



KINGDOM GREATNESS

MARK 10:32-45

I've always loved the story of the two little boys who were arguing. One said, "My dad can beat up your dad." "That's nothing," said the other little boy. "My mom can beat up my dad."

What does it prove? It proves absolutely nothing. We are called to be supporters and servants each to each other—not to beat one another up or down. If we truly want to glorify God the best thing we can do is serve one another.

We read last week in Mark 8 that Jesus told the disciples that he would be killed, but would rise again in 3 days. They would not accept what he said, and Jesus had to chastise them (8:31-34).

Now in Mark 10:32 they are on their way to Jerusalem. The disciples were astonished. Why, if he believed he was going to be killed, was he going?

So Jesus goes over it again with them (vv. 32b-34). He knew what his mission was. Jesus was going to do whatever was necessary for our forgiveness and salvation.

He was going to do whatever it took to do His Father's will. He glorified the Father by giving Himself in order to purchase our salvation. Jesus first of all was the Father's servant.

Jesus' first recorded words were, "I must be about My Father's business"? His last recorded words before His death on the cross were, "It is finished. Into Thy hands I commit my Spirit."

Jesus completely identified Himself with God's purpose. When you become a Christian you identify yourself with that same purpose and will.

We're always running around asking, "God, what can I do for You?" as if we can do anything for God.

The only thing we can offer God is ourselves, our worship and praise. In other words, we identify with Christ, and bring glory to him. But the disciples didn't yet understand this.

They were still thinking through the eyes of the world rather than through eyes of faith. When we think like the world we act like the world. There's a big difference between worldly and kingdom greatness.

Worldly Greatness:

1. Self-absorbed

(Read vv. 35-37). It's incredible that James and John would ask Jesus such a crass, self-serving favor immediately after all He said about the persecution and death He would face in Jerusalem.

They still didn't get it. The disciples believed that Jesus was the Messiah, they just misunderstood what kind of Messiah and the nature of his kingdom.

Their concern was for worldly greatness. They couldn't see beyond their noses. All they cared about was their place in the kingdom that would be established there in Jerusalem. They thought he was establishing an earthly kingdom. They were self-absorbed—they wanted to be sure they got theirs in the Kingdom. They wanted to be ahead of the other disciples.

Leonard Bernstein, the celebrated orchestra conductor, was once asked, "What is the hardest instrument to play?"

Without any hesitation he replied, "Second fiddle. I can always get plenty of first violinists. But to find one who plays second violin with as much enthusiasm, or second French horn, or second flute, now that's a problem! And yet if no one plays second, we have no harmony."

James and John were so absorbed in themselves they were determined not to be second-fiddle to the other disciples (cf. v.41) They were so preoccupied with their own plans and interests that His words just went over their heads. Worldly greatness...

2. Rejects godly values, ethics and purpose.

In v. 28 Peter said to Jesus, "We left everything to follow you. What will there be for us?" Two thousand years later many are still asking, "What's in it for me?"

Preachers are being told today that if you want your church to grow you must preach to the felt needs of the people. Don't preach the cross. Don't preach commitment and sacrifice. Don't preach suffering.

You can grow a church by preaching to felt needs—or through the personality of a pastor. But tickling their ears is not going to bring people into the kingdom of God. You are getting them

into the church under false pretenses.

And, any church grown by a pastor's personality doesn't belong to Christ, it belongs to the pastor. Jesus Christ builds the true church, His church.

There is a place for good, practical, Biblical teaching about marriage, raising children, and all the other myriad relationships we have. But even here the values of God are different than the world's.

The disciples had indeed left everything to follow Jesus. They had genuinely confessed Him as the Messiah and their Lord and Savior. But as many Christians in every age since that time, they began focusing on what they thought they would gain. What's in it for us? Worldly greatness...

3. Rejects concepts of suffering and cross-bearing.

It is not always easy to be a Christian. Sometimes it's hard and dangerous. The disciples were having problems accepting the idea of the Messiah suffering and dying.

The Messiah was supposed to rescue Israel from the Romans and reestablish Israel as its own, great nation. And if Jesus had to suffer and die, they might have to suffer and even die.

Jesus said, "I've come to give you life, an abundant, full life based upon your relationship to me. If you will be willing to take up the cross every day (willing to suffer for me), you may be one of My followers.

"It won't always be easy, and because of Me you may have to suffer. But I promise I'll keep you safe until I carry you safely to your heavenly home." "But what's in it for me?" is on the lips of too many. When James and John came with their request, the only thing on their mind was self-serving ambition. But they had no idea what they were asking.

You get ahead in this world by thinking about yourself; by knowing the right people; and by walking over people to get what you want. We have become self-indulgent, self-satisfied, and self-reliant. We don't need God!

We look at God's grace as a free lunch, a divine open door to health, prosperity, and self-fulfillment. We see God's grace as a vast celestial storehouse of good things we can order on demand from God.

Suffering and cross bearing are either ignored or explained away. A weak gospel, easy believism, and non-sacrificial Christian living are reflections of our narcissistic culture.

Let us not be too hard on James and John and the other disciples. They are simply a reflection

of us. Jesus came to suffer and to die for you and me.

Let's be very clear about that as we ask the question Jesus asked them in vv. 38-40. "Can you drink the cup I drink, or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

The cup that Jesus was about to drink was the cup of suffering and death. He had just described it to them. Jesus was saying, "Don't you realize by now that the way to eternal glory is not through worldly success and honor, but through willingness to suffer for my sake?"

Jesus is not talking about suffering from disease or an accident, or the emotional stress from the loss of a job or the death of a loved one.

Jesus can help us grow through the problems of life and the consequences of sin. But this is not the kind of suffering He is talking about here.

He is talking about the suffering we go through or may go through because of faithfulness to Him, His Church, and the Gospel.

The morals, ethics and values of the Kingdom of God are all opposite to the way the world views things. When we stand up for godly morals and values, many in the world are not going to like us.

Kingdom Greatness

(Read v. 42, comment). Jesus turned the world's greatness upside down. Self-serving, self-promoting, self-glorifying ways are completely against spiritual greatness.

What Jesus says here needs little explanation, but it is in great need of understanding and doing by those who call Jesus Lord and claim to be His followers.

Why? Because Kingdom greatness is a...

4. Willingness to be a servant

The disciples wanted all the trappings of what the world considers greatness—power and recognition and by being served by men. The way to God's greatness is through pleasing Him and serving men in His name.

There is nothing wrong in wanting to be greatly useful to God—but it is wrong to seek the world's kind of greatness. He uses two words that explains the difference—the first word is servant.

* One who does menial labor.

Servant (v. 43) is a secular word referring to a person who did menial labor such as house

cleaning or waiting tables. The Greek is diakonos (deacon). It was not a term of dishonor, but simply described the lowest level of hired help in which little training or skill was needed.

Jesus takes this word and elevates it to a place of great significance. He uses it to describe His most faithful and favored disciples—those who are willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others in the name of Christ. Kingdom greatness is...

5. Willingness to be a slave.

* One who belongs to another.

The second word is slave (v. 44) from the Greek word doulos. The position and work of a slave were the lowest and most demeaning. A servant had some freedom; a slave did not belong to himself but to his master.

He could only go where the master wanted him to go; he could only do what the master wanted him to do. He was the personal property of someone else.

Jesus is telling us that as His followers, if we want to glorify Him and be great in His Kingdom, we will not do as the world, but will humble ourselves in service to Him.

Whenever I read this passage I am reminded of the 1924 Olympics immortalized in the film, Chariots of Fire.

Two Englishmen won gold medals. Their achievements were very similar, but their ambitions were very different. Harold Abrahams ran to command the respect of an establishment he found hostile to his Jewishness.

Eric Liddel ran as a Christian. He ran to win, but he was moved by a desire to please his Lord, Who had given him his talents. He missed out on a possible other gold medal by refusing to race on Sunday.

For Liddel this was not an isolated occasion, but a pattern of life which later led him to serve as a missionary in China and to finally lay down his life in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp during WWII. He gave himself as a servant and slave to his Lord.

Application:

The secret to Kingdom greatness is the willingness to do whatever it takes to be a servant and slave of our Lord in order to serve him through his church and to love and serve one another, and be loving Christians to our neighbors.

Isn't this exactly what Jesus did for us! (v. 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."

A SERMON BY DR. ROBERT MYERS, DEL NORTE BAPTIST, ALBUQUERQUE, NM.