

What do you want from Jesus?

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[0 : 00] That passage open in front of you, let us pray for the Lord's help with it as we consider it together. Father, we thank you once again for your words. Lord, we thank you for your son. We thank you that he came not to be served, but to serve.

Lord, we pray now that we would see him clearly, that we might love to follow him as he would have us follow. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

What do you want me to do for you? That is the question, isn't it, on Jesus' lips in this passage of Matthew's gospel.

The mother of James and John comes up to him, what do you want? Two blind men come before him, what do you want? What do you want me to do for you?

Two. Normally in life, isn't it, when we're asked that question, the options are usually quite limited. The waitress comes up to your table and asks, what do you want?

[1 : 08] Your options, aren't they? They're constrained by the menu in front of you. They can get you a burger. They're not going to pay off your mortgage. What do you want? It's always a nice question to be asked, isn't it?

But the scope of our answer will be determined by the authority of the one asking the question. When it comes from a small child, you might appreciate the gesture, but it's not going to be a life-changing request, is it?

But if King Charles or Keir Starmer or Jeff Bezos personally knocked on your door and they said, what do you want me to do for you?

It all of a sudden carries a whole lot more weight, doesn't it? When someone with power and authority, when they ask you, what do you want me to do for you?

You want to think very carefully about your answer. We've seen, haven't we, throughout Matthew's gospel, that we've been introduced to Jesus, the King.

[2 : 18] The long-awaited Son of David who will reign on an eternal throne. The one with unparalleled authority. We've seen it in his miracles, haven't we?

He fed thousands with a few loaves. He has healed the sick. He has calmed storms and stilled seas with the words. We've seen it in his miracles and we've seen it in his teaching.

At the end of the sermon on the Mount, the crowd stands in awe. Not only because of the content of the sermon, but because of the authority with which he spoke.

When Jesus speaks, creation obeys and people listen. So when Jesus asks, what do you want me to do for you?

It's worth thinking very carefully about your answer. So how would you answer that question this morning?

[3 : 22] What do you want from Jesus? If Jesus, the King of kings, who has been given all authority in heaven and earth, if he came and sat down to you, sat down next to you after this morning service, and he turned to you and said, what can I do for you?

What words are going to come out of your mouth? What we learned in this morning's passage is that the answer to that question will reveal what your heart longs for and how clearly you see Jesus.

That is the question that is going to shape our points this morning. How clearly do you see Jesus?

And we're going to begin there in verses 17 to 19, where Jesus tells us what kind of king he is.

And then we'll walk through the rest of the passage, coming first of all to those who are blind to the kind of king that Jesus is. And then at the end, we'll take a close look at those who see Jesus clearly.

How clearly we see Jesus will dictate whether we answer that question as we ought to. So let's just begin in those first few verses.

[4 : 35] In our first point this morning, can you see the crown of this king? Can you see the crown of the king? Importantly, this account comes immediately, doesn't it, after Jesus' interaction with the rich young man and the following kind of discussion with the disciples.

And if you look at the verse kind of just before this morning's reading, verse 16 there, and in fact back to the end of chapter 19, you'll see, won't you, the part that Jesus wanted to hammer home to his hearers.

The last will be first, and the first lasts. The kingdom of heaven is an upside-down kingdom. Perhaps we should actually say the kingdom of heaven is a right-way-up kingdom that operates on completely different principles from all the kingdoms of this world. So it might at first look upside down, but actually, isn't it, the rest of the kingdoms of this world have it the wrong way around. And having just said that the first will be last and the last will be first, Jesus takes his disciples aside and points them in the direction of Jerusalem.

[5 : 50] Jesus draws our attention to his destination. And the question we are to be asking the disciples and of ourselves is, can you see his crown?

See, he says to the disciples, right? Behold, look where we are going. Jerusalem is the name on the map. That's kind of where the GPS has been set to. But it is not the city of Jerusalem that Jesus wants his disciples to see, is it?

It is what will happen in Jerusalem that Jesus wants his followers to fix their eyes on. Because what is going to happen in Jerusalem is that the king is going to be lifted up, not onto a throne, but onto a cross.

Jesus calls himself once more here that the son of man. The title given in the book of Daniel to the one who will have all authority. It is a kingly title.

And yet this king goes forward not to take on himself a crown that is made of gold, but of thorns. This king is deliberately walking towards the place where he knows he will be delivered over to his enemies, where he knows he will be unjustly condemned to death, where he knows he will be beaten, mocked, and flogged, where he knows his hands and feet will be nailed to a cross of wood, that he might be killed before being raised again on the third day.

[7 : 36] That is the path that this king willingly walks. The king who reigns over all is willingly walking to Calvary.

If you ask a child to draw you a king, what would be the defining feature? It's the crown, isn't it? You can just draw a stick man, but put a crown on it and you know it's a king. But what kind of crown goes on the king of kings' heads?

I mean, when we picture great kings and queens, don't we? We picture kind of magnificent images of splendor and majesty. The crown that our own king wears is made of solid gold, adorned with rubies, sapphires, and emeralds, and almost 3,000 diamonds.

You tell someone to picture a king and they will start thinking of that kind of crown. But not this king.

[8 : 41] It is not a crown of gold, it is a crown of thorns twisted together and pushed mockingly onto his head. Can you see it?

Do you see it when you look at this king? Do you see where he is going? Can you see the trajectory of his path?

And perhaps most significantly for this passage, can you see what that therefore means for those who follow him?

We see two contrasting responses in the verses that follow. There are those who cannot see, and there are those who can.

And we might expect the first group of Jesus to be perhaps Jesus' opponents, maybe the Pharisees or the scribes, or maybe even just kind of the crowds who seem to be only there to enjoy the show. That's what we might expect.

[9 : 45] But what we find is that the people who are blind to the kind of king Jesus is, is in fact his very own disciples. Let's just turn now to look at verses 20 to 28, where we have the blind who come looking for greatness.

Sometimes small words make a big difference, don't they? Verse 20 begins, Then, right straight away, immediately, as Jesus was saying these things, then at that moment, just as Jesus was pointing his disciples to the death, he was going to die, then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons and kneels before him.

And here, doesn't he, Jesus asks the question, what do you want? What do you want from me?

Don't kind of read that in an exasperated way, like, what do you want from me? One thing that comes out kind of clearly from this whole episode is that Jesus is perfectly calm, while others are getting riled up.

What do you want? The answer, Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand, and one at your left, in your kingdom.

[11:09] Now, we don't know exactly, do we, why it was the mother of James and John that is asking for this, but we do know they are right behind her. Sometimes mums, don't they go and do things that they think their kids want them to do that the children really don't want?

That is not what is happening here. James and John are there with her. They are right behind this proposal. Maybe they just thought, mum would be a bit harder for Jesus to say no to.

Now, we'll come on in a moment to what the Zebedees kind of together get so wrong. But first, I think we actually need to see what they get right. So it's not the Pharisees coming before Jesus to try and trip them up.

This isn't the crowds just looking for another meal. These people really do know Jesus as a friend and as a king.

As the king. The mother bows before him. The crest is that they sit at his right and left in his kingdom.

[12:15] They really do get the authority of Jesus and that is no small thing. But, they don't quite get it all right, do they?

They are so very right and yet they are also so very wrong. What they get wrong is what Jesus does with his authority. What kind of king Jesus is.

He came not to be lifted up by others but to lay down his own life. Not to exalt himself but to humble himself. As he'll say in a moment, not to be served but to serve.

But these men don't come do they longing to serve. They come looking for greatness. Who does, they say, in the best seats in the house.

We want to be in the royal box, the executive suite. They are pushing through to the front of the queue so that they can be first and others can be last.

[13:33] We should have the words of Jesus ringing in our ears, shouldn't we, from just a few verses ago. The first shall be last and the last first.

And yet here come the Zebedee saying we want to be first. They've not got it, have they? They are blind. They cannot see the crown on their king's head.

That is why Jesus says, you do not know what you are asking. They think being right and left of Jesus will be a place of power. But what does Jesus' response make clear?

He says, can you drink from the cup I am about to drink? I am going to suffer, he is saying, immensely. I am about to drink the cup of God's wrath. But they still don't get it.

Yeah, yeah, we'll drink from the cup. Just give us the front row seat, whatever it takes. Jesus tells them what they do not know. He knows his path.

[14:38] And he knows their path. They will drink from this cup. But it won't look like what they have in mind. But right now, they do not see.

They do not see that the ones who will sit at the right and left hand of Jesus are not those who are great like the kings of the world, but those who suffer. Those who suffer like the king of heaven.

When the other ten disciples hear about it, when they hear what going on, what is their response? Verse 24, they were indignant.

They were raging. How dare they ask this question? But why were they upset? Were they really upset that James and John had asked a really inappropriate question?

Well, indignant, we know, isn't it? It's not the right response. Otherwise, Jesus would have been indignant. And given what Jesus then goes on to say to all of the disciples together, I think it's quite clear, isn't it, why the disciples were indignant?

[15:55] They were not angry because James and John had got Jesus wrong, but because they had got to Jesus first. They still think the first will be first and the last will be last.

Right? The rest of the disciples, they were mentally lining up to ask Jesus the very same thing. And they get mad at James and John only because they think they've jumped the queue. And so Jesus calls them all together once more and says, let me tell you again.

Let me tell you again. What does greatness look like in this kingdom? What does greatness look like in this kingdom? Not, he says, not like the kingdoms of this world.

The Gentiles, he says, do this. It shall not be so among you, among the people of God, among Christ's church. It shall not be so amongst you. Jesus says there, doesn't he, the Gentiles lord it over them.

They live to be served. They use their authority to sit over people longing to be considered more important than others. That was the Gentiles in Jesus' day, wasn't it?

[17:10] 2,000 years might have passed, but it's not really any different, is it? People in positions of privilege and prestige are, we think, to only those who get served by others, who are driven around by chauffeurs, who have their own personal chefs, who have red carpets rolled out from underneath their feet.

Authority is used to be served. That is what people think is greatness. For so, so many. That is how we perceive success.

The world, people, the world looks at people who live lives like that. Maybe you think this this morning, looking at those lives and thinking, these people have really made it, haven't they?

That is, that is the life. If only I could get to that point. If only I could be there. Let me just say, if that is a feeling you even just occasionally have, right, looking up to people who are served by others.

And I'm pretty sure most of us here this morning have been there. If that is you, if that is me, we should be slow, slow to look down in judgment upon the disciples here.

[18:35] They didn't get it. But they didn't really get Jesus' mission yet, did they? When Jesus told them he was going to be crucified, they didn't really believe or at least not understand what they were saying.

They thought it kind of must have some other meaning to it. How could a king be crucified? But we know, don't we? We know that Jesus did walk that path. We see and read and hear that he did go to the cross.

We know that he is the king who has all authority in heaven and earth. We've seen and heard it all and yet so often, don't we, we too look at what the world believes greatness is and think, yeah, that looks pretty good.

Jesus comes and says to his disciples, to all of us, no. No, no, no, no, no, no. That is the way of the world where the first are first and the last are last.

It shall not be so among you because this kingdom is the right way up where the needs of others are preferred above one's own, where others are considered more important than ourselves, where even the king of all creation comes not to be served but to serve, even to the point of death and a cross so that he could lay down his life as a ransom for many.

[20:12] that is greatness in the kingdom of heaven. I just want to make sure you heard that right. That is greatness in the kingdom of heaven.

Serving others is greatness. If we are still, I think, blind to the true crown of this king, there's a very real danger. We'll read verse 26.

Kind of still with the upside down ways of the world fixing our minds. As if Jesus is kind of saying, humble yourself for a little while so that you'll be great afterwards.

I think that the word would be maybe actually a little bit unhelpful, implies, doesn't it, kind of a future status to be worked towards in the present. But the word translated would there is exactly the same word for want that Jesus uses in this question earlier.

If you want greatness now, serve now. He is not saying put in the hard yards of service so that you can look forward to a future of being served.

[21:23] No, he's saying if anyone wants to be great amongst you now, you must serve now. In this kingdom, greatness is service. To be first is to put yourself last.

It's not a case of suffering now, success later. If that is what we hear Jesus saying, I think we are not seeing his crown clearly. Whatever authority we have, we are to use to put ourselves under others, to serve them, not to be served by them.

That, of course, doesn't mean, does it, in practice that Christians are kind of disqualified from positions of authority. The implication is that Christians will have authority, but how will they use it? How will we use it? Whenever and wherever you and I as Christians occupy any position of authority, we want to use, don't we, whatever power we have for the good of those beneath us, not for the good of ourselves.

We can apply that quite broadly, I think quite helpfully, but the context here is specifically the kingdom of heaven. Whoever wants to be great among you. Brothers and sisters, this church

should be overflowing with humility, with people looking not to their own interests, but to the interest of others.

[23 : 03] No one trying to be first. Everyone trying to put others first. That is the kind of greatness we should come looking for.

So the blind come looking for greatness, but our third and final point this morning, the seeing come looking for mercy. Jesus and his disciples, they carry on their way to Jerusalem and are followed by great crowds of people.

And behold, do you see that there? Start verse 30 and behold. That is the same word that Jesus used in verse 17 for see. Matthew is saying, see, look, there were two blind men sitting by the side of the roads.

This isn't some kind of cruel word play on Matthew's part. He is deliberately, isn't he, drawing our attention to a great irony. The disciples were blind to the crown of the king, but these two blind men see it in perfect clarity.

They cry out to Jesus, Lord, have mercy on us, son of David. They get it. They not only get who Jesus is, right, the Lord, the son of David, the great ruler and king, they also get, don't they, why he has come.

[24 : 29] not to make people great, but to show people mercy. Not to be raised in a mighty throne, but to lay down his life for others.

And they also get, don't they, who they are before this great king, not those coming to make demands of greatness, but those coming begging for mercy. They get Jesus right, and they get themselves right.

He is the Lord who serves and saves. We are the ones who need his mercy. These blind men see clearly the crown of thorns on Jesus' head.

But the crowd do not, do they? They get Jesus wrong too, because they are telling these two men to be quiet. They are saying, aren't they, Jesus is too great for you.

The great king is not going to have any time for a lowly people like you. You're not worth his time. Sounds brutal, doesn't it?

[25 : 42] Because it is. The passing crowds see these men as unworthy of Jesus and his attention. I mean, in a sense, they are right, aren't they?

But what they miss is that they too are utterly undeserving of Jesus' time and attention. But Jesus did not come to have mercy on the middle class.

He comes to have mercy on all. Jesus came to have mercy on everyone who comes crying to him for mercy.

Because the blind men see that they are not deterred by the blind others. They don't care how the world sees them. They don't care how the world sees them. All they care about is how they see Jesus.

us. And so, all the more they cry out, Lord, have mercy on us, son of David. And Jesus hears them.

[26 : 48] Jesus hears them. And Jesus says, come to me. He hears them. He hears their cry for mercy and calls them to him and asks once more, what do you want?

What do you want me to do for you? They ask, don't they, for sight, for their eyes to be open.

Are they seeking kind of something similar for themselves, just like the disciples? Is it self-serving?

The disciples ask for greatness. Maybe these men are just asking for an easier life.

Is there really much of a difference? Well, I think we get the answer to that question in what happens next. Jesus, again, because of his pity, right, not because of what they deserve, he gives them what they ask for.

And what do they do? They immediately recover their sight and they follow him. They follow him.

[27 : 58] these men wanted their eyes open so they could follow Jesus. Not just hear him pass by on the road, but walk after him.

Right, these men did not ask for greatness. They didn't ask for an easier life. They asked for all that they needed to follow Jesus. Now, we don't do, we follow Jesus by walking physically behind him, so we don't need 20-20 vision to follow Jesus today, but the point I hope is clear.

When we clearly see the crown on Jesus' heads, we will come looking for mercy and ask him for what we need to follow him, that we might serve like he serves.

To follow him not to the throne of heaven, but to the cross of Calvary. these blind men got it. They saw Jesus with far greater clarity than anyone else, and so they asked him for what they needed to

follow him.

That is what they asked of Jesus. That is all they asked of Jesus, because they knew what kind of king he was, and what kind of death he was going to die.

[29 : 23] So as we finish up, let me just take you back to where we began. If Jesus sat down next to you after the service, and asked you, what do you want me to do for you?

What would your answer be? How clearly do you see the king? What is the deepest desire of your heart?

if your answer was something that would make you great in the eyes of this world, or make your life easier, or long to be served by others, I don't think there's a rebuke here.

Jesus didn't rebuke his disciples, and they were his disciples. They got a lot right, as I'm sure you do too, but I would ask you to look closely at Jesus.

Take in the crown that rests on his head. Take a moment to look at it and think what it means.

Greatness in his kingdom is serving as he served.

[30 : 41] To be first in his kingdom is to put yourself last. So what will you ask of the king? The reality is I think that there is a lot of right answers.

There are a lot of things you can and should ask the king for. The important distinction, isn't it, that I hope we have seen this morning is what we want to do with what we receive.

Ask the king for all that you need to follow him and he will gladly give it. If he doesn't give it it's because you didn't really need it. But everything you do need to follow him more closely he will gladly give.

See the crown of the king and come looking not for greatness but for mercy. And you will be great in the kingdom of God as you lay down your life for others and serve others because that is greatness in this church.

Let us pray together as we close. Father we do thank you and praise you that Jesus willingly the king of heaven he willingly walked to the cross for us that he might lay down his life giving it as a ransom for many.

[32 : 21] Lord we pray that we would see him clearly that we might follow him not to be great in the eyes of this world but to be great in the eyes of him by serving not longing to be served.

Lord open our eyes open the eyes of our hearts that we might see clearly that we might cry out Lord have mercy on us son of David and so be able to follow you all of our days.

In Jesus name we pray Amen. Amen.