

Life Group Questions

The Greatness of Suffering – Pastor Vinh Doan – **Matthew 20:17-34**

January 12, 2025

NOTE FROM PASTOR JONATHAN

We're having a Leader Training coming up on January 25. It'll be for current **and** potential leaders! If you're interested in being a leader, please email lifegroup@willingdon.org! It will be a great chance to learn more about leading a group and meet other leaders.

Our Men's Ministry and Women's Ministry are kicking off the season with fellowship and gathering! Men's Fellowship is next Saturday, Jan. 18 – Pastor Vinh will unpack Chapter 3: Know Your Doctrine, challenging us to grasp the vital role that sound doctrine plays in the Christian life. Please invite the brothers of your group for practical insights, friendship, fellowship, coffee and pastries!

<https://willingdon.org/events/mens-fellowship-know-your-doctrine/>

Women's Ministry will be hosting a Dessert & Coffee Night on Tuesday, Jan. 28th. This is an info. session to learn about the new initiatives for the Women's Ministry this season. Please invite the sisters of your group to join us!

<https://willingdon.org/events/womens-ministry-coffee-dessert-night/>

QUESTION OVERVIEW

Let's Warm Up

1. Is it easy for you to request an upgrade?
2. Have you ever volunteered or gotten a job that was not what you expected?
3. What do you think of when you think of achieving greatness?

Let's Get Started

4. Does suffering for Jesus sound strange to you?
5. How can suffering be beneficial?
6. What's the difference between ambition and selfish ambition?

Let's Dig In

7. How does Jesus demonstrate or explain greatness to His disciples in this passage?
8. Where do we struggle to follow Jesus' example of selfless serving?
9. How can Jesus motivate us to serve and suffer?

Mark It Up – Matthew 20:17-34

¹⁷ And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them,

¹⁸ “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”

²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. ²¹ 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.” ²² Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” ²³ He said to them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” ²⁴ And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. ²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

²⁹ And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. ³⁰ And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” ³¹ The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” ³² And stopping, Jesus called them and said, “What do you want me to do for you?” ³³ They said to him, “Lord, let our eyes be opened.” ³⁴ And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.

Let's Warm Up

1. Is it easy for you to request an upgrade?

Have you asked to move from economy to premium economy? Or move from a regular hotel room to the 9,000 square-foot Royal Suite (<https://www.fairmont-hotel-vancouver.com/accommodations/royal-suite/>)? Was it a fun adventurous experience or anxiety-ridden?

In this week's passage, John and James' mom asks Jesus to upgrade her sons' status in God's Kingdom.

2. Have you ever volunteered or gotten a job that was not what you expected?

Did you help someone move for "just a few hours" that turned into a weekend of backbreaking work? Maybe you thought working at a lab would be full of science, but all you did was clean beakers. Did a parent get you to babysit their "perfect angels" only for you to realize they were the fallen kind?

In this week's passage, we see that Jesus and the disciples had very different ideas of what following Jesus looks like.

3. What do you think of when you think of achieving greatness?

Does it require clear vision or hard work or can you luck your way into it? Is it easy to hold on to once you got it or do you need to keep working to hold on? What is God's idea of greatness?

In this week's passage, we see that Jesus and the disciples had very different ideas of what greatness looks like.

Let's Get Started

4. Does suffering for Jesus sound strange to you?

So much of what we do is suffering avoidance. Study hard in college or vocational school so you'll make good money and won't suffer financially. Take care of your body when you're young so you won't need beta blockers and your knees won't suffer during low-pressure fronts. Get friends and/or find a special someone so you won't suffer from loneliness.

Sometimes our aversion to suffering causes us to avoid following Jesus' example. We see people dying and suffering from persecution as failures, but it isn't. Jesus Himself suffered and died on the cross. The two sons of Zebedee in this passage also suffered. James would later be beheaded by King Herod (Acts 12:2) and John would be exiled to the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). Here's an article on the deaths

of the apostles (<https://overviewbible.com/how-did-the-apostles-die/>). It's fascinating that even the made-up legends end in martyrdom for telling people about Jesus. Suffering and dying for Jesus was an obvious assumption to the early Christians.

5. How can suffering be beneficial?

As Pastor Vinh shared, great athletes had to go through a ton of pain and sacrifice to get where they are. Eating right and giving up many of life's pleasures. Hours and hours in the rink or on the pitch. Training even when you don't feel like it. Have you seen LeBron James' feet? If you haven't, don't. Greatness doesn't come easy!

6. What's the difference between ambition and selfish ambition?

Pastor Vinh stated, "Ambition is not wrong but selfish ambition is". How can you draw a line between the two? Are there biblical principles or guidelines to help you assess whether your ambitions are selfish or not?

Let's Dig In

7. How does Jesus demonstrate or explain greatness to His disciples in this passage?

Let me list a few ways I see in this passage.

Suffering and Death. Jesus tells His disciples the third time that He will die. He started telling them in Matthew 16:21-23 and again in Matthew 17:22-23. He needs to be "mocked and flogged and crucified" to get to the good part. Yes, He's the ruling King in Daniel 7:13-14, but He's got the cross before the throne.

Drink the Cup. The path to greatness involves suffering. People break God's rules (at Costco and elsewhere) by loving other things more than Him and not loving others (Matthew 22:35-40). Disobeying the God who created the world and causing harm to others is evil and deserves punishment.

In the Old Testament, God uses the image of a cup filled with wine that represents His anger against evildoers (Psalm 75:8). Drinking the cup makes people stagger (Isaiah 51:17) and go crazy (Jeremiah 25:15-17). It's really terrifying (Revelation 14:10-11). It's also obviously forced upon the people God is punishing.

Nobody in their right mind chooses it for themselves except Jesus. By drinking the cup of God's wrath, Jesus took the punishment we deserve so God no longer has wrath for us (1 John 2:2; 4:10).

The Father's Decision. James and John's mom tried to pick their seats in Jesus' org chart. She wanted them to be Jesus' #1 and #2. She couldn't game the system or beg God to pick favorites. The Father picks the ranks. We don't get to choose how great we are in God's kingdom and we can't do that for our kids, either.

Servant. In the non-Christian world, greatness is all about the power to boss people around. Everybody has to make the CEO happy while nobody cares about the people at the bottom. Jesus says, "Not so!" Instead, the greater you are, the more people you serve, care about, and sacrifice for. Jesus is fully God, making Him the greatest human to walk the earth. He used His greatness to love and serve nobodies like two rejected blind men. He even died on the cross to save His enemies.

8. Where do we struggle to follow Jesus' example of selfless serving?

Too busy? Jesus stopped to care for the blind men. Are we too busy with our own tasks and agendas to care for the people around us?

Too focused? As Pastor Vinh noted, even though Jesus had a mission to accomplish, He was still aware of the needs of the people around Him.

Too great? It's easy to look down on others in need. That girl needing emotional help is dumb because she put herself in that relationship with that obvious loser. That guy's all alone in church because he needs to man up, stop being a coward, and talk to people. Maybe they wouldn't be struggling to parent their kids if they simply followed the Bible. The people who voted for that political party are what's wrong with this country.

It's all too easy to assume the best of ourselves and the worst of others while forgetting that we don't deserve God's love any more than them. Are there people we look down on?

9. How can Jesus motivate us to serve and suffer?

Cross. Jesus served by giving up His life. You can't do more than that (John 15:12-13). He even served His murderers by asking the Father to forgive them (Luke 23:34). Jesus did that for you because He loves you! If He didn't, we would all be doomed to hell. When early Christians suffered for Jesus, they rejoiced because they were worthy to suffer for Jesus (Acts 5:41). Jesus' immense love should lead us to love others, too.

Reward. Jesus was rewarded and glorified after dying on the cross and coming back. If Jesus was willing to give up His life for us, would He hold anything back (Romans 8:32)? Jesus will provide for us here on earth and for eternity (Matthew 19:29). By serving and suffering like Jesus, we can follow and experience Him (Matthew 16:24). What we do can lead to others believing in Jesus and receiving eternal life. There's a lot more I could list!