

"36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 37 They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" 39 They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. 40 "But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." 41 Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. 42 Calling them to Himself, Jesus *said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 "But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. 45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Mark 10:36-45, NAS95.

"Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as 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 slave of all' (vv. 42-44). There were no democracies in Jesus' day. The Greek experiment of a limited fledgling democracy had ended when it was conquered by Rome. Everywhere there were tyrannies, all the world over. In every continent despots ruled. That was the world into which the early Christians took the gospel. Notice how Jesus describes it, "rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them" (v.42). It was no appearance of ruling which they gave; they ruled, and usually with a heavy hand. There was no constitutional monarchy. The Emperors encouraged people to worship them; they gave themselves divine titles and encouraged temples built to their glory.

There was no history of democracy for the disciples to admire. There were only the famous generals of the past who had become the new tyrants, men like Alexander and Julius Caesar. That very time when Jesus was speaking these words the Romans were ruling the world, but before them Greece had ruled, and before them Persia had ruled, and before them Babylon had ruled. Because of their savage spirit they are compared in the Bible to four beasts. When Rome sent its governors to rule over some such province as Judea then the Emperor Tiberias disdained the lot of them. He once said

"There's another bloodsucker off to gorge himself on a wounded man." While our Lord was actually here on the road to Jerusalem talking to the Twelve the Roman governor living in Jerusalem was an infamous man called Pontius Pilate. He was typical of that ruling class; one of his contemporaries described him as "a man of inflexible disposition, harsh and obdurate" (Philo, 'Embassy to Gaius,' 302). The blood of many Jews flowed in the streets when he was in charge of Judea. Pilate's first response to any dissent was the sword. Role models for leadership for these disciples would be the more benevolent dictators. Religious centurions, for example, and yet they were men who said to one servant, "Go!" and he went, and to another "Do this!" and he did it. The Twelve were surrounded by the abuse of power, and so they knew what Jesus was talking about when he mentioned rulers lording it over the Gentiles. Notice how Christ begins his words to them, "You know," he says (v.42), because they did know about Herod and Pilate and Caesar. The least they had to do with such rulers the better. There was a little known man called Galba who actually became emperor and this is what he said, "Now I can do what I like, and do it to anyone." That was a typical response to having power amongst the rulers of the Gentiles.

"Not so with you," said Jesus (v.43). Is there anything we elders and ministers and deacons possess that we didn't first receive from God? What has made us different from anyone else? "I am what I am by the grace of God," says the Christian, so how can we lord it over others? God has given us a spiritual gift by which we're enabled to give out the ministry of the word, and others have gifts to receive that ministry, all as it pleased the Lord. Boasting is foolish in the light of the discriminating grace that made our office different. Again, our message forbids such a spirit. We tell men that it is only by the incarnation of the Son of God, his agony and death that they could be saved. Only by the Sovereign Spirit regenerating us in a birth from above can we entrust ourselves to the Savior and be made new creations. Salvation is not by works but through faith in Christ alone. Then how can that spirit - "I'm an important lord and

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master," - survive in a man whose message must be redemption through the Cross,
and regeneration through the Spirit? Not so with you.

Paul protested at the adulation some were giving him and Cephas and Apollos in Corinth. Not so to us! Paul said that they were, "Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord had assigned to each his task" (I Cor. 3:5). We are not servants from whom you believed - as if we were the authors of your faith, giving you new life. We are not servants in whom you believed - as if we were the objects of your faith. We are servants through whom the gospel came to you. Channels only of the blessed Master! We are like John the Baptist called "to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him" (John 1:7); John was a conduit by which light was focused on the people who dwelt in darkness.

What do these servants do? Paul said, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow" (I Cor. 3:6&7). The apostles in the book of Acts were itinerants; they came and went, staying for some months in one place or even a few years somewhere else, but all the time God himself was watching over his church, causing the seed to spring up and grow and blossom and bear fruit. Preachers dare not think of themselves as anything special, just scatterers of good seed, and waterers of plants; that is all. It's the work of the summer student temporarily working in the Garden Centre, so why complain? You're only a servant. The best complement you can give a minister is that he is good in planting seeds, or that he is useful in watering seeds. Such work is never going to catch the headlines, but it is utterly essential. One day someone sowed a seed in George Whitefield. One day some person watered a seed that had been planted in Charles Haddon Spurgeon, or Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Those men would never have become the men they were unless other utterly anonymous people had sowed a gospel seed in their lives, and another had watered it. Who did that? Servants did it. And such mighty men as those I've mentioned never forgot that they

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were also mere servants planting and watering. If power is your obsession then your whole focus in on yourself, and love for others is killed. Not so with you! Desire to serve others must be first in your life and then love for others grows.

But the Lord Jesus brings this whole concept of the glory of servanthood onto a far higher plateau, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (v.45).

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (v.45). Here is the role model, not the rulers of the Gentiles but the gentle ruler from heaven. For even Jesus Christ, whose glory we've heard about today, himself acknowledges that he didn't come to rule but to serve. If there was one person in all of human history that mankind should have fallen before and given their whole lives to serving it was the Lord Christ. But he didn't come for that but to serve us, and this was the zenith of his service, to give his life as a ransom for many. What are the implications of these words?

All men and women are in a state of captivity. Think of a child who is kidnapped and kept locked up. A ransom price is demanded for her to be freed. There will be no freedom for her until the money is handed over. How precious is that life to her parents? Beyond anything they possess. They would even bankrupt themselves in raising the money demanded if they might have her back alive; either of her parents would be prepared even to lay down his or her life that the daughter might be freed. She is beyond the price of pounds and pennies. So it is with you in the sight of God. What's the profit for you having gained the whole world and yet lost your own soul? Your life is more valuable than the world, and yet that life of yours is in bondage to sin. Think of this great statement; "But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin" (Gals. 3:22). The whole world is imprisoned to sin, not one man being at liberty? No not one. Everyone obeying sin.; not to think of God, and they don't; not to seek salvation, and they don't; not to think of judgment and hell, and they don't.

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity" (Roms. 1:28).

When God the Son says, "Come to me," it is sin that tells them, "Don't listen!" and they're all obeying sin. You understand that it is not that we feel that we are prisoners. We are prisoners to what we constantly obey, whether we feel we are or not. Jesus said, "Everyone who sins is a slave of sin" (Jn. 8:34), slaves to their pride; slaves to their temper; slaves to their jealousy; sin has made them prisoners. God's condemnation lies upon all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. What a burden. We've rebelled against God and he has taken our freedom from us. We boast of having a free will, but we'll only choose what our wills desire, and they never desire the living God and the abundant life that's found in Christ. Not for a moment. Our wills always say no to Jesus. "You will not come to me that you might have life," says Jesus. We are prisoners of sin.

An Indian evangelist was preaching on this theme in the open air and a young man was interrupting and asking him questions. "You say we are all in chains? I feel none. How heavy are they? Sixty pounds? A hundred pounds?" The preacher said, "If you laid an anchor chain on top of a corpse would it feel the load?" "No!" said the teenager, "It's dead. It wouldn't feel a thing." "So it is with the spirit that is dead. It doesn't feel its load."

Why did the Son of Man come? To serve and "to give his life as a ransom for many" (v.45). What wonderful words. Consider these two great interrelated words, ransom and redemption. For ransom - a price that must be paid to make you free, and redemption - the mighty consequence. The Jewish historian Josephus describes the Roman general Crassus invading Jerusalem in 53 B.C. He was going to plunder the Temple. A priest named Eleazar came to him carrying a large bar of gold and offered it to him as a ransom (it is the same word that Jesus uses here). "Don't destroy God's

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Temple. Take this gold as a substitute for the ornaments and hangings and furniture and curtains," he said. The Temple survived, it was redeemed by the ransom paid.

The children of Israel were slaves in the land of Egypt but the Lord redeemed them at the Passover. Blood of a spotless lamb was shed and sprinkled on the door of every believing household. The blood of the lamb was the ransom they paid and their first-born were spared. They were redeemed from their slavery. They became free men. Out of Egypt they went, and off into the promised land. God had redeemed them from their bondage with an outstretched arm and a mighty hand. Free at last! Free at last! Through God Almighty they were free at last.

We talk about people 'redeeming themselves.'

No, the phrase redeeming himself is used to describe someone who's in a bad way. His reputation is as good as gone, his life in ruins, and then he buys it back with his unexpected success or good deeds.

Are we able to redeem ourselves? Our problem as sinners is this, that we neither can nor will. We lack both ability and motivation. Sin is too powerful for men. It reigns over them and they want it to be so. "Don't go to church this morning and hear of God's wonderful provision of a Savior in his Son Jesus Christ," says sin to thousands of people this morning again, and one of them has obeyed their master - as they have for years and will continue to do so for the rest of their lives until eventually they're destroyed. "Accept this gospel of mercy through Christ," we say, but "the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14). We need a Redeemer outside ourselves to break the power of reigning sin, to deliver us and then never let us go, in other words, someone who will do for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. That Redeemer is the Son of Man, the Servant of the Lord, the promised Messiah, God's great prophet, the all-powerful Conqueror of sin and death whose name is Jesus. He did not come to judge but to save. He did not come to

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condemn but to deliver. He did not come to rule over but to serve. He will kneel on the floor with a basin of water and a towel and he will wash the feet of the Twelve. What a loving tender man! But his greatest service is when he gives up his very life itself - that magnificent and perfect life - when he chooses to die on Golgotha. His death is the ransom price and the result is that many are redeemed.

This is the unanimous testimony of the New Testament. Paul says that Christ "was born under the law to redeem those under law" (Gals 4:4&5), and again that he "gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness" (Tit. 2:14), and again, "In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ephs. 17). Peter too says the same, "You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet. 1:18&19). You always remember this, that there was no escape for you. You were hopelessly enslaved. There was no ransom who price you could raise to deliver you from such a situation, but then, incredibly, unbelievably, a ransom was provided. What a price! The death of the wonderful Son of God. That ransom price was lovingly and completely paid and you have been redeemed. Never take that ransom for granted. Never count it some inevitable and ordinary thing, like a bored teenager you catch with wandering thoughts in a Bible Class. "Why did Jesus die?" you ask him. "For our sins," he says without thinking. He has heard it so often. This is the most incredible event that has ever happened. The day Jesus Christ became our substitute on Golgotha's cross was the most remarkable day this world has seen or ever will see. Even the second coming will not be so glorious a day as that was, and redemption by the death of the God-man happened. Accept it with wonder. Think of it with gratitude. Consider it with awe. Live the rest of your life serving others in a spirit of reverent fear.

We were in captivity, in the grip of sin, unable to break free but the price of our redemption - the ransom price for our bondage to end - was met by God the Son by his death on Golgotha. The wages of sin is death, God has declared. Something in the very nature of the God of light, in his holy anathema towards sin, demands it, but that same

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loving God has provided the price to the last penny that pays those wages which he demands. The God who required redemption provided redemption. The God who declares, "A ransom must be paid for you to be free," himself pays the ransom and himself delivers us and grips us with a love that will never let us go, our Sovereign Protector. No ransom price could be found nor ever will be found except in the blood of Jesus. In him God's injured law and honor has been satisfied. So Satan and sin no longer have the right to control sinners. That right is withdrawn from them because God's law has been fulfilled by Jesus Christ, and the ransom for sinners' deliverance has also been paid by him. The strong man has been dispossessed of his prisoners. Sin did all it could to destroy our Lord on Golgotha but Jesus was more powerful and triumphed over it and rose on the third day. He is the conqueror of sin and death. He can liberate favored sinners at will.