



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however: 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!')* for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

emmanuel**church**billericay

Phone: 01277 632120 Email: emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org
Web: www.emmanuel-church.info Twitter: @EmmanuelCM12



HG98: Listening To Jesus On ...
Service

Matthew 20:20-28

Home Group Study Notes

27 July 2014 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

What are you looking forward to the most over the summer?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: What ambitions do you have for your life? How might these compare to what God's ambitions might be for you? Is there a conflict of interests?

2: Many Christians, who have worked hard for God over a long period of time, will have a lowly place in the kingdom because their motives were not purged of the ideas of merit and reward. What do you make of this?

3: How do you measure greatness? How does Jesus measure it? How might you go about closing the gap between your way and His?

3. High Standard vs 24-28

Now the disciples have started to argue among themselves, which shouldn't surprise us. I'm sure the other ten apostles were angry with James and John for going to Jesus when they wished they had thought of it first. The whole episode begins with the strange request by the mother of James and John and ends with a heated dispute. It's all perfectly natural because we humans are born to compete, to fight for the top spot, to look out for number one. Winning and losing is what life is all about. And so before we condemn the disciples, we ought to take a good look in the mirror.

Once again Jesus doesn't condemn his disciples. He used their bickering as a "teachable moment" to challenge them to channel their ambition in a brand-new direction. Ambition has become something of a dirty word in our day because, to many people it implies an overwhelming desire for personal advancement regardless of the cost—and regardless of who is hurt in the process.

Jesus knew all about men and women like that. And he understood that his followers would be tempted to use the same tactics. With four simple words he radically broke with that kind of ambition: "Not so with you." Then he painted an entirely different picture of ambition. "Do you want to be a leader? That's great because the world needs good leaders. Here's what I want you to do. Become a servant. Pick up a towel and start washing dirty feet. Think of yourself as a slave and not as a master." And to press his point home, Jesus uses a Greek word that means a maid or a house servant. He deliberately chose a very humble word to impress upon his men that being a servant was a very humbling occupation.

4. The Servant King vs 28

Vs28: " ... 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'" summarizes the whole Christian message and we are told several powerful truths in it: Jesus came to serve us so that we can serve others. Jesus came to serve us while we serve others. He is the ultimate servant and he is not only our example, he is also our servant. It is not only the disciples' feet that were washed. Our feet are also washed by the Son of God every time we come to him for cleansing from our sin. It is a thrilling and stunning truth that Jesus is our servant. The Lord of glory came to serve us so that we might be able to serve others in his divine power. He is not only the example of servanthood, He is also the servant who empowers us to serve in his name.

Clare Murray and Alison Hunter share something of their journey as to how and where God is calling them to serve Him in the future: Clare in Inverness and Alison at All Souls.

That's Not My Job!

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody thought Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did. Somebody got angry at that because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realised that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done!

There's always jobs to do in the life of Emmanuel. I'm not alone in being able to think of new ways of doing church and introducing new activities to bring Jesus to a new generation—especially in our youth work as Tom and Rob move on in the summer. But don't expect Everybody, Somebody or Anybody to do it because Nobody will. Far too many have been content to let Somebody Else do the work. The problem with this is that there aren't that many Somebody Elses out there. What is God calling you to do?

Sometimes our perspective gets a bit out of place and we forget our limitations. Muhammed Ali was on a plane and the stewardess asked him to buckle his seat belt. He said to her, "Superman don't need no seat-belt." The stewardess quickly answered, "Superman don't need no airplane!"

Jesus doesn't turn down or put down the 'sons of thunder' He merely raises the bar. "You want to sit next to me? Fine. Here's what it will cost you." Warren Wiersbe reminds us to be careful when we pray because we might get what we ask for! James and John assumed their suffering was over and their work was done. They were wrong on both counts. Their suffering was still ahead of them and their work was just beginning.

The concept of the "cup" in the Bible speaks of an intense personal experience. It's the same image Jesus used in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed that the cup of suffering he was about to drink might be taken from him. That "cup" was the burden of bearing the sins of the world. Jesus so loved us that he took the cup of God's wrath as our Substitute as willingly as a thirsty man takes a cup of water!"

Long Hours, Hard Work, Low Pay: In the verses just before this passage (Matthew 20:17-19), Jesus explained to his disciples that when he goes to Jerusalem, he would be betrayed, arrested, falsely accused, mocked, beaten, spat upon, and ultimately crucified. Nothing that happened was hidden to him. He went to Jerusalem with full knowledge of what was about to take place. When Jesus challenged James and John to join with him in drinking the cup, he is calling them to suffer in his name. Only he could pay for the sins of the world, but they could suffer with him by being faithful to him. This was what the apostles had to look forward to if they truly wanted to follow Christ. And that is exactly what happened. James became the first apostle to die. He was put to death by Herod Agrippa in Acts 12. John was the last apostle to die. He ended up in exile on the island of Patmos and wrote the book of Revelation. It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "I admire your bravery, and I will reward you!"

I love the way Leonard Ravenhill sums up the Christian life: "God isn't training Boy Scouts. He's training soldiers!" He's right. If you follow Jesus, you'll work long and hard and the "pay" won't necessarily make you rich. But the retirement benefits are "out of this world." That's the deal. Do you want in or not?

James and John wanted to talk about the glory but Jesus replies by telling them about their suffering. They wanted Easter without Good Friday, and a crown without a cross. Jesus says: "No deal!" It's almost as if he's saying, "You want to be on my right hand and my left hand? Great! Stay with me for a few days and you'll see who is on my right hand and my left. A dying thief on one side and a dying thief on the other side. I'm about to be crucified and the Romans have got two empty crosses. You guys want to make a reservation?"

When Jesus said, "Can you drink the cup I am about to drink?" he was inviting them to come and die with him. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran pastor who died in a Nazi prison shortly before the end of World War II: "*When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.*" Here we come to the bottom line of life. Are you willing to sacrifice everything that is dear to you in order to follow Christ? If the answer is yes, then you can also share in the rewards. These are not words to toss around lightly. You only make this kind of commitment when you have found something worth giving your life for.

Jesus also informs James and John that, whilst he is the host in the Kingdom, it is the Father who is in charge of the seating arrangements in the Kingdom. He's saying: "Don't worry about the seating arrangements, just make sure you get there!"

4: What opportunities to serve do you see in Emmanuel at this time, that Everybody, Somebody, Anybody or Nobody will do?

5: Jesus said: "*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" What might God be asking you to bring to Him 'as a daily offering of worship'?

6: Our Home Group series '*Listening To Jesus On ...*' has been a helpful and challenging series. What has challenged you the most? What has encouraged you the most? What will you 'carry' with you into your future Christian life?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG98: Listening To Jesus On ... *Service*

Matthew 20:20-28

Home Group Sermon Notes

27 July 2014 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction

This event (which is also recorded in Mark's gospel) occurs near the end of Jesus' ministry. In fact, it takes place about a week before the crucifixion as Jesus and his disciples are walking toward Jerusalem and mark the final action-packed days as the clock ticks down toward the climax of Jesus' public ministry and whilst Jesus is coming to grips with the bloody death that looms before him, his top men are angling for better seats in the Kingdom. They are awaiting a reshuffle of Jesus' inner cabinet! And who can blame them? It's easy to feel that walking with Jesus entitles us to special treatment: "Lord, I'm your servant. You have to answer this prayer." "Lord, I've been faithful to you. Now you've got to keep your end of the bargain" With that in mind, let's consider the conversation between Jesus and a mother of two sons.

1. High Ambition vs 20-21

Which mother only wants the best for her children? Which mother doesn't have great dreams for her children? One such mother came to Jesus with an audacious request. She asked that when He comes into his Kingdom, he would have one seated on his right and the other on his left. She wanted her sons to have the places of highest honour. No small dreams here.

While it is easy to criticize this woman, in reality she was doing what any mother would do. I can't blame her for coming to Jesus. All she really wanted was for her kids to do well and get ahead in life. Many Bible commentators suggest that this "mother of Zebedee's sons" was also the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus. If that is true (and it may be, but we cannot be sure), then James and John are first cousins to Jesus and she is Jesus' aunt. If that is the case, then perhaps she thought Jesus would take care of his own family members first. In any case, it must have been quite a scene. Here comes this mother with her grown-up boys in tow. Remember, James and John are full-fledged apostles. They are at least 25 years old and probably over 30.

The parallel passage in Mark 10 makes it clear that the boys had the same question in mind. It's obvious that the boys and their mother had discussed all this previously. Perhaps the mother is involved because they thought that Jesus would be more sympathetic if the request came from her. So she kneels humbly before Jesus and asks with great respect that James and John be given the seats of highest honour in the Kingdom. At this point we come up against a danger all parents face. It's easy to want our children to fulfill our dreams instead of God's for them. Often we try to force our children into a mold of our own choosing. But every parent should remember this: *Your desires and God's desire for your children may not be the same.*

Sons of Thunder: Having said that, I should add that there are several arguments in favour of what this mother did. First, she clearly believes that Jesus will one day have a kingdom of his own. Not many people believed that. He didn't look or act or sound like a typical king.

To many people, he seemed like just another itinerant rabbi from Galilee. His followers were more like a ragtag army than a royal court. As he marches toward his date with destiny in Jerusalem, the angry clouds of controversy swirl over his head. To the untrained eye he seems far removed from being the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Yet this mother saw past the superficial to the day when Jesus would indeed reign on the earth. Give her credit. She believed when most people doubted. Second, it's clear that Jesus loved her sons. He even gave them a nickname the "sons of thunder," which is sort of like calling them "Christian Hell's Angels." Third, they were among the earliest disciples. Fourth, they (along with Peter) were clearly in the top three of all the apostles. When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, his only witnesses were Peter, James and John.

So why shouldn't she ask that her boys have the seats of highest honour? Why shouldn't they have the place of power, prestige and intimacy? After all, someone has to sit on Jesus' right and on his left. It might as well be James and John. And it couldn't hurt to ask in advance. As we read the other gospels it's clear that this was a recurring controversy among the disciples all the way until the Lord's Supper in the Upper Room. No matter what we may think about James and John (and their mother), the other disciples wanted those seats as well. These were very competitive men.

We live in an ambitious world don't we? We want to know who is the best, fastest, smartest, strongest, loudest, longest, and richest. That's why the Guinness Book of World Records is a yearly best seller. That's why a worldwide audience of more than 1 billion, that's a thousand million, watched the World Cup Final. Let's face it, life is about winning and losing. That's why we keep score. That's why we love sports. We want to know who's up and who's down, who's hot and who's not.

And that's why this mother came to Jesus. In the great game of life, she wanted to make sure her boys came out ahead. If that meant asking for a favour from the Lord, she was glad to do it because she felt like her boys deserved it. She had big dreams and her sons had large ambitions.

And, despite what we may think, ambition itself is not evil. If you don't have any ambition, why bother getting out of bed in the morning? You might as well roll over and sleep all day. Ambition is merely a strong desire regarding the future. As such, it can be positive or negative, good or bad, righteous or evil. It can be very useful if we are ambitious for the right things.

What are your ambitions? What do you dream about? What are your secret hopes for your own life? British playwright George Bernard Shaw reminds us that: *"There are two tragedies in life. One is to lose your heart's desire. The other is to gain it."*

The basic problem is that James and John underestimated the cost of following Christ and they overestimated their own self-importance. They didn't ask for work in the coming Kingdom (which would have been a nobler request). They asked only for a place of honour. Seniority was their plea. We've been here longer than anyone except Peter! And they probably thought the Kingdom was coming soon so they wanted to get their applications in early and trade on family ties and friendship to get a high place. What will Jesus say to their brash request?

2. High Cost vs 22-23

Jesus doesn't rebuke the mother or her sons. And he doesn't deny his coming Kingdom or that there will be seats of honour. Leaving aside selfish motives for a moment, there is nothing wrong with the question per se. Jesus simply tells them that they don't know what they are asking for. Then he asks if they can drink the cup he is about to drink. With commendable bravery, they reply, "We can." Very confident they may be, even brave and honest - but not very smart.