

Series: Death and Resurrection: Why Jesus Had to Die

Sermon: True Greatness

Text: Luke 22:24-30

Speaker: Allan Waruhiu

Introduction

I did not grow up watching professional basketball; I watched a lot of football – soccer for y'all. But even though I did not get to watch Jordan play, I still think and would argue that Lebron is the goat. Now, most of you are ready to come at me with statistics and all kinds of arguments as to why you think Jordan is the greatest. We could probably spend the next few hours going back and forth and not agree. Some sports journalists have made a career out of this very argument. Who is the greatest!

You see, throughout human history, men and women have argued, disagreed, and even gone to war to determine who among them was the greatest. Today, you can actually google who is the greatest at X, and you will get a top 10, 15, 20 lists.

You probably are working towards some greatness, maybe you want to be the greatest worker at your job, the greatest husband or wife, doctor or teacher, and the list goes on. Or perhaps there is something you have done, something you have accomplished, or an ability that makes you conclude that you are great. Even if we do not want to rule the universe, we all crave to be great. And those who would argue that they don't crave to be great. They still have a way to measure greatness, they just don't think they measure up, but soon

enough, they adopt this "not measuring up" as their greatness. So you see, we all crave to be great, and given a choice, we would rather be great than the opposite.

The desire for greatness, at least some aspect of it, is part of our human composition. The origin of this ambition and drive is Godly. In Genesis 1, God gave Adam and Eve the privilege and responsibility to rule and take dominion over all creation. Because of sin and rebellion, they become corrupted. And this is what we inherited from them, and so instead of being humble and gentle, we are self-centered, prideful people who seek power and recognition at the expense of others.

If not aligned to God's will, this desire for greatness that produces remarkable groundbreaking innovation, on the one hand, can and will create selfish actions on the other side. Now the problem is not greatness; the problem is the pride that leads us to seek greatness for our selfish desires at the detriment of everyone around us.

This morning, I don't want us to pretend like we do not seek Greatness Rather, let's search the scriptures to find the right way to Pursue greatness. How do we become great? How will you be great in a way that honors God and serves those around you?

We are in week three of our easter series, Death and resurrection; why Jesus had to die. Our text will show us what true greatness looks like and the eternal reward for those who cling with Humility to the truly great one! To you who wants to be great, I invite you to taste and see the difference

between the world's definition of Greatness vs. God's definition of greatness.

I want to show you that you don't have to settle for less than greatness, but you and I must come to terms and embrace the right kind of greatness.

Our text today is Luke 22: 24-30 (This morning, one of our students will read scripture over us, here at mercy, we partner with parents to raise up the next generation of disciples of Christ, and one of the ways we do that is by affirming that middle and high school students are part of the body of Christ and thus we encourage them to serve and participate in the execution of worship services. Church, this is Camden Foster; he is in 7th grade ...

Read through the text

Last week we begun going through Luke 22, we saw Jesus having the Passover meal with his disciples, and during that meal, he instituted the Lord's supper and asked his disciples to make it a point to have that meal as a way to remember his sacrifice. This week we will continue listening in on this dinner table conversation; please turn with me to Luke 22 verse 24.

²⁴ Then a dispute also arose among them about who should be considered the greatest.

From verse 23, we learn that the disciples have just argued about who would betray Jesus, and now they were arguing about who among them was the greatest. This is insensitive because Jesus, their friend who had done life with them for

three years, their teacher who had taught them about love and servanthood for three years, just told them that he would be killed soon, and here they were arguing about who among them should be considered great. This is so out of order it's hard to believe it happened – But it's right there in the text – So we know it happened.

I love how Jesus steps into this messy situation. Jesus is so gracious. If it were me, I'd have given them a good talking to. I can hear myself saying things like, "I thought you were my boys, and here you are already arguing about who would replace me... remember when I called you, you had nothing ... on and on I would go." but that's not the way of Jesus. Instead of a scolding, Jesus offers his self-centered disciples a gracious lesson.

Please listen to me; child of God, you have been adopted into the household of God, if you haven't read your bible for a while, maybe you feel unworthy, you've messed up one too many times, or maybe you have some doubts about the Christian faith. You could be here this morning because that's what you do on Sunday. **Jesus is not mad at you.** The same way he was patient with his disciples is the same way he is patient with you; you need to hear this. He is not pointing a figure at you; he is extending his arms to you. He is gracious and compassionate.

You see, this was not the first time the disciples had argued about who was great among them. Oh no, in fact, at some point, John and James involved their mom in their ridiculous quest for prominence in the Kingdom of God. Yet, Jesus

remained faithful to them. He was working in them slowly, and soon they would understand the nature of Jesus' Kingdom and be willing to suffer for the sake of Christ and for the sake of the gospel.

Like these disciples, how often we might be tempted to forget the price Jesus paid for our salvation and start arguing over who is greatest among us. We could find ourselves arguing about who should get the prominent position instead of serving each other out of reverence for our Savior. Haven't you heard of brothers and sisters who got into it because of the color of the carpet, or the color of a wall, or a certain title? It's ridiculous for us to argue over trivial issues while 3.5 billion people are still unreached by the gospel.

This kind of preoccupation with self has a way of creeping into our lives in very stealth ways; it's the husband or wife who is fighting only for themselves instead of fighting for each other and forgetting the wonderful blessing God has blessed him or her with in a spouse. It's the worker who cannot celebrate another's promotion because they feel they should have been the ones to receive the recognition; even without voicing it, we are prone to dispute over who is greatest, especially in a culture that considers pride as a virtue.

Jesus, however, wants us to think differently and rightly about greatness. Look with me at verse 25

Jesus is about to unpack the upside-down nature of the Kingdom of God. He is about to contrast greatness according to the world vs. to greatness according to God.

²⁵ But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who have authority over them have themselves called 'Benefactors.'"

According to Jesus, the kings of the gentiles – those who rule earthly kingdoms exercise dominion over the people they lead. Not only do they rule out of a selfish hunger for power, they "have themselves called benefactors" This term "benefactors" literally means "ones who do good." But these kings of the gentiles did not do good for goodness sake. They required recognition and Glory for anything they gave or did. It's good for us to make an observation here, that.

- 1. Greatness, according to the world, is based on power and the pursuit of prominence.**

Growing up in Kenya, I saw this kind of world greatness firsthand. Our second president served for 24years, and in that period of time, not only did he Lord over us, he demanded to be called benefactor. So songs were singing his praises, poems, special choirs every news bulletin started with praises of him. We were literally being forced to praise him.

Now maybe you are thinking to yourself, Allan, I'm not into seeking greatness like that, I don't want to rule - if you don't think you struggle with this, ask yourself this week as you are about to post something on Instagram or that challenge on tik-tok ask yourself why I'm I doing this? 'm I seeking worldly greatness? I'm in pursuit of prominence right now– And by the way, this is true the other way round. There are those of us

who- **not posting** on social media is the greatness we pursue. We want to make sure everyone knows how bad they are doing and how good we are doing.

Jesus is against all kinds of self-glory. You can clearly see this in Matthew 23, where he advises a crowd listening to him not to be like Pharisees and scribes who do everything to be seen by others. He says they. **"love the place of honor at banquets, the front seats in the synagogues, ^{seven} greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi' by people.**¹ There is no amount of likes that will satisfy you, there are no amount of accolades that will satisfy you, and if you chase it, you will end up lording over people because you'll be intoxicated with the need for credit.

But notice something here, Jesus doesn't say being a pharisee is wrong; it's the attitude and the inclination of these Pharisees' hearts that he has a problem with. In our text, Jesus doesn't tell the disciples not to be great. He simply doesn't want them to be great as the world understands or defines greatness. We need to make this distinction because Humility is not a defense for passivity. What do I mean by this? If God has placed you in charge to lead out in some way, or the holy spirit has given you a spiritual or service gift, you abdicating your responsibility and privilege to be God's workmanship, and claiming Humility does not honor God. Colossians 3:23-24 **²³ Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done**

¹ [*Christian Standard Bible*](#). (2020). (Mt 23:5–7). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

for the Lord and not for people, ²⁴ knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ²

This has implications for our Monday-Friday. It means we have to do our jobs well for the Glory of our God, but not for human recognition. It means we have to set a better example at the office, and I'm not talking about being nice; everybody does that. If you are the boss at your job or have some people are working under you, the Lord wants you to treat them well. Students, it means you will not compromise your faith so you can be popular at school or get a few more like on social because that fame is so short-lived and empty.

Now, If the chase of power and the pursuit of prominence is not how we should seek greatness in the Kingdom of God, how then do we become great? I'm glad you asked. Jesus is about to tell us. Look with me at verses 26 and 27

²⁶ On the contrary, whoever is greatest among you should become like the youngest, and whoever leads, like the one serving. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one at the table or the one serving? Isn't it the one at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

In the ancient world, the youngest took the lowliest place. Jesus says that those who desire greatness in his kingdom should not expect the honor, respect, and status given to

² [*Christian Standard Bible*](#). (2020). (Col 3:23–24). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

older people; rather, they should embrace dishonor and accept the lowliest place.

To make it clearer, he asks his disciples ²⁷ For who is greater, the one at the table or the one serving? To sit at the table in those days was to sit in a place of honor. Even today, when you go to a proper restaurant, the waiter comes to you, greets you, tells you the days special, and so on. There is honor in being the one at the table. -SIDENOTE- BTW, This is the verse to quote when someone invites you to one of those cook-it-yourself restaurants or cook it yourself experience; why would I want to pay to do all that work? Jesus answers his question by stating, Isn't it the one at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves. Jesus now turns from giving illustrations and uses his life as an example for the disciples to follow.

Jesus was the leader of this group; he was the one who had the power to walk on water, heal the sick, restore sight, command the wind, resurrect the dead. If anyone had the right to Lord over people and demand to be called a benefactor, it would be Jesus. Peter in Acts 10:28 says this about Jesus "...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and...he went about doing good and healing all who were under the tyranny of the devil because God was with him."³

Indeed, Jesus deserved to be called benefactor, but he did not demand to be given titles, Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:9 tells us

³ [Christian Standard Bible](#). (2020). (Ac 10:38). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

⁴ [Christian Standard Bible](#). (2020). (2 Co 8:9). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

⁹ ...you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich.⁴ This is how you seek greatness according to Jesus. You serve! Mark 10: 45 ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁵ And we see this even as Jesus was instituting the Lord's supper. He was the one who broke the bread and served his disciples. In John 13:4-5, we read this about Jesus, ⁴ So he got up from supper, laid aside his outer clothing, took a towel, and tied it around himself. ⁵ Next, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around him. ⁶ This kind of service is so outrageous that at first, Peter refuses to let Jesus wash his feet

There is no other god who does this kind of thing. There are over 3000 tribes in African; each one of those tribes has its traditional belief system and its God. There is no single story of one of those gods who has ever left their throne to serve humanity like Jesus. If you are new to Christianity or are considering it, listen to me; you do not have to work yourself up to God, God has come down, and he has served you and me. You can rest and let Jesus take up your heavy load.

As Christians, it's sometimes easy for us to go past this act of service done by our Lord because we have heard of it many times or have read it many times, you know Jesus washed feet... yay let's wash feet... Please take a moment and

⁵ [Christian Standard Bible](#). (2020). (Mk 10:45). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

⁶ [Christian Standard Bible](#). (2020). (Jn 13:4-5). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

consider that the king of kings, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. The one who created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, thrones and dominions, rulers and authorities. The one who is before all things and by whom all things hold together, the alfa and the omega. Took a towel, tied it around himself, poured water into a basin, washed his disciple's feet, and proceeded to dry them.

You see, **greatness, according to the world, is based on power and the pursuit of prominence.** But

2. Greatness, according to Jesus, is found in Humility, self-sacrifice, and service.

The disciples were arguing about who is the greatest while the greatest was right there with them. They were so preoccupied with their material understanding of the Kingdom of God that they did not comprehend that the one who has all power and authority was right there with them. Brothers and sisters, listen to me. Jesus is the greatest. I pray that we would not be "proud to think we are great on account of our achievements, status or possessions."⁷

James 4:6 tells us God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. And we see clearly from our text that Jesus set an

example of Humility for his disciples and us today. In recent days, we have witnessed, heard, and seen some Christians misuse their authority, embrace prideful ways, and compete for power and prestige, but that is not the way of Jesus. Paul in Philippians 2:6-8 tells us to, **Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, 6, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. 7 Instead, he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, 8 he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.**

We, however, need to come to terms with the fact that Jesus is not just an example for us to emulate. There are many people who accept Jesus as a good teacher, a good moral guide, or a good example, but as one preacher put it, **"Imitation is not salvation. But salvation brings imitation. Christ is not given to us first as model, but as Savior. In the experience of the believer, first comes the pardon of Christ, then the pattern of Christ. - John Piper** Jesus did more than give us an example of greatness by washing feet or waiting tables. Those acts of service were, but a foreshadow of the greatest service of them all, our Jesus offered himself up as a sacrifice. And when he died and resurrected, he defeated sin and, by that, eradicated pride. Now whosoever believes in him is saved and given a new heart of flesh that is not self-focused but Christ-focused.

⁷ Manser, M. H. (2009). *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*. London: Martin Manser.

And yes, we fail, sometimes we fail so bad, but the same grace that saved us is the same grace that keeps us. So do not lose heart even when you fall into the trap of seeking your own Greatness, or Greatness as the world defines it. When the holy spirit of God convicts you, respond by repentance and "I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."⁸

If you are not a Christian, and I mean you haven't accepted the gift of reconciliation to God. The first step into the Greatness Christ is calling us into is to recognize that we are sinners in need of a savior. Like pastor Spence says, "You and I are terrible Gods. We are demanding and yet never satisfied. So, Jesus comes to set you free from you. And he does so by being a king who serves and says, follow me. Don't live for yourself; die to yourself. And then you will truly live." I plead with you, for your own sake, accept the salvation given to you today by the prince of peace who come to set all captives free. He can free you from your pride; he can free you from the constant pressure to attain greatness by your strength, or as the world defines it. He wants to give you a new heart that loves him and desires greatness as defined by him.

Now what Jesus says next to his disciples is baffling. If you ask me, this group of people does not deserve a reward; not only have they been arguing about their position throughout their time with Jesus, but they will also soon leave him to face trial

⁸ [Christian Standard Bible](#). (2020). (Php 1:6). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

alone. But our Jesus is full of compassion and grace. Look with me at verses 28-30

²⁸ You are those who stood by me in my trials. ²⁹ I bestow on you a kingdom, just as my Father bestowed one on me, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom. And you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.⁹

This leads us to our third and final observation

3. True greatness is only found in Christ.

C S Lewis (loo) said this about our human ambition, "It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Just think about it, what's the cause of our disputes? Why were the disciples disputing? They wanted to be great. We want to be great. We want to call the shots, we want people to think highly of us, we want the corner office, and there is nothing wrong with putting in the work and being rewarded for a job well done. The problem is, soon enough, we let whatever our "greatness is" define us, fulfill us, give us our identity, we want to be recognized for it, and we will even fight for status. We will fight to attain greatness. Jesus is

⁹ [Christian Standard Bible](#). (2020). (Lk 22:24–30). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

saying that that kind of greatness is not what he has for us. News Flash the ground is level at the feet of the cross.

And so, instead of competing for fading Glory, listen to the words of Jesus. **I bestow on you a kingdom, just as my Father bestowed one on me,** notice it is Jesus who is giving his disciples this great inheritance, so they do not have to fight and argue about who is great. They need only to follow their master faithfully and, in so doing, inherit the greatest position, which is being at the table with Jesus in his kingdom. Jesus makes a covenant; he gives a promise to all those who deny themselves and follow him. All those who will give up the greatness of this world, all those who will embrace Humility and service, will receive an Imperishable reward on the day of the Lord.

If we focus on the fact that the greatest of all times is the Lamb of God who was slain for our sins. And that he now has all power and authority and that we will one day be with him, seated at the table with him, breaking bread with him then we will faithfully serve each other, we will faithfully say "after you" instead of "move over," we will gladly say "I'm listening" instead of let me tell you. Like Paul in Ephesians, we will be completely humble and gentle, patient, and bearing with one another in love and knowing that our eternal reward cannot be taken away or diminished by us taking a lowly position. We will gladly serve our Lord, our brothers, and sisters, and our world knowing that the reward that awaits us is far much greater than anything we could imagine or create for ourselves here and now.

CONCLUSION

And so in conclusion, pride will have us believe that we can work for greatness and achieve it, but the kind of greatness it promises, greatness based on the chase for power and the pursuit of prominence, where we step on people to get ahead, where we are self-focused; thinking too much of ourselves or thinking less of ourselves, that kind of greatness is not eternal, it's going to fade away, and it can never satisfy.

But Glory hallelujah that our God knew this and He had the perfect plan, and He sent Jesus to die on the cross to save us and in doing so eradicated pride. Jesus introduces us to a different kind of greatness. As individuals and as a church, Christ is calling us into greatness based on Humility, self-sacrifice, and service. This is not something we can grant ourselves or work for; it is given to us by Christ through his Holy Spirit, so let's pray for it. Let's ask the Lord to grant us this kind of greatness.

St. Bede's Church in New Mexico had a sign over the church's door. The sign said simply, "SERVANT'S ENTRANCE." There was no other way to get in. If you wanted to attend worship there, you had to enter through the servant's entrance. **That's the way of Jesus**, to see ourselves as we truly are, servants with no one superior to the other. **So let's be great at Serving our church - let's be great at serving each other – let's be great at serving our city**

Let's strive for this kind of greatness in all areas of life; let's flee the desire for recognition. The one who has the name

above all names says you don't have to worry about your name; you are a child of God; that's your identity. You don't have to worry about influence and power. You will be seated at the table with the king of kings. Let us serve our way into the eternal greatness promised to us. (WOULD YOU BOW YOUR HEADS WITH ME)

INVITATION

Pride will have you believe that you are generally good people. But the truth is "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" we are all sinful people, and so if you are here, and you have not accepted the free gift of salvation, do not let your pride continue leading you away from God, your good works, your attending church services can and will not save you, only repenting and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ will. Jesus humbly went to the cross so you can be reconciled to God. If the Spirit of God is moving in you right now, convicting you towards salvation, do not harden your heart, today is the day of your salvation. Would you please lift your hand? We would love to pray with you; God wants to transfer you from the kingdom of darkness into his kingdom.