

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

How to Be Great in the Kingdom, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 20:26-28

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How to Be Great In The Kingdom, Part 2

We come before the Lord now in our time of worship to hear Him speak. He speaks to us in His Word. And our text for this morning, again, is Matthew chapter 20, verses 20 through 28. Matthew chapter 20, verses 20 through 28. Let me read it to you to refresh your mind and give you a setting for the Lord's Word to you this morning. Beginning in verse 20:

Then came to Him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshiping Him and desiring a certain thing of Him. And He said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto Him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand and the other on the left in the Kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink? They say unto Him, We are able. And He saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of My cup, but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give. But it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared by My Father. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto Him and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority over them, but it shall not be so among you. But whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant. And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your slave; even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.

What a lesson for them and for us. The great men and the great women in God's Kingdom have always been those whose lives were marked by humble service, never the self-seekers, the glory seekers, those who sought to be lifted up to the prominent place. But always those who serve God with a heart of humility, selflessly.

Abraham, that very special and wonderful servant of God, said, "Behold now, I have taken to speak unto the Lord who am but dust and ashes." Isaac, Isaac was willing to die as an offering to the Lord if that's what God required. Jacob, Jacob who cried out to God, "I am not worthy of the least of the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast shown unto Thy servant." Joseph, Joseph who dishonored, sold into slavery by his own brothers, humbly forgave those villainous brothers and never retained in his heart one ounce of bitterness or vengeance. Joseph, who it says in Genesis 50, when he saw his brothers wept and comforted them and spoke kindly to them. And there was Moses.

Moses, that humble servant of God who said, "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" And Joshua who faced the Lord after the defeat that came because of a lack of faith on the part of the people, a lack of obedience. It says he tore his clothes and fell to the earth upon his face and put dust upon his head. And there was Gideon, that very special servant of God who said when called to lead his people, "O my God, where with shall I save Israel. Behold, my family is poor and the least in Manasseh and I am the least in my father's house."

And then there was David, a wonderful servant of God who knew his own frailty and wrote in 1 Chronicles 29 one of the great and humbling texts of all the Old Testament. "Praise be to You, O Lord God, of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is Yours. Yours, O Lord, is the Kingdom. You are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from You. You are the ruler of all things. In Your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks and praise Your glorious name. But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from You and we've given You only what comes from Your hand. We are aliens and strangers in Your sight as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow without hope. O Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building You a temple for Your holy name, it comes from Your hand and all of it belongs to You."

Those are the great heroes of the Old Testament. Every one of those that I just mentioned to you is listed in Hebrews chapter 11 as a hero, one who is great in God's Kingdom. And they were great because they served humbly, not because they sought prominence like James and John did here with their mother's help. And there were others, too. We cannot mention them all but I think of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, who it says in 2 Chronicles 32, humbled himself. And there was Manasseh, another king of Judah, of whom it says he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And then I think of Josiah, king of Judah, who was told by God, "Because your heart was tender and you did humble yourself before God, and you tore your clothes and you wept before Me, I have heard your prayer."

And there was Job who was humbled and put on himself dust and ashes. And there was Isaiah who was so humbled he cursed himself and then he cried out, "I have a dirty mouth and I dwell amidst a people of dirty mouths." And it was just that kind of humility that God could use and so He called him to be a great prophet.

And there was Jeremiah who said, "Ah, Lord God, who am I to speak?" And then there was John the Baptist who was shocked that he should be asked to baptize Jesus Christ. And who cried out, "He must increase and I must decrease for it is He who is so worthy and I who am unworthy, even to

unloosen the laces of His sandals."

And I think that John the Baptist may have been the greatest because he was the humblest. In fact, it's more than just a thought for Jesus said in Matthew 11:11, "There hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." And the reason he was the greatest was because he was the humblest. You see, the greatest is always the humblest in God's Kingdom, not so in the world. The greatest in the world come to greatness by the way that James and John sought to come.

Do you remember our study last time? They sought to come through political power play, through manipulating by virtue of who they knew. They sought to come by audacious ambition, self-seeking, self-promoting. And Jesus warned them that greatness in the Kingdom does not come by those means. It does not come by dominant dictatorship, He says in verse 25. It doesn't come by lording it over, as the pagans do. It doesn't come by charismatic control. It doesn't come by charming your way into greatness. Those are all the ways of the world, not God way...God's ways.

When we think of the great men of the New Testament after John the Baptist, our minds are drawn to two men that seem to dominate the scene. The first is Peter. And Peter found his greatness, I believe, in the expression of his heart in Luke 5:8 when he said to Jesus, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." And in the heart of his humility was born his greatness.

And the greatness of the Apostle Paul is found in the fact that in chapter 20 of Acts and verse 19 he could say, "I have served the Lord with all humility of mind." It is always the humble heart. It is always the servant heart. It is always that slave perspective that ushers us into the greatness of the Kingdom. "It is reserved for those, Jesus said in Matthew 18:4, "who come as little children." For He says, "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven."

And James reiterating that great Old Testament truth says, "God resists the proud but pours out grace to the humble." And so we learn a great lesson, beloved. Or we are reminded of a great lesson. And that is that greatness in God's Kingdom is reserved for those who are humble. And when it says in verse 23 that the honor of the Kingdom is reserved for those for whom it is prepared by the Father, it is for those who are humble that the Father has in fact prepared eternal glory and greatness in its maximum reality.

So, if we pursue greatness, we pursue it on the path of humility. If we pursue greatness, we pursue it on the path of service, we pursue it on the path of slavery. And that takes us, then, to verses 26 to 28.

Last week we looked at 20 to 25, how not to be great. Let's look at how to be great, verse 26 to 28. And I confess to you that I hold this in my own heart to be one of the most beautiful passages in the

gospels. It is a simple passage. It is exceedingly clear. It needs very little interpretation, but may demand for our time and our age and our heart attitude, a great amount of emphasis and exhortation.

There are two things to notice in these three verses. The exhortation and the example...or, if you will, the precept and the pattern. The exhortation comes in verses 26 and 27 and the example is given in verse 28. Let's look at the exhortation in verse 26. "But it shall not be so among you." Stop right there.

In the world, people get their greatness by political power play, audacious ambition, dominant dictatorship, charismatic control. Not so with you. Jesus says to the disciples, you're in a Kingdom where that's all reversed. You remember John 18:36 where Jesus says, "My Kingdom is not of this world?" What did He mean by that? He meant My Kingdom doesn't operate on the principles that the kingdoms in this world operate on. It's the opposite. It is the very opposite.

In fact, it is a total reverse. In the world it's pyramidal. You get on top of the pile and you control everybody underneath you. In the Kingdom, the pyramid is inverted and you're on the bottom. And that classic Lutheran commentator, Lenski, says, "The great men are not sitting on top of lesser men, they are bearing lesser men on their backs." He's right. Jesus says it's not so among you...not so.

So, to begin with then, we do not seek greatness in the Kingdom as the world seeks its greatness. Sad to say many do. There are many like James and John and their mother. There are many who...who pursue the limelight of Christianity, who want to be on a part of the contemporary Christian personality cult, who want to be a part of the Christian super-star list, who want to seek the prominent place, the place of prestige and honor, the place of personality affirmation, the place of respect, a place of power and control where they can generate those kinds of creature comforts that minister most of their physical bodies and their psychological needs and so forth. And they may be esteemed by some to be great, but not so in God's Kingdom. And when the true evaluation is made in the end, they'll be far down the line from those who are the truly great whose lives were marked by humble selfless slavish service.

Now as you approach verse 26, you see that the standard is different. And then you hear this statement, "Whosoever will be great among you," and you can stop again with that phrase because that's a very important thing to comment on. It literally it says "whoever wishes among you to become great." And some have said at this point, "Well, isn't Jesus sort of accommodating a very ungodly ambition? I mean, for Jesus to say if you really want to be great, do this. Isn't that to acquiesce to someone's ambition? I mean, is it really right to want to be great? Is it right to seek a reward? Is it right to want to be a leader? Is it right to be rewarded and seek that? Is it right to seek exaltation?"

I remember speaking one time on the subject of Christian rewards and the crowns on a college campus. And a student came to me afterwards and said, "I just really can't take what you said. You remind me of the guy in the Imperial margarine commercial who kept getting crowns and stashing them up in the cupboard. I mean, is that what you live in the Christian life for, just to amass some kind of crowns?" And he really did not understand whether or not it was proper or right, or he concluded it wasn't to seek to be great, to seek to be rewarded, to seek to receive from God something special in the time of judgment.

I tried to take him to the Word of God again and explain it to him, and I guess the best defense of it is the fact that Jesus here advocates it. Jesus never promotes a sinful ambition. And Jesus dealt with the sinful ambition of James and John but He reaffirmed that it wasn't wrong to seek to be great. It was only wrong to seek it for the wrong reason, that's all. I mean, even John said, "Look to yourselves that you lose not the things that you've wrought, but that you receive a full reward." And Paul said, "Run that you may win." And he also reiterated that we ought to be concerned that our works when they stand the test of fire at the judgment seat of Christ are not wood, hay and stubble, but gold, silver and precious stone. And that we so live according to 2 Corinthians that when we come to that day and face the Lord Jesus Christ, we may receive reward for the things done in the body, whether they be good or worthless. And John reminds us at the climax of the whole Bible that the Lord said, "Behold, I come quickly and My reward is in My hand to give you according to your work."

And so, it's not wrong to seek glory in eternity. It's not wrong to seek exaltation. The Lord has given us that as a goal. It's not wrong to seek that, it's only wrong to seek it for the wrong reason. It's only when your motive isn't right, when like James and John, you seek it so you can lord it over the others, or you seek it so you can be more esteemed than others in this life, or you seek it so that you can have for yourself greater authority, greater power, greater comfort. It's not wrong to seek it, it's wrong to seek it for wrong and selfish reasons.

And let me add a note to that. If you seek it, if you seek greatness on God's terms, you will seek it on the track that He has ordained. And it's the track of suffering. And that sort of helps us to deal a little more honestly with the issue, for the path to glory is the path of suffering, it's the path of sacrifice, it's the path of slavery, it's the path of sacrificial selfless service. And so, if you seek the glory on that path, it is in itself a self-effacing seeking. You understand that?

Oh, there are those who seek the glory but would avoid the pain. There are those who seek the glory through the pain and they are the ones who seek it on God's terms. That's why the Apostle Paul says, you know, "I have done many things in my life, in effect, but all I want to be said of me when you take account," 1 Corinthians 4, "is that I was a faithful under-rower, that I was a third-level galley slave who pulled his oar, that's all. Because," he said, "that's a little thing with me whether men judged me. It's a small thing with me to be judged by men, it's even a small thing to be judged by

myself because I tend to be bias in my own favor, I'm not objective so I don't listen to my own evaluation and I really don't care about people's evaluation. What I'm looking for is the day when the Lord brings to light the hidden things of the heart and makes manifest the secret things and then will every man have his praise from God."

In other words, only God can read motive. Only God can read the reason why we did what we did. But we can read a little bit from the outside because if a man seeks to give his life for Christ, if he seeks to spend himself, if he seeks to be the best teacher, or the best Christian, the best disciple he can be, if he seeks that in order that he may receive a reward, but willingly seeks it through the path of self-sacrifice, humility and suffering, then it marks a man with a pure motive, doesn't it? It marks a woman with a pure motive. So it isn't wrong to seek it.

In fact, in 1 Timothy 3, the Apostle Paul said if a man desires the office of an overseer, he desires a good thing. That's a good desire. I'm in the ministry today basically because I desired it. And someone said to me when I first came to Grace Church: how did you know you were called? And they've asked me that thousands of times since, but how did you know you were called to the ministry? And at that very point, I said, "I know because it's my desire. I want to do that." And I believe God has planted the desire there. And I believe the only way you know you're called into ministry is in the New Testament age is that you have the desire and it's affirmed by the church. First Timothy 3, "You desire it, it's a good thing." The church then looks at your life and evaluates whether you have the principles that would qualify you to serve in that in capacity. And so, the church comes together with the desire of the heart and says this is a man fitted for service. And you desire a good thing.

So, there's nothing wrong with desiring that. I desire for my life that I might give all that I have to serve Christ. I desire that through eternity I might be able to give Him the most glory that's possible. I want to fulfill my spiritual gifts. I want to maximize the potential I have for God. I want to so live my life that I can be an honor to God throughout all eternity. I don't want to lose any of that capacity by the forfeiture of sin in my life. Now you can judge in your own mind whether that's an ambition that I may gain some esteem for myself, or whether it's a desire to please the Lord I love who died for me. It's God ultimately who can measure the heart. But you can evaluate a little bit if you look at the sacrifice of life. If you don't see the sacrifice there, then it may not be as pure a motive as it ought to be.

But those are the conditions upon which the desire is legitimate. And I think that's what our Lord is saying in contrast to James and John whose desire was very selfish.

Now look at the end of verse 26. Because at the end of verse 26, He says, "If you want to be great, let him be your servant." That's the path. You know, people, you don't want to get tied down to this world. It passes awfully fast. And you don't want to waste all your time trying to pad your own case

with creature comforts and psychological affirmation and making sure you're at ease and at peace and so forth and nobody's ruffling your feathers and you're not dealing with too much pressure, too much anxiety and so forth. You don't want to get caught in this culture's mad dash for leisure and so forth. Some people are wearing themselves out trying to relax, little question about that. You don't want to panic into that kind of a situation. What you want to do is spend yourself for the purpose of the Kingdom. You want to abandon yourself for the purpose that is eternal. And you want to give yourself away to that end.

And that's what I think He's saying here. You need to be a servant. We get letters all the time, I mean all the time, weekly, from people across the country, wonderful folks, godly folks, who would like to come and serve on our church staff. They would like to be a part here. They'd like to minister here. And they, no doubt, would be a tremendous blessing from God. They would be a great help to us. They would enrich us. And we would really cherish that opportunity. But we have established the simple principle in the Scripture and that is that you cannot lead until you have proven you can serve. You cannot be given the rulership role, you cannot be given the responsibility at the broad level until you have shown the humble...the humble heart of a servant. And so, we always respond to people by saying we appreciate the fact that you would consider us and desire to serve here, and we would like to suggest to you that we are not committed to just hiring people and bringing them here, but if you would wish to come on your own and serve among us, should God approve of the service you render, He might by His own will be pleased to lift you up to a place of responsible leadership.

Well, the truth is that's foreign to most people's understanding. But nonetheless, I believe that's the thing that is consistent with the Word of God. And many of these people have been so approved in the place where they minister, but it's hard for them to perhaps see the need to do that in another place.

Now the word for servant here is very interesting. The word is diakonos. We get the word "deacon" from that. And I suppose we all think "deacon" is a religious word. And in fact in our society it is. It has no other use in our society. But in the time of the New Testament, the word was a secular word. It had no religious use. It's not a word taken from pagan religion or something. It is a word that had to do with low menial service. You would hire a deacon to clean up your yard, take away your trash, serve a meal, collect the garbage, do some kind of menial job. It's just a...it's not a dishonoring term, it's just a low term in terms of social strata. It talks of the guy who simply serves, who simply does a menial job. It doesn't take a lot of education or training or skill, an unskilled kind of thing where a person willingly comes to serve. That's the word.

And the word was taken out of paganism, it was sanctified and it was made the most dominant word in the New Testament to speak of the service of Christians. It is the most dominant word. And it is not as though there were no other ones to choose from. There were a myriad of terms they could have chosen. They could have used the term "priest" which is somewhat an exalted term. They

could have used the term archon which has to do with a ruler or a leader, one in a responsible place. There were terms, timea place of honor, an office of honor. There were words that had to do with a place of authority, but the chosen word by the Spirit of God was this word "deacon," menial service. And it's used with its cognate verb more than 50 times in reference to the service of Christians...lowly service. God is looking for those who come to serve. That's the right spirit.

I want you to look with me for a moment to a passage I moment ago alluded to. First Corinthians chapter 4, because I think it enriches our understanding of this. The Apostle Paul in this chapter has marked out his own attitude as a servant. He has spoken of himself in a humble way. In verse 1 he has called himself a servant only this time he uses the word huperetes which is a word referring to a slave who rode in a big ship underneath in the hull, a galley slave who did nothing but was chained to some kind of post and he pulled an oar in the darkness of the hull of a ship. And Paul says, "May it be said of me that I am a third-level galley slave, under-rower for Christ."

He really had the right perspective. He was so self-effacing, so humble. He was helped in his humility by the Lord leaving him with a thorn in the flesh and he was helped in his humility by God bringing all the pain and anxiety and suffering into his life. He was helped even in his humility by the failures that occurred in his life when he had tried to disciple people who bombed out on him like Demas and John Mark early in his life. I mean, he had enough failure to be sensible and realistic and enough success to know God was at work. But it was in that humility that he rightly evaluated himself and in chapter 3 and verse 8, or rather verse 5, he says, "Who is Paul? Who is he? Who is Apollos? They're nobodies, they're just servants, that's all." And Apollos was the greatest living Old Testament scholar and Paul was the greatest living new covenant scholar. And yet he says they're nobodies, just third level galley slaves for the sake of Christ.

In contrast to that, he indicts the haughty proud boastful honor-seeking Corinthians in verse 8 as if to say who do you think you are? This is dripping with sarcasm. Now you are full. Now you are rich. You have reigned as kings without us. Aren't you something? Then he says pensively, "I would to God you did reign. I wish it were true that you were what you think you are." And then he goes on with the sarcasm. "I think that God hath set forth us the Apostles last as it were appointed to death for we're made a spectacle unto the world and angels and men, we're fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We're weak but you are strong, you are honorable and we're despised even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked and buffeted and have no certain dwelling place and labor working with our own hands; being reviled we bless, being persecuted we endure it, being defamed we entreat, we are made as the filth of the world and the off scouring of all things to this day."

In other words, he says you just don't know where true greatness is. You're puffed up and proud and think you're honorable and think you're wise and think you're strong and you're not. You think you're kings, you think you reign and you don't. We who are apostles who are buffeted and abused and

mistreated and do it for the sake of the Kingdom, we are the ones who are truly exalted. Paul understood that.

Oswald Saunders writing in his wonderful book Spiritual Leadership quotes William Law as saying, "Let every day be a day of humility. Condescend to all the weaknesses and infirmities of your fellow creatures. Cover their frailties, love their excellencies, encourage their virtues, relieve their wants, rejoice in their prosperities, compassion at their distress, receive their friendship, overlook their unkindness, forgive their malice, be a servant of servants and condescend to do the lowliest offices of the lowest of mankind."

And he also quotes Samuel Brengle(?) who wrote in his diary, "If I appear great in their eyes, the Lord is most graciously helping me to see how absolutely nothing I am without Him and helping me to keep little in my own eyes. He does use me but I'm so concerned that He uses me and that it is not me by which the work is done. The axe cannot boast of the trees that it cuts down. It could do nothing but for the woodsman. He made it. He sharpened it and he used it. The moment he throws it aside it becomes only old iron. O that I may never lose sight of this."

And so, the heart of the servant is the heart that truly pursues greatness. The next verse, verse 27, basically reiterates the same thing only makes the contrast even more stark. "And whosoever," this for emphasis, "will be chief," and here the word is protos, it means first, "whoever will be first, let him be your doulos," and now He uses a word of even lesser nobility than diakonos, this word means bondsman. "Whoever would be first, let him be your slave." Boy, when you said that word in the context of the New Testament, they understood something, didn't they? We hear the word "slave," we don't understand much because we don't have slaves. But they did. They knew what it was to see slaves whipped and beaten. They knew what it was to serve in the terrible kind of conditions that many of them served in. They knew that. And yet, for them it became a graphic demonstration of how committed they should be to serving one another to find the true place of greatness.

It's a tremendous illustration in their world. You are to be a slave. And I think Paul looked at his life in that way. He knew that his life was not his own, that his master was in charge. He said, "If I live, I live. If I die, I die. Both unto the Lord. So whether I live or die, I'm the Lord's." He was a slave bound to Christ. Over and over again he said that. He calls himself a slave of Jesus Christ. He even said to the Corinthians, "Death works in me that life might work in you." He said, "I go through all of the things I go through for your sakes." Slavishly did he fulfill his responsibility before God for the sake of others. And you can know that in the back of his heart, he knew that some day there would be a reward, some day he would enter into his glory and some day he would receive that great weight of glory which was so much beyond that light affliction that he told the Corinthians about. Sure he did it seeking to be exalted. Sure he did it for those reasons, but he did it that the Lord might be glorified in his exaltation and that was demonstrated by his willingness to go through the path of pain to get there.

And I see a lot of people who want the path to glory but they don't want the pain. And they build Christian institutions around them and organizations around them. And they build their little world around them to insulate and to pad them and to promote them and to exalt them. And you see very little of the pain and very little of the suffering. And I look at my own life, too, and I wonder sometimes if my own motives can remain pure. All of us need to ask that question. And Paul becomes for us a wonderful illustration of one who sought the glory but he was also willing to bear the pain.

Oswald Saunders writes, "Scars are the authentic marks of faithful discipleship." It was said of one leader, "He belonged to that class of early martyrs whose passionate soul made an early holocaust of the physical man."

One of the most beautiful of all the writings of Amy Carmichael is this poem, listen to it: Hast thou no scar, no hidden scar on foot or side or hand? I hear thee song is mighty in the land. I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star. Hast thou no scar? Hast thou no wound? Yet I was wounded by the archers spent, leaned me against the tree to die and rent by ravening beasts that encompassed me, I swooned. Hast thou no wound? No wound? No scar? Yes, says the master, shall the servant be and pierced are the feet that follow Me, but thine are whole, can he have followed far who has no wound? No scar?"

Well, the cost of greatness is humble service, selfless service. Do you wish you could get this across to young Christians, especially young men who go out in the ministry that they would not fear the hard place but seek it? Not seek the comfortable place, but the uncomfortable one? That they may receive that greater weight of glory? Time is so short and eternity is so long. And the cost of greatness may be persecution, it may be death. In some cultures more so than in ours. But even in ours there is a price to pay, the cost of humble suffering service. The true path to glory I think is marked by loneliness. And that's a suffering of sorts. There is a certain loneliness, there is a certain being apart from the social scene. There is a price of quietness to pay.

Tozer once said, "Loneliness is the price of saintliness." You just are so consumed by that which God has called you to that you lose some sight of the whirling of the world around you, even the good things sometimes cannot be fully enjoyed because deep in the heart is this...this mandate of God that you should accomplish His goals for eternity. There is loneliness involved in that. And most people don't understand the burden that's borne in the pursuit of glory along the path of suffering.

I think, too, there is weariness there. Fatigue is the price of pushing past mediocrity. I never met a man who was abandoned to the cause of God who wasn't tired and weary..or a woman. And criticism is another part of the pain. You can expect to be misunderstood and misrepresented, misjudged, wrongly evaluated, accused. And to handle that without self-defense, without self-justification means that you bear the burden between you and the Lord and perhaps someone close and dear to you.

There are those pains in the path to glory, but they are but momentary light affliction for the weight of glory that is forever.

And so, he who seeks to be first...and that's not wrong. I don't know about you but I would want to be all that God would want me to be. I would want to be known as one who served Him with my whole heart. That's not wrong. And for the right reasons to seek that, you must then be a slave, you must give your life away.

Out in the world, the people who are great are the ones who can manipulate the most folks, who can ambitiously sell...seek self-glory, who can dominate others, who can charm others into doing things they need done for them. But that's not how it is in God's Kingdom. I think William Barclay put it rather succinctly when he says, "The world may assess a man's greatness by the number of people whom he controls, and who are at his beckon call, or by his intellectual standing and his academic eminence, or by the number of committees of which he is a member, or by the size of his bank balance and the material possessions which he has amassed. But in the assessment of Jesus Christ, these things are irrelevant," end quote. And what is relevant is his humility.

Ask yourself the question: what sacrifice do you make to serve Christ? What sacrifice? What pain? Or do you demand mostly to be served? And if it's uncomfortable, you're not willing to do it. Those are very important questions that we need to face every day. So, the exhortation is very clear. Let's look at the example.

And if you can resist the exhortation, and you really love the Lord Jesus Christ, I question whether you can resist the example because it comes with such clear impact. "Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve," stop right there.

Here's our example. You say you love Christ. You say you abide in Him. First John says if you say you abide in Him, you ought to walk as He walked. And His life was utterly abandoned, as an act of humble selfless service on behalf of others. For He thought it not robbery, something to be grasped to be equal with God but made Himself of no reputation, took upon Him the form of a servant, was found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, was obedient unto death even the death of the cross. The Lord Jesus Christ went through the greatest humiliation ever. God became man. The sovereign of the universe, the sovereign of all eternity came to be a victim of sin. The greatest humiliation of all. And that's why in the Kingdom He's the greatest. He is the greatest, the most exalted because He was the most humbled. And He is the example.

Even as...those two words mark Him as the example. He is called the Son of Man. That's the Messianic term drawn from Daniel 7:13 used more than 80 times in the gospels by Christ to refer to Himself. It speaks of Him as the incarnate one, the Messiah, God in human flesh. And He came not to be served. He didn't come like other kings come. And that's what kind of confused Pilate who

said, "Are you a king?" And in effect what he's saying is, "You don't look like a king and You sure don't act like one. I mean, You've been abused and maligned and mistreated and You don't do anything. You don't retaliate. And it's obvious that You don't have any Kingdom, it's obvious You don't have any possessions, You don't have anything." And all He did have was a robe on His back. "I mean, are You a king?"

By all standards there was no way that He could be a king. And that's when Jesus replied and said, "Well, you don't understand because My kind of Kingdom isn't your kind of kingdom." Most kings demand to be served. This king came to serve.

In fact, in Luke 22:27, one of the most beautiful statements ever came out of His mouth, He said, "I am among you as one who serves." I am among you as one who serves. And you see it when He washes the feet of the disciples. They are so self-seeking that they will not wash each other's feet and so the Lord takes off His outer garment, puts a towel on His waist and then He washes their feet. Oh what humility. And He is the pattern. What an example.

Forfeiting our comforts to meet others needs, that's service. And it says His service extended in verse 28 to the giving of His life. The ultimate act of service--to die on behalf of someone else, the voluntary act of ultimate self denial. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man...what? Lay down his life for his friends. And you're My friends if you do whatever I command you, He said, John 15:13 and 14.

I was kind of encouraged the other day, in a way, by...what I read in the paper about the very heroic act of Joe Delaney, who was a very excellent running back for the Kansas City Chiefs, saw some little boys drowning and even though he knew he couldn't swim well, he dove into the water to try to save the little boys. And it's difficult to save one person because they tend to want to drown you along with them. And he had three on his hands. And the result was that he drowned, two of them ultimately drowned and one was saved. And it was wonderful to see a young man at the height of his career who had heard all the accolades of the crowd, who had lived in the euphoria and the fantasy world of professional athletics, then made almost into a God and yet he saw himself as one who served. And with all that he had to protect for himself, he gave his life, as it were, to save some little boys, or to try.

The world seems to understand so little of that kind of selflessness that they, I think, rather quickly passed off his heroics, lest it become too intimidating in a selfless self-consuming kind of society.

But Jesus sets the pattern for us. He gave His life on our behalf. The passage could end there. And all we would really need to hear at this point would be that Jesus is our pattern. He gave His life in service, we must do the same. If we want to be great, we do so by selfless abandonment. But the passage can't end there. And the reason it can't end there is because if it does there will be a

misunderstanding. And the misunderstanding will be that Jesus died only as an example of selflessness, that Jesus died only as an example of one who was willing to humble Himself for others' sake, that He died only in an effort to try to demonstrate humility.

But there's more than that. And so, the Spirit of God adds a new teaching in the New Testament, never heretofore given to this point. And it is this, that He gave His life not just as an example but as...what?...as a ransom. And here we are introduced for the very first time in the New Testament to the redemption work of Christ, the substitutionary vicarious ransoming redeeming act on the cross. It is not only an example, yes, He gave Himself as an example. There's no question about that. An example of selfless sacrifice. Peter makes it very clear in 1 Peter 2 that Christ suffered for us leaving us an example. There's no question about that. But Peter also says it was more than example, "Who by His own self bore our sins in His own body." More than example, His death was ransom, redemption. Oh, what a great truth.

The word "ransom", you see it there? Lutron, only used twice in the New Testament. Here and Mark 10:45. Lutron is the price of the release of a slave. You have a slave, he wants his freedom, lutron was whatever the price was to free him. We were slaves of sin, death, Satan, the flesh, the world, hell. Christ paid the lutron to release us. And now we know as Romans 8 says the glorious liberty of the sons of God. What a great thought. His death was not only an example, it was a ransom. He paid the price for our sin to release us. There was a price a slave could pay to be released. But a slave, for the most part, could never earn it because a slave was paid only the wage to sustain his life. How could he also amass enough money to buy his freedom, when all that he received was given just to sustain the bare necessities? And so, we could no longer...or could no more buy our freedom than a slave could. Someone else had to come and pay the price. Christ did it. He became the ransom.

And though the word lutron, that noun form, is only used twice in the New Testament, other related and varying forms of that root are all over the New Testament. And at least, I think I counted 83 times in the Old Testament. The idea of ransom and redemption is a very, very common idea in Scripture. First Corinthians 6, for example, says we are bought with a...what? With a price. We have been redeemed. That's what that means. We have redemption. It's in Galatians, Ephesians. It's in 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Romans, Corinthians.

Peter, I think, sums it up wonderfully. First Peter 1:18, he says, "You are not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold," you weren't purchased out of your slavery by silver and gold, "but by the precious...what?...blood of Christ as of a lamb without spot, without blemish."

So, the passage then comes to a wonderful climax in the fact that the Lord Jesus is not only our example, but He's our redemption. He's our ransom who purchased us from sin.

Now I want you to notice in verse 28 the word "for" because it, too, is a very important theological term. It is the word ante, we get our word "anti" from it. It means as over against something, or an exchange for something, or in the place of something. And what He is saying here is He's a ransom in exchange for many. In other words, it was His death for our death, His life for our life, His sin bearing for our sin bearing. He was our ransom.

Then the word "many." People wonder, "What do you mean by many? You mean He only died for a few? You mean many means some that are outside that ransoming capability? Is this teaching a limited atonement?" No, it is not. Many is simply an expression referring to all, but it is used in a contrasting way as over against one who gave the sacrifice, many--by contrast--are ransomed. It's simply used to demonstrate contrast.

And that's not uncommon. Look for a moment at Romans chapter 5 and I'll show you something very important. Romans 5, it says in verse 12, "Wherefore as by one man, sin entered into the world and death by sin; so death passed on all men for all have sinned." Now it's saying then that when Adam sinned, death came on all men for all have sinned. So we know he's talking about all men.

Now you go down to verse 15. It says in the second sentence, "For if through the offense of one, many are dead." Well, we just heard how many? All. So "many" then when used in a contrasting context is substitute for the word "all." To demonstrate contrast, one...many. And in verse 19, "As by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners." Well, we know the "many" there means "all." So, again I submit to you that the "many" here is simply used in the contrasting terms here and has reference to everyone.

I believe Christ provided a ransom for all. And the Scripture points that out in many, many passages. He has been ransomed for all of us. We need but appropriate that.

Now, beloved, because of what He did, Philippians 2 which is the commentary on this passage says God has highly...what? Exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue should confess Jesus as Lord to the glory of God. Now what happened was because He was so humbled and because He offered Himself in selfless service, God so highly exalted Him. It is proportionate. In proportion to His humility is His glory. And that is the principle you must learn. Greatness in the Kingdom, capacity for glory in the Kingdom is in direct proportion to humility and selfless service rendered.

Simple and yet profound truth. And if your spiritual life is on target, then you will seek that eternal weight of glory and you will desire it with all your heart which will cause you to serve Christ with a whole heart and to take the path even though it means pain or suffering that brings about that eternal weight of glory. Let's bow in prayer.

Lord, we study these grandiose truths, we study the wonder of what You are saying and we feel so far away from the standard. We feel so short. We could almost wish that we could suffer more when what You're asking is that we serve more and the suffering takes care of itself. And if we do not suffer and if there is little pain, then perhaps there is little service. So, Lord, help us to seek to be great for Your glory and to seek it through the path of humble service as our Lord did.

Yes, our Lord said glorify Me with the glory I had with Thee before the world began. Yes, He sought the glory. But willingly through the path of suffering. May we be so seeking that Your name would be glorified and that we through all eternity might receive that eternal weight of glory by which we can with full capacity praise you forever and ever and ever.

Our Father, we pray that You'll draw into the prayer room when we dismiss all who should come, that Your work might be accomplished in every heart. Bring us back together tonight with anticipation of what You have for us. And may we serve as our Savior served that we may know that eternal weight of glory that brings honor to Your name. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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