

Matthew 20:17-28

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 4/22/2012

How to be great in His kingdom

Prayer

Father, what a privilege it is to come before You, to sing Your praises, to glorify and magnify Your name. We are so thankful that You are holy, that You are righteous; that You are gracious, merciful and good. And that You are now making us like Christ. We are so thankful for those of us here who have been saved. We have been delivered from darkness to Your marvelous light. We have had all our sins forgiven. We have been declared righteous. And we can boldly come before Your throne and receive grace and find mercy in a time of need. And Father, we thank You that You used Your powerful Word to call us out of darkness, Your Word concerning Christ. And Father, I thank You that You use Your Word now to grow us in respect to salvation. And I pray as we look at this passage today that You would give us insight and wisdom, not from ourselves but from You. That you would help us understand it rightly, the way You intended it. That we would then respond by Your power and strength, as You desire, for your glory. Lord, I thank You for Your Word. I thank You for this opportunity together for us to worship You. We praise You now in Your Son's precious name. Amen.

Sermon

What do you think of when you think of great people? What do you think of when you think of great men? Or great women? You know the world classifies "great" based on popularity or talent, or whatever it might be. You see that people who are considered great usually have either great authority or they have great stature, personality, talent— whatever it might be. You see, without Christ, the mode of classification, or the way people would see people that are great is based on what they do. Have you ever desired to be great? If you are a kid you probably have, right? You wanted to be great at something; you wanted people to look up to you, whatever it might be. The reality is that there are great men and women; and there are not-so-great men and women, right? There are those with great talent and authority as I have shared, those with large personalities, maybe celebrities, whatever that might be, and even in the church there are those who are considered to be great. Sometimes it has to do with the position, authority, or a talent or gifting; sometimes it manifests in titles that are given in the church. Now today we are going to see that the world has one view of greatness, and God has another view of greatness. And we are also going to see that we who are true believers are tempted to be conformed to the world, to think wrongly. And Jesus' disciples were tempted to do so also, and the Lord would have to correct them concerning what true greatness really is.

Would you turn with me in your Bibles? We are going to see today how to be great in His kingdom. And the title of the sermon we are going to see here today sounds prideful. But we are going to see today that it is not prideful if it is in the right context. Turn with me to Matthew chapter 20. And we are going to be looking at a wonderful, wonderful passage, and I just am so thankful for the privilege of being able to share it. We are going to be looking at verses 17-28 today, Lord willing.

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And it has been wonderful to be in the book of Matthew, where we have seen God, a gracious God, the Christ, took on human flesh. And we saw that “You shall name His name Jesus,” God speaking to his father Joseph, that He would be the One that saves His people from their sins. “The Lord is salvation.” We saw the King of kings and the Lord of lords come, the King of the Jews; we saw the people who sat in great darkness saw a great light. We saw the people’s rejection of Christ, that generation, an evil and adulterous generation that liked what He did for them but did not repent of their sin. We saw Jesus’ condemnation very clearly: woe to you Chorazin and Bethsaida, those cities, those people who had seen so many miraculous things— their judgment would be worse than those in Sodom and Gomorrah. We saw very clearly the Lord turn away from this evil generation, to start to speak in parables to veil His truth. And we saw the leaders that hated Christ, that wanted to kill Him, that were trying to set Him up on every occasion. And we saw the Lord turning to His disciples and instructing them specifically, although still being gracious to the crowds, teaching His disciples. And then we saw in chapter 16 the Lord Jesus turns His face towards the cross on His way to Jerusalem. As He started to from that point on, share that He must suffer and die— go to Jerusalem, suffer and die and be raised on the third day.

We saw very clearly some lessons that He gave His disciples. Very clearly, how we are to address a sinning brother, how important His children are to Him. We saw we are to forgive in the same context the Lord forgives. We saw how, in the context of the Pharisees’ accusations, what God says about marriage and divorce and singleness. And we saw Jesus evangelize someone who appeared to be very interested in eternal life, that rich, young ruler. We saw yet that this rich, young ruler was unwilling to give up his life and follow Jesus. We saw the disciples’ amazement—if he could not be saved, then who could be saved? And the Lord Jesus said, “With man it is impossible; with God all things are possible.” Then we had Peter’s statement, basically: “We have left everything,” in contrast to this man who would not leave his stuff, “We have left it all; what will there be for us?” And the Lord Jesus shared that special blessing for those apostles that would be judging the 12 tribes of Israel, but also for every single one who has left family, houses, whatever it might be, for Christ. That we have a hundredfold in this life right now. That you— yes you may be separated from some of your family because of Christ— but you have a new family, a much greater family, the body of Christ. We saw those wonderful, wonderful truths.

And then we saw the Lord Jesus in response to what Peter had said— we saw it last week— give a parable, and He was addressing Peter’s wrong motives. And as we will see today, the disciples were trying to be great. They wanted to be great; “Who was the greatest?” And we saw very clearly Jesus unveil the wrong motives for serving. And we saw very clearly that we should not be envious of other believers. We are not to meddle with God’s sovereign plan. It may not be the same for us as it is for others in how we serve and when we come to faith. We are just to follow Christ. We are just to follow Christ. And that leads us to our passage today where we are going to see how to be great in the kingdom of God. Again, let’s turn to Matthew chapter 20:17-28. Scripture says, verse 17:

¹⁷ And as Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, ¹⁸ "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will

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condemn Him to death, ¹⁹ and will deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up." ²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, bowing down, and making a request of Him. ²¹ And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left." ²² But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able." ²³ He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; 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." ²⁴ And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵ But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. ²⁶ "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." [Matthew 20:17-28]

So you want to be great in the kingdom of heaven? There are a couple things we need to see, and I think we will see them today. That first of all, we need to understand very clearly what the world's view of greatness is and repudiate that, and replace that understanding with the truth of God concerning true greatness in the kingdom. Now as we begin, Jesus begins with a fitting reminder here of His imminent suffering, death and resurrection to set the scene of what He will teach these disciples. You see Jesus is facing Jerusalem; He is on His way, and along the way He is using these circumstances to weed out sin in His disciples to prepare them for when they would serve when He was up at the right hand of the Father. Very clearly, we see in verse 17 again in such a wonderful portion: "¹⁷ And as Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, ¹⁸ 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, ¹⁹ and will deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.'"

Our text makes it clear that Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, but that is really not the best translation— it literally says "As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem." And if you look at Mark 10, in our parallel passage, it is very clear that they were on the road to Jerusalem, and they were actually, as we see in these texts, approaching Jericho; they are getting closer and closer to Jerusalem. Remember they had taken the route from Galilee and had gone east into the Perea area, and now they are coming back; they are close to Jericho, and they are getting closer to Jerusalem. And it says on this walk, it says He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves. And the word really speaks of privately, it has that emphasis. He took them aside privately, so there were more than just the twelve on the way; there were others, as we will see, going with them. We will see that James' and John's mother was with them, and there were others in this group of people following Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. And now Jesus takes them aside privately and what does He say? Verse 18 again: ¹⁸ 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn

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Him to death,¹⁹ and will deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.”

Now if you will remember very clearly, the Lord Jesus had previously in Gentile territory started to show His disciples that this would happen. Go back to Matthew 16:21. And each time He shares, as we will see, He adds more information for them to understand. Matthew 16:21: **“¹⁶ From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day” [Matthew 16:21].** And they did not understand that that first time, but He also shared with the three on the mount of transfiguration as they were coming back, and then He shared with everyone. Move up to Matthew 17:22. This is the second time He shared with all His disciples. **“²² And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men;’ [Matthew 17:22a].** He adds this phrase “delivered,” being handed over. If you will remember, this is the passage in which Jesus would pay taxes to wicked men, that He would submit, and He was laying the foundation within what He would do; that He would offer Himself over, He would allow Himself to be taken by evil men, according to the Father’s plan, that He was a submissive Savior according to the will of God. **“²² And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men;’ ²³ and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day” [Matthew 17:22-23a].** And then we have our passage in verse 18 where we see the same truths that He is going to be delivered or handed over, or “betrayed” even is a possible translation, to the chief priests and scribes, and we have this statement, “and they will condemn Him to death.” You see Jesus had set His heart to obey the Father, to go to Jerusalem to die for our sins. And each time He explains this to these disciples and gives them more information.

And here we see not only is He going to be condemned to death by the chief priests and scribes, that is the religious rulers, we also see He tells them, “and will deliver...” and that is the chief priests and rulers, “to the Gentiles,” and that would be the Romans. And what will they do? Three things: to mock, scourge and crucify Him. The word “mock” speaks of verbal ridicule. Jesus is saying He is going to be ridiculed, and we see that very clearly in Scripture. The term “scourge” speaks of punishment with the whip, a whip that would have hard embedded material in the end— whether it was bone or whatever it was— and it was made to flail the flesh of those being punished. And then we see this statement now, very clearly, it is no longer as He has said before that He was going to die, He now explains to them how it is going to happen: “and they will crucify Him.” This speaks of the cross. Crucifixion had been the Romans’ favorite method of execution. They would take the prisoner and they would nail them to a cross, and they would be left to die a brutal, painful death. And Jesus informs His disciples at this point that He is going to be crucified.

Now why does Matthew at this point review what Jesus shares in detail? Why does he share the account of this brutal, imminent death, and as we will see, resurrection? I believe he is laying the foundation for what he is going to teach them next, inspired by the Holy Spirit, as he shares our Lord’s words. You see, if you look down in verse 28, as Jesus exemplifies the whole point He is making, notice what He says, “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a

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ransom for many." Jesus is going to teach them concerning true greatness. And we are going to see that greatness comes in the context of suffering as a servant of the living God, according to the will of God. And do not forget Jesus also said that He would raise from the dead on the third day— praise the Lord for that!— He is the risen Savior. But I believe that Jesus is sharing this, very clearly, on the way to Jerusalem, to pave the way for what He will teach His disciples and what we will be taught today from His Word. Their sinfulness that needed to be corrected, just like ours needs to be corrected.

Notice at this point we have something happening. As they are walking along in the midst of this, verse 20, back in Matthew 20, we have the term "then." It is in the midst of Him telling His disciples; it appears at this point the author wants to make the point that now something else happens. And what is it that happens? Verse 20: ²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, bowing down, and making a request of Him. ²¹ And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left." They are on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus has predicted His brutal suffering and death and resurrection. And then we have the mother of the sons of Zebedee— that is James and John, we saw them back in Matthew chapter 4— they were the two brothers who were called to follow Jesus, and they dropped their nets and did follow Jesus. They are two of the three inner circle, those who are above but among equals. And we see their mother here, and most likely her name is Salome, if you go to Matthew 28:5 and then Mark 15:40, it appears that that is who this is. The mother of Zebedee brothers' name is Salome. And so the mother of James and John, who Jesus called the Sons of Thunder, she comes to Jesus. It is interesting that the Sons of Thunder do not make this request, their mother does. I guess maybe they have a Mother of Thunder, too. I do not know.

So we have the mother of the sons of Zebedee coming to Him, respectfully bowing down by the way, this is like someone coming to make a request of someone in authority. There is respect here; it is not disrespectful, we need to recognize that. It is a very respectful request in this context. And Jesus does not condemn her, He actually says, "What do you wish?" right? So they come to make this request: ²¹ And He said to her, 'What do you wish?' (What do you desire?) She said to Him, 'Command (or literally, "say") that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left.'" And here we have a very proactive mother, don't we? Yet in Mark chapter 10, Mark makes it clear that these two sons were in on it also, and we will see that in our text too. Turn to Mark chapter 10, verse 35. Mark chapter 10, this is a parallel passage to this. And we see different aspects of this same event based on the Lord's desire through the inspired writer. Mark chapter 10:35:

³⁵ **And James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Him, saying to Him, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You."** (Now that seems a little bold.) ³⁶ **And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"** (I find it amazing how approachable the Lord, God is with them. This is the Lord, God of the universe and He is very approachable, and yet He does not compromise ever in any way. He always does the right thing.) ³⁶ **And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"** ³⁷ **And they said to Him, "Grant that we may sit in Your glory, one on Your right, and one on Your left."** ³⁸ **But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are**

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you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" [Mark 10:35-38]

And very clearly back in our text when Jesus reproveth them in a sense, He actually says it in a plural form pointing to the brothers, not to the mother. So the mother came and the brothers are with her. She kind of paves the way and makes the request, and they say, "We would like You to do whatever we like," and then they make the request. So really it is these guys here who are behind this, even though it is their mother who is leading the way. So James and John, with the mother initiating their request, these two sons follow up specifically here. Now before we get upset and think, *this is a terrible request, they are totally out of line— how could they ask for something like this?* We need to recognize that first of all, this request reveals that all three of them had faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to see that. They all believed He was the King; they all believed He would come in His kingdom. That is really good. And remember earlier in chapter 19, the Lord Jesus had actually told the disciples that they would reign with Him. Look back in chapter 19:27.

²⁷ Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" (And notice what Jesus says to them, this is to the disciples:) ***²⁸ And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne,*** (that is a king, right?) ***you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*** [Matthew 19:27-28]

Jesus has made it clear that there is a reward for them, and this request is along the lines of that, but it is just that they want the best seats in that. And sitting on the right or left of someone was a picture of the authority and the most prominent places of those who were serving the king. And so yes, they had faith in Christ, but as we will see, it was faith mingled with selfishness. And folks, that is our problem at times too, isn't it? We believe the truth of God, we come to the Lord based on that truth, but yet we mingle it with our selfish desires. And we are going to see that today, that this is a selfish request, although it is in the context of faith based on what Jesus had promised. And you say, "How do you know that is selfish?" Well, remember, look back in Matthew 18—, let's go back there, Matthew 18:1. We see from other passages that these disciples had a problem. They were always trying to figure out who was greatest. They knew that they had a prominent position, they understood that, they were following Jesus, Jesus did not say anything otherwise than that, but within them, they were trying and jockeying for the best positions. And we see in Matthew 18:1, it says:

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"(We see very clearly in parallel passages that they were arguing about who was the greatest. And they come to Jesus to resolve the argument. And you remember the answer?) ***² And He called a child to Himself and set him before them,*** (and that is an infant, that is a baby) ***³ and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted*** (that is turning, that is repenting, become like children, that is total humility) ***you shall not***

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enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. [Matthew 18:1-4]

Those who are the most dependent are the greatest. Now even in Luke chapter 22 we have a troubling scene, you want to turn there, Luke 22:24, this is on the night that Jesus was betrayed. And we see a parallel teaching. The Lord Jesus is gracious. This is the night He is going to be betrayed; this is the night He is going to be handed over and notice what is happening. Luke 22, verse 24. ¹²⁴ **And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest" [Luke 22:24].** They are arguing about who is the greatest. The disciples have a problem. And Jesus is weeding that problem out. And we will see wonderfully later on, they all get it. We see the statement, "It should not be so, and it will not be so among you," and the truth is it was not, because they got it. But the Lord had to weed it out with His Word. So then, with this in mind, we come back and we realize it is a selfish request. The mother wants the guys to be in the most prominent spot; the guys want to be in the most prominent spot, and Jesus is going to reprove them in this as we see in our text.

Again, back to Matthew chapter 20: ²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, bowing down, and making a request of Him. ²¹ And He said to her, 'What do you wish?' She said to Him, 'Command (or literally, "say") that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left.' ²² But Jesus answered and said, 'You do not know what you are asking for.'" That should have stopped them at that point. They probably should have clarified, "What do you mean?" "You do not know what you are asking for." And notice, even without clarification, evidently them not knowing as Jesus said, the Lord asks another question, "'Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?' They said to Him, 'We are able.'" Do not answer rashly, by the way. They said, "We are able." "We are able."

Now, it is my belief that these disciples had a different view of what Jesus was saying concerning the cup. There was the widely understood view that to drink the cup would be to take something in its full measure; that was understood and we see that throughout Scripture. But it is quite possible that they were thinking of this kingdom scene that is in the ancient Near East. You have those who would be on the left and the right, those who are powerful in a kingdom. And they are probably thinking like that, and what would happen when these kings would bring in those powerful people, they would do two things, they would first give them a glass of wine to drink, and then second, they would actually have them bathe. And I think that is why we see in Mark chapter 10, Jesus says, "And be baptized," we will see this, and we will talk about that in a minute. I think that they are thinking very clearly that Jesus is saying, "Are you able to go through this like those, this ritual?" "Yeah, we could drink the cup, yeah, we could do that. Sure, we are able." But that was not what Jesus meant.

Turn again to Mark chapter 10. Mark 10:38. Jesus says they obviously do not understand what He is saying. They do not know what He is saying. And this is what I think is possibly what they are thinking when they so rashly say, "we are able!" Mark chapter 10:38. ³⁸ But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?'" Jesus is thinking of something totally different— being identified

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with this death, to be baptized— but they are thinking of taking the dip! I think that is what it is; I think that they are thinking that Jesus is saying, “Are you able to do this, are you able?” They are saying, “We are able.” But as we saw, Jesus said they do not know what they were asking for. So regardless of what the disciples thought, they did not understand. They thought they were in for a swim, “sure, we are able to do it! We can drink the wine and take the dip, sure we can do it.” And I am not sure about that, but what I do know is that Jesus did not intend it that way. That His intent was concerning this metaphor of a cup, very common metaphor, a metaphor that speaks of taking something to its fullest measure, drinking it completely. It would be used to speak of God’s wrath, the cup of His wrath. It would be used to speak here very clearly of His death. And ²³ He said to them, “My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, (oops. They are going to drink the cup, but the answer they get is not what they asked for) but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.”

Wow, we have a declaration from the living God, that both of these brothers are going to suffer and die in the context of obedience to Christ. His cup was perfect obedience to the will of God as we saw in Philippians chapter 2. He humbled Himself, becoming a bondservant, being obedient to the point of death. And James and John would drink that same cup. Turn to Acts chapter 12. We see the first martyr; this guy Stephen, the first apostle to be martyred. Acts chapter 12. **“Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church, in order to mistreat them. ² And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword [Acts 12:1-2].** We have James drinking the cup that Jesus drank. He is put to death with the sword. We see the apostle John banished to the Isle of Patmos in Revelation, and historical tradition says that Nero boiled him in a vat of oil. They did suffer as Jesus proclaimed; they did drink the cup. Be careful what you ask for and what you agree to, right?

At this point we have a telling response, verse 24 back in Matthew 20: ²⁴ “And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers.” These ten other disciples got hot; they got upset. The term indignant speaks of getting angry, expressing displeasure. They were very angry at James and John, and why were they angry? Because James and John were jockeying for the best positions in the kingdom—the very thing they had been arguing about, and the thing they would argue about even up to the point that Jesus was betrayed. They were hot. And here we see the problem with these disciples. They are selfish. They are selfish. They are looking to advance their own position. They are looking to raise themselves up, even in something that is good—the kingdom of God. But they are selfish. And notice this gives the occasion for our gracious, wonderful Savior to give them and us a lesson about greatness—that is the occasion. Let’s take a look at the lesson.

Verse 25. ²⁵ “But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. ²⁶ “It is not so among you...”” Jesus confronts the wrong thinking of the disciples and that is what He does with us. And we will see He does the exact same thing on the night He was betrayed in Luke chapter 22, the same discussion. Now He addresses their problem, their worldly thinking. He says, “You know...” and actually He called them to Himself, He brought them privately. Now there is a time for a lesson, and the Lord is calling us to Himself privately together here to hear this lesson. “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it

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over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.²⁶ "It is not so among you..." Two parallel maxims of how the world operates concerning greatness. Lording over, and exercising authority over. Now the way these terms are used here in the New Testament are not like the way people perceive them today. In the church these days we have a generalized view of submission, or lack of submission, that anytime anybody in spiritual authority asks someone to do something, it is "lording over!" That is not the point He is making here. We will see very clearly He uses the illustration of the gentile leaders of the time as what lording over is— it is very helpful to us. The term "lord over" comes from the Greek word *kurieuo*, and it has the intensifier *kata*. *Katakurieuo* it speaks of exercising dominion over something; it speaks of even subduing, it is very harsh term. Turn with me to Acts chapter 19. We see this term used in a different context, but we can understand it better. Acts 19:14. And it was used of the demoniacs who subdued these Jewish false brethren in Acts 19. Acts 19, verse 14:

¹⁴ And seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. (That was casting out demons in the name of Jesus.) ¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶ And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and (lorded over, subdued, *kurieuo*, *katakurieuo*) subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. [Acts 19:14-16]

Do not ever try to cast out demons without a relationship with Jesus Christ—and by the way we do not do that now anyway, but we see that here. And the demonic man overpowered them; he subdued them; he lorded over them; he forced himself over that person— that is what this word is talking about. And He says in this passage that "The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over." What did Herod do in Acts chapter 12? We saw he was taking away people in order to punish them and to hurt them, and he killed James. That is lording over. The way the Gentiles were at that time described "lording over," very clearly. It speaks of a tyrannical reign for selfish gain. And that is exactly what elders of the church are commanded not to do, 1 Peter chapter 5.

⁴Therefore, (Peter writes) I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; (so it is according to God's will and not your own will) ³ nor yet as lording it over (*katakurieuo*) those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. [1 Peter 5:1-3]

It spoke of tyrannical reign for selfish gain— subduing, exercising dominion— and the leaders of the Gentiles were tyrannical leaders. When you look at the Roman government at that time, they were tyrannical; you look at Herod, he was tyrannical, a lord— that was the way they did things. And notice He says, and negatively illustrates it also with the term "great men," at the end of verse 25 back in Matthew, "and their great men exercise authority over them." These were men who were great in stature. You know, in the world's eyes, we have lesser men and we have great men. Even in the

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judgment in Revelation chapter 20, we see very clearly “the small and the great” who do not know Christ are brought up and judged for their deeds, and then put in the lake of fire. There are great men in the world’s eyes. And these great men were those who were popular, they were elevated, they had control because of their popularity. And it says, “And their great men exercise authority over them.” Again, *kata*, or *kate* here, *katexousiazo*, authority, but *down* authority. It is not speaking of authority in a general sense, but tyrannical authority. Gentile leaders and great men exhibited this tyrannical authority. This is the way the world functioned at that time, and we have seen it in our days too.

Yet this has been misunderstood in the church also; people think it is lording over, exercising authority, when someone uses Biblical authority. And there is Biblical authority in the church. Paul would share to Timothy that He does not allow women to teach or exercise authority over a man, which implies that men exercise authority. There is a righteous servant authority, and there is an evil, selfish, lording over that those who do not know Christ do by nature. And He is saying, “You guys, this is wrong.” This is wrong, the way you are doing this. And He gives them an illustration. And we see this today in our world, don’t we? We see those in our world, unbelievers, those in business who will step on anybody to get to the top, those who will push down those who are in the way. We see it in politicians; we see it with athletes; we see it with those with notoriety. We see this today also. It is a self-serving focus that puts everyone else own to raise themselves up, and that was what was going on with these men; they were arguing, “Who is the greatest?” Jesus is saying, “Hey, you know the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you.”

Now I believe the NASB has not translated this verse the best. In the Greek text there is a term *de*, it speaks of “and” or “but.” The NASB has it in the present tense; it is really a future tense. And I think the New King James does a good job, “Yet it shall not be so among you,” and I have translated it this way, literally: “but not thus, it will be among you.” This is how the gentiles do it; it is wrong. Not that with you guys-- it will not be that way with you. Future tense. He is saying, “You guys, this is not going to be the way it is with you.” And we will see later on, it was not the way with them, that these apostles were obedient to Christ; they were servant leaders until their death. Not so among you. And we see this for us— not so among us.

Folks, if you are self-serving, if you are trying to elevate yourself, remember what we saw in Matthew. Matthew chapter 18, ⁴ ***“Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest” [Matthew 18:4a]***. That is total dependence in the context of the will of God. Galatians chapter 6, it is on your bulletin. Let me share it, verse 2 and 3: ² ***Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.*** (And he explains,) ³ ***For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself” [Galatians 6:2-3]***. The real issue is pride— pride versus humility. And the disciples were prideful in the possibility of where they might be in the kingdom of heaven, and Jesus needed to show them what true greatness really was in the kingdom. What does God say about selfish ambition? James chapter 3, let’s turn there. James chapter 3. It is not good to be selfishly ambitious, by the way. It is not good at all; it is totally contradictory to our Savior and His kingdom. It is the opposite. James chapter 3:13.

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¹³ **Who among you is wise and understanding?** (He is basically going to say, “Let his behavior be manifested.”) **Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.** ¹⁴ **But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.** ¹⁵ **This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.** ¹⁶ **For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.” [James 3:14-16]**

Who is the greatest? They did not understand; they were thinking in the world’s ways. And Jesus says, “It shall not be so among you.” It is not to be this way among you. It is not to be this way among us. It should never be this way among believers. Never. We need to humble ourselves. 1 Peter 5:5:

⁵ **You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders;** (the women are going through this) **and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.** ⁶ **Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time. [1Peter 5:5-6]**

We are going to see the way up is not up; the way up is down. It is the total opposite, that the first will be last, and the last will be first. We see the same thing in James chapter 4, very clearly— those who have disputes and factions and all that stuff because of their own desires. They pray, but God does not answer because they want to spend it on their own desires. They are adulteresses—friendship with the world, we see. And the solution is He gives a greater grace— “For God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” The reality is there will be many great who will burn in hell, Revelation 20. ⁴² **And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, [Revelation 20:12a].** And we see there is a judgment, Revelation 20. And that those who did not have their name in the book of life through faith in Christ were thrown into the lake of fire. You can be great in this world, and the way the world sees greatness is to push other people down to become great, and that is what these disciples were doing, but not so among you Jesus says.

And at this point He gives the real picture of greatness in the kingdom which is totally opposite to that of the world. It is totally opposite; it is foreign. If you wish to be great, we need to humble ourselves in His kingdom, being servants like Christ. Look at verse 25 again, back in Matthew 20. ²⁵ But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It is not so among you, (or it shall not be so among you. Now look at the contrast, verse 26, in the middle of that) but whoever wishes (that is a desire, whoever desires) to become great among you shall be your servant, (it is hard to translate, and we will talk about that in a minute.) ²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave.’” And that is difficult, right? It does not make sense, initially. You want to become great, in contrast to the world’s way, Jesus now explains.

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Now initially this phrase could be misunderstood if you read through quickly, and I, and we can misunderstand it very easily. It could appear as though He is saying that if you desire to be great in a bad way, you are going to be the least; you are going to be a servant. Now that is true— the first will be last and the last will be first— but that is not what He is saying here, I do not believe. I actually believe He is instructing them on how to be great, and I will show you this. You could literally translate this verse this way, “But whoever wishes to become great among you (i.e. the disciples, that is who He is talking to) then you (singular— it is singular, the person that desires this,) shall become your (plural’s) servant.” The single one desiring to be great shall be the servant of the plural in that group which was the disciples. That is what I think He is saying. If you want to be great, you become the servant of them. That is what He is saying. You want to be great? And then He says in parallel fashion: “Whoever wishes (desires) to be first, (that is, *protos*; you want to be the top,) you shall (singular) shall be (the plural’s) slave. You cannot see that in the English, but it is there in the Greek text.

The road to greatness is in the context of Christ-like humility. And that comes in the context of truly serving according to the will of God. That is the road to greatness in the kingdom. The word “servant” here— *diakonos* means servant— it spoke of those who did the menial tasks, they were the lowest on the order. It was not necessarily a demeaning term; it just spoke of the lowest level of hired help, the least trained, the least qualified who did the menial tasks. It is a simple term: it is one who renders service. We see it in Scripture, *diakonos* or deacon. There are those who are recognized in the church as recognized servants; it speaks of serving. It speaks of serving. This is an extremely important kingdom principle.

And we will see the disciples, although they were sinning, that they did get it. “It shall not be so among you;” it is not going to be that way among you. That is not the way it is going to be, and the same thing for us, brothers and sisters— it is not the way it is going to be. And then He says here in parallel fashion, “²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave;” the term *doulos*, it speaks of a bond-slave. It speaks of one who has been sold over to the will of another. That is much different than a servant— it is a bond-slave— but the concept He is using in parallel. He is speaking about serving. And if you are familiar with the Word of God, you realize that we are bond-slaves of Christ.

The apostle Paul says in Philippians 1,

“Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus,” [Philippians 1:1a]

James 1:1

“James, a bond-servant of God” [James 1:1a]

2 Peter 1:1

“Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,” [2Peter 1:1a]

John writes in Revelation 1:1

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“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants...”
[Revelation 1:1a]

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you are a servant of the living God; you are a bond-slave of Christ. And if you want to be great, then serve those around you. That is what He is saying. You see, when you do not serve, you are trying to elevate yourself and your life and your own ways— isn't that true? You are elevating your own agenda; you are elevating whatever it is. When you see others as more important than yourself, you start to see, very clearly, the attitude of Christ. The reality is the apostles recognized they were slaves of Christ. The Scripture reveals that we are bond-slaves. That Jesus Christ has purchased us with His blood. Acts chapter 20, ***“He purchased [us] with His own blood” (Acts 20:28b)***. 1 Corinthians 6:19: ***“¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” [1Corinthians 6:19-20]***. All throughout Scripture, true believers are spoken of as servants and slaves of a good Master— a Master who, as we will see, died for us. It is one thing to be a slave or a servant to a bad master; it is a wonderful thing to be slave or servant to a good master. When you obediently are about the Father's will, serving His body as we see in Scripture, when you are obediently humbled to His commands, this is how one is the greatest. When you are dependent on Christ alone in obedience to His Word, this is how one is the greatest. And this mindset is the mindset of Christ. What is your view of what Bob shared earlier? Turn to Philippians chapter 2. This is the mindset that we are to have, and we need to be convicted because of what we see is happening to the apostles; they were not having that mindset, and Jesus was correcting them with His Word, and He is correcting us with His Word. Philippians 2:2,

² If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, (and the way it is phrased, the answer is yes, it is an automatic answer) ***if there is any consolation of love,*** (and the answer is yes) ***if there is any fellowship of the Spirit,*** (the answer is yes) ***if any affection and compassion,*** (yes—if this is all true, Paul says,) ***² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.*** (What do we have here? The purpose) ***Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit,*** (Nothing in your life should be for yourself. Nothing. Nothing. You want to be great? He says here,) ***but with humility*** (see how humility is used?) ***of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; ⁴ do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. [Philippians 2:2-4]***

We have been called to serve Christ in this life. Our existence, our entire existence on earth is about serving Christ. You want to be great in the kingdom? Serve. Not out of your own strength, but in humility, total dependence: “The one who humbles himself like this child,” totally dependent. It is not “Now, I am going to go out and I am going to do all this stuff for Christ—” that is not what Jesus is saying in context. Now Jesus is not saying that at this point we should all run away to a monastery or something and serve the Lord in some removed fashion. Service to the living God is in the context of obedience to His Word, and we have commands in many areas in which we serve and obey Him. God has commanded men to work. We have commands how we are to raise our children; we have

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commands very clearly on how we are to serve the body of Christ. 1 Peter 4:10 ¹⁰ ***As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God*** [1Peter 4:10]. You want to be the greatest? Serve. That is what He is saying. See, kingdom greatness comes through humility and Christ-likeness. And we will see very clearly that Christ came and did not do His will, but the Father's will unto the point of death for us. He did not come to be served, but to serve. Here we see the application very specifically, verse 28, back in Matthew 20:

²⁸ ***just as*** (here is the example— this is why, I believe (verse 27), He is speaking about serving, not being the lowest— if we have that mindset of trying to be the greatest. If you want to be the greatest then serve, and Jesus says, “Look, here is the perfect example... Just as”) ***the Son of Man did not come*** (by the way, to come, that means you had to be somewhere else. God the Son took on human flesh, He came to this earth, and He says here, just as the Son of Man did not come...) ***to be served***, (He did not come for everyone to serve Him, but it says very clearly) ***but to serve***, (that is our word *diakoneo*) ***and to give His life a ransom for many.*** [Mat 20:28]

Now some might say the terms “to serve” and “to give a ransom” are parallel, the same thing, and that is possible. Is He saying that giving His life is the serving? That is possible, but the reality is He served the Father from day one to the point where He culminated that service by giving His life a ransom. And the term “ransom” is a wonderful word, *lutron*. It spoke of a price being paid to release one slave from captivity. And it is very interesting in parallel form. You see, sometimes in the Greek language you will see “one” and “many—” it is a way to make a parallel statement, and that has caused people to have differing opinions about the extent of the atonement. But it is very normal to say in light of one— rather than one— *many*; that is kind of a normal way to say it. And what is really wonderful in this passage is the word, “for their—” it is not our usual word, “for,” it is the word, *anti*, which carries the sense of, “instead of.” Jesus Christ came to voluntarily give His life and pay the price *instead of the many*.

What is the price? God makes it clear: “The wages of sin is death” [Romans 6:23a]. Jesus Christ — “bore our sins in His body on the cross” [1 Peter 2:24a]; He was the substitute, the perfect lamb; He paid the price. 1 Peter chapter 1, let's turn there. He paid the ransom for you and I, instead of us paying it. Instead. God holds us accountable for our sin, and if you reject this you will pay the price forever in hell. But He paid it *instead*. 1 Peter 1:17:

¹⁷ ***And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth;*** ¹⁸ ***knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers,*** ¹⁹ ***but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.*** ²⁰ ***For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times*** (notice this) ***for the sake of you.*** [1Peter 1:17-20]

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He came to serve, not to be served, and to give His life a ransom. That is the mindset of Christ, and that is the mindset that we should have. If you keep your life you will lose it; if you give up your life you will gain it. Jesus gave His life for us. We are to walk in love, also, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, Ephesians chapter 5. An offering, a sacrifice, a fragrant aroma. You want to be the greatest? Then serve Christ obediently and humbly. That is the reality of being the greatest in the kingdom.

Now this passage has some interesting things in there: He says “to give His life a ransom for many.” And I have already shared that those terms in Greek are used, “one” and “many,” it is a way to say things, but many have said that Jesus only died for those many and not everyone, so we need to answer those questions. And we are not going to get into it and argue about it like people do, but if this was the only passage in Scripture that said He died for the many, then I would say, “You know what, He died for the many,” even with that understanding with that Greek portion. But very clearly we see more in Scripture concerning the atonement.

John 3:16:

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever (the whosoever, not that everyone in the world, but whosoever) believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. [John 3:16]

1 John chapter 2, very clear:

¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. [1John 2:1-2]

1 Timothy chapter 2, and this is the same word “ransom” used here. 1 Timothy chapter 2, turn there with me for a moment. 1 Timothy chapter 2. I am not saying that everyone’s sins are forgiven. We know that it is only through faith in Christ that one is transferred from darkness into light, that one is redeemed. That is the reality that God lays forth in His word. There is no salvation apart from Him; it is in His name alone that we are saved. 1 Timothy 2:1:

¹ First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (That is a hard one to get around.) ⁵ For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time. [1Timothy 2:1-6]

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The reality is, regardless of your view — it does not matter, that only those who put their faith in Christ will have His blood apply to their lives. The bottom line after all is said and done— forget all the theological arguing— the bottom line is that it is only those who placed their faith in Christ who have the price paid for their ransom. So forget all that arguing, theological arguing, go back to our passage here: Jesus Christ came to serve, not be served. And if we spend our time arguing about the theology and not catch this part, we have missed it all. He came to serve not be served.

Someday you will die. And if you have not repented of your sins you will be held accountable for every word, every deed, forever— you will pay the price which is death, and the ultimate price is the second death which is the lake of fire. But Jesus Christ bore your sin in your place; He paid the price in your place, *anti*, He the one for the many. He came to serve by giving His life. And He is the perfect example of the mindset that we should have, the mind of Christ. Again, let's look at Philippians chapter 2 to finish. Philippians chapter 2.

⁵ Have this attitude (or really the word is “mind,” thinking,) **in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus**, (this is what we should be thinking, instead of our will, how we order our day, whatever it is, this should be our mindset) **⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form** (what, of a *doulos*,) **of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [Philippians 2:5-8]**

Do you want to know what serving looks like? Look at Christ. He was humbly obedient to the Father's will—that is what serving is. And God's Word reveals God's will; we have it all throughout. There is no excuse. You want to be great? Humble yourself before His mighty hand. By His power and strength obey Him and serve Him. Make your entire life about serving Christ. Not in your own way— you can go off in a worldly way and accept this whole paradigm of serving— I am talking about humble, dependent obedience to the Word of God concerning what He says.

And although these apostles did not initially get it; we see they had to be re-taught on the night he was betrayed, and you can read that in Luke 22, the very same explanation. He says, “It shall not be so among you,” and it was not so among them— they got it when they had the Spirit of God. Very clearly, Peter got it. 1 Peter 4:10: ¹⁰ “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Do you desire to be great in the kingdom? Humble yourself. The way up is down. The first will be last and the last, first. The humble will be exalted in their proper time. So how does one become great? First, realize the world's view of greatness is totally opposite of Christ's. It is not a step-on-raise-yourself-up-top-down-lording-over, it is a humble servanthood of those around you, as Christ being our perfect example who gave Himself a ransom.

Some of you are on the precipice of judgment today. Your sin has not been paid for. Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross; He paid the price in your place. He calls out to you to repent, to turn from sin to Him, to call out, crying His name, “Lord Jesus, save me!” Whoever will call on the name of the Lord

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will be saved. "Save me from my sin! I deserve Your wrath Lord God; I believe Your Son bore my sins on the cross." Cry out to Christ. He will save you. Totally humble, like a little child: I cannot do it. And then you want to be great in the kingdom? The same thing— totally humble— humble obedience to the Word of God. Brother and sister do you serve Christ? Or do you serve yourself? Are you trying to gain a position in your life, do what you do over other people? It should not be so among us, right? Just as Christ did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom.

Leaders in the church, we have model of servant-humility. There is leadership; there is authority, but it is not top-down. It is not the "Senior blah blah blah" stuff. It is through serving; it is through obediently going about what God has called you to do. Brothers and sisters, God has called each one of us to serve in many facets. Take care of our families according to His Word; to serve in the body of Christ according to His will. If you are not serving according to His will by His strength, you are not the greatest. You want to be great? The only way to be great is to be like Christ, the great One, and to trust in Him.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank You for Your Word. I just pray that anyone here whose life is not about serving You, Lord, their view of serving is skewed because of sin, I just pray they would confess, that they would humble themselves. "Lord God, my life is not about serving You as You have ordained in Your Word; I am sorry. Help me to obey Your Word." Father I just pray in that, I pray that You would pierce our hearts, and for each one of us— we all are tempted to be conformed to this world. We all are tempted to elevate ourselves. Lord, convict us when we do it, that we would repent. That we would humble ourselves before You, that we would be here on this earth to serve and not be served. May this body be a body that serves You. Obediently, based on what Your Word has said. May we humble ourselves before You in every area of our lives. May Your Word direct us exactly how You desire us to serve. Thank you for Your Word. Thank You for Your Son, and it is in His name we pray, amen.

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