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*Aspire to Slavery! (Matthew 20:17-28)*  
*3/26/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow*

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What did you want to be when you grew up? Maybe some wanted to be an astronaut or the president. Growing up, I think it's funny: I wanted to be a fireman, and my brother wanted to be a pastor. Now I'm a pastor and he's a fireman!

But let me ask you this, did any of you, as a child, want to grow up to be a servant? Today, our God calls us as his people to the highest aspiration he can think of: to be a slave, to be the servant of all. Today, we take a closer look at our sinful selfishness and our Savior's selfless servitude. Today, as always, our God calls us to be like him. He calls us to *Aspire to Slavery*.

Slavery? Really? By calling us to slavery, our God is calling us to serve others rather than just ourselves. Maybe that sounds awful to you. Let's take some time to consider slavery's opposite in this context: selfishness. What does that look like?

A serial killer once spoke about what got him started on his dark path. It was actually very simple and not so strange. It started by him merely fulfilling his desires. The man simply got into the habit of always giving in to what he wanted. He wanted something and he got it, regardless of what other people wanted. His journey to become a serial killer started with simple selfishness.

Pretty much every sin that we consider disgusting or unbelievable begins with selfishness. You hear about pastors who have affairs, about church treasurers stealing money from their fellow believers, about good kids growing up to become drug dealers or even terrorists. It all starts with a little whisper in their minds, one they hardly notice, that says, "Me, me, me."

Now, I'm not saying that our selfishness will lead every one of us to those kinds of sins, but even if we don't sink to the depths of sin that selfishness has led others to, it will lead us away from what truly matters. And at that point the damage is already done.

Look at our lesson for today from Matthew 20. It starts with Jesus speaking about *the* greatest moment in human history, the moment when God earned salvation for all mankind by Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus tells the disciples about this event that is coming oh so soon! This is something the very angels in heaven love to talk about and look into. This is something that has rocked humanity! All human history before it looks forward to it and all human history after it looks back to it! Even today we count the years of history either as years B.C. (Before Christ) or years A.D. (Latin *anno domini* which means "in the year of our Lord").

At the very least, Jesus talking about the future should have perked the

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disciples' ears up. But what do Jesus' disciples want to talk about? Do they want to talk about Jesus' death and resurrection? Do they want to even ask Jesus what exactly he's talking about to better understand it? No. What do the disciples want to talk about? Glory for themselves.

James and John wanted the seats of honor in heaven. The other disciples wanted to shame James and John for saying it (or for asking Jesus before they had a chance to). Their selfishness led them to completely ignore the essence of the gospel message, the very foundation of our Christian faith, the very thing that will bring us eternal life in heaven and salvation from eternal death in hell.

This is what all selfishness does. It leads us to forget Christ and what he has done. It leads us to forget why we are here. It leads us away from Christian love for one another and instead toward resentment of each other and those around us.

Just this past week I received a phone call, a survey asking churches how they are doing in the area of evangelism; the great mission that Jesus gave to his church: to spread the gospel message to the entire world.

The surveyor hardly understood English. She clearly just had a sheet in front of her and was recording the multiple choice answers that I repeated back to her. If I said anything that wasn't on her sheet, she got really confused. But her questions really hit me hard.

As she asked me how often our congregation reached out to the unchurched with the gospel, a lot of questions ran through my head. What are we doing here? Are we selflessly reaching out with the gospel or are we selfishly just gathering here as though church were just some social club? Do we selflessly work with our church to open heaven to damned sinners, or do we just selfishly want church to cater to *my* needs and *my* wants and *my* wishes?

I remember hearing an Atheist talk about why he did not believe in God, and his answer still haunts me to this day. The reason he did not believe in God was not that God was unbelievable, it was that he found Christians to be unbelievable. He said, "If Christians truly believe that there is eternal suffering in hell awaiting people who don't believe in Jesus, how can Christians be so indifferent to evangelism? How can they care so little for the people around them?" He asked, "Is it even possible to hate another human being more than that?" I don't know if I have an answer for that.

Does "I'm not comfortable talking about Jesus" justify ignoring someone in danger of hell? Does "They probably won't listen" justify not even trying to tell them about Jesus?

Do we care? Jesus said the world would know we are his if we love one

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another. Do we? Can you point to any specific *actions* that show we do?

Jesus gave his church the mission of spreading the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to the ends of the earth. Are we doing *anything* as a church to see that the gospel message is reaching those who don't know?

Back in our gospel lesson, when Jesus saw his disciples blind from their own selfishness, when he saw them ignoring what mattered and getting caught up in their own petty squabbles, he called them together to refocus them. We live in a selfish world, he told them. The rulers of the nations, the great people of the world, they revel in their authority. They flaunt their power over others.

"But you are different," Jesus told his disciples (and he tells us today). Don't fall into that same trap called selfishness. Instead, as Christians, *Aspire to Slavery*. Whoever wants to be great in God's kingdom, must live as a servant.

As Christians, our goal is not to be served but to serve! Just look at Jesus, our Savior and our hero, our life and our example, our righteousness and our role model. Jesus is God over all, forever praised, and yet he came to this world not to flaunt his glory and authority.

Instead, he came to be wedding problem solver when the wine at the party ran out, so he turned water into wine. He came to be caterer to hungry people as he fed over 5000 people with a small boy's lunch. He came to be a comforter as he calmed storms for scared sailors and assured outcasts of forgiveness. He came to be a servant, as he got down on his hands and knees to wash the disciples' feet.

He came to be Savior, to give his very life, through day to day service for the good of others and through his ultimate sacrifice on the cross to take away all of our sins of selfishness. Jesus came to serve us, and through his slavery, you and I have the freedom of eternal life in heaven.

It is Christ's selflessness that curbs our selfishness. It is his love for others that leads away our love for only ourselves. It is his caring action that atones for our hateful inaction.

Therefore, as those who have been set free from selfishness by Jesus' selflessness, don't fall into Satan's trap. A famous poem speaks about a man standing before a broken monument. At one point it was some glorious statue, and the inscription boasted about the power, glory, strength, and wealth of a ruler named Ozymandias. But the powerful boasts had lost their impact as the man looked at this broken monument, covered in sand, that was supposed to immortalize the greatness of a man that history had completely forgotten. Selfishness makes us seek glory and treasures and desires that have no lasting value. Even if you or I got everything we wanted in this life, one day it would all be gone. One day it would all

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be worthless to us.

But Christian slavery, giving ourselves in Christ-fueled service to others, that does have lasting value. Imagine a timeline that starts where you are now and goes all the way to China. It's over 6000 miles from Wisconsin to China. That line represents how long you are going to live, taking eternity into account, which means that our line is actually pretty short compared to eternity, but it works for now.

Now take the width of your pinky finger. It's a little big, I know, but the width of your pinky finger represents how long your stay on earth is compared to that over 6000 mile long line of your life in heaven. There's just a mild contrast there, isn't there?

Now tell me, do you want to spend your short time on earth seeking earthly power, authority, and glory, seeking everything you now desire? Or do you want to spend that time seeking heavenly treasures, treasures that will last? Would you invest billions of dollars into the VCR industry? Absolutely not! VCRs are dying away, that would be a total waste of resources and would leave you with nothing! In the same way, do not waste your life seeking selfish desires, because they, along with this earth, are passing away. That would be a waste of resources and would truly leave you with nothing. Instead, invest your life in service to others. **Aspire to Slavery!**

Can you imagine accomplishing anything greater than getting to heaven, finding someone you know here on earth, and hearing them say, "Thank you"? What could any of us accomplish or acquire that would be greater than that? Dear friends, **Aspire to Slavery.**

That is the path our Savior walked, and that is the path he calls us to walk! Jesus aspired to slavery and he won eternal life for us. Jesus spent himself in servitude and he won for us eternity in heaven. He promises eternal reward to all who, like him and through faith in him, **Aspire to Slavery.**

Fellow slaves in Christ, repent of your selfish ways. Do not ask, "How can I get what I want?" but "How can I serve others?" Do not ask, "How can I get better?" but "How can I build others up?" Do not ask, "How can I get to heaven?" because Jesus' slavery has won that for you already. Instead, ask, "How can I help others get to heaven?" Amen.