

Serves
October 22, 2023
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Mark 10:32-45

Opening: Remember Mr. Rogers? He “often told this story about when he was a boy and would see scary things on the news: *“My mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’ [He added] To this day, especially in times of disaster, I remember my mother’s words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers — so many caring people in this world.”*”

When you think of people who are devoted to serving others what occupations come to mind? Now, a contrast, when most people think of “greatness” what kind of people come to mind? During Jesus’ earthly ministry, when the Roman Empire ruled the world, servants (or slaves) were not considered “great” by the world’s standards. Sadly, that thinking persists today.

In the encounter recorded in today’s text we see Jesus redefine what it really means to be “great” by His standards. Greatness by Jesus standards doesn’t mean looking out for “number one,” it means serving others. Jesus would model that as only the Son of God could by His death on the cross. While many devote themselves to service, Jesus “stands alone as the Suffering Servant who gave up His life”ⁱⁱ so we can have eternal life as His followers.

We will also see how even Jesus’ most trusted disciples still didn’t fully understand the sacrifice He was about to make. They expected to be beside Him in a political victory. They didn’t yet understand that “victory in Jesus” is about an eternal kingdom requiring sacrifice and suffering.

The point: After we’ve trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord, He begins to work on changing us [sanctification] from clueless, selfish, and competitive people into servants who put others first. By Jesus’ standards “greatness” comes not from ambition but from service.

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.” (ESV)

- Jesus predicted His death and resurrection to His closest disciples for the third time and He gave them very specific details.
- Shockingly, both Mark and Matthew record no reply from the disciples.
- Luke adds a little more color: ³⁴ *But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.* ⁱⁱⁱ

- Was their lack of understanding divinely orchestrated by God the Father? Was it motivated by their expectations that Jesus would be a conquering King rather than a suffering Savior? I found no consensus among multiple commentators.
- What we see for sure is they were clueless to God's plan. Maybe they were blinded not only by their expectations for Jesus but by their own "blind ambition."

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." **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?" **39** And they said to him, "We are able." 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." **41** And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

- James and John were special to Jesus, a part of His inner circle. They were with Him at His mountaintop transfiguration experience, still they seemed clueless.
- What does their request tell us about their motives?
- Matthew's account tells us it was James and John's mother who asked Jesus for these positions of honor for her sons.^{iv} Perhaps she was their "Momanger."
- Let's be fair, Jesus had said to them, "*In the Messianic Age, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.*"(Mt. 19:28)^v
- Jesus didn't rebuke them but said they WOULD experience the cup and baptism of suffering. James was the first apostle martyred. John would be tortured and exiled.
- In verse 41: Why were the other ten disciples mad?
- The disciples were not only clueless, but they were also selfish; blinded by ambition.
- Why should we not be overly judgmental about their request?
- Two weeks ago, in our lesson on denying self, I said, "*my SELF wants to rush to the front of every line.*" Then we asked, "*What does Jesus want?*"
- He told his disciples and us beginning in verse 42:

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. **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."

- Verse 42: Who was influencing the disciples' thinking about position and power?
- Verse 43: How did Jesus redefine the world's view of "greatness"?

- What is the lesson for Christ-followers? How do our motives come into play?
- Greatness comes from serving others. Jesus went further in verse 44, He used the term “slave.” In the Roman Empire about “one in five people” were slaves. You couldn’t get any lower in the social structure than a slave.
- Here’s a kind of corny way to remember this lesson on greatness redefined.
- In the sports world there is an expression “G.O.A.T.” What does it mean?
- The world defines greatness as climbing the ladder ahead of (or over) others. Jesus said to be great in His kingdom be a servant of all people: S.O.A.P.
- Instead of striving for worldly greatness (G.O.A.T.) we need to clean up our ambitions with some S.O.A.P.
- The cynical might say, *“Don’t be naïve. Look around, ambition and self-promotion work pretty well in this world.”* True, “in this world” they do work even in the church.
- You know the Greek word for “great” in verse 43 is “megas” (as in “mega-church”). When the rewards are handed out in Heaven one day, will they be based on “mega” in size or “mega” in service? It will be interesting to see which churches and followers are “mega” and which are “mini” in God’s economy. Jesus said, “...some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”^{vi} Which recognition are we working for?
- Verse 45 describes how Jesus modeled His priority of serving others as only the Son of God could. It was His reason for coming to earth: *“...to give his life as a ransom for many.”*
- Isaiah 53:7 says Jesus went to the cross voluntarily *“like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.”*^{vii} He truly is the “greatest of all time” and yet he came like a lamb; the perfect “lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”
- As the Good Shepherd, He calls His followers to be humble “sheep.”
- Instead of focusing on the world’s definition of “greatness” we need to strive to be servants. Instead of trying to be the “G.O.A.T.” we need to strive to be sheep.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- By Jesus’ standards “greatness” comes not from ambition but from service.
- After we’ve trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord, He goes to work changing us [sanctification] from clueless, selfish, and competitive people into servants who put others first.
- Our motivation to be servants should come from looking at His sacrifice for us.
- Instead of looking in the mirror to admire our “greatness.” We should put down the mirror and look at the cross.
- When we read about Jesus’ suffering in verses 32-34, we can tend to let the description of His sacrifice go right past us kind of like the disciples. Instead, we need to pause and really “turn our eyes” toward the cross. With that in mind I composed a little poem.

The Price He Paid
By Allen Power
October 18, 2023

*It's been so long ago,
It seems so far away,
It's hard to truly grasp
The heavy price He paid.*

*I read the words on paper,
But ink will not suffice,
To help me understand and feel,
His horrible sacrifice.*

*My mind needs to imagine,
The spikes, the spear, the thorns.
The blood He shed in awful death,
So I could be reborn.*

*I need to feel His suffering,
To see His love displayed.
Sorrow mixed with gratitude,
At the heavy price He paid.*

- A REAL poet (Issac Watts) wrote these words:

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.^{viii}*

- Greatness comes from service. Our model of that is Jesus, Who “*came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

ⁱ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/198594-when-i-was-a-boy-and-i-would-see-scary>

ⁱⁱ Explore the Bible Leaders Guide – Lifeway 2023

ⁱⁱⁱ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Lk 18:34). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

^{iv} Mt. 20:20-12

^v [The Holy Bible: Holman Christian standard version](#). (Mt 19:28). (2009). Holman Bible Publishers.

^{vi} [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Lk 13:30). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

^{vii} [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Is 53:7). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

^{viii} https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/When_I_Survey_the_Wondrous_Cross/