



“Jesus Teaches Greatness”

Luke 22:24-38

January 17, 2021

Please join me in Luke Chapter 22. The title of this morning’s message is *Jesus Teaches Greatness*.

This morning I pray that by the work of the Holy Spirit, your heart will desire greatness in the counterintuitive, upside down, self-denying, others elevating way that the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, defines greatness.

The sin and self-interests of our hearts is such that it will take a work of the Holy Spirit in us to desire greatness in this way but, brothers and sisters, that is why we are here and that is what the Holy Spirit does.

There is a question that has been often discussed by fanatics of all kinds. It is a question that often turns into a debate among baseball, basketball, surfing, golfing, all kinds of fans. The question that is discussed or debated is: Who is the GOAT? By that, I am not talking about a billy goat or a mountain goat. Rather, we are talking about who is the GOAT as in the acronym who is the greatest of all time. That is an issue and a discussion that I can tell you by personal experience can become very lively and heated at times.

As we dig into the pages of Scripture this morning, what we find is that a similar discussion was taking place among the disciples of Jesus. They were having that kind of conversation. However, they were not contending with one another about who the GOAT was. They were contending with one another about who the GOAD was, if you will bear with me. Who is the greatest of all the disciples! That is what the disciples were discussing.

This morning as we look into the pages of Scripture, what we find is that this consideration of who is the greatest somehow slipped into one of the most holy and important moments of redemptive history. Jesus was in the upper room with His disciples, and roughly fifteen hours away from His crucifixion.

Jesus had shared the Passover with His disciples. What we have is the first observance of the Lord’s Supper in the New Covenant Age of Grace. What we find is that moment was stained with sin. The sin of pride. It was pulsing in that room. Thoughts and ambitions of superiority were living in the hearts of Jesus’ closest disciples.

They could not contain those thoughts in that upper room at that dinner. The disciples began disputing which among them was the greatest; who was superior in relation to all of the rest. Amazing! Jesus knew what was happening and He addressed it head on.

This morning we see how Jesus responded to that discussion. We see how He used that moment to define greatness; to define what greatness truly is according to His Kingdom and He instructed them on additional related issues as He prepared them for what it was going to be like when His bodily presence was removed. As we look into what happened here, it is so easy to marvel that they were having this conversation at that time.

However, if we are going to marvel, let us marvel that we are cut from the same fabric and what we see them arguing about, we are capable of ourselves. And we need the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with the renewing grace of His Kingdom power, that we would be those who deny self, lifting up Christ and others in Jesus Name.

So let's see how this went down. Luke Chapter 22 starting in Verse 24:

²⁴A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. ²⁵And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. ²⁷For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

²⁸"You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, ²⁹and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, ³⁰that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

³¹Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³²but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." ³³Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." ³⁴Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny me three times that you know me."

³⁵And he said to them, "When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "nothing." ³⁶He said to them, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. ³⁷For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.' For what is written about me has its fulfillment." ³⁸And they said, "Look, Lord, here are two swords." And he said to them, "It is enough."

So we have the Lord's Passover Discourse with His disciples. As you can see here, it is something of a combination platter. There are several topics that are addressed here in this portion of Scripture. But everything that is here falls under the umbrella of greatness, of greatness in the Kingdom of the Messiah, the one name Jesus of Nazareth.

As we dig into this portion of Scripture, let us know the heart of God for His people, for His church. The Lord desires greatness for us, but it is so essential that we come to this portion of Scripture with a mind prepared to be renewed, allowing our minds to be untrained in everything we learn about greatness from the world and the flesh and from the devil, and that we have our notion of greatness totally redefined by the One who has the authority to define all things.

As we look to what is here in this portion of Scripture, I think we have four aspects of greatness in the Kingdom of God laid out before us. Not just first, but first and foremost, greatness is a matter of humility. Supporting that we also see that greatness in the Kingdom of Christ is a matter of perspective. Then third, discernment and fourth, preparedness.

Greatness in the Kingdom is a matter of humility and of perspective and of discernment and of preparedness. I intend to develop a little carefully points one and three, and just give the essence of what I think is in points of two and four. You can dig into those a little bit more on your own.

First we see in this text that greatness in the Kingdom of the Messiah is:

1. A matter of humility (22:24-27)

What we find in Verses 24 through 27 is that this passage opens with the disciples disputing with one another about who is the greatest. At first glance, this is incomprehensible. How absurd. How absurd is this?! Thinking about this all week long, all I could say was absurd!

Here we have this moment: Here was the Lord of glory, solemn and sober in their midst. The weight of the cross was bearing down on Him. The gravity of Calvary was pulling within Him. There was not only a cup of wine before Him, but there was a cup of wrath. And Jesus was sharing with His disciples, This is my body broken for you. This is my blood shed for you.

And at that very moment, dwelling in the hearts of the disciples were thoughts of relative superiority, one over the other. One over the rest. It was an ongoing debate they had that you could trace through the all the Gospels. And here we see it being rekindled in the Upper Room.

How in the world did the disciples get on this topic? I think one worthy consideration is this: We remember that in feasts and dinners in the ancient world and in the Jewish world, there would be placed of distinct honor at the table. Those who were closest to the host were the ones in the most prominent and honored positions.

The more prominence you had the closer to the host you would be. Is it not very possible that each one of the disciples were thinking that they should be closer to Jesus than they were? Maybe some things about how life contributed to this effort were being overlooked here. Who did Peter and James and John think they were?

How did they come off always thinking that they were the ones that were going to be closest to Christ? From what we know about Peter, you can just picture him right at the center of all of that, doing the seating arrangements telling everyone where they needed to sit. There was resentment seething inside the rest of the disciples about where they were told to sit.

That is one possibility that would very much be in keeping with the cultural ways that dinners like that would play out. But what is amazing to me is that eventually the disciples settled into their spots. However, this was brewing within them the whole time. It was living in them. Even at that sacred moment there was fuming going on within the disciples.

Brothers and sisters, we are capable of this. Not only are we capable of this, but I also wonder if this has actually lived in and risen out of us, where we are in sacred worship and times of fellowship and there is irritation and animosity within us about other people—who do they think they are?! Yes, such things live still within the hearts of us. How badly we need a Savior to keep us humble.

So whatever led to this dispute, Jesus knew of it and He addressed it and He rebuked it and He did so using several pictures. Knowing the hearts of His disciples at that moment, what came to the mind of Jesus was the kings of the Gentiles. The spirit that was being released among the disciples was more like the pagan rulers than it was the character of the leaders of His Kingdom.

Jesus talked about how the rulers of the Gentile world loved to lord it over their subjects, even Caesar required that the citizens of Rome declare him lord. They like to lord it over their people. They loved the control.

Meanwhile, they did it in such a way, reminding the people, Oh, it is so good for you that I am the one who is reigning and on the throne. You are being benefited in so many ways by my skillful leadership and my gracious heart. So there were those kings lording it over people and those who loved being called benefactors, who benefited so many people with their benevolence. Jesus pulled this kind of imagery up and said, Don't be like that.

Instead, be like the youths. Be like the child. Instead of having these kinds of notions like—Oh you are so fortunate to have me in your midst. Oh how good it is for you that I am a part of this effort. You would be so lost without me—Jesus was saying that if you enter into the Kingdom, you enter in as a child in dependence. Understand that *you* need the people that around you, and God's work through them.

Instead of having notions about how everybody is benefiting from you and how you need credit for it, say, Lord, help me to have eyes to see how You are benefitting me from those who are around me that I might encourage them. If there is anything that I'm contributing to the cause, it is purely by the fact that Your Spirit is alive in me. Thank you, Lord. Let's have them have the good table. Let's have them have the good seat!

When we have this kind of humility and recognize that the good that come from us is God working through us, we want to sit at the kiddy table. You take the good seat. Enjoy it. I am happy for you! Greatness in the Kingdom of God. Greatness! Like John the Baptist said, Less of me and more of Christ. I am going to help you enjoy Christ as I enjoy Him too. Greatness!

Then Jesus gave an additional picture telling His disciples to be like a child and to be like a servant. In a picture of a banquet there are the ones that are sitting at the table, the ones being so honored. Then there are those who are serving the ones sitting at the table. Jesus took it a step further, saying, Church, My servants, don't even be at the table. Rise from the table and serve the people at the table. Pick up their dirty dishes. Scrape off the scum from the plate.

With the Spirit of Jesus filling His people, we have a heart to serve and everything gets turned around. Jesus said here, I am leading by example. I have been among you as one who serves. I am on the staff, serving the table. I have been administering care to lepers, touching them and giving them healing. I have been healing all kinds of sick people, entering in with them. I have been going into tax collector parties, being among those who have lives broken by sin.

Jesus was telling His people to just go and serve. Greatness in the Kingdom of God is all about emptying yourself of yourself and seeking to serve others wherever possible, allowing them to have their way instead of insisting upon your own way. Humility! Greatness in the Kingdom of God is all about humility. Jesus laid this out for us.

We continue and we see another aspect of greatness in the Kingdom. It is:

2. A matter of perspective (22:28-30)

I think this is at the heart of what comes next in Verses 28 through 30. All the disciples were jockeying for position at the Passover meal and Jesus had so much more in store for them. We just have this vapor of time on this earth called life and Jesus has been assigned a kingdom.

When we look at what is in Verses 28 through 30, there is only one kingdom in view. Jesus is assigned a kingdom. Jesus said that it was His kingdom and He was telling His disciples, I have assigned you a place in My kingdom. You are going to have a place at the table. You are going to be judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

With all of the things I have in store for you in eternity, Jesus said, why is it that you are arguing and festering with resentment at this brief moment in time, as special as this time is. That is the perspective that Jesus brought. There are things coming in the Kingdom that would blow your mind. It is going to be so good for you, so don't get involved with little squabbles and disputes. Just be a servant.

I think that is the heart of what is in Verses 24 through 27. Remember what it says in Scripture—humble thyself in the sight of the Lord. Then what? He will lift you up in due time. Don't seek to honor yourself. Let the Lord do the honoring according to His design and perfect purpose.

Here we are given a picture of us being in the Kingdom of Jesus with opportunities and with honors and with very special roles. What does that mean? These twelve disciples are going to judge the twelve tribes of Israel? Judas I think being replaced by Mathias or Paul. But what does that mean?

Good question. I look forward to seeing what that means. Some parents like to put out a Christmas present under the tree a week early so that the kids can wonder what it is. There are amazing statements in Scripture and we have to just say, Wow. It is something good and we look forward to seeing how it all plays out. We need to have this perspective of eternal things and that helps us to be humble in the temporary things.

Third, greatness in the Kingdom is:

3. A matter of discernment (22:31-34)

We need to be discerning of the spiritual warfare and satanic attack that is happening. We need to be discerning but, in addition to that, we need to be discerning of our weakness and our dependence on Christ in view of satanic opposition that we need Jesus to be filling us with substance we don't have. This is what we have coming next in this text.

Once again, we don't know how everything went down in that room. We do know that Peter was an impetuous disciple and he said things. He would fire and then aim. He just blurted things out. So it is hard to imagine that Peter was not right there in the middle of that rough and tumble debate that happened.

Whatever the case, Jesus centered His attention on Peter, who was in fact a leader among leaders, but needed to have humility in the leadership role that he had. There is the element of spiritual warfare where the Lord allows it because it humbles us and shapes us and it tenderizes us so that we can be affective servants of the Lord.

We see the attention spotlighted on Peter. There was concern for all the disciples, but Verse 31:

³¹Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³²but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Notice the repetition of the Simon's name. We find that that kind of repetition occurs just a handful of times throughout the pages of the Bible. Each time we see such a repetition of names, it is a moment that mingles great sorrow and affection.

Think of King David in the loss of his son. Absalom, Absalom. Think about Christ perched up and praying over the holy city, weeping over Jerusalem: Jerusalem, Jerusalem. Think about Christ on the cross: Eloi, Eloi lama Sabachthani—My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

So there is just a certain gravity every time this double reference is used, and here we see it: Simon, Simon. Then a chilling picture is presented with Satan. What we read here is that Satan desired to not only have Peter, but also the twelve. There is plural language used in Verse 31 with Simon being specified first.

What we see here is similar to what we studied about in the book of Job. Remember how bold Satan was? God commended Job's character. And Satan said, Of course he worships you with the kind of blessing that is upon his life. But let me afflict him and then we will see what Job is really made of.

Then we see how God allowed it. The leash of the Leviathan was loosened. That same dragon has been lurking with various pictures that are used to describe his malice. He is also a roaring lion searching for someone to devour.

We see here once again that Satan's attention was on Simon Peter and the twelve. We see that Satan in his boldness demanded to have them. When it says, Simon, Simon, Satan has demanded to have you all that he might sift you all like wheat, saying that of course these disciples are strong when the Son of God is next to them, but let me take them to the threshing floor. Let me sift them like wheat. Let's see what happens then.

This take us takes us to the wheat harvest in the ancient agrarian world. They would harvest in all the stocks of wheat. Kernels were locked within the stock of wheat, and there were a couple of ways that they would go about removing the kernel from the rest.

Sometimes the men would take a pitchfork and toss piles of the wheat harvest up in the air. Chaff is so much lighter than the kernel so when it was tossed up into the air, chaff would blow away and the kernels would drop to the ground. That is one way they went about harvesting.

Another way is that they would use a sifting tray. One or two people would take the stocks of wheat and put it in the tray and shake it violently. Then the wheat would fall down to the bottom and the chaff was all removed.

For some reason the stupid, silly little cartoon version of Satan is always pictured with a pitchfork. I wonder if this is the reason why. No, it is not because he would be pictured with a sifting tray.

What was going on at the heart of this verse is that Satan was saying, Let me shake the disciples violently. His intention would have been that he would have taken away the substance of who they were and just leave them the shell of what they once were. That is what Satan wants to do.

Satan knew Peter's name. Satan is ancient and has wisdom. I don't know how much he knows, but he knows a lot and he has a demonic force. They know a lot as well. I think that they even know Bethel Grace Baptist Church by name. They might know the member roster by name.

Brothers and sisters, we have got to be discerning of the reality of spiritual warfare. We need to know that there is an enemy that just wants to leave our brothers and sisters the shell of what they really are in the Lord. He attacks.

Knowing this, maybe we will look upon each other's lives with some mercy and some compassion, even as we follow what Christ said to Peter, I am praying for your faith. It is going to stay and you strengthen your brothers. You strengthen your sisters, and, church, you do it with love and understanding and you do with it with compassion and you do it with the intent to embolden and to encourage.

We need to be discerning of the reality of spiritual warfare. We need to be discerning that our strength is in the Lord and in the Lord alone. So in the midst of the sifting that was going on, we have King Jesus, saying that He had prayed. It is good to have Jesus praying for you. But I have prayed that your faith will remain. There is even a little bit of prophecy in this passage. Peter is going to stumble in the time ahead—but when you have turned back, you strengthen your brothers.

We continue in what is here. I think that Peter kind of got the understanding that something unpleasant was coming. He kind of understood the illustration. There would be a painful time ahead. Peter sort of got the point, but had not discerned his own weakness and dependency yet.

What did Peter say in Verse 33:

³³Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.”

Lord, I’ve got this! Looking at the parallel accounts of this, Peter said, Whatever these other guys do, I will be right there with you to the shedding of my blood and my imprisonment and my death. I am not going anywhere! Peter was a man’s man! Be humble, brothers.

Sometimes we raise our voices and we charge and admonish but there is power in humility when we realize that we need God to fill us with the substance that we do not have. God needed to fill these men with the substance they did not have.

That is what Peter missed here and:

³⁴Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny me three times that you know me.”

Humble-pie is on the menu for Simon Peter. Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew Peter. Jesus knew what Peter needed, so Jesus allowed this sifting to take place. Peter would experience this time of failure.

Peter would experience a time of lamentation, and he would come out of that lamentation more prepared and equipped to strengthen others than he was before, because now he would be a man of tenderness and understanding as he dealt with others in their struggles as he sought to fortify them with the strength of God as well.

So we have the Lord doing this deep character shaping within the hearts of His people. Some have said that a leader can’t really be a leader in the Kingdom of Christ until he has been humbled through failure. So when you go through the deep waters and struggles don’t be discouraged because God and Christ is with you and shaping you even then.

Jesus is quite serious about the humility of His people; that we learn to depend on God alone and that we be strong in His grace and in His grace alone. If we are going to have greatness in the Kingdom of Jesus, we need to have discernment of spiritual warfare and our desperate need of Jesus Christ to be filling our hearts every step of the way. Satan is real. We are insufficient to stand against him.

Our own, sin that remains is real and we are insufficient to conquer it. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Praise God, hallelujah, King Jesus will. And it is the presence of Christ through the Spirit as we are reduced and He is increased that we start walking and growing in holiness and in spiritual power and in grace and in the love that is to be definitive of the Kingdom of Christ in a fallen world.

Peter had some lessons to learn. Finally, greatness in the Kingdom is:

4. A matter of preparedness (22:35-38)

When we go into that final very, very interesting, intriguing section, we need to be aware of and prepared for the fact that times and seasons change. We as Christians and we in the church will face various seasons in terms of the world in which we are serving. We cannot be fair-weather Christians. We need to follow Jesus in season and out of season.

We proclaim the Gospel and the message of the Kingdom in season and out of season; when it is honored by culture and when it is not, understanding that when it is honored by culture that is probably a rare period to time. When it is dishonored by culture like the last couple of thousands of years, that is what most of the Christians in the world have experienced.

That is what Jesus was getting at in the final portion contained in Verses 35 through 38 as I just try to summarize it. Jesus reminded the disciples, saying, Remember when I sent you out earlier. You didn't have a moneybag or a bag of supplies. You didn't have anything. I just told you to go out. Did you lack anything? The disciples replied with no.

Understand, that was at period where the popularity of Jesus among the masses was high. Jesus was doing stunning ministry throughout Galilee and the people knew who He was. While the pharisees were starting to grumble against Him, there was still popular intrigue with Jesus and His ministry, so the disciples could depend on some hospitality when they went out.

Jesus was basically saying that season was done. It is time for me to be numbered among the transgressors. So when you go out you take some money. When you go out you bring a knapsack. Jesus even said that if you have a cloak, sell it and get a sword. What?!?

Sometimes you wrestle with the text and the text wins. What in the world did Jesus mean by that? So digging into the commentaries, I found that some say that we are to take that very, very literally. Get a sword to protect yourself. That is how fierce the opposition was going to be.

Others say that this is purely metaphorical. No, because what happens in the next scene? The disciples had swords with them and here came the mob and evidently Peter was aiming for the neck, but he only got the ear of the soldier. And Jesus said, No, put that sword away.

Then the other side might say that was just a very unique moment in history, because the crucifixion needed to happen and the disciples could not put up a fight to resist it. So among those conservative commentaries that I like to read, written by people that have the same view of Scripture as us, it goes back and forth.

I have made up my mind at least three or four times about just what it was that Jesus intended by saying to buy a sword. What was at the heart of this? Understand this, whatever Jesus meant by the sword it is not a sanction to spread the Gospel by force. It is not a call to militancy. Absolutely not!

It may very well be an allowance for self-defense. Did you know that there are churches across this United States that have guards at their churches because crazy people have been coming in with explosives? They are self-protecting themselves. Maybe that is what Jesus was talking about here.

But above all, what Jesus was talking about was the fact that the season for those disciples was going to change. He would be numbered with His transgressors. The Jewish world would name Him a heretic. The Roman world would consider Him an insurrectionist.

The apostles would be guilty by association and the people of Christ were to continue proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom and its ethics for living and the Law of the Kingdom, which reveals our sin and our need for grace and forgiveness. The disciples were to continue with the pure, biblical message of the Kingdom in season or out of season.

Brothers and sisters, in the midst of all this, we carry a message of power, and we are to carry it as those who have humble hearts ready to serve the people that we bring the Gospel to. There is a spirit of humility that needs to characterize the people of Jesus Christ, even as we remain unbending in our doctrinal convictions pulled up from the Word of the Living God.

I am going to finish by taking this back to what I think is the most encouraging element of what we have read this morning. What did Jesus say? In the midst of all the darkness, Verse 32:

³²but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Peter, I have prayed for you. Now it is singular. Jesus was saying I have prayed for you. He did not pray, Peter, I am praying that your sense of self-confidence will remain intact. Rather, Jesus said, I have prayed that your faith will remain. That your faith and your eyes will stay on Me, and that you will have the assurance in your heart that if you have any substance, it is Christ being formed in you. That is what you are designed for. I pray that your faith will be strong; that it will remain and that out that you will encourage your brothers.

That is specially there to Peter, so was Peter the only one Jesus has prayed for like this? He is our Great High Priest. Hebrews Chapter 7 teaches that He always lives to make intercession for us. It is also Romans Chapter 8 and Verses 31 through 34:

³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

So in a portion of Scripture that helps us not to marvel at the disciple's sin but helps us to marvel at our sin because we are just like them, here we have a beautiful picture of our gracious Redeemer who not only wants to cleanse and forgive us but wants to transform us and make us new from the inside out.

So we fall before Him in His grace and ask Him to show us our pride, to show us the arrogance that resides within us, to show us where He is calling us to serve His people with the strength that He alone provides. Let's fall into the grace of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.