**TRUE GREATNESS**

 August 16, 2020

Mark 10:32-45 Key Verse 10:45 “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.”

Last week we learned that no one can enter the kingdom of God on their own and in order to enter the kingdom of God we need child-like simple, pure, and absolute trust in God without any doubt or fear. Today we are going to learn what is true greatness. In today’s passage the disciples reveal their struggle for high position thinking that being on top, having power over people, and exercising authority is the way to success and greatness. But Jesus teaches that the true greatness in God’s sight is totally different. Jesus says, “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all (43,44).” As their master and Lord, Jesus reveals the whole purpose of his coming to this world. It is not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. So, let’s learn about true greatness and obey his teaching. Amen.

Look at verse 32. “They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again, he took the twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.” Now this was Jesus’ last journey to Jerusalem. This time in Jerusalem he would be crucified for the sin of the world. Jesus’s heart must have been heavily burdened. Yet in order to fulfill the will of God Jesus willingly and boldly journeyed toward Jerusalem. The disciples sensed Jesus’ firm determination and that something would happen because they saw Jesus’ demeanor was different from usual times. So, they were astonished and those who followed were afraid.

On the way, Jesus talked to the disciples for the third time about his upcoming suffering. Look at verses 33, 34. “‘We are going up to Jerusalem,’ he said' ‘and the Son of Man will be delivered overd to the chief priest and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.’” This time, unlike the first and second time, Jesus shared the further details of impending event very precisely with the twelve. Why did Jesus repeat this teaching three times? It was because Jesus really wanted their hearts to be prepared to his imminent death. So, when Jesus was crucified, they would remember what Jesus had said and believe in him. Also, Jesus really wanted the gospel of his death and resurrection to be planted in their hearts.

Did they then accept the gospel of his death and resurrection after Jesus’ repeated teaching? Not at all! They were still dreaming their own dreams. We can see what their dreams were through James and John. Look at verse 35. “Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘We want you to do for us whatever we ask.” Wow! What a brave request! In a sense they have child-like pure trust in Jesus’ love for them but in bad timing. Jesus asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” Now, as for Jesus, painful suffering and death were waiting for him. But James and John asked Jesus for two most glorious positions in Jesus’ glory. What a great misunderstanding and wrong request! Jesus could have been upset with them. But Jesus was patient with their spiritual slowness in learning the gospel of his death and resurrection. So, he said to them, “You don’t know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” Here the cup and the baptism mean suffering and death. Jesus’ question was a rhetorical question. Jesus knew that now they were not able to do so. But James and John, without a second thought, answered Jesus, “We can.” Even though Jesus knew about their inability right now, he bore with them and accepted their answer because he knew they would be transformed later. So, Jesus said, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.” As Jesus predicted, later James would become the first martyr among the twelve disciples and John would suffer in life sentence exile on the island of Patmos, outliving all the other disciples. Yet even though they might live such suffering lives following Jesus, who would sit at Jesus’ right or left was up to God the Father.

The other disciples did not know about James and John approaching Jesus to make such hot request. Yet when Jesus loudly replied to them everything was exposed. Look at verse 41. “When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.” What did it mean? It meant that all of them also had a strong desire to sit at Jesus’ right and left. Even though they did not ask Jesus boldly for the same request, all of them were competing each other to be greater than the others. So, Jesus taught them about true greatness and the right attitude in following him.

**First, those who serve others are great**. Let’s look at verses 42-44. “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.” The disciples had seen the Roman rulers and high officials lord it over people and exercise authority over them. They were usually cruel and oppressive. So, they must have hated them. But surprisingly in their hearts they also desired to get such power and lord it over people. Many times, when we see others’ authoritarian attitude, we hate it. But when we are in a position with authority and power, we do the same things. Jesus’ disciples were also the same. This is all human beings’ problem because we are all self-centered and have pride thinking that I am better than the others. Yet what does Jesus tell them? Jesus said in verse 43a. “Not so with you.” The disciples are the followers of Jesus. So their standard on greatness should be different from that of the world. How different? Let’s look at verses 43b and 44 again. “Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.” A servant is one who has a lowly position and attends on people. A slave is the possession of a master and has no freedom. A slave serves all kinds of things for the master. Of course, Jesus’ disciples were not slaves. Yet if they lowered themselves to be like slaves and served others, they would be truly great and regarded as being first.

Why then is such a life of serving so great? It is because to humbly serve others is the most difficult thing to do. In order to serve others, we need an extraordinary inner character and faith. Without such character and faith, serving like a slave is almost impossible. Many heroes defeated their enemies and conquered fortresses. But they could not conquer their emotion and temper. That is why Proverbs 16:32 says, “Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.” The greatest man is not one who conquers many enemies but the one who controls his temper, pride, and overcome self-centeredness. The person who is extraordinary in his humility and serves others patiently is truly great. The disciples struggled for a position. They thought that a higher position would make them great. Yet Jesus says that what makes a man great is not his position but his serving character.

**Second, Jesus came to serve**. Look at verse 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.” Jesus is, in very nature, God the Creator. He is holy, glorious, and worthy to receive the praise, worship, and service from all angels and all human beings. For Jesus to be served would be absolutely natural. Yet Jesus said that he did not come to be served but to serve. Yes, he came and served all kinds of people. Jesus served a paralytic who was sick with his sin. He served tax collectors who betrayed their own people for their selfish ambition. He served a man with leprosy. He served a demon-possessed man. He bore with and served his immature disciples who were full of worldly dreams and a competitive spirit. He served the stubborn and unrepentant Pharisees patiently. As for us, after serving someone in certain period, we become impatient and sometimes become upset thinking that I have served this far. How much more should I serve? Then we begin to demand from them. Yet when we reach our limit, that’s the time we need to think about Jesus again. To him, as he said, the whole purpose of his coming to this world was to serve. When serving was the only purpose and goal of his life, whether people recognized him or not, didn’t matter to him. Rather while serving needy people, he was full of joy. He was the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Yet he served as a servant. And that serving itself was the blessing and made him great. So, as the followers of Jesus, let’s do in the same way as Jesus did. Serving others humbly like a servant makes us truly great. Whether we are in a high position or low position, position itself doesn’t make us great. Our inner serving attitude and humble character makes us great.

**Third, Jesus gave his life**. When Jesus served as a servant, how much did he serve? To the point of giving his life as a ransom for many. How marvelous and how wonderful! Jesus did not reserve any portion of his life. He gave all. Yes, he gave all. This made him truly great. When we think about Jesus who gave his very life as a ransom for us, we cannot but be amazed by his truly really awesome greatness with which nothing can be compared. When we think about such greatness and true love, we cannot but live the same kind of life; serving and life-giving life because we don’t find any other life to make us truly meaningful and great.

One of the Cambridge Seven, Charles Studd (1860-1931) was one of the most popular and famous cricket players as a British national representative player. He was a Cambridge university student and his father was so wealthy and a renowned figure. As a young man he had almost everything; fame, honor, wealth, and popularity. One day he attended D.L. Moody’s spiritual revival conference and there he heard about John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his One and Only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Amazingly by the word John 3:16, he was deeply convicted about the love of God and he decided to give his life for Christ. He said, “If it is really true that God the Father sacrificed His Only Son to save us from our sins and eternal condemnation, any of our sacrifice for him cannot be considered as sacrifice.” So, he became a missionary for China and then later for Africa. He was the founder of WEC (Worldwide Evangelisation Crusade). His famous poem was this, “Only One Life, Twill Soon Be Past.”

Only one life, ’twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.
And when I am dying, how happy I’ll be,
If the lamp of my life has been burned out for Thee.

This poem inspires us for what we, who have only one life, should live in this short life. We should live our life for true greatness; serving and life-giving life for Christ and others.

Personally, after I believed in Jesus in my college life, my desire and goal of life was to serve God’s life-saving work throughout my entire life and I knew that it was the only way to true greatness and a most blessed life. So, I began my campus shepherd life and then later I came to Canada as a missionary. But to be honest, when I look back on myself, I did not know what Jesus’ life-giving love is deeply. After giving my life to Jesus in certain degree, I always saw myself going back to my self-centeredness again. I had a head knowledge about Jesus’ life-giving love but in actuality, many times, I was not giving myself to Jesus and to his people. Through many failures, especially through the difficulties in raising children in godly way, I have been learning what Jesus’ life-giving love is. Jesus came to serve; only to serve and he gave his very life as a ransom for many. He literally gave all without any reservation for himself. That is life-giving love. I want to learn Jesus’ such life-giving love so that I may grow in his character and be found as a truly great man.

In conclusion, today we learn that true greatness is not to be served but to serve and to give. Being a humble and life-giving servant no matter in what position you are is the way to true greatness. We cannot do so in our own but by remembering Jesus’ life-giving grace and love and example we can live such great life. In our UBF ministry we already have many good exemplary servant-like men and women of God. So, let’s learn the good example so that each of us may grow as truly great men and women of God. Amen.

**Big word:** True greatness is not to be served but to serve and to give our life.