

*Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them,<sup>18</sup> “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<sup>19</sup> 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!”*

#### *A Mother’s Request*

*<sup>20</sup> Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.*

*<sup>21</sup> “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.”*

*<sup>22</sup> “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.*

*<sup>23</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>24</sup> When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—<sup>28</sup> 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 20:17-28 NIV)*

#### **Sermon Theme: You Were Worth the Price**

Is it worth it? Before you make a number of decisions, you may have to wrestle with this question. Whether the price was the hours in your life that you won’t get back, the energy you spent spilling blood, sweat, and tears, or it was the dent it made in your wallet there are times when we get finished and come to the conclusion, “Yes, it was worth it.” And those times are great. But then you have those other times. The hours spent were more of a waste of time. The energy you used left you feeling empty and wore down. The money could have just as well been thrown in the garbage for as well as it all worked out. It’s times like these where we question our decision making and wonder all the more, “How could I have thought that would be worth it?”

Is it worth it? Jesus was on his way back to Jerusalem one last time before his death when he decides to take his 12 disciples off to the side. For a third time Jesus predicts

his death to his friends. This time he is more explicit about what he will face. He warns them that when they arrive in Jerusalem he will be delivered over to the people who hate him—the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will hand Jesus over to the Gentiles because he needs to die a very specific death. He would be handed over to be mocked, flogged, and then crucified. Jesus was a man on a mission from God and nothing would stop him even when he was fully aware of what waited for him. But it wouldn't be all doom and gloom. He makes sure they hear another time that on the third day Jesus would be raised to life again!

After Jesus explains all of this the mother of James and John comes to Jesus with her sons, kneels down, and asks him a favor. **“Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”** Make it so that my two sons have the best places in your kingdom. Make them your trusted advisers, your “right-hand men.”

Speaking to all three of them, Jesus points out that they have no idea what they are asking. They want to be on the same level as Jesus. Not taking his position. But no one above them either. Before he answers, Jesus really wants them to think, he asks: **“Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”** Were you paying attention when I told you what I was going to face in Jerusalem? This cup is the cup of suffering that he was going to drink. It's the pain he would endure. It's the humiliation that would be piled on him. It's the death that would be his. He's asking James and John, “Do you seriously think that you could drink this cup?”

And the Sons of Thunder boldly rumble their response, “We can.” Can we drink this cup? Would suffering and pain be worth it as long as we received what they wanted? Do we think we can share in this suffering? “We can!” And Jesus lets them know, **“You will indeed drink from my cup.”** And they would. James would be the first of the apostles killed for being a follower of Jesus. John would be exiled to the island of Patmos. But it wasn't Jesus' place to decide who receives those seats. His Father had those places kept and prepared; he would make the decision.

But this was far from over. The other ten disciples hear what James and John did and are extremely angry at the two. You can almost hear their accusations and questions: “You think you could go behind our backs? You got your mom involved? Who do you think you are that you think you could reserve those seats for yourself? You guys think you are so special, what about everything we have done?”

Here Jesus is trying to prepare his disciples for his death in the not-so-distant future. He's probably trying to prepare himself mentally for what he was about to face. Not to mention the number of times he already told them that the first would be last and the last who would be first. He just explained the depth of his love for them with the prediction of his selfless sacrifice he would willingly give. But instead of marveling at that they argue who would have the best seat in the house. Jesus' patience really is incredible.

Again Jesus calls his disciples together. **“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.”** He’s telling them: The way you are acting is how the world operates. They spend all their energy to get to the top, and once they are on top, they cause all others to feel the weight of their authority. They think about themselves and want people to cower under their power. The way of the world is that you need to be willing to do anything to get that power, keep that power, and make sure others know who holds the power. **“Not so with you,”** Jesus says. Instead, **“whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.”**

But is it worth it? To serve means putting someone and their wants and needs before yourself. It means using your own time, talents, and treasures to take care of something or someone else. It says “no” to yourself and “yes” to someone else. But then how are you supposed to get ahead and get yourself noticed? How are you to improve your status and position? You feel it: if you want to get ahead in this world, you need to be willing to put other people down and get your hands dirty. No one is going to take care of you, so you need to watch out for yourself. If you want to succeed, it’s on you. The end justifies the means. How you get there is of little consequence as long as it is worth it.

But is it? Our test tends to be if it makes me happy, feel good, promotes my status, makes my life comfortable, puts me in a good position, then it is worth it. So serving others is a struggle when you often don’t receive any thanks. You aren’t recognized. People feel like they can walk all over you. You don’t see the benefits. It’s easy to get burned out. What about me? Who is going to serve me?

But it’s not just others who fail us; so often we struggle to trust God will take care of me. So, I need to look out for myself before anyone else. I don’t trust that God is going to make it worth it in the end, so I need to make sure that I watch out for myself right now. We are experts at focusing on personal wants and needs. When serving doesn’t fit into what I want, what I have decided to be worth it, then it is not as important. But when I am self-focused and selfish I not only put myself before my neighbor—all those around me—I put myself before God. We become a people who are completely content with being served. But then we also get upset that no one else is willing to do anything while conveniently forget that each of us is called to serve.

I’m no better than those disciples who argued for a better place in Jesus’ kingdom. What if Jesus had asked that question about me? Could I honestly say I am worth it? Me who is more focused on what everyone else should be doing while conveniently shooting down opportunities presented to me. How could I be worth it when my status in the eyes of my peers and neighbors seems to be more important than staying connected to God’s Word and working on my right relationship with him? How can I be worth it

when I say I want to serve others and look to help, but in my heart I do it because it's going to impress someone else and make me look good? Unless I get something out of it, I have difficulty wanting anything to do with it. How can I be worth it when I'm more focused serving me, my wants, my needs, me, me, me? How can I be worth it when the truth is that by nature I'm God's enemy, hostile to him, want nothing to do with him and by nature I'm dead—worthless.

But you are from worthless. In fact, in Jesus, you are made worthy. The one who truly deserves to be waited on hand and foot did not come to be served, but instead to serve. He served under God's Law in your place not to look good, to impress anyone else, or his own gain. He did it because God demands perfection under his Law. He did it so that he would give you his perfect selfless work. Jesus, to whom every knee will bow on earth and under the earth, lowered himself to be lower than the lowliest of slaves to be executed on a cross—a punishment reserved for the scum of society. But this punishment brings you peace with God. The pain that he would endure on that cross, the sins of the world that would be laid on his shoulders, was all worth it because by his wounds you are healed. No amount of silver or gold in this world could make a single sin right. No amount of money could be offered to set one person free from slavery to sin. God's demand was perfection and Jesus lived it. The price was blood and Jesus shed it. He willingly and selflessly goes to the cross to pay for us who are so often selfish and self-serving. The total on the bill was the sins of the world. The only currency that would be accepted was the innocent blood of Jesus. But now the receipt reads: paid in full. And the receipt is the empty Easter tomb. All your sins—including the sin of selfishness—every single one of them was paid for by him. Jesus came to give his life, pay your debt, and buy you back. By the gift of faith in your heart this is all yours making you worthy in God's sight.

For Jesus, you were worth the price. It wasn't even a question on Jesus' mind. He wanted you to be his own and to set you free. And now that you have been freed from slavery to sin you are free to serve God. It is not an obligation; it's an opportunity. It's not to try and climb the status ladder in God's sight. You are already on top because Jesus makes you worthy in God's sight. That's what he promises you at your baptism. That's what he assures you in the Lord's Supper. Jesus selflessly serves you so that you are able to selflessly serve God and your neighbor. Yes, it was a hefty price. But Jesus saw that you were worth it. Amen.