

30 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” 32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

36 He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 37 “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

Great...

In every class there was always that one student who had a question. The rest of us were ready to move on with an early release as the professor wrapped up asking, “Are there any more questions?” And that’s when he would speak up. It’s as if he did this on purpose, making us wait, trying to fill the space. We sighed, “Great...” Sometimes our professor recognized the random off topic question intended to waste time and responded, “I feel like we’re on a hike, walking through the woods, and you’re off in a tree throwing coconuts at us.” At other times, and we’d never admit it, we were actually quite thankful they asked the same question we were thinking but were afraid to ask. Most of us thought to ourselves, “Better to remain silent and be considered a fool than to open one’s mouth and remove all doubt.” We didn’t want to be seen as fools but we were completely content to remain fools in order to appear great.

If that doesn’t sound like your experience in school, well, at least it’s biblical because the disciples did the same thing. Jesus takes his disciples aside for some remedial education. He again reiterates the passion prediction and sadly there was not one odd student ready and willing to ask any questions. Jesus finishes up class asks, “Are there any questions?” And their eyes glaze over, mouths agape, and they shake their heads, “No,” because they didn’t understand and they were too afraid to ask. They wanted to be great but instead we think, “What fools!”

That’s because greatness doesn’t come by keeping up appearances, feigning knowledge and wisdom, holding your life together. Jesus defines greatness as service and love to and for others. Maybe you were the one who served others by asking lots of questions, maybe you were afraid to ask. If you’re still struggling with what greatness is look to Jesus who is the great one who stooped to love and serve you.

But for now Jesus didn't want anyone to know where he was at. It was important to teach and train the apostles. So he took them off by themselves and again makes his passion prediction. These are almost the same words as last week, *The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.* There is a change. It's no longer must and necessary but it is, "the Son of Man is being handed over." It's a present passive verb. Jesus is being handed over now. At that very moment. Translations state "is going to be" because they see it as a prophetic present but after the resurrection of Lazarus plans are being made to deliver Jesus. Judas is probably already making plans as well.

Jesus is saying, "We're on a sinking ship. It won't go well. I'm going to die but I will rise three days later. Any questions?" But rather than ask for understanding they remain quiet and continue on in ignorance, apathy, and fear. They don't want to let on, "I have no idea what you are talking about." Maybe they didn't speak up for the same reasons we didn't in class. Maybe they didn't want to admit ignorance in front of Jesus? Last time Peter got an answer right but then when he spoke up he was rebuked by Jesus, *"Get behind me, Satan."* Earlier in Chapter 9 Peter speaks up again without thinking, *"Let us build three shelters one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah."* to which no response was given. The disciples fail again when a demon possessed child is brought to them and they are unable to drive it out. Jesus responds, *"This kind can only come out by prayer."*

But that doesn't quiet bother them so much as to argue along the way about who is the A student, *"Who is the greatest?"* Here they are traveling along trying to establish a pecking order for the coming kingdom. Maybe it's at this moment that they are trying to figure out who gets to be head Rabbi when Jesus is dead and gone. Jesus takes time to instruct them further. Greatness is service to others and welcoming little children. *"Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."* As an example of this Jesus takes a little child into his arms and says, *"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."*

This same word little child is probably better translated as a baby/infant/toddler. Whenever we talk about children in the Bible we have to be careful not to put some sort of anachronistic projection of innocence, trusting, imaginative, and delightful children. An anachronism is best explained as Moses wearing a rolex watch while parting the Red Sea. It's in the movie but it shouldn't be there, just as these projections of innocence, trust, and imagination shouldn't be thrust upon Jesus words.

Children in Jesus time were seen as unable to do anything. Childhood was a time of terror with infant mortality up to 30%. Children suffered first in famine, war, and disease. Few would survive to adulthood with both parents alive. They were the weakest and most vulnerable in society which is

why the coming of age, adulthood was celebrated. They made it! Here Jesus says greatness is welcoming, receiving those who who can do nothing for you. Expending energy and serving those who cannot repay. You won't gain in popularity, wealth, power, or influence but greatness in the Kingdom of God isn't about these things.

But just as the disciples were slow learners, so are we. We can argue we have it better off because we have God's Word written down and recorded for us to go back to again and again. We don't always understand and sometimes we're afraid to ask. Sadly that is often my fault. If people are afraid to ask questions because I'll become upset or respond in such a way as to discourage questions that doesn't help anyone. Nobody wants their mistakes enshrined on the wall of shame. That serves no one. We come together and gather around God's Word to grow in our understanding. Questions can be a very good thing for challenging and clarifying what we believe.

And as we grow in our understanding it should become obvious that we too are failing on every front. Just look at how we strive for greatness in this world. In our narcissistic society, the me first mentality runs wild. It's all about getting ahead and sometimes anything goes to get ahead from slander to sabotage. We want to look great in the eyes of the world and so we work and may even sacrifice family on the altar of self. We want to be great so we don't take time to come to church. That's the same mentality that says a baby is a burden and stands in my way of achieving greatness - so we remove them rather than welcome them. This happens more and more with the elderly, the sick, the suffering, the poor - and those that stand in our way of greatness. Just cut those toxic people from your life because the reason you aren't great is someones elses fault, someone outside of you is holding you back.

That's not greatness in the kingdom of God. We're not the main thing. Each has different gifts that God has given and we are supposed to use them not only for our good but for the good of others. We mess it up all the time. Our sinful nature wants to be first. We may even look to the law in order to be great. One of the greatest lies of the devil is that you can obey the law and become great in the eyes of God. We may look to these Words of Jesus and strive for the last position in order to be first, slave away as servant of all, and welcome children. Jesus isn't teaching us a way to bypass the crowds and become the greatest by rushing to the end. He's teaching us that you can't do this on your own. Jesus is pointing out how sinful, self-centered, foolish, and ungreat we really are.

The only thing great about us is our sin. But we have one who is greater who gives, and serves, and welcomes those who cannot save or serve themselves. Jesus didn't come to make a name for himself. It wasn't about his legacy. Jesus didn't come to be great. Jesus *didn't come to be served but to serve and to give his life for all*. Jesus makes it very clear in his passion prediction. He has not come for

a throne but a cross. He has not come to be great but the least and even to die for the least of these. Jesus carried our failings, our rebellion, our sin to the cross.

Ultimate greatness is found in Jesus and as an example he takes up an infant into his arms. This child that can't do anything but drool, slobber, and soil himself. That is selfless service. That is greatness. While the world values power and wealth. While the world only cares about self, Jesus gave up both power and wealth to live as one of us and to give himself for us. He didn't do it under threat of force or compulsion. He did not play the victim. He did so because he wanted to. He served those who weren't great. He gave up his life for those who could not repay him. He humbled himself to the point of death, dealing with people who would mock him and strive to prove their greatness over him by having him flogged and sentenced to death.

Jesus still welcomes them. He receives sinners from birth. He welcomes them into his family through baptism by forgiving all their sin and claiming them as his own. He serves them with his body and blood which he lays down for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus serves us. He died for us. He lives for us. He rules this world for us.

That is what makes you great. Your greatness does not come from you. It comes from outside of you. And when you do great things it's God who works in you and through you. Jesus served us in the greatest way by bringing us his Word, and the Holy Spirit working through that Word to create in us a will and a desire to serve others.

He became the least, the worst, the last. He came to us in our inability. He embraced us like helpless infants. He came to serve you. He forgives us for removing those who stand in our way be through murder (abortion - The other great lie of the devil is not only that the Law is able to make you great in the eyes of God but that your sin is so great that the Gospel isn't for you. That your sins are so great they can't be forgiven.) slander, or rebellion against authority. We are forgiven and welcomed as his children. This forgiveness is ours and it leads us to see how great God has made us. That we may not be great in the eyes of this world but when God sees us he sees his son, his daughter, one for whom Christ died.

So instead of seeing those who stand in your way of greatness, see them as those created by God to be loved and served as Christ loved and served you. See how God has given you to love the people in your life. They may not be lovely, but hurting, lost, obnoxious and annoying... like some overly eager college student trying to impress the professor with their questions or maybe he was simply trying to get his money's worth out of the class. Sometimes he served us and it was great.

Serve one another in love. Maybe you see your act of service in asking questions that people are afraid to. It won't always be comfortable but you are called to serve those placed before you. You don't have to go on a mission trip to the ends of the earth to find people in need, just look to your neighbor

and those close at hand. Jesus greatness inspires us to be great in our lives. Greatness flows from thankful and forgiven hearts serving God and others just as Christ served us. So if you must ask questions, seek answers, and serve others with the knowledge that you've been made great by our great God. Any questions? Go back to God's Work for you. Amen.