

## Victory of the Lamb – March 26, 2017

Like Us in Every Way – “When “No” is Way Better Than Yes” – Bill Limmer

I am going to say a word that a lot of people don't like. A word that a lot of people have trouble saying and hearing. Are you ready for it? Here it is: “No.” A lot of us have trouble saying “no.” We have trouble saying, “no” to our children. We have trouble saying “no” to our boss. “No” to that bag of chips or bag of candy. Not only do we have trouble saying “no” we certainly don't like to hear “no.” We don't like it when our small children tell us “no.” We don't like when our parents tell us “no.” We don't like it when the guy or the girl we ask out says “no.” We don't like it when the boss tells us “no.” We don't like it when our bank, credit union, or credit card company tells “no.” And we don't like it when our God tells us “no.” I'm not sure that I have ever received the answer “no” and at the time thought it was a blessing, that it was a good thing. We have come to feel entitled to the “yes.”

As we grab up this ancient writing today, we see once again that is so applicable today that it might as well have been written 30 seconds ago. The back story: Matthew 20:17-19 **Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them,** <sup>18</sup> **“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death <sup>19</sup> and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”** It is real clear what Jesus says here but the disciples only hear what they want to hear. They hear Jesus is going up to Jerusalem. There is going to be some tough times. They think Jesus is speaking metaphorically here about death. They think this hand over to the chief priests and teacher so of the law, and being mocked and flogged is like a senate confirmation hearing. And since Jesus teaches with authority and truth he will come out unscathed and he will be king. He will be king. And they are thinking earthly king. And that leads us to: Matthew 20:20 **Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling, asked a favor of him.** <sup>21</sup> **“What is it you want?” he 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.”** And many thought that it was our culture that came up with the concept of a helicopter parent. You know the parent who takes it upon themselves to call up the university and complain about a professor or the grading system. Or the parent who goes to the boss and assures the boss that his or her child deserves better treatment, higher salary, and a promotion. The parent who tells the coach how much their kid should be playing more. You know what I am talking about right? So, big boys James and John's mother comes to Jesus and says, since your kingdom is about to come I would like to under the disguise of humility ask you to set my children, my boys, in places of honor, one at your right and one at your left as you begin your new administration. Ok?! After they have hung in there with you these past three years, traveling up one mountain side and down the other, going into the rough parts of the world like Samaria, listening to you, bringing you food and drink. In other words, give them what they think deserve. Do understand too, that James and John were all good with this request. This was what was in their hearts too.

And you know what, when the other disciples heard about this, they were miffed. Verse 24: **When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.** They couldn't believe it. James and John of all people. They didn't deserve that. I do, they thought to themselves. Immediately they were kicking themselves – each thinking to themselves I knew should have asked for this before. Because they were thinking the early bird get the worm and now the request that was in their heart is out of the box only not from them. They were angry at themselves for not asking ahead of time and they were angry at James and John for asking for what they wanted first. I can't picture Peter responding with locker room talk about his one. *(There is a passage in the Bible that says, “Whoever exalts himself will be*

*humbled." Have you ever exalted yourself? Do you deserve to be humbled, punished by God, for this attitude? Mt. 23:11-12)*

Before we throw James and John, their mommy, and all the other disciples under the bus, don't we treat Jesus the same way sometimes. Does petty jealousy and confusion leak into our hearts as drive by a neighborhood of expansive homes and see that some have received a blessing that we seemed to have missed. I'm sure I work just as hard or harder than some of those people. And I at least deserve a participation trophy for coming to church. In our prayers, do we ask for health, job security and financial peace because, after all, we've hung in there and gone to church all these years when others haven't. Don't we deserve at least a participation trophy. Or perhaps for some of us here, Jesus as I turn a new page in my life and follow you, give me these things because after all I am now following you. I want the world to revolve around me – that's the attitude inside of us when we first come into the world and sticks around for our life time. Have you ever run into one of those people who think the world revolves around them? They think their problems are the biggest problems ever. Their joys are the greatest joys ever. They are so stuck on themselves we think. Don't they get it. The world doesn't revolve around them. It can't, because it revolves around me.

Jesus responds to the question at hand, to their hearts and ours: Matthew 20:22-23, **"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered.** <sup>23</sup> **Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."** The answer is "No" and it is for their greatest good. The answer is: no, and it is way better than yes. What they deserve and what they think they deserve are two different things. They think their good has deserved merit and their sin deserves overlooking but the wages of sin is death, separation from God not to the right or to the left but to the south. They deserve pain not prestige. They deserve gory not glory. Same here. Same for you and me. We boast of our "goodness" even though the Scriptures say our righteousness is like filthy rags, and we minimize our sin.

You know what changed their hearts and what can change our hearts too? The gospel, Matthew **20:26-28** **whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,** <sup>27</sup> **and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—** <sup>28</sup> **just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.** What changes their minds was the truth that God patiently loved them even when they were arrogantly unlovable; their boasts of strength were pardoned through Jesus' weakness; their glory seeking was forgiven through Christ's shame on the cross. When they pushed Jesus away, Jesus welcomed their sins with open arms and it changed their hearts and minds. When they considered their selfishness, and saw how selfless Jesus was it melted their hearts.

Out of his great love for us God saves us from our own destructive, sinful actions and lives. **"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all"** (ISAIAH 53:6). Out of his great love for us Jesus says to us "No, I will not give you what you deserve." You see Jesus loves and forgives selfish and self-centered people. Jesus loves those who feign to be religious, the con-artists and the manipulators. He loves and forgives people who have been lied to and who lie. He loves people with infirmities and weaknesses. He loves and forgives people with a past. He loves people who loves things instead of God. Isn't that good news my friends because this means he loves and forgive each and every one of us. God says, "No" I will not give you what you deserve instead I will give you my love, my forgiveness, my companionship, my home, my joy, my life as a perfect ransom. His "no" is way better than we deserve.

This great love that Jesus moved the disciples to seek the position of servants. In fact, James will put to death for his service to the LORD and John was exiled because of his service to the LORD. They saw what true greatness was: it's service... putting others first. They were comfortable serving others because they were sure and certain of their forgiveness, of their status and position in Jesus Christ. Here is what we know: We can serve joyfully, lovingly, because God did so to us. We can forgive the unforgiveable because we are forgiven. We can be generous because God was and is generous with us. We can love the unlovable because God has the unlovable us. We can be patient with because God was and is patient with us. We can be understanding because God was and is understanding with us. We can meet people where they are at in their messy world because God met us and meets us where we are at in our day to day messiness. We don't have to do any of this, we are just moved to do this because Jesus loved us enough to say, "No, I won't give you what your sins deserve, instead I will give you unconditional love."