

**Matthew 20:20-28**  
**(Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 1 John 4:7-5:3)**  
**“Our Mission: Loving God, Loving Each Other, Serving the World”**

**Introduction**

In our gospel text we see the raw ambition, the lust for position and power, of Jesus’ disciples James and John, who actually *get their mother* to go to Jesus and ask him to give them the places of honor at his right and left hand. The other disciples show their ambition as well in their anger at the brothers for trying to rob them of any chance of occupying the places of honor. How strange that they could have spent three years in intimate fellowship with Jesus and still have had so little sense of what he had come to show us of God’s kingdom and of God’s heart. Yet I wonder how many of us here this morning have walked a long road with Jesus, studying the Scriptures, attending worship services, Bible studies and mission conferences such as this, considering all these things, and yet who, truth be told, have walked this road because we are actually seeking something other than God’s kingdom and righteousness. Perhaps what we really seek – without ever realizing it – is our success, our place, our position in God’s kingdom. Like James and John, we believe that Jesus is Messiah, and when his kingdom comes in power and glory, we want positions of power, and even now, to be recognized as important.

Others of us here today may wonder what this is all about and whether any of it is even true. But whoever you are, the message is the same: Jesus is still calling across the years for those of us who hear his voice to follow him. How? What does that mean? Perhaps the best definition of a disciple of Jesus is this: We follow Jesus as, like him, we love God, love one another, and self-sacrificially serve the world.

But, you may ask, what does that really mean? All the talk about loving God and loving each other and serving the world still leaves most of us with no clear idea what all this involves. Are we simply talking about warm feelings? How am I to command my emotions to feel something I don’t? Wasn’t Bonnie Raitt pointing to the truth about our emotions when she sang, “I can’t make you love me if you don’t, I can’t make your heart feel something it won’t”? How can we command our hearts? And how are we to love people we don’t always even like? And isn’t the world the enemy of the Christian? Doesn’t John also write earlier in his first letter, “Do not love the world or the things in the world? If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15)? Why should I offer myself in service to the world around me?

The foundation of creation and salvation is the love of God for all he has made: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). And the summary of all God’s commandments to us is simply this: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.” The One whom we worship and serve came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). So as we end this year’s global mission conference, I want us to be as clear as we can be as to the nature of the mission entrusted to us.

## **Body**

### **1. First we must be clear what we mean by “loving God”?**

- Learning heartfelt (= warm), God-honoring (= biblical) worship
- Growing in our glad obedience to his commandments

### **2. Then, we must be clear what we mean by “loving one another”?**

- Creating intimate, costly community with a few other believers
- Developing honest accountability to each other

### **3. And finally, we must be clear what we mean by “serving the world”?**

- Modeling our service on the self-sacrifice of Jesus by which he set us free
- Discovering our gifts and giving them freely in loving service of the world

## **Conclusion**

What difference does this make? All the difference in the world! God turns this world's values upside down: “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12). The way to the crown leads first to the cross for both Jesus and his disciples. His mission is carried out under the shadow of that cross, both its shame and its glory, its pain and its triumph. He has entrusted the completion of his mission to us, his people, and our joy and our salvation is in following him toward that day that is surely coming, when at last, “at the name of Jesus every knee [bows] ... and every tongue [confesses] that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).

That is why we gather and worship, why we open our lives to one another, and why we give ourselves, our children and our resources for the life of a world often at enmity with us. It is our mission. It is our heart's longing to see the nations worship and then to join together with us as we seek to love God, to love one another, and to give ourselves in sacrificial service to the world.

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