

Serves
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Mark 10:32-45

Is it wrong for a follower of Christ to have ambition? Is it wrong for a follower of Christ to pursue “greatness?” We will explore both questions later.

- In Mark chapter ten Jesus and His disciples were headed to Jerusalem.
- He knew what was awaiting Him there and He was preparing them for it. The closer they got to Jerusalem, the more specific Jesus got about the suffering He faced. It was clearly more than they could grasp.
- With this as the backdrop, two of Jesus’ most trusted disciples (and their mom) lapsed into a display of naked, selfish, human ambition.
- Jesus didn’t yell at them, instead He used their question to teach the whole group (and us) how “greatness” works in His Kingdom.

Big Idea: The world measures greatness by status, power, and stuff. Most people seek greatness by self-centered striving. Greatness in God’s Kingdom comes by service to others with Christ as our example and our source of power to imitate Him as selfless servant.

- Let’s begin with Mark 10:32–34 (ESV)

³² And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³ saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

- Jesus had hardly uttered these words in Mark 10:34 when his two closest disciples changed the subject in a way that makes us cringe.

³⁵ And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” ³⁶ And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” ³⁷ And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”

- What? Jesus just described the incredible suffering ahead and these two are thinking about getting good seats in the Kingdom!
- And these are His best and closest disciples!
- Matthew’s account says they sent their mom to ask Jesus the question.
- They weren’t totally wrong. (Wiersbe) *“Salome and her two sons were claiming the promise Jesus had given that, in the future kingdom, the disciples would sit on twelve thrones with the Lord Jesus. (Matt. 19:28.)”*ⁱ
- Their error was trying to elbow their way to the most important spots.

³⁸ Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”

- **What were the “cup” and the “baptism” He referred to?**
- **What does their response in verse 39 say about their understanding?**

³⁹ ...And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

- Human nature was on full display during this episode. Look at verse 41:

⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

- **Why were they most likely ticked off at James and John?**
- This is where Jesus stops and calls a huddle for a “teachable” moment.

⁴² And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

- Notice the contrast. In the world’s system it’s all about climbing to the top of the ladder in terms of authority and power.
- Jesus said, *“That’s not how it should be among my disciples.”*
- Jesus’ disciples are to be humble servants. *“Mark chose to use the Greek term diakoneō [1247], which originally meant “to wait tables.”ⁱⁱ*
- Even more shocking was the term slave (doulos)! (Swindoll) *“Free Romans and Greeks considered slavery a shameful existence; they would sooner end their own lives than become enslaved to others.”ⁱⁱⁱ*
- We asked, Is it wrong for a follower of Christ to pursue “greatness?”
- Followers of Christ are called to a “counter-cultural” path to true greatness.
- Our lesson writer: *“Jesus did not forbid His people from wanting to become great. What He did was redefine what it means to be great.”^{iv}*
- This was not the first time Jesus had introduced this concept.
- In Mark 9:33–35 (ESV) Jesus had also just described his coming death.

³³ And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵ And he sat down and called the twelve. And he

said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”

- Greatness in the world is measured by status, power, and stuff, and is often pursued by selfish striving.
- Greatness in God’s Kingdom comes by service to others.
- Then Jesus gave them the ultimate example of this: His own service.

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

- Paul wrote in Philippians 2: ⁵ *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* ⁷ *but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* ⁸ *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*^v
- We know verse 45 is about more than just Jesus as an example of servant leadership. It speaks to His role as our substitutionary Savior. Dying to pay the ransom for the sins of humanity was the role only Jesus could play.
- However, His example of serving instead of being served applies to us all.
- Back to James and John and their request. Clearly, James and John were showing how ambitious they were.
- **Is it wrong for a follower of Christ to have ambition? Why?**
- There are two kinds of ambition in the dictionary: **a:** having or [being] controlled by ambition **b:** having a desire to achieve a particular goal: aspiring^{vi}
- If you search the scripture for ambition you will find good and bad:

James 3:16 (ESV) tells us:

¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

Philippians 2:3 (ESV) instructs us:

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

2 Corinthians 5:9 (NASB95) defines worthy ambition:

9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

- If our ambition is to please Christ, then this passage made it clear that serving others is what is pleasing to Him.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- The world measures greatness by status, power, and stuff. Most people seek greatness by self-centered striving.
- Jesus didn't say it is wrong to want to be great in His Kingdom. He redefined greatness and called us to a counter-cultural path to it.
- Greatness in God's Kingdom comes by service to others with Christ as our example and as our source of power to imitate Him as selfless servant.
- So, that's pretty simple. We'll all just go right out this week and become a servant and slave to others like flipping a switch, right?
- Good thing we came to Sunday School today!
- No, it's not so simple. We don't naturally think about serving others more than ourselves.
- If it was natural, we wouldn't need Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Our "homework" this week is to pray and ask Him to put a spotlight on our selfishness; point out our opportunity to serve others; then to help us tap into the power of the Holy Spirit to do just that in order to please Him.

ⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 147). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱ Swindoll, Charles R.. *Insights on Mark* (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 2) (p. 284). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*

^{iv} Explore the Bible Leaders Guide - Lifeway 2018

^v [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Php 2:5–8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^{vi} Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). [*Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary*](#). (Eleventh ed.). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc.