

# SERVE PASSIONATELY

Base Camp (Part 3) | Matthew 20:17-34

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## The Good Seats

Everybody likes the good seats. From the stadium and the symphony, to the T.V. room and the board room, from the airliner to the family car, from the movie theater to the midtown bus, people love the good seats. Seats are social shorthand in this crazy world of ours. Status, success, and significance are often spelled "S-E-A-T-S." How do you know someone's made it big on Wall Street or at the Merc? They have their own seat. How do you tell the difference between a king and a courtier? Just look at their seat. How do you know the guest of honor at a party or if Papa Bear's home? That's right; check out the seat.

So let's forgive this lady, in the story here today, O.K.? I'm talking about Salome, the woman Matthew 20 calls **the mother of Zebedee's sons**. I know, Jesus had just dropped the bomb of all bombs and she missed it. Jesus has just said: **We are going up to Jerusalem, and [I] will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn [me] to death and will turn [me] over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. [But] on the third day [I] will be raised to life!**

Never mind that Jesus has just described the hideous way He's going to die or revealed the mind-boggling notion that He'll be resurrected from the dead. Let's cut Salome some slack here for being a bit distracted. After all, if you've got connections with someone about to rise to a higher office, aren't you going to want to use them for the people you love? Give her credit for at least being polite about it. **"Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him."**

Incidentally, the sons being mentioned here are James and John. Their father, Zebedee (the name means "abundant") appears to have been a businessman of some means in Galilee. Luke 5 tells us that he owned a couple of boats. Mark 1:20 makes it clear that he was wealthy enough to have **"hired servants."** His wife Salome would have been used to the finer things of life and what mother doesn't hope and pray that her kids won't rise even higher than her. So who could blame her for asking? **What is it you want?' [Jesus] asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."** Can they have the good seats?

## How God Spells Success

Let me say it again: In this world of ours status, success, and significance are often spelled "**S-E-A-T-S.**" But do you know how God spells those desirable ends? He spells them "**S-E-R-V-E.**" That's right: SERVE. The places of honor in the kingdom of God are reserved for those who choose not to sit but to serve -- even when that service costs them mightily in terms of what this world considers status, success or significance.

This is what Jesus was getting at when He answered Salome: **You don't know what you're asking.** Jesus then turned to James and John and said: **Can you drink the cup I am going to drink? "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup,"** meaning, perhaps, that they too would drink from the cup of his grace, his blood soon to be poured out for the sins of this world. Or maybe Jesus was speaking of the way in which each of them would one day drink too of the cup of suffering and give up their lives as martyrs in the cause of Christ. **But to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant,** Jesus went on. **These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.**

Then Matthew tells us, **When the [other] ten [disciples] heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.** "Hey, are you two trying to get in on some deal and cut us out?!" But **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. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave."** And then to hammer home the point, Jesus says, in effect: "You want real status, eternal success, genuine significance? Then follow my example. For I, **the Son of Man,** the One who could have any seat I wanted, **did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give [my] life as a ransom for many.**

Time is short, so here's the deal: A lot of people are confused about why they are here in this world. As Bob Logan says, it's as if they've spent their life tuned into WIIT-FM, the station that plays mainly one song: "What Is In This -- For Me." They are upset that the government isn't serving them better, that the church isn't serving them better, that their parents or employer or God himself isn't serving them better. They want a better seat. They believe they've earned the right to sit in such a seat. They do a lot of sitting and soaking, of lolling and lording. They sit in the stands criticizing the players. They are educated beyond their level of obedience. They claim authority beyond their level of experience.

But **not so with you,** says Jesus. It won't be this way with those of you who have been to Base Camp. You will teach the next generation... You will show by example... that true status, success, and significance only comes through serving. Author Rick Warren puts it this way: *"You were put on earth to make a contribution. You weren't created just to consume resources... God designed you to make a difference with your life. While many best-selling books offer advice on how to 'get' the most out of life,*

*that's not the reason God made you. You were created to add to life on earth. God wants you to give something back.*" Along with worshipping worthily and growing intentionally, one of the most significant things you can do to climb toward the summit of your potential is to SERVE PASSIONATELY. Figure out where your servant ministry is. You may be interested to know that, in the New Testament, the word "minister" and the word "servant" are often the same Greek word.

## **The Mindset of a Servant**

I invite you to think with me for a moment about what it means to live with the mindset of a servant. The Apostle Paul says: **Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Rom 12:2)... Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but humbled himself, taking the form of a servant (Phil 2:5-7).** So what does it mean to live with the mindset of Christ when it comes to being a servant?

D.L. Moody once said: *"The measure of a [person] is not how many servants [one] has, but how many [people one] serves."* It's true, I've found, that those who exert the greatest influence in this world are almost always people clear on this purpose. But it is also true that, given the human propensity to look for a good seat, choosing to be a servant instead takes a certain mental discipline. Five words help describe for me something of the mindset we need. Together, the first letter of each word forms the word SERVE and I offer them to you.

The first word is simply STOP. Most people in search of the good seat in life are loathe to stop for anyone. If they hear the cries of people or see a sign of need, they are moving too fast to be deterred. Not so with a servant. If there's one thing a servant must be willing to do, it is to stop whatever he or she is doing and answer the call of need when it comes. At the close of Jesus' teaching on servanthood in Matthew 20, we're told that Jesus was going upon his way when two blind men along the road cried out to him. **The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet... [But] Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked (Matt 20:31-32)** It's a familiar pattern. We see Jesus stopping for a woman who had only dared to touch the hem of his garment in the crowd. We see him stopping to talk with a woman at a well, even though it's lunchtime and his disciples are urging him to come eat. We see him interrupting his tour through Jericho to stop for Zacchaeus, a man whose heart was repentant and ready. Jesus had a world to save, a huge agenda, a titanic schedule. Yet He managed to stop and serve. What needs stop you and me?

The mind of a servant says STOP when others say "Keep going!" And it also says ENOUGH when others say "Only excellence will do." Rick Warren observes that while God certainly deserves our best efforts, a true servant refuses to make an idol of excellence. King Solomon of Israel, one of the wisest and most effective leaders of all

time, once wrote: **If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done (Eccles 11:4).** It is a whole lot better to be *on your feet* doing something to help than *on your seat* musing too long over how to do everything flawlessly. The church today needs the “good enough” principle in operation some places. Excellence is a good thing but it is much better to have a whole army of servants doing a pretty good job in ministry than a handful of ministry professionals, a class of elites doing the job perfectly.

Maybe the hardest word some of us ever have to learn on the path to being a servant, however, is the “R” in the word SERVE. I’m talking about the word RECEDE. Jesus once said: **When you are invited [to a party] take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, “Friend, move up to a better seat.” Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 14:10-11).** One church leader puts it this way: *“The true test of a servant is if I act like one when I am treated like one.”* Don’t get me wrong. God doesn’t want us to be doormats; remember, we are diamonds in His hands. God doesn’t want us to think less of ourselves; He simply wants us to think of ourselves less. When we are willing to recede from the prime spots in order to serve others, we succeed in the eyes of God.

Maybe you heard about the child who was passed over in the casting of the school play but who excitedly told his parents, “Guess what? I’ve been chosen to clap and cheer!” Can you imagine feeling a vigor like that at playing a part so far from the limelight? Yet that’s a fourth aspect of a servant mindset and the “V” in SERVE. To be a servant means being willing to pour yourself into minor tasks with major VIGOR. Helen Keller once remarked: “I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.” In Colossians 3:23, Paul writes: **Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord.** Or as John Wesley put it: *“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can.”*

In the end, our lives will depend on what we pursued **PASSIONATELY**. Is your purpose to scrap after good seats or to serve? People like Salome and Zebedee may lead us astray sometimes. In that sense, maybe it is the “E” in SERVE that matters most. I mean the word EMULATE – as in “Emulate Jesus.” A follower of Christ once came upon a homeless child, shivering on the streets of her city. It only took a nanosecond for her to know what Jesus would do. Removing her coat, she wrapped it snugly around the shoulders of the child. “Are you the mother of God?” asked the little one. “Oh no, I’m just a child of God!” The child smiled, “I knew you were related.”

Will others spot the reflection of God’s glory as obviously in you and me? Will they see, as the Apostle Paul said, that **we are God's workmanship, created... to do works**

**of service, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:10)?** Will they perceive in us the **same mind which was in Christ Jesus... who took the very nature of a servant (Phil 2:5,7)**... and who sits now at the very SUMMIT – at the right hand of the Lord God Almighty himself (Phil 2:9)?

You see, there's a vital secret we learn at Base Camp. In order to rise to our potential... In order to become all that we were created to be... In order to go UP we must learn from Jesus how to stoop down.

Let's pray together...

*Our Lord and our God, as we go from this place today, enable us to see and STOP for the needs of others. Free us from bondage to the myth that what we have to offer is not ENOUGH to help. Grant us the humility to RECEDE from public view when what is needed is someone to serve in the back row. Move us to pursue with VIGOR whatever tasks to which you call us, and in all ways and at all times and with all people, EMULATE the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.*