

Matthew 20:20-28

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[0 : 00] I was both sad to hear that Nathan was sick, but at the same time a little selfishly excited that that means I'll get to preach to you again. I don't know if you all share that excitement, but I'm excited.

And that's the main thing. No, we're going to be in Matthew chapter 20 verses 20 through 28 this morning. This is a sermon I actually preached at our men's retreat two years ago, I think it was. And at that time, it was maybe my third or fourth sermon total. So it's one of those ones I always wish I had back. So this is my chance.

But yes, we're going to be seeing a interesting story today and somewhat approaching a little more around an idea. Not necessarily my preference to preach that way, but given that we're going through Romans and we're taking a break since Nathan's not here, I thought this would be fitting. So as you're turning to your text again, Matthew chapter 20 verses 20 through 28. I want to begin by considering the cultural and social pressures we face as individuals.

[1 : 11] Now, there's many of them, but one in particular, and that's this message. It's this message we hear daily. It's this message that's reinforced everywhere. It's a message we love to hear, and that's this.

Serve yourself. Right? Treat yourself, or however you want to put it. And just think about this for a moment. We live in a technologically advanced society.

We have TVs that obey our fingers, iPhones that we personalize and set up to please ourselves, and computers that do more or less the same. And consider food.

Unlike the majority of human history, we can afford to be amazingly picky about what we eat or what we will not eat. Right? I hate hot pot. Let's get some burgers.

Or I won't eat McDonald's. Let's get Chick-fil-A. So it's very easy to be comfortable in our society. And the majority of what America produces are items that are meant to serve the individual.

[2 : 12] So from a young age, we feel entitled because as kids, especially the younger crowd here, right, myself included, we grew up in homes where we had so many toys and gadgets and gizmos that do our bidding.

They don't talk back. They don't fight. They do what we tell them at a press of a finger or even voice command. And so it's not surprising that when many of us get older, growing up in this very comfortable, luxurious, advanced society, that we don't handle disagreement well with a spouse or with a friend or with any kind of authority figure, because we're used to being the authority.

We tell most things what to do. It's very rare that it's the other way around for us. Right? What happens when the meal is not what you expected or what you like?

Well, you get angry whether you show it or not to your spouse or your mom or the waitress or whoever did the cooking. And so obviously those technologies, these options for food, all these things are not inherently wrong.

But this illustration shows how even in the most basic daily things, we're being told a message constantly and we are hearing it consciously and subconsciously.

[3 : 27] Serve yourself. And that message is constant. And it can be seen in far more significant and dangerous ways. Right?

Get married only if he or she makes you happy. Right? You. Get divorced only if he or she no longer makes you happy.

Make friends with that guy only if he makes you happy. Stop being friends with that guy only if he no longer makes you happy. And so you can see the destructive sin pattern that results.

So we're going to consider that sin pattern in light of our text today. And again, our text is Matthew chapter 20, verses 20 through 28. And we're going to see the disciples seeking to serve

themselves.

We're going to see the seriousness of that problem. But more importantly, we're going to see the gracious example we have in Christ to learn to deny ourselves. So let's read that text together.

[4 : 27] Matthew 20, starting verse 20. Matthew writes, Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him. That's came up to Jesus. They came up to Jesus with her sons.

And kneeling before him, she asked him for something. And he said to her, what do you want? She said to him, say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.

Jesus answered, you do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? And they said to him, we are able.

And he said to them, you will drink my cup. But to sit at my right hand and my left is not mine to grant. But it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my father.

And when the ten heard it, the other disciples, that is, when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, you know that the rulers of Gentiles lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them.

[5 : 31] It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant. And whoever would be first among you must be your slave.

Even as the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. So where are we contextually in Matthew's gospel?

We are in what is often called the fourth narrative. If you study Matthew, it's structured. There's five narratives, five discourses. They all kind of intermesh, bouncing back and forth, and they all play on each other.

So they're always connected and they're always displaying that Christ's life, his person, his works are in complete agreement with his words. He does as he says and he says as he does.

And the last discourse in our flow of Matthew's narrative began in Matthew chapter 18, verse 1. Here the disciples approached Jesus and asked him who the greatest one was in the kingdom of heaven.

[6 : 31] And so they asked him the same question already in Matthew's narrative. And Jesus' immediate response in chapter 18 is, Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

That's Matthew 18, verse 4. However, Jesus' disciples seem to not have liked Christ's answer. After all, he goes on to teach many wonderful things.

You know, Jesus teaches about God's heart for the lost. We see that in Matthew 18, verses 10 through 14. He talks about the process of reconciliation and forgiveness in the church in verses 15 through 35 of chapter 18.

And he even talks about salvation being possible from God alone in chapter 19, just to name a few of the wonderful truths that Christ shares with the disciples. And after all these lessons, after already getting an answer to their question, you know what they're still thinking about?

Is that same question. Who is the greatest? That's what they care about. They don't really care about God's salvation or reconciliation in the church or any of these things.

[7 : 39] They want to know who is the greatest among us. And this question shifted gears. So Jesus mentioned that they would all sit on thrones with Christ in chapter 19, verse 28.

So this question of who the greatest is becomes who will sit at the right and left hands. Who will be in the positions of prominence next to Christ for the eternal reign?

Because whoever sits there will be the greatest. So they're still concerned with this question. So this leads us to our first point this morning. Self-serving by nature blinds us from Christ, his work, and his words.

And I'll repeat that. Self-serving by nature blinds us from Christ, his work, and his words. So to really drive this point home, let's just back up a little bit in our text.

So Matthew chapter 20, picking up in verse 17. Matthew writes, Imagine, right, for most of us, we would at least hope that if we're there, if we're one of these disciples, this is our Lord speaking to us, our Savior Christ, God incarnate.

[9 : 16] And he just told us, hey, in three days I'm going to be killed and I'm going to be raised. Right? I would want to hope that we'd all be just blown away by this. What? What do you mean? What does that mean? Why?

Why do you have to die? How are you going to be raised? I mean, so many questions. And of course, we know that this is one of the essential things of our faith. Christ's death and resurrection. Apart from those, our faith is in vain. So this is core of the core of the gospel. This is ground zero for being a Christian. These truths. So he's teaching these essential truths that he will be killed, that he will be raised.

It's being taught in unambiguous terms. But then when you get to our text in verse 20, it begins with the word then.

So the response to Jesus teaching these core truths, these wonderful truths, these sobering truths. The mother came and asked.

[10:14] So they didn't care about anything he was saying about the gospel. Essentially, James and John's response to Christ's teaching was, Excuse me.

Do you think now is a good time to have mom ask if we can sit next to Jesus in heaven? So we can infer that James and John put their mother up to this because it is they that Jesus responds to.

So the mother comes. She asks. Mark's gospel omits this. The mother entirely from the account.

But it's clear that the sons put her up to it and they're playing this petty little political game.

And it sounds petty. It sounds silly. It sounds, frankly, stupid because it is. This is unbelievable. But this is what happens when we allow ourselves to dominate our thinking and our desires in our hearts.

This self-driven consciousness of James and John is not shocking. Especially when you consider their history. They were from a wealthy family, as indicated by the common reference, the sons of Zebedee.

[11:22] So in the Greco-Roman world, only families of renown or prestige or wealth were referred to with such a title, the sons of so-and-so. We see that in John chapter 18, verses 15 through 16.

And their family was known by the high priest in that text. So again, indicating they're in the upper echelon of society. Further, James and John were in the Lord's inner circle.

Right. They were always with him at key moments, even when many of the other disciples were not. Such as the transfiguration in Matthew 17. And clearly, James thought highly of himself.

Right. If you look at Luke chapter 9, verse 54, he wanted to call down fire on a village like the prophet Elijah. So notice that he's equating himself with that great man of the Old Testament.

I'm like Elijah. Let me cast down fire. So all this to say, it kind of makes sense from an earthly perspective why they might think they were fit to sit at the left and right hands of Christ.

[12:23] Positions of prominence in the ancient world. Because that's what they grew up in. That's what they're used to. That's what they think they deserve. And I want to suggest that Jesus subtly and softly rebukes them in our text.

He brings the conversation back to his pronouncement that we just saw in 17 through 19 about his death and resurrection. By mentioning the cup in verses 22 through 23.

So a cup in the Jewish world and throughout the Old Testament was symbolic for the wrath of God. So hence why our Lord asked our father if it would be possible to remove this cup on the night that he was to be betrayed.

We see that in Matthew 26, verse 39. And the sons of Zebedee, James and John, they display their maddening focus on their self-promotion by swiftly and foolishly claiming that they can drink the cup that Jesus is to drink.

So because of their sinful self-centeredness, they clearly missed the fact that Jesus is talking about bearing the wrath of God in reference to this cup.

[13:30] They say we are able to bear the wrath of God. Doesn't that sound ridiculous? And it should have been clear to them, not only because of an entire Old Testament that testifies to the atonement and the wrath of God being poured out like a cup.

But also, as we saw, Jesus literally just pronounced his death in resurrection in no uncertain terms. So self-serving by nature, it blinds us from Christ, his words, and this leads us to our second point.

Point number two. Self-serving by nature causes divisions, distrust, and disunity.

Distrust, and disunity. So as I alluded to earlier, we get the impression in Matthew 20, verse 20, that James and John put their mother up to this task of securing the seats at the right and left hand of Christ's throne.

And the mother was clearly complicit. So they're playing this political game, a scratch-and-claw mentality, to get ahead of the other disciples.

[14:47] Notice that the other ten are not near, but the mom goes and approaches them when the ten are not near. So they were in competition for these honors. And it was not James and John exclusively guilty of this sin, as we see reading further in our text.

Verse 24 reads, And when the ten heard it, so after the fact, they didn't know this was happening, but when they heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers.

So the other disciples were not experiencing a righteous anger, but a selfish and worldly anger.

They, too, were asking in chapter 18, verse 1, who is the greatest?

They want the answer to be them just as much as John and James want it to be them. They want that honor just as badly, but James and John strike first.

And we can also see that even at the Lord's Supper, all the disciples were concerned about this question, not the new covenant being inaugurated in Luke 22, verse 24.

[15:50] So clearly, this is not a James and John issue. All the disciples were concerned with the self. And this is all of mankind's nature. This is true of you.

This is true of me, everybody. The second commandment assumes this self-love. Love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus repeats that in Matthew 22, verse 39.

So being that it is within all of us, it is no surprise to see the early church have this same problem. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church because of such issues.

As he states in 1 Corinthians 1, verses 10 through 11, I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. This quarreling was due to a number of factors, such as picking particular leaders or shunning the poor during the Lord's Supper, incest, sexual promiscuity, all of which is the result of self-interest and selfish desires, sin.

[17:06] And the Apostle James, a different James from the brother of John, he wrote, What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? This is James 4, verses 1 through 2. He goes on, Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. And you do not have because you do not ask.

So notice what James is saying. Our fights and quarrels are always the result of our self-interest, our desires, our sin. And further, notice the implicit reference that James is making to his audience not paying attention to God, but to themselves.

He says, You do not have because you do not ask, indicating they're not fixated on Christ. And so it is with the disciples in Matthew 20, verses 20 through 28.

Their quarreling is the result of wrongful desires, wrongful motives, and wrongful ambitions. So this leads me to my last point about self-serving, and then we'll discuss self-denial.

[18:17] But point number three, self-serving is antithetical to being a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. Self-serving is antithetical, or it's opposite, to being a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

So we just saw how division, disunity, and distrust are the result of self-serving desires and ambitions. So think about it. When everybody in the kingdom has their own objectives, their own goals, their own desires, then the problem of disunity, distrust, and division is compounded.

And this is why at the very foundation of self-serving, no matter what self-serving entails of, it is antithetical to being a true citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

So a major theme in Matthew's gospel is the concept of true disciples opposed to false disciples. This is all over Matthew's gospel. But perhaps the clearest expression of this can be found in contrasting the Sermon on the Mount with the Seven Woes Discourse in Matthew 23.

So the Sermon on the Mount heavily emphasizes the characteristics of the true citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Hence why it begins with the Beatitudes, which reveal many of those characteristics.

[19:33] Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the persecuted. And so forth. So the Sermon on the Mount outlines the heart dispositions of true believers, especially chapter 5.

So we're not merely to avoid murder, but even anger, which is the heart of a murderer. And ultimately, this heart of the true citizen of the kingdom of heaven will result in this person taking the narrow path, as the Sermon closes in Matthew 7, verse 13.

And narrow path is a way of expressing single-minded devotion to God, to his plan, to his will, on his terms, to conforming to his righteousness.

But in the Seven Woes Discourse in Matthew chapter 23, we see false conversion and religiosity in full. And it is interesting to note that before the Seven Woes Discourse begins, Jesus reaffirms his teaching.

He says, The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

[20 : 42] That's Matthew 23, verse 11 through 12. So this serves as a textual clue that Matthew sees the teaching here, chapter 23, closely related to our text in Matthew 20, 20 through 28.

So the scribes and the Pharisees, you don't have time to read chapter 23, but I'll summarize. The scribes and Pharisees were self-serving hypocrites. Due to their self-serving ways, they were guilty of, one, being a barrier to others entering the kingdom of heaven.

We see that in verse 14 of chapter 23. They're guilty of damning proselytes with false teaching. We see that in verse 15. They're guilty of sacrilege. We see that in verse 16.

They're guilty of neglecting justice and mercy. Let me tell you, if you read the Old Testament, that is not something you want to be guilty of. That's in verse 23. We see that these scribes and Pharisees were being inwardly wicked in verse 25.

In verse 28, Jesus says, and these are all accusations made by Jesus, by the way. In verse 28, Jesus says they were practicing hypocrisy and lawlessness. And then in verses 29 through 33, Jesus says they were murderers of God's prophets.

[21 : 58] So it is right and just that on each of these accounts, Jesus says, woe to you, which would have stung a Pharisee's ear, much the same way as today we might say, damn you to hell. That line stings because that's what it means.

So these are traits. These traits here, being inwardly wicked, being hypocritical, being murderers in the heart. These kinds of traits are traits of citizens of the kingdom of Satan.

This is Satan's fruit. In Matthew chapter 4, verse 9, Satan is tempting Jesus in the wilderness. And he says to our Lord, all these I will give you if you, referring to Jesus, if you, Jesus, will fall down and worship me.

Satan serves himself. He does not care for nor love God. And likewise, the seed of the serpent, right? All those who follow in his ways, the Pharisees, the scribes, the false converts, they too serve only themselves.

It's a divided kingdom. God seeks true worshipers who will worship in spirit and in truth. We know this from John 4, 24.

[23 : 08] So it is quite literally impossible for self-serving Satan to worship God. And it is impossible for the sons of Satan to worship God as well.

This is why they are known by their disunity, their hate, and their wickedness. That kingdom, that city, has a compounded problem of competing selves rather than worshiping the one true God.

In Augustine's famous work, The City of God, he wrote a line. And this line, if you've not heard it before, is probably one of those lines that is the most important line for any Christian to know outside of Scripture itself.

He wrote, Two cities have been formed by two loves.

The earthly city by the love of self, even to the contempt of God. The heavenly city by the love of God, even to the contempt of self.

[24 : 35] So we now see one foundational difference between true citizens of the kingdom of heaven and the false citizens who inwardly are ravenous wolves.

The latter is characterized by self-serving, but the first is characterized by self-denial. And this leads us to our fourth point.

Point number four. Self-denial means servanthood and slavery to God. Self-denial means servanthood and slavery to God.

Let's look back at Matthew 20, verse 25 again. I'm going to read two verses. Matthew writes, But Jesus called them to him and said, so Jesus called the disciples and said, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.

And remember, for Jews, Gentile means sinner always. So you know that the rulers of the sinners lord it over them. And their great ones, the great ones in the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of Satan, right?

[25 : 42] Their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

And whoever would be first among you must be your slave. So in our text, verse 25, the phrase lord it over them is a single Greek word.

Okay, and this word has a prefix, kata, which in Greek means down. In other words, you could translate this as one who is lording down on someone. And it creates a picture of a leader on top who deals harshly with those underneath him.

They use their position to bear down on those beneath them. In fact, the phrase even implies that they view themselves above those whom they're pushing down on.

But what does Christ say about this? He says, it shall not be so among you. It will be so among the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of hell, but not so for the kingdom of heaven.

[26 : 46] So what then shall it be like? How then will we live? Well, he says, verse 26 and verse 27, the greatest among us shall live like a servant and a slave.

When you think about the perfect slave or the perfect servant, you think of someone who has the exact same desires as you do, but not for themselves, but for you.

Okay, in other words, if my desire is for a stake and I have a servant slave, right? If my desire is for a stake, then the perfect servant or slave's desire should be for me to have that stake.

The perfect servant slave has no concept of self other than self-denial. So this servant slave finds satisfaction only in pleasing his master.

And praise God for his grace and mercy to not only save us, but to transform our hearts so that we would have our desires reoriented to serve him alone.

[27 : 50] And this might really be rubbing against your sense of freedom right now, but let's think about this for a moment. God created us and loves us. So surely he knows what's best for us, which in this case is self-denial and total devotion to serving him.

Furthermore, you cannot understand sanctification apart from this servant slave concept. Paul writes in Romans chapter 6, verses 17 through 18, But thanks be to God.

So he's thankful. Thanks be to God that you who are once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.

And having been set free from sin, freedom free from sin, You have become slaves, bondage, slaves of righteousness. That is good news.

And God prophesying the new covenant, which we are under, said in Jeremiah 32, verse 40, He said, I will make with them, he's referring to his saints, the church, the believers.

[28 : 59] He said, I will make with them an everlasting covenant that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts that they may not turn from me.

So notice first the promise that God will only do good to us. What a blessing. But recognize this blessing also necessitates God transforming our hearts' desires so that we will not turn from him.

We will become this perfect servant slave. When we are fully glorified and sanctified, we will worship and think of nothing but God. And that is very good news.

And we have a glimpse of this future reality from the Apostle John. He witnessed the great multitude cry out in Revelation 19, 6 through 8. They cried out, Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

Let us rejoice and exalt and give him the glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure.

[30 : 05] So again, notice the single-minded devotion to worshipping God. Not the angels, not other saints, not heaven itself, creation or anything, but God.

And these prophecies, these descriptions can only come true if our hearts are radically and totally transformed by gracious God Almighty. So an ounce of wisdom, an ounce of humility would teach us that we all want to fully entrust ourselves to the infinite, eternal, kind, gracious, compassionate, merciful, sovereign, just, loving, relational creator God.

Why do we think we know better about what would serve us best? And 1 Corinthians 6, 20 makes it clear we were bought with a price.

Meaning God doubly owns us, both as his creation and his redeemed. We are no longer our own, but Christ. And a final note on this point, we know that we are to suffer as Christ followers.

Matthew 5, 10, blessed are the persecuted. All of God's people are persecuted without exception. Though persecution may look different for everyone. Jesus warned his disciples to count the cost.

[31 : 24] He said in Matthew 16, 24, So again, there is implied suffering here as we all have crosses to bear.

And despite these constant warnings and teachings, the disciples of Matthew 20 do not get the picture. They were caught up with notions of thrones. So Matthew uses similar language from our text later on in the gospel.

The phrase in chapter 20, verse 21 of our text, one on the right and one on the left. Right? These thrones that James and John want. Matthew uses this phrase verbatim only one other time in his gospel.

And that's in Matthew 27, verse 38. Referring to the two thieves crucified to the left and to the right of our Lord. So rather artistically, Matthew is echoing Jesus' lesson in his gospel account by signifying that this, this is the way of Christ.

Self-denial, suffering, and death. So truly, as we see in verse 22, the disciples will drink from Christ's cup. In the sense that they will be martyred.

[32 : 35] So whoever will be greatest among you must be least. Must be servant of all. And this leads to our final point for this morning. Point number five. It's in verse 28 of our text.

Point number five. Christ is our great example of self-denial. Christ is our great example of self-denial. So verse 28, Matthew writes, Even as the Son of Man came, not to be served, but to serve.

And to give his life as a ransom for many. So two things here. First, we see that Christ came to serve. Paul writes in Philippians chapter 2, verses 5 through 7.

Gary read it this morning. God incarnate took the form of a slave.

He serves us, though we are created to serve him. He has every right to cast us aside. And yet he saves us, loves us, and serves us.

[33 : 50] So only a God who is willing to deny his rights immediately could have accomplished the incarnated work of Christ. There was no need for him to become a man.

No need for him to train disciples. No need for him to suffer. No need for him to sacrifice himself. No need for him to save himself. Apart from the fact that he is gentle and lowly in heart.

Desiring to save those whom the Father has given him. He added 100% humanity to his 100% deity. Which is subtraction by addition, right?

It did not diminish his glory, but he covered it for a time. As seen in the transfiguration, Matthew 17. So none of us will ever know what it means to deny ourselves the way our Lord did.

In the incarnation. We have never been so high and we will never have to drop so low. And second, it is interesting that Jesus ties everything back to his death and resurrection.

[34 : 50] As he began teaching on it in verses 17 through 19. He brings it back by mentioning that he himself will give his life as a ransom for many. So why is Jesus mentioning the atonement here again?

Why is he mentioning his death? I do not think he is primarily making a comment on limited atonement or unlimited atonement. Though it's obvious that there's only the many. No, I think he is saying something more pointed.

I think he is saying, he is doing this subtly. I mean, he is bringing the conversation full circle to make his point. And what he is saying is that, excuse me, everything went blank.

There it is. He is coming to die for them. And in this moment, these disciples were not even willing to give up a seat for the other. Much less die for one another.

So I am going to repeat that. He is making the point that I am here, God incarnate, to die for you. And you are arguing about seats. But you are not even willing to die for one another.

[35 : 52] You are competing for chairs. So we need to recognize that we only have salvation because we serve a God who was and is willing to deny himself.

We have grace upon grace because of this servant attitude that our God willingly has provided. And let me add to that because the disciples were blinded by their selfish ambitions, they failed to see that Christ was the greatest among them.

What's the point in arguing about second place? Christ is the greatest among them. And so looking at that Philippians text one more time that I mentioned a moment ago, Philippians chapter 2, verses 8 through 11, Paul writes, And being found in human form, he's talking about Christ still, being found in human form, Christ humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God, the Father. So to speak extremely reductionally about Paul's words above, he is saying Christ serve others at the expense of his own comfort and stature.

[37 : 15] And I think it is so fitting that Jesus is gracious in our passage today to not outright rebuke the disciples in a very blunt fashion. More fitting that in the immediate preceding text, we see our Lord have mercy on two blind men by stopping and asking.

And this is Matthew chapter 20, verses 32 through 34. He sees two blind beggars, stops, asks them, what do you want me? This is Jesus talking. What do you want me to do for you?

And they said to him, Lord, let our eyes be opened. And Jesus, in pity, touched their eyes. And immediately they recovered their sight and followed him. So in closing, I just want to offer some simple applications for being believers characterized by self-denial.

And this is one of those things that there are so many applications. I mean, every moment, every day, there's opportunity to deny self. But to speak more generally, to speak more broadly, application number one.

There's nothing we are too good to give up or sacrifice, especially considering Christ, our Lord, who gave himself up. There are so many selves in our society today, and they are astonishingly celebrated as virtues.

[38 : 39] Self-love, self-care, self-service, self-esteem, self-respect, self-worth, self-pity, and so many other selves. And I'm telling you right now, you have to kill every one of those.

The Bible never commands us to love ourselves. It assumes we love ourselves. And that very self-love is a part of our problem, sin. The concept of self-care is mocked throughout Scripture as the practice of an ignorant fool.

We are to look to our providential God and pray that he care for us as he does the sparrows and the lilies of the field. We just saw how deadly self-service is.

And where in the Bible does God ever say, my servants, make sure you esteem yourselves? The Bible is consistently telling us to not even consider ourselves. And further, the Bible consistently commands us to esteem only one, and that's God.

The concept of self-respect is a foreign concept to the Bible. The concept of self-worth for mankind is antithetical to the Bible. Paul writes of mankind in Romans 3, verse 12, that together we have become worthless.

[39 : 51] We become worthless in our sins. Of course, this is prior to salvation, but the point stands. And I could go on, but I think you get the point. Christian living, the Bible, none of this is about us.

It's about God, loving him, serving him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. So give all of that up. It only leads to death, ruin, and destruction.

And this leads to our second application, application number two, consider Christ. So when I say consider, I do not mean for a brief moment or that you give him a slight ode in your mind.

But I mean exclusively, constantly, always consider Christ. We are called to live not for ourselves, but for him. So what does that look like? Well, obviously, as I said earlier, it looks like a lot of things. But for the sake of this application, speaking broadly, we are to consciously reorient our minds to think about Christ in everything we do. So something as seemingly small and minor as folding the laundry, right?

[40 : 57] Which has worth. It has dignity. How can I fold laundry in a manner that reflects Christ's humble serving and makes me love him more? How can I fold my laundry in a way that replicates Christ's love in washing his disciples' feet?

Or think about stewarding your resources, right? How am I using my financial assets, my belongings, my time, my home, and so on in such a way that is Christ-oriented?

Right, that question alone should eliminate much of what we do. You don't need the fancy car. You don't need the beach house for your biannual vacations that the rest of your family doesn't even want to go on.

I mean, seriously, let me channel some John Piper here until you quit wasting your life on that stuff. It's a pathetic legacy, and there's no return on investment. So everything you've been given has been given to you by God, and you will give an account to him for your stewardship.

And you know what he will test your stewardship on, whether or not you stewarded everything you've been given to exalt Christ and obey him. The Father loves the Son and wants his name to be above every name.

[42 : 08] Who cares what name is on the right or the left? So we could go on and on with examples like these things, but the point is we need to consciously be orienting everything in our lives towards serving and exalting Christ, forgetting ourselves, considering Christ.

And this leads to our final application that I'm bringing from outside our text, but certainly throughout the Bible. And that's application number three, recognize Christ is worth living for in a perpetual state of self-denial.

Christ is worth living for in a perpetual state of self-denial. Believe that. No other person, no other thing will satisfy in the slightest, whereas Christ satisfies in the fullest sense and beyond.

And Psalm 23, second half of verse 5 through 6, the psalmist writes, My cup overflows, meaning our satisfaction, our joy, our deepest needs, all of these things are met with overwhelming provision.

And he goes on, he says, As my cup overflows, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

[43 : 26] So this is very good news. The life of self-denial is not one of constant disappointment or lack. We have Christ, and what more could we want?

What more could we desire or need? And Christ will surely satisfy your every true craving if you would only look to him and no other. So I just want to close with this quote from George Mueller. I'm sure you've heard it before, but it's worth repeating. And my hope is that this would be true for all of us. George Mueller, he once wrote, of his own conversion experience, he wrote, Let's pray. Let's pray.