



Matthew 20:24–28

24 When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. 25 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. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28

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.”

Reflection

(Today’s reflection is given by Justin Mofatt)

The context of our passage today is Jesus’ declaration that he is going up to Jerusalem to die, and that ‘On the third day he will be raised to life!’ No-one quite gets this, but James and John (and their mum) get in early and ask for power in the kingdom. Their mum asks, ‘Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.’

Jesus answers them and our passage to-

day follows on from this. Here it is again,

When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. 25 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. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 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.”

‘Not so with you’. What a challenge! Possibly the most challenging words that could be expressed towards the toxic culture of

leadership and power in the world today. 'Not so with you'. Four words that could change your life and re-shape our planet.

I have three questions for us to consider. Firstly, is power always toxic? Secondly, how does it become toxic? And finally, how do we detox? Let's consider each of these in turn.

Firstly, is power always toxic? The answer is 'no'. Power in and of itself is not bad. God has power, for example. James and John get in there before anyone else requesting (using their mum as spokesperson) to sit at Jesus' right and left in glory. It is important to note that Jesus doesn't reject their bold request. He just says that they don't understand what they are asking.

According to Jesus, it's not wrong to want to be great. In fact, in verse 23, he simply says, 'God will decide who gets glory.' And then in verses 26–28 Jesus goes on to spell out exactly how to become great. So it's not power or greatness that's the problem. It is the corruption of it. It can be made toxic. Which leads us to our second question.

Secondly, how does it become toxic? Where does the poison come from? The answer, according to Jesus, is that we have been shaped by a toxic culture. In the disciples' case it was the Greco-Roman culture. We read in verse 25,

Jesus called them together [a pow-wow] and said, 'You know that the

rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.”

It is rare to see a comment by Jesus about non-Jewish culture. We know from here and elsewhere that the culture of Roman world was to win and to humiliate at all costs; to ‘Lord it over’ each other. After all, their Romans gods won battles and humiliated their enemies so of course they followed suit. The disciples have unwittingly imbibed some of this culture and passed it on to each other. See in verse 24,

“When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers”

They weren’t indignant because they

were pious and thought that James and John were power hungry. It's just that they didn't get in there first. How often do you see that!?

We too can drink deeply of our culture without even realising it. It's very easy. But Jesus upturns the culture! And changes and challenges our peer relationships. 'Not so with you.' Or 'It will not be so amongst you!'

Finally then, how do we detox? Jesus is the answer. Jesus says serve! And he provides a model.

26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—

The way to find the new culture is to get under people and serve them. Like a slave, Jesus says. That's the way to true greatness. It's a call to a counter-cultural community about serving others; not serving self. Jesus is advocating not a hierarchy. But a low-rarchy.

There is the challenge. Do you want to be great? Do you really want it? Do you desire it? Are you hungry for it? These are good desires as long as they're fulfilled in the service of others and not in the service of self.

The one who follows Jesus can now freely and boldly say, 'How can I serve you? What hard and small thing can I do for you to lighten your load? What sacrifice can I

make to make you look good; rather than me?’

To be a slave usually meant that you were defeated in war. Humiliated. And then made to do the lowest of activities. Like washing feet in an ancient world of dust, dirt, sandals and long journeys by foot. Jesus says here (and elsewhere), ‘Be like that.’

This is the way to detox toxic power in the world. How do you do it? You follow Jesus, and be freed (ransomed) by him. Verse 28,

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.’

Look to Jesus. Not someone else getting ahead. He is the new lens through which to see your life, the Son of Man came to serve. He is the new lens that changes everything in your life.

Think

There is a video doing the rounds on YouTube. It's an American guy standing in a park overlooking the water at sunset. He tries on a pair of sunglasses. Nothing spectacular there. Except for the fact that this guy is colour blind. And what he is trying on are the "Enchroma Colour", a new pair of sunglasses that allows the colour blind to see full colour for the first time. He is being filmed by his friend. The moment he puts the glasses on and looks up at the sun setting over the ocean he goes

completely quiet. He backs away from the view and you can see the tears begin to form in his eyes. He mumbles that everything is so bright: the grass, the water, and the sky.

And then he says, 'I'm going to have to re-learn all my colours'. Once you've seen Jesus, you've need to re-learn all your colours.

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.'

This is our counter-cultural; counter-religious God. When God, the immortal, all powerful, all knowing, creator God, who is larger than our every expanding universe, who sustains every breath in exis-

tence, and who is Lord over time and matter; when he enters our world he comes not to be served, but to serve. And to give his life. To ransom many.

Pray

Ask yourself now what power relationships exist in your life. Pray about letting go of the prevailing cultural narrative on power and choose Jesus instead. We need to loose ourselves from our culture. We need to wean ourselves off it. We are being offered a real option here to be different at work. Bullying in the office? Jesus says: 'Not so with you.' Coercion in our relationship? Jesus says: 'Not so with you.' Refusing to humbly listen to people around us? Jesus says: 'Not so with you.' Bulldozing someone in conversation? Jesus says:

‘Not so with you.’ Remaining distant to promote an image? Jesus says: ‘Not so with you.’ Gossiping (which is, at its heart, is a power play). Jesus says: ‘Not so with you.’

So ask God to help you to serve. If you are in a toxic culture, ask him to free you. He died as a ransom. Perhaps think about one or two people that you can serve today and ask God for the power to do just that.