

Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, ¹⁸ “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”

²⁰ Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

²¹ “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.”

²² “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.

²³ 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.”

²⁴ When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸ 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.” (NIV84)

Theme: A Selfless act for Selfish Sinners.

1. He willingly went toward his death.
2. He gave up his life as a ransom for us.

The rules of shotgun are very simple and very clear. The first person to shout 'shotgun' when you're within sight of the car gets the front seat. That's how the game is played. And it's a game that many of us played growing up—perhaps you still play it today. What's the big deal about the front seat? Well, it's the best seat in the car. It has the most leg room and elbow space, you get a better view, and if the driver allows it—you can control the radio and the heat. There is good reason why we argue over the front seat.

But that's the problem. It may seem like an innocent enough game. But it's really just a microcosm of the rest of our lives. We are always fighting for the best spot, the highest accolade, the greatest name. And we often do so at the expense of others.

But not Christ. No, today we see his selfless act for selfish sinners. He willingly went toward his death; and he gave up his life as a ransom for us.

In two weeks we will celebrate Palm Sunday—the beginning of the last week of Jesus' life. But before he entered Jerusalem on a donkey, he had to get to Jerusalem. Before our text Jesus was preaching the gospel on the east side of the Jordan River. From there he traveled to up to Jerusalem—up in elevation. As in about 3300 feet in elevation—a longer and treacherous path through valleys and up mountains. Jesus made this journey with his 12 disciples and a large crowd.

Along the way, Jesus pulled the disciples aside and predicted his death. This was the third time Jesus told his disciples about the way he was going to die. He would do it once more on the Tuesday of Holy Week. Each time he would give more information. This third time, Jesus predicted the way he was going to die—crucifixion.

“The Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!” Death by crucifixion was typically a long and excruciating process. Nails were pounded into his hands and his feet. You would hang there for hours, without food or water. Blood would start to pool in your lungs from the beatings you took before and because of the nails being pounded through your flesh. Eventually you would become too weak and exhausted to cough up that blood. So over time, typically after a day or two—you would suffocate on your own blood. Of course Jesus didn't die in this way. Nevertheless he knew his crucifixion wouldn't be pleasant.

But that wasn't the only thing Jesus had to suffer through. He would be betrayed by one of his disciples. His own countrymen would put him under trial and falsely accuse him. They would hand him over the

Pilate and the Romans. And at the hands of the Romans he was mocked and flogged. Mark adds that Jesus predicted that he would also be spit upon. Jesus predicted all of this. He was also beaten with rods, crowned with thorns, struck in the face. The worst of these was the flogging. Having your flesh ripped open with jagged pieces of metal or bone. Or your ribs broken with blunt heavy objects. Flogging was known to kill people every so often. Jesus endured it all. But Jesus wouldn't just endure physical pain, but emotional and spiritual pain as well. That's because he took our sins upon himself. And because he became guilty of all our sins, he was forsaken by his Father. So he suffered through the pain and agony of hell.

Jesus knew all of it was coming. He told his disciples about it. And yet what do we see Jesus doing. Going up to Jerusalem. He knew what was going to happen. He understood exactly the pain and torment he would feel. Yet he still traveled up to Jerusalem. He didn't run or hide. He didn't go the other way. But he willingly traveled to his death.

Why? For us. He didn't go to Jerusalem to have a good time. He didn't go there so that he could be praised by the crowds there for the Passover. He went there to suffer and die—for us. He did that, in our place. He went through the pain and agony of hell so that we wouldn't have to.

That is selfless love. A selfless act for selfish sinners. Jesus put his own wants and desires behind what we needed. He cared more about what was best for us instead of what was best for him. So he willingly suffered. He willingly died. For you. He died for you so that he could give you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

For that is something else that Jesus predicted would happen. **On the third day he will be raised to life!** Jesus knew that he wouldn't stay dead. He would rise from the dead three days later. And through his resurrection we know that we too will rise from the dead. On that Last Day Christ will come again to take all believers to live with him forever. Jesus did this all for us. He suffered, died, and rose—putting aside his wants and desires for us.

It was the ultimate selfless act. And one that we do good to try to follow. But that is something we fail to do again and again.

Just look at James and John. It wasn't long after Jesus told them about the sacrifice he would make for them that they approached with their mother. She asked Jesus, **Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.** Jesus showed them the depths of his selfless love. But James and John, selfishly sought a position of high authority with Jesus. Jesus was looking out for others. And James and John were looking out for themselves. They wanted what was best for them. They wanted power and prestige. They wanted fame and authority. They acted like we often do. We often look out for our own interests instead of the interests of others. We want what's best for us. And not just by playing "shotgun." But we strive for the best seats in the game of life. We want to be first, we want to be the greatest. We want all the accolades, the praise, the promotions. So we put others down, try to sabotage their work, and step on their toes simply so that we could get noticed ahead of them. Marriage becomes a power struggle. We want to be the one who is in charge. We want to call the shots. So we fight for control, we argue, we manipulate until we get what we want.

And then there is the reaction of the other 10 disciples. When they heard the request of James and John they were furious—or indignant as Matthew puts it. Why? Because they wanted to be first. They wanted to have positions of authority. Why should James and John get it and not them? They were jealous. Perhaps some of them were already jealous of James and John because they enjoyed a special relationship with Jesus. They were part of the inner circle—the closest of Jesus' disciples, who from time to time got to go with them or see things that the other disciples were not able to see. And then there is the ever-brash Peter. Perhaps he wanted to be the leader of the disciples—Jesus' right-hand man. The request of James and John could have easily angered and upset him.

We often react the same way. We become jealous of the success of others. "That should have been me," we say, "I deserve that much more than he does." We become upset when someone gets chosen over us. We complain we someone else is chosen to start on the team over us, or gets the lead in the play, or is given that big promotion. We get angry when someone else is chosen from that leadership position at Church. You should have been chosen as President, or an Elder, or the Sisters in Christ President. We hate it when others

succeed. “He doesn’t deserve that,” we say, “what has he done to deserve all the millions of dollars that has?” So instead of rejoice in others success we complain and try to bring him down.

That’s how the world acts. The world is jealous, angry, and vindictive. But not you. That’s not how a Christian behaves. Jesus knew that the disciples were upset and arguing about such things. So he called them together and rebuked them. **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** The world rubs it in. They make others pay. But not you.

No, for Christians, those who are great, make themselves the least. They don’t care about their wants or desires. They care more about others than they do themselves. So they seek to please others. They don’t lord over those under them, but help them. They serve the needs of each other. They make themselves lower than all others. They lift others up and make themselves nothing. And in doing so, they are great in the eyes of God.

But that’s not us by nature. Jealousy and selfishness ambition. Our sinful nature is filled with it, so it is a battle we must wage daily. And Christ has given us the ultimate example to follow. And he has given us the proper motivation. We make ourselves low just as he made himself low. As he says in verse 28, **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.** Christ became human, not so that he could be praised, but so that he could serve us. And he served us by giving up his life on the cross for us sinners. He died so that we sinners might live. He gave up his life as a ransom. A ransom is the price someone pays for the release of someone under the control of another.

We were under the bondage of sin. Under the control of the devil. Until Christ shed his blood on the cross and paid for our release. We have been set free from sin. No longer under the control of Satan. Christ has released us from the bondage of sin and death. Through his selfless act, he has set us free.

It is this act of selfless love for us selfish sinners that leads us toward selfless acts of love for others. That’s not who we are by nature—no by nature we are selfish—looking out only for what is best for us, just think of that seemingly harmless game, shotgun. Don’t live according to the sinful nature, but according the Spirit. For you belong to Christ. Live as his child, following his example of selfless love. For he gave up his own life and became the ransom for the sins of all. A selfless act of love. Amen.