

Luke 22:23-30
A Kingdom of Servants

23 Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing.

24 Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.

25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.'

26 "But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.

27 "For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.

28 "But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials.

29 "And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me,

30 "that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

There is one place in Fayetteville I hate going with my kids. It's not the doctor's office. I refer to it by the nickname: "Cheese E. Rat" Now I don't hate "Chuck's place" because it's terrible value for money. I mean you stick token after token into these machines, and then when you've finally got about 10,000 of these tickets, you go up to the counter and find that you are still roughly 1 million tickets shy of the CD player, but you can get a tiny plastic spider worth maybe 1/3 of a cent. I also don't hate it because after your child is finished crawling through the human habitrail, they are all sticky and smell like used sweatsocks. I hate it because the whole place seems to bring out all the worst manifestations of selfishness in young children. So much so that I have difficulty understanding how any parent could spend a couple of hours at Cheese E. Rats and not come away convinced that the doctrine of total depravity is true. The whole place is "I want this" "Its my turn" "Give me another token" ad infinitum.

I always expect to see a circle with the words "please" and "excuse me" and "thank you" in it and a red line going through the middle. Maybe it just whenever I go, but I don't think so. Maybe you're saying well Andy, you're just overreacting to the ongoing breakdown of civility and manners in our culture, and there's probably a lot of truth in that. But what I think has more to do with it is the fact that at heart, we are not inclined to put others first, or to be inherently selfless. So that when you put children in a situation where they are literally surrounded by temptations to selfishness, what you tend to get is selfish behavior.

But its not just kids who are suceptable to selfishness is it? No. They just haven't learned to control and cloak and rationalize it as well as most adults can. We are going through the Case for Kids parenting class on Wednesday nights, and on the video we are watching the presenter Tedd Tripp was pointing out how silly it really is when we grab our kids after they've been fighting over a toy and say "How could you be so selfish???" when we ourselves do things like racing to grab the best parking spot, or making sure that when the desert comes round we got the best portion, or even when we say, "this is my time to watch the game." In fact far too often, even when we do sacrifice something, we want recognition for it, and if we don't get it, there is going to be trouble, *cause we deserve it*. You see at no point is that "self-less" behavior, when we are doing something for recognition, self has everything to do with it.

It's helpful to remember that when we read passages like this, because otherwise we might be tempted to say how on earth could the Apostles be so crass and just **SELFISH** as to be arguing over which of

them was the greatest after Jesus has just gotten through telling them that He is about to lay down His life as a sacrifice for their sins, and that one of their own number is going to betray Him. They have, in a matter of moments gone from “*Lord is it I?*” to “*No, I’m the greatest because...*”

Now, Jesus knows that we have that fallen human inclination to selfishness and pride, and so here on the eve of His own crucifixion Jesus teaches them and us about the nature of true Christian greatness. He did it first with an illustration that isn’t recorded in Luke, it is recorded in John 13. He got up and he took a towel and he washed the feet of the disciples. An action of enormous significance. Because washing feet was a duty that was reserved for the very lowest slave in the house. It was so menial, that other slaves would object to being forced to do it. And yet here is Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Kings, washing the smelly feet of Galileean fishermen. If God is willing to stoop to perform such a task to teach us a lesson, then we had better be willing to listen.

He tells them first, that the practice of Lording it over others, or demanding that others revere you is something that marks the Gentile world. And here the distinction isn’t between the Jews and the Gentiles, Jesus after all had drawn attention to the fact that the Pharisees to Lord it over the people and have all the best things themselves. Rather by Gentiles Jesus is making a distinction between the way the People of God act and the way Worldlings act.

Christ’s reference to the title of benefactor is a probably reference to the Ptolemies, the Greeks who ruled Egypt after Alexander the Great. Cleopatra was the last of these Ptolemy rulers, but for instance Ptolemy III had actually adopted the title *Euergetes – Benefactor*. Titles of the Ptolemies ranged from Soter “Savior” the title of Ptolemy I to Epiphanies “God Manifest” of Ptolemy V. But in all things the worldly kings in their coinage and their titles implied a status and an honor that belongs to God alone. In fact the coinage of Rome was particularly despised by the Jews because of the amongst the titles the Caesars affected were “God” in the case of Augustus, and “deserving adoration” in the case of Tiberius.

Jesus is quite explicit about this, saying essentially, “that’s them – NOT YOU!” In the kingdom of God there is an entirely different standard for greatness, instead of striving to be honored, to have titles, to be served by others, you should be instead striving to serve and instead of being selfish, to die to self. To put others ahead of you whenever you can.

Again Jesus uses an illustration he says, who is greater, the customer or the waiter? Or in this context, the Master or the Slave who serves him his dinner? Everybody there knows the answer, the Master of course! And yet here is their own Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, who has come not to be served, but to serve others. He humbled himself that he might become the sacrifice to save them from their sins. There has never been a greater act of service. The distance between us and God is infinite, and so God had to make an infinite stoop to dwell amongst us and save us from our sins.

In light of that, how silly are we if we imagine that we are too important to serve others? ***Sometimes when I’m feeling that I don’t have enough, I’m reminded that when the King of Kings was ministering here on earth, he started his life in a stable, walked everywhere he needed to go on foot, and had nowhere to lay His head.***

Jesus is compassionate, and having rebuked them, he goes on to encourage the disciples. He does not wish to crush them, only to correct them. And so he commends them. As weak as their faith was at times, they did not desert him, they didn’t leave him when he taught hard things. They knew he had the

words of life and they clung to him even though it meant leaving their homes, and their jobs, and their comforts. And even though it will mean taking up their own crosses and dying for the gospel. Jesus tells them, your service has not been in vain, and here the disciples are promised that a singular honor will be bestowed upon them in the kingdom. When he returns and when the kingdom has come in all its fullness, the Apostles will rule with him. And here the word Judge means what it means in the book of Judges someone who sat and ruled as a shepherd of God's flock.

As just a brief aside notice let me make a comment on verse 30, there is as you know a brand of theology called dispensationalist that would seek to divide the people of God into two forever distinct groups. The Jews and the Gentiles, and which in essence says that the Jews are the first class citizens of the kingdom and that the Gentiles are an afterthought, God's plan B. Now there is a sense in which the Jews were very privileged in a worldly sense, to them was given the Law and the Prophets, they had the Gospel preached to them first. And yet whenever we have visions of the kingdom after the return of Christ, you don't see a division into two classes, in fact the language that is used to describe the people of God in the Old Testament, for instance the twelve tribes of Israel, is applied to all the people of God. Because when you as a Gentile were redeemed, although you were once far off you became a Son of Abraham as well. Paul labors to make that point in Galatians 3:

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

So when we read of the 12 tribes here, it doesn't mean that the Apostles will only be put over the Jewish believers, rather it means that they will serve as Judges for all the redeemed that one people of God in whom there is no longer a division.

Applications:

1) ***I hope you see how central selflessness is to the Christian faith.*** And how this puts paid to the whole Give to Get movement – We do not become Christians in order to have our worldly desires satisfied. In fact, if the only reason we give is that we might get something in return, we are guilty of doing exactly the same thing the Pharisees did. “widows mites”

To Ministers -

It shows that the true minister of Christ is not a Lord over the Flock, but a servant, a Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Now it is vital that there be leadership in the church, but not like the worldly leadership. That shows what a disaster it was when the ancient church jettisoned the biblical church government and adopted the hierarchical government of Ancient Rome. Instead of Elders and Deacons, she now had Bishops, and Arch Bishops or Metropolitans, and then finally Cardinals and Popes. She multiplied titles and exaltations for herself.

It is vital that ministers remember who they are and that they are here to serve not to be served:

“Their works are but a ministration to the church, in putting the laws of Christ relating to it in execution, and it is their greatest honor to be humble” – Matthew Poole

To Individual Christians:

“The hero in Christ's army is not the man who has rank, and title, and dignity, and chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. It is the man who looks not on his own things, but the things of others. It is the man who is kind to all, tender to all, thoughtful for all, with a hand to help all, and a heart to feel for all. It is the man who spends and is spent to make the vice and misery of the world less, to bind up the broken-hearted, to befriend the friendless, to cheer the sorrowful, to enlighten the ignorant, and to raise the poor. This is the truly great man in the eyes of God. The world may ridicule his labors and deny the sincerity of his motives. But while the world is sneering, God is pleased. This is the man who is walking most closely in the steps of Christ.” – JC Ryle

That humility the world knows nothing of, and it can only happen in a heart that is regenerated. That is truly captivated by the great act of service that Christ gave.