

INTRODUCTION

EXPOSITION

I. THE DISCIPLES SAD DISPUTE – v.24

- Context: the Last Supper, before Jesus' betrayal, trial and crucifixion. This is amazing, seeing that at the same supper they are questioning themselves about who would betray Him.
- A dispute among them [the apostles] = Gk. philoneikia = "readiness or desire to argue or quarrel" (Louw-Nida). This was more than a discussion, but had escalated to a heated argument. The dispute was...
- Which of them should be considered the greatest (Gk. megas) = most important, most influential, greatest in esteem and rank. Obviously there were those who had their strong opinion, either regarding themselves or others among the disciples, and now in the midst of the supper were arguing about it.
- Remember that these were Jesus' closest disciples, those who had been with Him throughout His ministry, and saw His example. At the same supper in which Jesus was demonstrating His humility, and that He is about to die they were jockeying for position as leaders. A similar incident had happened previously (Mt.18:1; 20:28), and Jesus corrected them. Now, at this time, when they should be focusing on the greatness of Christ, they are arguing about their greatness.

...at this very season, the last quiet time they could spend with their Master before His death, this little flock begins a contention who should be the greatest! Such is the heart of man, ever weak, ever deceitful, ever ready, even at its best times, to turn aside to what is evil. – J.C. Ryle

- Sadly, the Lord's correction did not end the dispute. We have record of the church at Corinth debating over who was the best and most influential teacher in the church (1Cor1:11-13). John wrote of a man named Diotrephes who "loved to have the preeminence" (3John9). Authority structures have emerged in the history of the church where leaders are exalted and almost (if not wholly) worshipped. (Note: the Roman Catholic Church's answer is Peter as the first Pope, but is refuted in this very passage). Men have taken to themselves unbiblical titles like "Eminence", "Lord", "Reverend", and "Father" to be a title of authority.
- What is striking is that even the apostles were not called "Apostle Paul" but "Paul, an apostle." They recognized the difference between an office and a title. This is one reason I prefer in my salutations to write "Stephen Gambill, Pastor" rather than "Pastor Stephen Gambill." I have a name, and hold an office. I do not consider it disrespect for you to call me by my name.

II. JESUS' CORRECTIVE RESPONSE

- We should be in wonder at Jesus' response, in the self-control He exercised. Rather than rebuking them, He patiently instructs them.

A. Greatness in the Kingdom is Exercised Through Service - vv.25-27

- They were thinking about their positions in relation to the authority structures of the nations. Because they understood (wrongly) that the Messiah's Kingdom was going to take the socio-political form of other kingdoms, they wrongly concluded that there would be similar structures in the church.
- What He does is make a paradigm (or example) correction. They were modeling their view of the kingdom after the "kings of the Gentiles." Jesus says three things about these rulers.
 - 1.) They "exercise lordship." This is a single word (Gk. kurieuo) meaning have power over, lord it over, dictate to, have dominion over.
 - 2.) They "exercise authority" (Gk. exousiadzo) which means have power over, be master of.
 - 3.) They require the title of "Benefactor" (Gk. eurgetays), which was an official title that some rulers required their subjects to call them. This was the equivalent of forcing people to recognize their goodness to them.
- In summary, the people existed to serve the ruler. He was their Lord, he was their authority, he was the one upon whom they depended and looked to. In these cases it included such things as wealth, prestige and great honor.
- This was the example that they were using to think about their place in the Kingdom, and Jesus says this is the wrong way of thinking. He says "not so among you" and "on the contrary." He has a different pattern for them to follow, one very different than the world's form. This includes two things:
 - 1.) He who is greatest is to be as the younger. Jesus affirms that there is such a thing as greatness. But their greatness will be marked by a very different spirit. Instead of acting like the greatest, they are to be as the younger. In that cultural setting, labor and service was for the young (along with the most difficult tasks) and honor was to be bestowed on the older. Those who are truly great in the Kingdom will be those who labor and willingly take the more arduous and difficult tasks. They don't demand their ~~writes~~ ^{writes}, but joyfully take up the position of the younger.
 - 2.) He who governs as he who serves. Again Jesus affirms that in the church there will be those who govern. This is so not only during the time of the apostles, but also through the elders in our own day. But the governing of the

church is to be viewed as service to them. This is the word (Gk. diakoneo) from which we derive our word "deacon." It means to serve, wait on, care for, see after, provide for. It was a term used for a table waiter.

- From this general pattern, Jesus moves to His own example as a paradigm breaker. While in His "humiliation", He was marked not as an earthly king, but as a servant, ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of others.
- He refers to the ordinary way of how people think about service and position. When you have someone at a table, and someone is serving them, we ordinarily think about a kind of superiority of the one being served. But Jesus breaks that pattern, and though He is the greatest, He sits among them as one who serves. This is more gloriously demonstrated in John's account of the washing of the disciples' feet (John 13).

B. Greatness in the Kingdom is Experienced Through Trials - v.28

- Jesus identifies the overall tone and thrust of His ministry as that of "My trials." Is53:3, referring to Jesus' earthly ministry says that "He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him."
- There is here an implicit compliment to His disciples. Even in the midst of their foolish disputing, and knowing of their coming betrayal, He encourages them.
If we are true believers, let us know that He looks at our graces more than at our faults, that he pities our infirmities, and that He will deal with us according to our sins. - J.C. Ryle
- Jesus refers to the fact that His Father had given to Him a kingdom. That Kingdom included this time of struggle and trial in this world. And now Jesus gives to them a Kingdom, and their experience will not be unlike His own experience. These trials would continue to be the calling of the apostles, who would suffer, be despised, and mocked by the world. This would not end after Jesus rose from the dead, but continue to be the calling of true disciples.

C. Greatness in the Kingdom is Realized in the End - v.29

- This suffering and struggle is not without purpose or goal. It is that those who do so, living out the Kingdom in this world would one day eat and drink at Christ's table and Kingdom.
- The battle would not continue forever, but Jesus promises a day which is pictured as a feast in which there will be celebration and the consummation of the Kingdom. At that time the apostles would sit and judge the 12 tribes of Israel. Whether that refers to a Israel as a physical nation or the church as spiritual Israel, the meaning is essentially the same. First suffering and trial, then glory. The glory will not come until they have first served and sacrificed for the church.

APPLICATION

- Let us beware of the spirit of the Apostles demonstrated here – the desire for greatness in the Kingdom patterned after the world, and not after Christ. Essential to fostering such a spirit is to remember what Paul wrote in Phil2:3-5.
Usefulness in the world and church, - a humble readiness to do anything, and put our hand to any good work – a cheerful willingness to fill any post, however lowly, and discharge any office, however unpleasant, if we can only promote happiness and holiness on the earth- the are the true tests of Christian greatness....
It is the man who looks not to his own things, but the things of others [who is truly great]. It is the man [or woman] 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 labours 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. – J.C. Ryle
- For our church leaders, we have a particular call to beware, and to remember our call to service. / Verse
- For the leaders of our homes, this is what loving headship includes. Will our testimony be in our dying day from our wives and children that we were servants in our home reflecting the glory of Christ?
- The real test of servanthood is how one responds when they are treated like one
- There is properly one who does Lord it over and have dominion, and that is Christ – Rom14:9