

Mark 10:35-45 The Measure of Greatness Falls Church AM 3/19/2023

Greatness. The Greatest of all time, the Goat. The highest scoring athlete, the best actress, the most gifted musician, the most sales, the largest influence.

What does God say about Greatness?

Greatness is a theme of Mark 8, 9, and 10.

Let me take you back to Mark 8:29, when Jesus asked the disciples, “*Who do you say that I am? Peter answered Him, “You are the Christ.”*”

Peter might as well have said, “You are the truly great One!”

For Peter, greatness meant power. No one could defeat Jesus or stop Jesus. Jesus would free His people from the oppression of the Romans. The disciples agreed with Peter’s measure of greatness. Peter had something to learn.

So, in Mark 8:31, Jesus “...*began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected...*” the disciples were still tracking with Jesus. It still made sense. Suffer some? Sure. Hard battle? Rejected by current leaders? Sure. It was not until Jesus got to His next point of teaching that the disciples began to show their disagreement with God’s measure of greatness.

In Mark 8:31, it is recorded the precise point when Jesus lost them. The Son of Man must suffer. Okay. Be rejected. Okay. “...*and be killed, and after three days rise again.*”

Wait. Back up. Be killed?

When you watch a movie about a hero, does the hero die, before helping everyone? Of course not, that does not make a movie. It is just a sad clip.

The great one does not die. That is not the measure of greatness.

Jesus says, yes, it is. The measure of greatness is to die and rise again.

What was the response of the disciples?

In Mark 8, Peter responded by taking Jesus aside and rebuking Jesus!

Fastforward to Mark 9:31, where Jesus taught the 2nd time out of 3 times that the great Son of Man would be killed, and after 3 days He will rise. But the disciples “...*did not understand the saying.*”

Now look at the 3rd time Jesus taught about the measure of greatness. Mark 10:33...the son of man will be delivered...and they will condemn Him to death...And they will kill him...and after 3 days He will rise.

The main point of our sermon has been made clear. **Our Lord’s measure of greatness is serving.** Do you think the disciples grasped it this 3rd time? No.

1. Selfish demands are out of place in serving Christ. (v.35-37)

Verse 35, two disciples asked Jesus to do for them whatever they asked!

No, the disciples did not yet understand the lesson on greatness.

They wanted Jesus the great one, to do great things for them.

They asked for a blank check.

Remember in Mark chapter 6, when foolish King Herod told a woman to ask for anything she wished, and the silly king would give it to her? The king gave the woman a blank check, and the woman asked for her enemy to be killed!

But there is a contrast here. That king Herod in chapter 6, decided to put himself under a wide-open commitment. But here in chapter 10, what is different about the disciples is that they were trying to get Jesus to commit beforehand, even before telling Jesus what they wanted.

Whatever we ask you, you do.

What a demand! It is unethical. It is illegal. It is discourteous.

What contract would hold up in court, if the amount of money was not specified? Blind promises are wrong.

So, in verse 36, Jesus is wise and right to not commit Himself. Instead, Jesus asked a question. What is the task you want me to do for you?

Tell me the arrangement. Be more specific. Out with it.

Verse 37, places in heaven! One to sit at Your right hand, one to sit at Your left hand, in glory.

The disciples have the same hearts as Adam, who ate the fruit because he wanted to be like God. The same heart which we were all born in Adam. We demand things from Christ, instead of being willing to serve Christ. We ask Christ to give us a different life scenario than the one that we have. I am sick, make me healthy, I am poor, give me money, I am single, give me a spouse, I am childless, give me children, I want grandchildren, I want retirement, I want a legacy, I want respect, I want, I want. We don't want to follow Jesus if it means amounting to a nobody!

These two disciples did not want to follow Jesus if it means having a regular place in heaven. They wanted the 2nd and 3rd seats of glory. They wanted greatness! Their measure of greatness was being able to ask for something you want, and getting it.

Little did they understand that greatness is the opposite. Greatness is finding something that another person needs, and providing it to that other person.

Were these disciples serving self or serving others?

Who did they want in the two most honorable places? Not Andrew, not Peter, not Philip or Bartholomew, or Matthew or Thomas. No. Themselves. To James and John. Consider the selfish ambition here!

Why did they sign up to follow Jesus?

Freeze. Let me ask you that question. Why did you sign up to follow Jesus?

If you signed up to follow Jesus in order to get something like glory, honor, position, prestige, power, authority, influence, access, or attention, then your measure of greatness is what Jesus can give to you.

But if you signed up to follow Jesus in order to serve Him and serve others, in the strength that Jesus supplies, then you have found the true measure of greatness.

Most people wake up every morning wanting greatness, but not being willing to help others.

Only those changed by Christ's death and resurrection wake up every morning wanting to help others. Only those are great ones.

Helping others is costly. Living a great life requires paying a price. That brings us to our second point, from verses 38-41.

2. God serves us a cup of suffering to drink. (v.38-41)

It is costly to serve others. A price must be paid. There is a cup to drink.

First of all, we have to lay down our sinful, selfish earthly ambitions.

Second, we have to become familiar with suffering. We have to receive suffering, like a cup that we drink. We have to bear the marks of suffering, like baptism that we receive.

Verse 38, Jesus asked James and John are you able to bear it? Can you take it? Can you withstand it? Are you ready for the life of suffering that it will take?

Verse 39, the disciples answered yes, they were ready, able, and willing.

Then Jesus replied by saying that suffering is unavoidable.

Then, in verse 40, Jesus returned to answering their exact question about the seats of honor in heaven. Those are not for Jesus to grant! Rather, those seats are reserved for those for whom it has been prepared.

Wait. What? Jesus the great one, cannot grant the seats on his left and right?

That is like saying Giannis could not request a court-side seat for his family.

If Jesus cannot grant those seats, who can? It is God the Father!

Do you catch why Jesus is saying that?

If Jesus carried the ability to assign all the seats, then Jesus would assign to Himself a seat that did not require this cup of suffering for Jesus Himself to drink!

Jesus was assigned the seat. Jesus was assigned the cup.

Jesus was assigned the suffering that is coming.

Jesus was assigned by His Father to become the Son of Man and the Suffering servant. Jesus was anointed as the Christ, the Messiah.

This place on the cross was reserved for Jesus, and after that, the resurrection.

Once Jesus was raised again, and ascended, then, and only then would the place of honor be granted to Jesus.

How dare these two disciples ask for glory, without suffering?

Who did James and John think that they were, that they could follow Jesus to the glory, without first following Jesus to the suffering?

Here is the point of Jesus. God serves us a cup of suffering to drink!

Drink it.

If the Son of Man cannot get to the seat of glory without first going to the cross, then we His followers cannot get to our seats in heaven's glory, without first going to our crosses.

Jesus had said this to them in Mark 8:34, "*If anyone would come after Me, let him deny Himself and take up his cross and follow Me.*"

Jesus drank a cup of bitter suffering. Are the disciples willing to drink that? A request for glory is a request for suffering.

Paul understood this, as we read in Colossians 1:24, "*...I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the church....*"

A desire to be a leader, is putting in an order for more pain in your life!

For the disciples to be great, they would need to be more like Christ, deny themselves more, take up their cross, do what God called them to do, and in all of this, to follow Jesus more closely than before. An important aspect of the measure of greatness is accepting the suffering that God gives us to drink.

In the case of James, we read in Acts 12:2, that King Herod "*...killed James...with the sword.*" And in the case of the apostle John, his banishment to the island of Patmos as we read in Revelation 1:9, "*I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*"

In other words, Jesus foretold that these two men would later drink various cups of suffering.

And more immediately, verse 41 tells us that the other ten disciples were very angry at James and John. So, their suffering started right away!

God serves us each a unique cup of suffering to drink.

3. The great ones are always serving others. (v.42-45)

You know who should be angry? Jesus!

But instead, Jesus was very tender with them.

We are told what Jesus did next. Verse 42, "*...Jesus called them to Him and said... 'You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.'*"

So, Jesus is the tender Shepherd who loves His sheep. He called The Twelve to Himself to talk with them.

This is in contrast to the way of worldly leaders, about whom Jesus spoke then! The worldly leaders spend all of their energy getting to the top. Then, once they are in charge, they cause everyone around them to feel the weight of their authority. Jesus used the phrase "lord it over." Have we not all had such a boss in our past? The type of boss is the one who exercises his authority. I had a boss like

that in the army when I was stationed briefly in Iraq. There were four people in our tent, and he made us 3 pull guard duty for 24 hours a day, even though the camp already provided guards all around us. Why? Because he had the authority to do so! He wanted to show us the power of a Lieutenant Colonel! That is a worldly leader.

Jesus knew all about this. So did the disciples. So do you.

This is a certain measure of greatness. How many people could a CEO call in on the weekend to work overtime and overnight? How many people could you hire and fire?

How many people can you command? How many people can you make feel the squeeze of your influence?

Look carefully at what Jesus called them in verse 42, *“those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles.”*

There are people who consider them rulers, but not Jesus. Jesus calls them considered rulers, or supposed rulers, or so-called rulers.

Jesus is saying – that is not greatness.

This is greatness...verses 43-44, *“whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.”*

Greatness in the kingdom of God is obtained by pursuing the exact opposite course of action than what is followed by the unbelieving world.

Greatness consists in self-giving.

The measure of greatness is in the outpouring of self in service to others, for the glory of God alone.

To be great means to love.

The Christian is the humble attendant to all.

In doing this, isn't the Christian following the footsteps of His Lord and Savior?

Yes, that is the very point that Jesus stresses in the famous statement of verse 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.”*

This shows that the humiliation of Christ on the cross was the salvation of His people, and also our example, and also our motivation!

From all eternity Christ is in Himself the all-glorious One, and yet He humbled Himself. He took on human flesh and became a newborn baby. This was not with the purpose of being served, but rather with the purpose of serving. He came in order to give his life as a ransom for many. His life in exchange for our lives. His life given in place of our lives. Christ is our substitutionary atonement. His death on the cross is the price that was paid.

Jesus was teaching His disciples that He came from heaven in order to rescue them from the curse of God upon their sins, and gain for them the blessings of God for their souls and bodies throughout all eternity future.

Notice the word “many.” This salvation is not for all people. It is for believers. It is for many. Jesus put Himself in the place of many, and many were in fact saved by his self-sacrifice. Christ’s self-sacrifice was voluntary.

This ransom was paid to God the Father, whose justice required that sins be punished properly.

In this context of Jesus teaching His disciples, the willingness to humble self and giving ourselves in service to others is expected in our own small degrees and in our own manner by every follower of Christ. Since Christ served others, we must serve them also.

Conclusion: Three applications – we look to Christ as our Savior, our teacher, and our example.

1. We look to Christ as our Savior. Remember that Christ is the measure of greatness, and He came to serve You by taking the punishment for your sins. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “*Remove this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.*” Mark 14:36 And in Luke 12:50, Jesus said, “*I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!*” By that cup, by that baptism, by that death, Jesus made a full and complete satisfaction for all of our countless wrongs. When He hung there on the cross, He hung there as our substitute. Christ has paid our debt. The ransom was accepted. We are set free in Christ our Savior. Have you trusted in Christ alone to cleanse your soul from wrongs? You are invited to follow the great one right now, by placing your faith in Him. We look to Christ as our Savior.

2. We look to Christ as our Teacher. He taught us the opposite of our culture’s perspective on greatness. We need to let go of our understanding of greatness that is from the world. Jesus taught us the reverse - that greatness is measured by how far we are willing to humble ourselves to help others. Jesus was willing to come from heaven to earth, and then to the cross and the grave in order to serve us. That is the measure of greatness. You want to please and honor the Lord with your life? You want to do something great for God? Christ taught us that our desire to be a leader is actually a pledge to accept the suffering God gives us while we serve others. Jesus taught us that there is suffering for us to undergo, while we serve others. Jesus taught us that we need Him for strength to keep serving, because in our own strength we cannot drink the cup, and we cannot endure the baptism. Christ taught us not to be over-confident in our own abilities. Christ taught us not

to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Christ taught us not to boast in our own strength. Rather than what James and John said in our passage today that they can do it, the truth instead is what Paul later wrote in Philippians 4:13, “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*” We look to Christ our Teacher, who teaches us to remain dependent on Him always.

3. We look to Christ as our Example. We keep watching for opportunities to serve Him by serving others. We serve willingly, like Christ did. We serve willingly, as God would have us. We serve eagerly, looking to Christ as our example. We serve faithfully, understanding that we will receive the unfading crown of glory. We serve humbly, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. True greatness is not in being the one in charge. True greatness is following Christ’s example of devoting ourselves to the wonderful work of lessening the sorrow of others, increasing the joy of all around us, and rejoicing only that are names are written in heaven. True greatness is found in Christlike people who distribute kindness, mercy, tenderness, love, joy and peace. We look to Christ as our Example.