The incident that is recorded in these sections of Matthew’s and Mark’s Gospels happened while Jesus and His disciples were going up to Jerusalem for the last time. They had retired to Ephraim after Lazarus was raised from the dead (Jn. 11:54). Now they were leaving Ephraim, which is in the wilderness, and going to Jerusalem by way of Jericho. So the request that came to Jesus from the two sons of Zebedee (James and John) - an ambitious request for the highest places of honor in the kingdom - was made a little more than a week before their Lord was crucified. How little they must have expected concerning events about to happen! But it was not because they weren’t warned. Just before they presented their request, Jesus had explicitly announced His approaching death for the third time. He indicated to them that His death would take place in connection with this present visit to Jerusalem. He also added other details about His last sufferings that He had not previously mentioned. They were designed to attract their full attention. Specifically, He mentioned that His death would be centered around a judicial process, that He would be delivered up by the Jewish authorities to the Gentiles, and that He would be mocked, scourged, and crucified (Mt. 20:17-19; Mark adds spitting to his list of insults in 10:34).

After Luke records Christ’s third announcement of His death, he adds: “And they (the disciples) understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said” (18:34). Two things are evident from the events that transpired next. First, the truth of Luke’s comment is apparent. Second, the cause of their lack of comprehension is made clear. We believe that the disciples were thinking about other things while Jesus spoke to them about His approaching sufferings. They were dreaming about the thrones they had been promised in Perea. Consequently, they were unable to join their Master in His thoughts, because His were totally different from their own. Their minds were completely possessed by romantic expectations and were dizzy with the sparkling wine of empty hope. As they came closer and closer to the holy city, their firm conviction was “that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately” (Lk. 19:11).

The Plot of James and John
While all of the disciples were looking forward to their thrones, James and John were coveting the most distinguished ones. They even devised a plan for getting these thrones. As a result,
they started an argument over who would be the greatest. These were the same two disciples who made a name for themselves by resenting the rudeness of the Samaritans who refused them lodging for the night. The most zealous of the Twelve were also the most ambitious. This insight will not be surprising to students of human nature. In the case of the Samaritans, the disciples asked that fire be sent from heaven to consume them. In the present situation, they ask for a favor from Heaven that will elevate them above their friends. The two requests are not that dissimilar.

While these two brothers were scheming and carrying out their little plot, they had help from their mother. Her presence is not explained in the text, but it may have been due to her having become an attendant for Jesus after she was widowed (cf. Mk. 15:41). Or, she could have accidentally met Him and His disciples at the intersection of the roads that converged on Jerusalem. All of them were going there to keep the feast. Salome, James’ and John’s mother, was the main actor in this scene, and it must be admitted that she acted her part well. Kneeling before Jesus, as if she were paying homage to a king, she humbly asked Jesus for a favor in order to make her more specific request known to Him. She was gently asked, "What do you wish?" (Mt. 20:21). And she responded, “Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left” (vs. 21).

This prayer certainly did not originate from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And the plan behind the request is certainly not one that we would have expected from the companions of Jesus. Yet, the picture before us is so much in line with human nature that we cannot help but feel this is not a myth. Rather, it is a genuine piece of history. We know that a large portion of the world’s spirit can be found at all times in religious circles where the leadership has a reputation for zeal, devotion, and holiness. We have no right to throw up our hands in amazement when we see it appearing again - even with Jesus’ disciples. The Twelve were still only baby Christians. We must allow them time to become sanctified. Therefore, we need to avoid two extremes: We should not be offended by their conduct, nor should we try to hide their true character in order to save their reputations. We are not surprised at the behavior of the two sons of Zebedee, and yet we can say very clearly that their request was foolish and offensive. It indicates they were bold in presuming the positions for themselves, exercised gross stupidity, and were totally selfish.

It was an irreverent and presumptuous request. They virtually asked Jesus their Lord to become the tool of their ambition and vanity. Maybe they thought He would give in to simple solicitation. Perhaps they reasoned He would not have the heart to deny a request that came from a female, especially one who, as a widow, was an object of compassion, and who had some claim to His gratitude since she contributed to His support. Whatever the reason, they begged a favor which Jesus could not grant without His being untrue to His own character and teaching (for example, the discourse on humility that He gave in the house at Capernaum). By doing this,
they were guilty of a disrespectful, unwise aggressiveness that was characteristic of an ambitious spirit. They had absolutely no sensitivity. Their spirits pressed on to achieve the goal, irrespective of any hurt it might cause. They had no concern about how it could wound the feelings of others.

The request was as ignorant as it was presumptuous. Their concept of the kingdom completely missed the mark of truth and reality. James and John not only thought the coming kingdom was to be a kingdom of this world, but they also had a low view of the kingdom. When the highest positions - even in a secular state - can be obtained through solicitation and favor, corruption and unhealthy conditions exist. The only reason a position should ever be held is because the person holding it is the most qualified. When family influence or manipulation are the pathways to power, every patriot has a reason to mourn. How preposterous, then, that anyone could think promotion is possible in the divine, ideally-perfect kingdom through means that are not even allowed in any well-regulated secular kingdom! To favor this idea is, in effect, to degrade and dishonor the Divine King. It makes Him look like a despot who does not have any principles, and who has more favors for flatterers than for honest men. It also caricatures the divine kingdom by comparing it to the most misgoverned countries on earth, such as those ruled by a Bomba (Ferdinand II, 1810-1859, King of the Two Sicilies), or Nero (Roman Emperor from A.D. 54-68).

The request by these two brothers was also selfish. They were not thinking about their fellow disciples. Rather, they were attempting to surpass them. And, like all such attempts, it produced conflict, disturbed the peace of the family circle, and created bitter feelings between them. “And hearing this, the ten became indignant at the two brothers” (Mt. 20:24). No wonder. If James and John did not anticipate this response, it just demonstrated that they were only consumed with their own selfish thoughts. And if they did anticipate it and would not stop themselves from taking a course of action that was sure to cause offense, it only made their selfishness more heartless and inexcusable.

But the petition of the two disciples was selfish in a broader sense. It was selfish in relation to the public interests of the divine kingdom. It virtually meant this: “Grant us the places of honor and power, no matter what happens. We want these positions even though everyone associated with us will become unhappy and disloyal, and what follows will be disorder, disaster, and chaotic confusion.” These consequences are certain to follow any promotion that is granted as a favor rather than by merit, both in the church and state. Many a nation has discovered this truth the hard way when trials have come their way. It is true, James and John never dreamed about the disaster that would come by having their petition granted. Self-seekers and position-hunters never anticipate evil consequences that come from their promotions. But that does not make them less selfish. It only shows that, besides being selfish, they are vain.
Jesus’ Response

Jesus’ reply to this ambitious request was mild when compared with its character. The presumption, aggressiveness, selfishness, and pride of James and John must have been offensive to Jesus’ meek, holy, and humble spirit. But He did not directly rebuke them. He dealt with them as a father might deal with a child who made a ridiculous request. He abstained from criticizing their serious faults which were brought to light by their petition. He noticed only the least of their faults - their ignorance. He said to them quietly, “You do not know what you are asking for” (Mt. 20:22). Even this comment was made with compassion rather than with blame. He felt compassion for people who offered prayers which, if answered, would lead to painful consequences that they could not foresee. It was in this spirit that He asked the question: “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” (Mk. 10:38).

There was more than compassion or correction in this question. There was even more than instruction about the true way for obtaining promotion in the kingdom of God. By His question, Jesus taught His disciples that promotions in His kingdom were not granted as favors. The way to thrones was the via dolorosa (“the way of sadness”) of the cross. The palm-bearers in the realms of glory would be those who had passed through great tribulation. The princes of the kingdom would be those who had drunk most deeply from His cup of sorrow. For those who refused to drink of the cup - those who were selfish, self-indulgent, ambitious, and vain - there would be no place at all in the kingdom, much less places of honor on His right or left hand.

The startling question asked by Jesus did not surprise James or John. They replied quickly and firmly, “We are able.” Had they really thought about the cup and the baptism of suffering and deliberately made up their minds to pay the costly price for the coveted prize? Had the sacred fire of the martyr spirit already been kindled in their hearts? We would love to believe that. But we are afraid there is nothing to justify this favorable opinion. It is much more probable that the two brothers, who were eager to obtain their reward, were ready to promise anything. They did not know, nor did they care, what they were promising. Their confident response resembles the bravado spoken by Peter a few days later: “Even though all may fall away, yet I will not” (Mk. 14:29).

Jesus did not choose to question the heroism that was so outwardly professed. Rather, He assumed that they were not only able, but willing - even eager - to participate in His sufferings. With the air of a king who is granting to his special friends the privilege of drinking out of the royal wine-cup and bathing from the royal pitcher, He replied: “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized” (Mk. 10:39). It was a strange favor that the King granted! If they had known the meaning of His words, the two brothers might have thought that their Master was indulging in a stroke of irony at their expense. Yet this was not the case. Jesus was not mocking His disciples. He was not offering them a stone instead of bread. He was speaking seriously and promising what He intended to grant
them. When the time came for them to receive what Christ had promised - and it did come - they regarded it as a real privilege. For all the Apostles agreed with Peter that those who were reproached for the name of Christ were to be considered blessed and had the spirit of glory and of God resting on them. We believe this was the thinking of James when Herod had him executed with the sword (Acts 12:2). This was the thinking of John when he was on the island of Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 1:9).

Jesus first promised the two disciples a favor they did not want. Then He explained that the favor they did want was not His to give unconditionally: “But to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father” (Mt. 20:23). The King James Version suggests the idea that the granting of rewards in the kingdom is not in Christ’s hands at all. That, however, is not what Jesus meant to say. Rather, He was saying that it was not in His power to grant places of honor out of partiality and favor. But it is His prerogative to assign citizens their rightful places in His kingdom. They will be assigned in accordance with the principles of justice and the sovereign will of His Father. When the words are paraphrased, they read: “I can say to anyone, ‘Come, drink of My cup,’ for there is no risk of any harm coming from favoritism with this offer. But that is all I can offer. I cannot say to anyone that I please, ‘Come, sit beside Me on a throne.’ For each person must get the place that is prepared for him and the one for which he is prepared.”

This solemn saying of our Lord does not infer that one may taste the cup and yet lose the crown. At first, His words seem not only to suggest this thought but to make the inference necessary. He was not teaching that there is no relationship between how much a disciple may have had fellowship with Christ in His cross and the place that will be assigned to him in the eternal kingdom. Jesus had no intention of teaching this doctrine. This is evident from the question He had asked just before He made the statement we are now considering. His comments imply a natural relationship between the cup and the throne, the suffering and the glory. The sacrifice and the great reward that were so closely joined in the promise made to the Twelve in Perea are separated here. The purpose is to let everyone know the effort that is made to exclude all corrupt influences from the kingdom of heaven. There is no doubt that those who receive the honored favor of suffering with Jesus in tribulation will be rewarded with high promotion in the eternal kingdom. Jesus’ words also do not compromise the sovereignty of the Father and Lord of all. On the contrary, they establish it. There is no better argument to support the doctrine of election than the simple truth that affliction is the education for heaven. For in what does the sovereign hand of God appear more memorably than in the appointment of crosses? If crosses would let us alone, we would let them alone. We do not choose the bitter cup and the bloody baptism. We are chosen for them, and in them. God presses people into the warfare of the cross. And if any come to glory in this way, as many a drafted soldier has done, it will be to a glory to which they did not aspire (at least at the beginning).


**Suffering and Glory**

The connection between suffering and glory serves to defend as well as to establish the doctrine of election. When viewed in relation to the world to come, that doctrine seems to lay God open to the charge of partiality and is certainly very mysterious. But look at election as it bears on the present life. From that point of view, it is a privilege for which the elect are not likely to be envied. The elect are not those who are happy and prosperous but are workers and sufferers (Euripides said, “I have never heard it said that sons born to mortals of divine paternity were happy”). In fact, they are not elected for their own sakes but for the world’s sake. They are God’s pioneers involved in the rough, dreaded work of turning the wilderness into a fruitful field. They are to be the world’s salt, leaven, and light. For the most part, they will receive little thanks for the service they render. They often get what the destitute, the afflicted, and the tormented get for their reward. So election is a favor to the non-elect. **It is God’s method of benefiting people at large.**

And whatever unique benefit is in store for the elect, it is well-earned. There should be no complaining about it. Does anyone envy what is going to come to them in the future? That person could also have the same future joy - if he is willing to become a friend of such miserable beings and share their tribulations now.

It is not necessary to explain that Jesus did not mean to deny the means of prayer by saying, “You may ask for a place in the divine kingdom and not get it. It all depends on what God has ordained.” He only wanted for the two disciples and everyone else to understand something important. To obtain their requests, they must know what they are asking for and accept all that is implied, in the present as well as in the future, in the answers to their prayers. This condition is too often overlooked. Many bold, ambitious prayers - even the ones for spiritual blessings - are offered up by petitioners who have no idea what the answer would involve. If they did, they would not want their prayers answered. Young Christians ask, for instance, to be made holy. But do they know the doubts, temptations, and difficult trials that go into making a great saint? Others long for a full assurance of God’s love and desire to be perfectly persuaded of their salvation. Are they willing to be deprived of the sunshine of prosperity, that in the dark night of sorrow they may see heaven’s stars? Wait just a minute! How few really do know what they are asking for! People need to be taught so much about praying for right things with an intelligent mind and a right spirit!

**Humility**

After Jesus said what had to be said to James and John, He spoke a timely and appropriate word to their fellow-disciples about humility. For even though the Ten were the ones who were offended, the same ambitious spirit was in them. Otherwise, they would not have felt such resentment toward James and John. Pride and selfishness may provoke and grieve those who are humble and selfless, but they cause resentment to arise only in those who are proud and selfish.
The best way to guard against the attacks that come from other people's feelings is to get rid of similar feelings in one's own heart. “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). Then you will do nothing in strife or pride.

“And hearing this, the ten became indignant at the two brothers” (Mt. 20:24). Without a doubt, a very stressful situation occurred. It is extremely disappointing to witness these kinds of situations. A godly picture of brothers living together in unity could have been seen. But the men around Jesus were real people, not the imaginary creations of a romance writer. In all real human relationships - in happy homes, in the most elite fraternities (scientific, literary, or artistic), in Christian churches - storms will arise every now and then. Let us be thankful that the Twelve, even in their foolishness, gave their Master an occasion for speaking the noble words that are recorded here. They shine down on us from the serene sky of the gospel story like stars that appear through the tempestuous clouds of human passion. Obviously, they are the words of a Divine Being, even though they are spoken out of the depths of an amazing self-humiliation.

Jesus was very compassionate and low-key as He addressed His angry disciples. He gathered the Two and the Ten, the offenders and the offended, around Him as a father might meet together with his children when they need to be corrected. He spoke to them with the calmness and solemnity of someone who is about to face death. Throughout this whole situation, death's sobering influence plays heavily on the Savior's spirit. Doesn't He speak about His approaching sufferings by using language that reminds us of the night of His betrayal? Doesn't He describe His passion by using the poetic, sacramental name “My cup”? Doesn't He reveal, for the first time, the secret of His life on earth - the grand purpose for which He is about to die?

As to its moral significance, Jesus' doctrine at this time was a repetition of His teaching in Capharnaum when He chose the little child for His text. He said at that time, “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 18:4). And now He says here, “Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant” (Mk. 10:43). In the first discourse, His model and His text was an infant. Now it is a servant, another representative of those that are poor and desppicable. As before, He quotes His own example to enforce His teaching. He stimulates His disciples to seek honor by taking the path of humble love by representing the Son of Man as the one who did not come to be served, but to serve, even to the point of giving His life a ransom for many. Then He reminded them that the Son of Man came like a shepherd, to seek and to save the lost sheep.

Two Kingdoms
The new feature in the lesson which Jesus gave His disciples at this time is the contrast between His kingdom and the kingdoms of this world. The difference lay in the way power was acquired. He said, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them;
and their great men (provincial governors, often more tyrannical than their superiors) exercise authority over them; but it is not so among you” (Mk. 10:42-43a). There is a hint here at another contrast besides the one that is primarily intended. That contrast is between the harsh despotic rule of worldly leaders and the gentle dominion of love which is the only kind of rule that is allowed in the divine kingdom. But the main goal of the words He spoke is to point out the difference in the way power is acquired rather than in the way it is used. The idea is this: “Earthly kingdoms are ruled by a class of people who possess their rank because of heredity - the aristocracy, nobles, or princes. The governing class are those who rule by birthright. They pride themselves on the fact that they have never been in the position of a servant but have always been served. In My kingdom, on the other hand, a person becomes great and a ruler by first being the servant of those over whom he is to rule. In worldly kingdoms, the ones who rule are those who have the privilege of being served; in the divine commonwealth, the ones who rule are those who consider it a privilege to serve.”

In making this contrast, of course Jesus had no intention of teaching politics. Neither did He intend to recognize or to call into question the divine right that the princes had to rule over their fellow creatures. He spoke about things as they were and as His hearers knew them to be in secular states, especially in the Roman Empire. If any political inference could be drawn from His words, it would not be in favor of absolute or hereditary privilege. Rather, He would be in favor of power being in the hands of those who earned it through faithful service, irrespective of whether they belonged to the governing class by birth. For what is beneficial in the divine kingdom cannot cause harm to secular commonwealths. The true interests of an earthly kingdom would be promoted if it were governed as closely as possible with the laws of the kingdom - laws which cannot be changed. Thrones and crowns may use hereditary succession, regardless of personal merit, in order to settle disputes. But the reality of power should always be in the hands of the one who is most capable, wise, and the most devoted to the public good.

**Jesus’ Own Example**

After Jesus had used contrast to explain the great principle of the spiritual commonwealth, that the one who would rule in it must first serve, He proceeded to strengthen the doctrine by using Himself as an example. He said to the Twelve, “Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all” (Mk. 10:44). Then he added the memorable words, “For even the son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (vs. 45).

These words were spoken by Jesus as one who claimed to be a King and aspired to be the first in a great and mighty kingdom. At the end of the sentence we must mentally supply the clause “if he seeks to obtain a kingdom.” The words were not expressed simply because it was so obviously implied in the logic of His thought. Our Lord uses His own life as an example of humility and as one whose case illustrates the truth that the way to power in the spiritual world is service. In
stating that He did not come to be served, but to serve, He does not express the whole truth. It is only the present fact. The whole truth was this: He came to serve in the first place, in order that He might be served in turn by a willing, devoted people who acknowledge Him as their Sovereign. He wants His disciples to focus on the peculiar path He takes to get His crown. What He says, in effect, is this: “I am a King, and I expect to have a kingdom. James and John were not mistaken about that. But I will obtain My kingdom in another way, different from the way secular princes get theirs. They get their thrones by succession. I get Mine by personal merit. They secure their kingdom by the right of birth. I will secure Mine by the right of service. They inherit their subjects. I buy Mine. The money used to purchase them is My own life.”

We do not know what the Twelve thought about this novel plan of getting dominion and a kingdom, especially what ideas the concluding word of their Master suggested to their minds. However, we are sure that they did not comprehend that word. It is not surprising, because Jesus’ thought was very deep. Even now, who can fully understand it? Here, we emphatically see through a glass, in mysteries (see I Cor. 13:12).

\textit{Theological Debate}

This memorable saying has been the subject of much debate among theologians. And we certainly cannot hope to terminate the controversy by anything that we can say. His message is a deep well which has never, even until now, been comprehended. It probably never will be. It was brought in so quietly as an illustration to strengthen a moral precept. Yet it opens up an area of thought which takes us far beyond the immediate occasion when it was spoken. It raises questions in our minds which it does not solve. And yet there is little in the New Testament on the subject of Christ’s death that can be comprehended within the boundaries of its possible significance.

First of all, let us say that we do not agree with that school of critical theologians who call into question the authenticity of this word. It is strange to observe how unwilling some are to recognize Christ as the original source of the great thoughts which have become essential elements in the faith of the church. The idea of Christ’s death as a ransom is right in front of us now. With whom did it originate? Was the mind of Jesus not original enough to conceive it, that it had to be fathered by someone else? Another thing has to be considered in connection with this saying and the similar one spoken at the institution of the Supper. Jesus was deep in thought and emotions over the fact that He must die. It was inevitable that His mind would add poetic, mystical meanings to this harsh, straightforward fact. For the moment, we speak of Jesus as a man of wonderful spiritual genius, whose mind was able to cope with death. He was able to rob it of its character of being simply fate and invest it with beauty. He clothed the skeleton with the flesh and blood of an attractive system of spiritual meanings.
What Did Christ Mean?

Since we regard this precious saying as unquestionably authentic, what did Christ mean to teach by it? First, in general, and at the very least, He was indicating that there was a causal connection between His act of laying down His life and the intended result - spiritual sovereignty. And even without having any thought about the term ransom, we can see for ourselves that there is such a connection (even if we pretended for a moment that the word was absent from the text). No matter how original the method was that Jesus used for getting a kingdom, its originality is beyond dispute. This is especially true when His ways are compared with other methods of getting kingdoms - by inheritance (the most respectable way), by the sword, or by paying a sum of money as in the last days of the Roman Empire (the lowest way). And no matter how original the method of Jesus is, it has proved strangely successful. The event has proved that there must be a connection between the two things - the death on the cross and the sovereignty of souls. Thousands of human beings - no, millions - in every age have said “Amen” with all of their hearts to John's doxology in the book of Revelation: “To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Rev. 1:5-6). Without a doubt, Jesus was thinking about this outcome of His devotion when He spoke the words before us. In speaking them, He meant, for one thing, to emphasize the power of divine love in self-sacrifice. He also intended to assert its influence over human hearts and to win for the King of the sacred kingdom a kind of sovereignty that could not have been attained except by humbling Himself by taking the form of a bondservant. Some assert that the sole purpose of the Incarnation was to gain this power. We do not agree with this view. But we do not have any hesitation about regarding the attainment of such moral power by self-sacrifice as one result of the Incarnation. The Son of God desired to charm us away from satisfying the desires of the flesh and worshiping self. He longed to emancipate us from sin's bondage by the power of His love, so that we might acknowledge that we are His and devote ourselves with gratitude to His services.

But there is still more in this text. Jesus not only says He is to lay down His life for the many, but that He is to lay down His life in the form of a ransom. The question is, what are we to understand by this form in which the fact of His death is expressed? Now it may be assumed that the word ransom was used by Jesus in a similar way that the Old Testament used the word. The Greek word for ransom is used in the Septuagint as the equivalent for the Hebrew word copher. There has been much discussion about the meaning of this word. But the general sense of the word is a covering. How the idea of covering is to be taken has been debated and must remain doubtful. Some say it has to do with the sense of shielding; others, in the sense of covering the same surface exactly (like one penny covers another, as an equivalent). The theological interest in the question is this: If we accept the word in the general sense of protection, then the ransom is not offered or accepted as a legal equivalent for the persons or things redeemed. Rather, the ransom would simply be offered as something which has a certain value and is received as a
favor. But let’s leave this point for the moment. What we are concerned with in connection with this text is the broader thought that Christ’s life is given and accepted for the lives of many—whether as an exact equivalent or otherwise being left indefinite. Jesus represents His death as something He voluntarily endured so that He could deliver from death the souls of the many. How or why is not clearly stated. A German theologian, who energetically fights against the Anselmian theory of satisfaction, finds in the word *ransom* three thoughts. *First*, the ransom is offered as a gift to God, not to the devil. Jesus undoubtedly has in His mind the thoughts contained in Psalm 49, and speaks of devoting His life to God as He pursues His vocation. He does not subject Himself to the power of sin or to the devil. *Second*, Jesus presupposes that no man can offer a valuable gift that is capable of warding off death before God, either for himself or for others. In addition, He asserts that in this view, He Himself performs a service in place of many which none of them could provide for himself or for another. *Third*, Jesus probably had in mind also the words of Elihu in the Book of Job concerning an angel, one of a thousand, who may help ransom a man from death. So He distinguishes Himself from all other people who will certainly die. He thinks of Himself as someone who is excepted from the natural sentence of death and conceives His death as a voluntary act by which He surrenders His life to God, as in the text in Jn. 10:17-18. In extracting so much from the text, we are not stretching it too far. It seems reasonable to assume there is a mental reference to the Old Testament texts in Psalm 49 and Job 33. There also seems to be a reference to the redemption of the males among the children of Israel by paying a half of a shekel. In the light of these passages, it does not seem like we are going too far to extract these three ideas from our Lord’s words: (1) the ransom is given to God (Ps. 49:7 – “Or give to God a ransom for him”); (2) it is given for the lives of people who are sentenced to die; and (3) it is available for such a purpose because the thing given is the life of an exceptional being, one among a thousand. He is not a fellow mortal doomed to die, but the Angel of Jehovah (Christ) who took on flesh in order that He may freely die. Thus, the text contains the general truth that by dying in self-sacrificing love, the Son of Man awakens in many a sense of grateful devotion that carries Him to a throne. But it also contains a more special truth. By His death He puts the many who are sentenced to death as the penalty for sin somehow in a different relation to God. They are no longer criminals but sons of God, heirs of eternal life, members of the holy commonwealth, enjoying all its privileges, redeemed by the life of the King Himself, as the half-shekel offered as the price of redemption.

These few hints must be sufficient to give us an indication of the probable meaning of the autobiographical saying in which Jesus conveyed to His disciples *their second lesson on the doctrine of the cross*. Now with two additional thoughts, we end this chapter. When He said that He did not come to be served, but to serve, Jesus did not only allude to His death, but to His whole life. The statement is a summary, in a single sentence, of His entire earthly history. The reference to His death has the force of a superlative. He came to minister, even to the extent of giving His life a ransom. While He breathes the spirit of utter humility, this saying betrays the consciousness of
superhuman dignity. If Jesus had only been a man, His language would not have been humble, but presumptuous. Why should the son of a carpenter say about Himself, “I did not come to be served?” The position and occupation of a servant was to be expected for someone of that background. The statement before us is rational and humble. It comes from one who, being in the form of God, freely assumed the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death for our salvation.