

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Ministry: A Study of Matthew 14–20

STUDY TWENTY

A Roadside Reminder and Reproof

Matthew 20:17–28

There will be no brash lording it over. There will be no flaunting of authority. On Jesus' team, there is no place for self-serving ambition, personal promotion, shameless narcissism, presumptuous arrogance, or bold—even veiled—pride. Few things are more different from our world-system than that.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IF there ever was a human being worthy of being *served*, it was Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God, the long-expected Messiah, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. Despite all His power, glory, and divinity, Jesus *chose* to adopt the posture of a slave. “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

He earned His wage as a humble carpenter and forsook all the extravagancies wealth could offer. His best friends were vagabond fisherman, and He shared meals with societal outcasts: prostitutes and tax collectors. He healed the sick and the demon-possessed time and again.

Most importantly, though, the King of Heaven *died* so His people could *live*.

What a powerful story! A winsome leader! A compelling model! In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll look deeply at the example of our great King and admire its beauty just as a jeweler would a perfectly cut diamond.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Matthew 20:17–28



PREPARE YOUR HEART

If God did not have a caring, compassionate heart, then everyone would be eternally lost in their self-absorption and self-deception. Offer this prayer to Him today before you dig into His Word:

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son Jesus not to be served but to serve. If not for Him and His sacrifice I would be far from You with no guiding light. I ask that Your Word today would be a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. I pray in Jesus' gracious name. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

At this point in our study of Matthew's gospel, we're following Jesus on His final journey to Jerusalem. The disciples expected this expedition to culminate in Jesus taking the throne and overthrowing the oppressive Romans. But the disciples just weren't on the same page as Jesus. Jesus knew what really awaited Him . . . a crucifixion, not a coronation.

This reality shouldn't have startled the disciples. After all, Jesus already told them *twice* that He was going to die in Jerusalem (*Matthew 16:21–28; 17:22–23*). Read Jesus' third prediction of His death in *Matthew 20:17–19*, and summarize what He said.

Third time's a charm . . . right? Let's now turn to Matthew 20:20–28 to see if Jesus' disciples finally got on His page.



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Observation: A Discussion of Unfamiliar Greatness

Pastor Chuck explains in his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* that the first step of Bible study, observation, should look for five kinds of words in a passage: emphasized words, repeated words, related words, alike words, and unlike words.¹ Read *Matthew 20:20–28* and group its contents into some of these categories.

A Request—Matthew 20:20–21

Who made the request to Jesus in *Matthew 20:20*? _____

What did she ask in *20:21*?

A Response and Reaction—Matthew 20:22–24

Summarize Jesus' response in *Matthew 20:22–23* to the mother's request?



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How did the rest of the disciples react in [Matthew 20:24](#) to these events? Check a few different translations to get a sense of their emotions. What might have prompted these feelings?

A Clarification and Confession—Matthew 20:25–28

According to Jesus in [Matthew 20:25](#), how do earthly rulers use their power?

They not only had missed His point; they misunderstood the whole issue of kingdom promotion in His kingdom lifestyle. It's not about who sits on the right and who sits on the left. It's not about title. It's not about who's on top. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

How did Jesus call His disciples to act differently from these rulers ([Matthew 20:26–27](#))?

Jesus didn't simply make empty demands of His followers. He led by example. Jesus expected His disciples to serve *because* He was willing to serve. And more than this, He did the most sacrificial service imaginable: giving His own life to save others.



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Interpretation: Jesus, the Servant King

Jesus addressed many groups in this passage: the mother, James and John, the Twelve, earthly rulers. Why did He speak about so many topics in one conversation?

What did the mother mean in *Matthew 20:21* by asking for her sons to have seats to the right and left of Jesus' throne? What motivated this question? Use your *Bible study tools* to guide your thoughts.²

Jesus' address in *20:22* is plural, so He shifted His attention to James and John, showing that the request for greatness flowed out of the sin deep in *their* hearts, not their mother's. The brothers likely had an idea of how Jesus would respond to the request, so they had their mother ask Him to soften the blow. But Jesus saw through their scheme, and He didn't offer a soft rebuke.

What's with all this talk about cups? It may sound odd to modern ears, but the “cup” is a common image in Scripture. (See *Isaiah 51:17* and *Matthew 26:39*.) Based on this context, what did Jesus say about Himself and His disciples by using the cup metaphor in *Matthew 20:22–23*? For help, see page 133 of Pastor Chuck's commentary *Insights on Matthew 16–28*.

Suffering must come before significance . . . brokenness before usefulness . . . humility before authority granted . . . the bitter cup of pain before promotion.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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What timeless truths did Jesus teach about power, authority, and leadership by contrasting earthly rulers with His heavenly kingdom in *Matthew 20:25–28*. Why are these truths significant for Christians today?

Once again, Jesus showed that His way radically reverses the ways of the world. Jesus doesn't measure greatness by status or wealth or power. No. Greatness belongs to servants—to those who are willing to sacrifice even their own lives for the good of those around them.



Correlation: Jesus Emptied Himself

It feels like the apostle Paul had the words of Matthew 20:28 resonating in his mind as he penned the beautiful, theologically rich poem in *Philippians 2:6–11*.

According to Paul in *2:6–8*, what did Jesus do despite His divine nature?

What did the Father do in response to His Son's servant-like disposition? See *2:9–11*.



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Now, let's move backward a little. What was the context that led Paul to direct the Philippians to Christ's example in Philippians 2:6–11? What kinds of behaviors was Paul encouraging them to adopt in 2:3–5?

In these few verses, Paul demonstrated exactly what Jesus described in Matthew 20:27: “whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave.” Jesus poured Himself out, even accepting His own death, for us, and now God has exalted His name high above every other name.



Application: Leading by Serving

Pastor Chuck asks us one piercing question that will help us apply the truth of this passage to our lives:

When will you start leading by serving?

This sounds like a contradictory statement. Isn't that why people become leaders in the first place—to *be served*? But Jesus showed that He desired to *offer* service, not *receive* it. In what ways do you see the rulers of our world grabbing for authority, power, and influence rather than adopting an openhanded posture of humility and sacrifice? How is Jesus' way better?



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What opportunities for leadership has God given you? You may not have a team to lead or have a fancy title, but each one of us has a unique sphere of influence. What would it look like for you to emulate the servant-like attitude of Jesus in your daily routine this week?

This picture we've seen of Jesus' servant heart is both beautiful and compelling. Its beauty is found in the contrast between the humble kingdom of heaven and the proud kingdoms of earth. And it compels us to imitate our King. We can serve others well because we have the perfect image of self-sacrificial service in our Savior.



A FINAL PRAYER

Use this prayer from Pastor Chuck to guide your closing prayer today:

Father, help us to get past ourselves and get beyond the “I, me, mine, and myself” nonsense. Use us in great ways, uncommon greatness, that no one would ever expect. Minister to every one of us as we journey along this thing called life. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 100–101.
2. Other tools we recommend are a whole-Bible commentary, such as the two-volume *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Pastor Chuck's favorite Bible dictionary is the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. A variety of versions of the Bible are available at BibleGateway.com, and an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at netbible.org.

