

Place two three-year olds five feet apart and one toy in between them. This always gets entertaining. Sometimes you don't know if you should smile at how small this catastrophic problem really is in the vast scheme of things, or start pulling out your hair and taking deep breaths to reduce stress. Let the malay ensue. "*Mine!*" "*Hey! I was playing with it first!*" "*Stop wrecking my city!*" "*Get your hands off of me!*" "*You're not being nice!*" The words "please" and "thank-you" are conveniently lacking. One does not hear, "When you are done, would you be able to pass me that toy so that I could enjoy it just as much as you did, if that's not too much to ask?" That would be truly unheard of. No one has to instruct them how to act or what to do. Everything is natural. Ever since we're born, this is the way of the world. Selfishness. Service to yourself. Thirty years later, once the preschool classroom and play room at home turns into a business office downtown, the screaming over one toy turns a little more civilized but remains just as selfish. "*If you don't look out for #1, who will?*" This attitude is woven throughout the fabric of our society. It's so natural it's unthinkable to operate otherwise. But here, right as Jesus is about to go up to Jerusalem to win our salvation, he has a vastly different outlook. Today Matthew shows us how "**Jesus Turns Our World Upside Down.**"

Jesus turns our world upside down with his mission. Jesus had already spoken to his disciples before about his mission. This was the third time doing it. Still at this time, his disciples expected a Messiah, a Savior, who would act like the world. He should fight the enemies from Rome. He should restore Israel to glory. But he certainly should not suffer. That's the last thing he should do. Jesus, though, knows this mission is so important that he takes his disciples aside from the crowds for an important private message. His mission of salvation is one act with four parts. "***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 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!***" The name Jesus gives himself, "the Son of Man," sounds like Jesus is emphasizes his humanity, showing how he will suffer. But in the Old Testament, the prophecies of the Son of Man show him with all the power, glory, and authority of God himself. "The Son of Man" is virtually the same as calling himself "the Son of God." Any Jew familiar with the Old Testament would have thought: this is not how God is supposed to operate.

Jesus turns our world upside down with his service. Even though Jesus just gave them a prediction of his humble mission in his passion, the disciples are still thinking about their power and status. James and John even bring their mother into this mess. She was probably Jesus' aunt, and thus they thought maybe that could help out their position. "***Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.***" Now Jesus had just said in the previous chapter that he would sit on a throne of glory and his disciples would sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. This is probably where the request is coming from. The right and left hand were the top two positions of power after the king, sort of like having two vice presidents. It's where we get our phrase "my right hand man." James and John were in the inner circle of the disciples along with Peter. They wanted to beat Peter to it. But they conveniently forgot that to reign with Jesus is to suffer with him. Jesus points to the cup of suffering he would undergo in his passion. The disciples are bold and naïve enough to think they can suffer just as much as Jesus. They do not yet truly know about Jesus' suffering and kingdom.

Jesus turns our world upside down by exchanging power and status for service. The disciples are furious, simply because they didn't think of it first. Jesus corrects their thinking on how servant leadership operates in this world. The world focuses on how to be over everyone. Jesus focuses on how to be under everyone. ***"You know that the 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 your slave."*** Jesus even uses an unthinkable comparison. Those that want to be first must be a slave, the servant of all. In that Roman culture, this type of humility is not a virtue but a vice. It's not something desired but something scorned. How could this possibly happen? Why would someone ever want to do that? Jesus points his disciples to himself as their empowerment and their model. ***"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."*** King Jesus becomes the servant. He dies in place of all. He buys the world back. The disciples want everything done for them. Jesus wants to do everything for others.

Every company we've ever worked for has some sort of job structure and management to it. Once you get through that never-ending first day on the job, you conveniently wear the badge of "the new guy." All the dirty jobs or busy work no one likes goes to the person on the bottom of the totem pole. Most new workers can't wait until someone else gets hired so they can conveniently return the favor, after putting in their due, and dish off all the dirty work to them. Does anyone turn down a promotion to be able to serve more? Hardly ever. Everyone looks to climb up the latter, from hourly to salaried, from manager to mid-level management to corporate. CEOs do not clean bathrooms. CEOs do not answer the phone. CEOs do not take out the garbage or vacuum the office. That's beneath them. Our whole business world is about working your way up to the top, not working your way down to the bottom.

We all want to get better in life, to move up the latter. But why? It is so you can better serve others? Or because vacuuming and cleaning is a little too lowly of a job for me to do in Christ's kingdom? Or because I have dutifully put in my time, and now it's someone else's turn? Or because my gifts can be better used if I get recognition for them? Take a look at your calendar. What gets scheduled in? Self-time or others time? An undying pursuit of self-improvement, or an undying pursuit of others-improvement? No wonder we see so much favoritism, pride, and envy. I have gifts, and people should notice. Everything I have should be meant to cover up my weakness and exaggerate my self-worth. Suddenly my identity is built upon my job, my bank account, my number of Facebook friends, my title. We feel the need to create the top spot for ourselves instead of seeing that it has already been created for us.

Why do we feel the need to create a top spot for ourselves in our own little corner of Christ's kingdom? Because we're blind to the fact that Jesus has already given us the top spot in his kingdom. The CEO of the whole universe gave up the top spot of his heavenly home to come down to subject himself to this world. He came not just to live for us, but in place of us. He is our substitute in our lives. Here you see the greatest role reversal. Jesus goes to last place and gives us first place. Jesus easily could have made use of all his power. But he didn't. He could have spurned the dirty work of the slave, but he washed his disciples' feet. He could have lorded his authority over the Jewish court system as the embodiment of justice itself to expose what injustice was done, but he didn't. He could have deposed Pilate that day and instituted himself as the governor not only of Judea but of the world, but he didn't. He could have become a powerful, earthly Messiah and forgotten about selfless service, but he didn't. He, the commander of legions of angels, could have had the entire world serve him during his passion,

but he didn't. The king becomes the slave. The author of life gives up his life. He gives up his freedom to free us. Jesus accomplishes his entire plan of salvation in your place. For your selfish service, he gives you his selfless sacrifice. For all those time you looked to yourself as priority #1, Jesus gives you his freedom from that self-enslaving spiral of pride and favoritism. Here Jesus triumphs over selfishness through selflessness. He wins our salvation in our place.

You're missing the picture if you look to yourself for that top stop. Jesus has already given you the top stop in the kingdom. You have nothing else to prove. That burden is gone. The world creates self-worth through favoritism, pride, and envy. Jesus changes that. He turns our world upside down. No longer do we model ourselves that way. Jesus gives us a new way to operate.

Look to Jesus. He is both your empowerment and your model. Be willing to put yourself dead last. Jesus put himself last to put you at the top. Be a servant. Jesus was yours. How can you serve? Before you want to talk your stress away and open up the concerns of your heart, ask and listen to your friend first. Clean the bathroom and take the garbage out at home, even if it's someone else's turn. Change that list of to-dos for someone else into a list for yourself.

In a world where kids scream "Mine!" and businessmen and women built their identity on climbing to the top, here we see the CEO of the world reject that structure of prestige and come down to scrub our hearts clean from selfishness and take out the garbage of our sin, never to be seen again. He turns our world upside down and gives us a new identity: one built on his selfless sacrifice which empowers us to serve. Amen.