

## **Introduction**

Today is communion Sunday and we remember the death of Jesus. Verse 45 in our text reveals its utterly unique nature. He gave His life as **"a ransom for many."** He took into Himself all of our sins on the cross and paid the penalty for them that we should have paid so that we wouldn't have to. That explains why His death is a focal point of our study, thought, and conversation and rightly so.

But let me ask you a question. Shouldn't His life also be a focal point of our study, thought, and conversation? I think so for several reasons, one of which is this. Jesus didn't just die a cross-death. He lived a cross-life as well and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

## **The Throne Life**

Let's start with verses 35-37. They remind me of the English statesman, Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell, who was afflicted with warts, commissioned an artist to paint his portrait. Wanting to please him, the artist omitted the warts in the portrait, whereupon Cromwell declared, **"Take it away and paint me warts and all."** That's what we have in verses 35-37. It's Mark showing James and John **"warts and all."**

Notice their request. They asked Jesus to give them a throne. In the preceding verses, 33 and 34, He had told them plainly that He was going to be killed in Jerusalem. They didn't get it though. They still labored under the delusion that He was going to establish an earthly kingdom and each wanted a throne when He did. They wanted position and power in other words. They wanted to rule over others. Or to say it another way, they wanted a throne-life.

But they aren't the only ones. Jesus used their request in particular to make an observation about people in general in verse 42. In their natural state apart from Him, they seek to **"lord it"** over others, to **"exercise authority"** over others, as He says it.

That observation reminds me of the renowned 19<sup>th</sup> century German

philosopher Frederick Nietzsche. Nietzsche classified Christianity as the nadir or lowest point of human progress. Why? It's because of what Jesus taught in verses 43-45, which he believed is self-debasing. It suppresses the potentiality of human beings and stifles progress individually and socially. Nietzsche believed that Christianity was stunting the entire European moral system. He argued, therefore, that it must be destroyed and replaced with a moral system based on power. The most basic human motivation is man's desire to control his own destiny and to impose his will on others. Civilization and individual lives, as a result, must be built on that motivation. Nietzsche had his disciples, two of whom all of you know, Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini.

But it isn't just the Nietzsche's, Hitler's, and Mussolini's of the world who love power. It's "**Everyman**" and that's precisely Jesus' point in verse 42. Nietzsche was right about one thing. The desire to impose our will on others is one of the most basic of all human motivations. Almost all of the people we know and meet every day want to be masters in their relationships. They desire ascendancy and control over others.

Acclaimed psychiatrist Eric Berne developed a concept called transactional analysis and wrote a best-selling book about it, *Games People Play*. The "**games**" he writes about are transactions, interactions, between two or more people. He gives each one a colloquial title that expresses its essential nature. There are 36 such games that include the following: (1) "**Husbands Are Stupid**"; (2) "**I Am Bigger**"; (3) "**So's Your Old Man**"; (4) "**It's All You**"; (5) "**If It Weren't for You, I Could**"; (6) "**Now I've Got You, You S.O.B.**"; and (7) "**Uproar.**" Those colloquial titles clearly reflect what those games or relational transactions are. They're power struggles. Each person is trying to master the other. Each is trying to impose his or her will on the other.

Take something as simple as tailgating. One driver wants another to go faster and does this (power point) so that he or she will. What's the bottom line of that kind of tailgating? It's one person trying to impose his or her will on another, and it's a microcosm of human life. Almost

everyone that we know and meet wants what James and John did – a throne-life.

### The Cross-Life of Jesus

Jesus, however, didn't. Verse 45 makes that perfectly clear. He states about His life that He lived it to serve not to be served. He lived it as a servant or slave, not a master, of others.

Sixty years ago, Guy Hershberger wrote a book titled *The Way of the Cross in Human Relations*. He coined a term in it that describes well the 33 year life that Jesus lived. It was a "**cross-life.**" Yes, Jesus died a cross-death, Hershberger explains, but He also lived a cross-life. He took up the cross not only in His death but in His life as well. Verse 43-45 reveal specifically how He did that. He didn't lord it over others – didn't seek to selfishly impose His will on others. He sought to serve them instead. That is, He sought their good over His own. He did that in literally every phase, circumstance, and relationship of His life.

Think of Him, for instance, as a servant son of Mary and Joseph. According to James Dobson, parents should discipline children only for willful disobedience. Suppose Mary and Joseph followed that rule. How many times do you think they disciplined Jesus as He was growing up? The answer is "**zero times.**" Luke 2:51 describes his relation to His parents, "**He continued in subjection to them.**"

Or think of Jesus as a servant carpenter with unreasonable and overly demanding customers. I read an article titled "Responding to Conflict with Customers" that establishes eight guidelines for doing so. They include remaining calm, keeping an open mind, and stressing cooperation rather than competition. We can be sure that Jesus always did each of those things with every customer He ever had.

You get my point. Jesus lived a cross-life. He never once lorded it over anyone, never once sought to selfishly impose His will on anyone. What He did seek was the good of everyone over His own. He was a servant with everyone in everything He did.

## The Cross-Life of Disciples of Jesus

And so should we be! We should live the same kind of cross-life that Jesus lived. Stop for a moment and think of all the roles you fill in your day-to-day life: spouse, son or daughter, sibling, employer, boss, employee, co-worker, teacher, student, neighbor, classmate, teammate, in-law, shopper, driver, and countless more. To live a cross life means to put the word "**servant**" not "**master**" before each of your roles. It means, in point of view and practice, to be a servant spouse, a servant son or daughter, a servant sibling, a servant shopper, a servant driver, and so on. That's the cross-life and there are two sides to its coin.

One, in verse 42, is the negative side. We don't lord it over others. We don't seek to selfishly impose our will on others. We don't try to manipulate or control them in order to get what we desire or deserve. Consider a husband who, in a candid moment, confessed to me that he routinely uses anger "**to get my wife to do what she needs to do.**" What he really meant was "**to get my wife to do what I want her to do.**" Or consider the father who "**guilt tripped**" his son, an attorney I knew, into joining his law firm. Anger and guilt are two of many tools of manipulation. They're tools, however, that disciples and friends of Jesus never use. They have no need of them because they never lord it over others. They never selfishly impose their will on others.

The cross-life also has a positive side to its coin, in verses 43-44. We're "**slaves of all.**" Just as slaves seek the good of their masters over their good, so we seek the good of everyone we know and meet over our good. We do that primarily by deferring to their rights, opinions, and desires, when it's best to do so, and by pursuing their needs over ours.

Dallas Willard was a professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California. One day in class, a student challenged something he said with statements that were totally offensive and incorrect. Willard, a giant intellect, could easily have dismantled his statements and humiliated him in the process, but didn't. He simply paused instead and said that was a good place to end the discussion. After class, someone

asked him why he didn't answer the student's disrespectful statements and put him in his place. To which he kindly replied, **"I was practicing the discipline of not having to have the last word."** My point is this. Willard, a friend of Jesus, was also a servant professor. He always sought the good of his students over his own.

Those then are the two sides of the cross-life. On the negative side, we don't act as the masters of others. We don't selfishly impose our will upon them. On the positive side, we do act as the servants of others. We seek their good over our own.

William Law articulates the essence of the cross-life so profoundly in his classic book that we read as a congregation *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. He counsels us to do the following: **"Condescend to all the weaknesses and infirmities of your fellow-creatures, cover their frailties, love their excellencies, encourage their virtues, relieve their wants, overlook their unkindness, forgive their malice, be a servant of servants, and condescend to do the lowest offices to the lowest of mankind."** Wow, what a description. That is the cross-life.

### **Save and Best**

Sadly though, it's rare not just in the world but in the church as well. Few Christians subscribe to it in point of view and even fewer in practice. That's because they think they'll be harmed if they do. As one Christian summed it up: **"You know what happens when you're a doormat. You get stepped on."** Most Christians think that way about the cross-life. It will prejudice or hurt us.

But according to Jesus, it won't. On the contrary, it's always safe and best to be servants of all.

First, it's safe and best *immediately*, in this life. One of the most crushing burdens in life is always having to have our own way. Leadership expert John Maxwell writes about that: **"The fight to secure our rights and get everything that is coming to us is one of the**

**major causes of emotional fatigue. Both the Bible and experience teach us that this battle frequently brings bitterness, resentment, anger, hatred, and fear which are the five destructive emotions that deplete energy.**" The fight to always get what we want is a terrible burden and the cross-life releases us from it. It releases us from the stifling self-pity that accompanies always having to have our own way. It then puts grace and peace in its place. The cross-life is safe and best *immediately*, in this life.

It's also safe and best *ultimately*, in the life to come. Jesus makes just that point in verses 43 and 44. Notice the words He uses there, **"great"** and **"first."** They remind me of the lyrics of a Franks Sinatra song, *New York, New York*. He sang in it about becoming **"the king of the hill," "the top of the heap," "A-number one,"** and **"the top of the list"** in the greatest city on earth. But there's something infinitely better than that. It's being those things in the eternal kingdom of God. That's what Jesus has primarily in mind in verses 43-44. He says that we'll become **"great"** and **"first"** if we live the cross-life. We'll take our place in His eternal heaven with power and authority. And we'll exercise that power and authority to reign with Him there forever. We'll exercise it to shape the very nature of heaven itself as we desire to shape it.

## **Conclusion**

Taking what everything I've said today into account, it's obvious what our text is – one of the most striking paradoxes of our existence. It's the paradox of servanthood and greatness. Hymnist George Matheson captured its essence so well and I close with his words: **"Make me a captive, Lord, and I shall be free; force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be."** Captive and free. Render up my sword and conqueror be. That is the cross-life.