popularity contest.

**"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, 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 by my Father." Matthew 20: 22-23**

Mom may have asked the question, but the question came from her boys. Jesus answers the boys, not their mother. Did you know these boys had the nickname Sons of Thunder because they were Zebedee's sons? But the thunder seemed to be coming from mom here. Even with the inappropriate question, Jesus is gentle with them. "Do you really know what you are asking?" It's the same tone, as "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Jesus didn't say his followers would not have glory coming to them. He just said the Father had not delegated that office to him. But the one office the Father did certainly delegate to the son was that of Suffering Servant. Jesus said, "If you want to follow me, let's talk heroic serving and suffering."

What does Jesus mean when he speaks of "My Cup?" Part of the drink is the hostilities that come upon us when we are faithful to live out the message of Jesus in our culture. James and John certainly sipped of that cup. History records that James sipped from the cup of martyrdom and was beheaded by Herod. That's recorded in Acts 12:2. John sipped the cup of exile and tribulation on the Greek Island of Patmos.

As you might expect, word of this request from James and John's mother got back to the other ten, and they discussed it among themselves. Probably asking, "Did you hear that James and John's mom asked Jesus for his sons to have a special place above the rest of us?"

**When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them**

**together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Matthew 20: 24-25**

Perhaps the disciples were ticked that they didn't think to ask first. There was a split in their community. What started as a new and different community now looked like every other community. So, Jesus intervenes. In Jesus day, every time someone picked up a coin, they would see the head of the reigning Gentile ruler with the inscription, "He who deserves adoration." As obnoxious as that sounds, it reveals the cultural values in Jesus' time. Then Jesus countered the cultural values with kingdom values.

**Not so with you Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— Matthew 20: 26-27**

Heroic acts reveal Jesus' Kingdom values. Servant in this verse is translated from the Greek word, diakonos, which means a common food server or table clearer. Slave in this verse is translated from the Greek word, doulos, which refers to an ordinary slave. Both the words servant and slave would have repulsed Jesus' hearers. No one chose the role of a food server or slave. Jesus didn't just teach by giving us advice here; he taught us by becoming our servant and our slave. Serving our Heavenly Father, and serving our neighbors are marks of heroism in the kingdom.

I want to go back to when Jesus spoke of "my cup." The word "cup" opens up another window for us. In the Old Testament, the cup was a graphic picture of God's wrathful judgment upon wickedness. It was a picture of a chalice containing a fiery liquid that rebellious sinners deserved to drink and would certainly die.

God grieves over our sins, division, hatred, violence, and over the pain and suffering of the victims of sin. He knows justice must be served for all of this because God is fair and holy. God's righteous anger against sin, God's wrath against all that is unjust is only satisfied if the penalty is paid. The penalty for our sin, for the causes of injustice in our world required someone to drink the cup of God's wrath. A price had to be paid to defeat sin and injustice.

And Jesus knew it was his purpose is to drink it so we won't have to. He struggled with His father over doing this. He agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane asking his father "to let this cup pass from me." He suffered in his body and soul, bearing God's judgment due us upon himself.

The Old Testament prophets spoke about the "cup of God's wrath." Isaiah described the hope we have because Jesus will voluntarily drink the cup.

**"This is what your Sovereign LORD says, your God, who defends his people: "See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from**

**that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again.” Isaiah 51: 22**

Jesus endured the wrath of God that came in the form of betrayal, an unfair trial, an innocent man being flogged, and executed by crucifixion. God’s righteous wrath, his anger at sin and what it does to people, is satisfied by Jesus, our hero, who suffered, served, and sacrificed himself for us.

Jesus jolts us out of our attachment to celebrity by reminding us that celebrities, lifted up by our culture, are not known to drink the cup of suffering. They are not known for being servants, which are marks of heroism in the Kingdom of Jesus. And now we come to one of the most powerful verses in the entire Bible. And Matthew was right there to hear it and write it down for us. Let’s unpack it.

### **Jesus Displayed Kingdom Heroism through Sacrificing**

**“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20: 28**

The title Son of Man was Jesus’ favorite title for himself. It refers to Daniel’s picture in the Old Testament of the one coming on the clouds and receiving all dominion and glory as King of his Kingdom forever and ever.

Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man who is also the servant. That’s a picture. And even a more amazing take, the Son of Man is also the suffering servant.

Why did Jesus, the Son of Man, sacrifice his life? He gave his life as a ransom for many. The word “for” means “instead of” or “in place of.” The preposition “for” means “as a substitution.”

This idea of Jesus being our substitute can rub us the wrong way because it’s something “done for us” not something “done by us.” We can take no credit for being saved. We can’t boast in ourselves, as Paul said, “We boast in Christ and him crucified.” That little word, “for” becomes one of the most important words in the world.

There is another powerful word in verse 28. It is ransom. In Jesus day, a ransom could be paid to free a person from a sentence of capital punishment handed down for a serious crime. When we use the word ransom today, we usually are talking about a hostage situation, and kidnappers demand a ransom to release a person from slavery.

It’s best to keep both definitions of ransom in mind. Jesus’ death paid the penalty for the capital crime our sins deserved. And Jesus’ death paid to set us free. Free for us to serve others. To be made a slave of righteousness instead of a slave to sin.

So, our hero and his disciples continue their journey, and Jesus encounters two blind men. He couldn’t be farther from the lime-light of celebrity. The cultural centers of power and influence

are far away. And Jesus shows us the way to break the grip of bondage to fame and power, is to pay attention to the least among us. Heroics in the kingdom of God, are suffering, serving, sacrificing, and sympathizing.

### **Jesus Displayed Kingdom Heroism through Sympathizing**

**As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” Matthew 20: 29-30**

So who enters the story? We are introduced to two blind men who heard Jesus was walking by on his way to Jerusalem and they shouted out the greatest profession of faith in Christ in the gospel of Matthew.

### **And then there is a large crowd**

**The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” Jesus stopped and called them. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked. Matthew 20: 31-32**

The crowd followed Jesus. That was a good thing, but what else did they do? They rebuked the blind men. The crowd’s rebuke of the blind tells us they liked Jesus the celebrity king, a king who came to be served. But they didn’t like that Jesus was the merciful king, who came to serve the most marginalized. That seemed to them as dignifying behavior for their celebrity king. Jesus doesn’t rebuke the blind men. Just as he asked James and John’s mom, he asked the blind men, “What is it that you want?” Do you want money? Do you want socks? Do you really believe that I’m the Son of David and able to cure your deepest need? Here is their answer:

**“Lord,” they answered, “we want our sight.” Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him. Matthew 20: 33-34**

These guys were blind, yet they saw Jesus as the King. Of all the people on that road, these blind men saw him for who he is first. They put together that He is both the human king in the line of David and the divine Lord God. Three times it’s the word “Lord” that came out of their mouths first. These two men who received their sight left one life behind and began a new life. And it can happen to anyone here today. Those who ask Jesus for something finds Jesus’ searching question coming right back at them, piercing through the outer crust, and finding the real request bubbling up underneath.

### **Since Jesus has already given us everything we really wanted, what else is there to do but follow Him?**

Our challenge today is to live like heroes. Heroes in the kingdom of God, follow Jesus into marginal places and show extraordinary

love for ordinary and marginal people. Heroes respect the disrespected. Heroes offer generous mercy to those starved for mercy. Heroes come in all shapes and sizes. They come in all ages and stages. They serve, they sacrifice, they are sympathetic, and they are willing to suffer because they have this in common: Heroes follow Jesus.

It doesn't surprise us that the Forbes list of the most famous doesn't include Jesus in their top 100 every year. Because Jesus isn't a celebrity, he is a hero. And Jesus has his own list of heroes of which he invites us to join the ranks of his hero list on his stage of glory. May we follow Jesus and no longer allow the cultural to spiritually form us, but allow God to form us spiritually.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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