

Greatness In The Kingdom Of God.

Text: Luke 22:24-30

Suggested Hymns:

490, 487, 257, 182, 299

1) Is Not Measured According To Human Standards

2) Is Measured in Terms of Humble Service

3) Reaches Its Wonderful Climax in Heaven

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 22:24-30, *²⁴ Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. ²⁵ And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ ²⁶ “But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. ²⁷ “For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. ²⁸ “But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. ²⁹ “And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, ³⁰ “that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The drive for recognition and the desire for power and prestige is a part of every personality. Everyone, it matters not who he may be, has to contend with this drive. It demands satisfaction, security, and attention ahead of and above all others.

Among the many gifts and faculties with which man was endowed by the Creator, this faculty ranks among the chief. Man was made in the image of God, a creature of perfect and good will, a living soul, a driving organism, with understanding, power, and a will to act.

Man was not just a mimicking piece of activated protoplasm, a human puppet that merely responded to the tugging of the hand of God, but he was a separate being, with a will of his own and a drive of self. By God’s will “man became a living soul,” with the ability to think, feel and act.

In the beginning this self, the human drive and will, was in perfect harmony with God. Man was perfect and holy in every respect, and his ambitions were in complete agreement with the will of God.

It was Satan who misdirected the drive of self and misled man into that which is evil and out of harmony with the holy will of God. When the serpent told Eve, *“For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil,”*¹ the will of man, the drive of self, was directed away from God and His will into the vain and evil self-will which has since that time marked the human personality.

It was with the offer of greatness, *“you will be like God,”* that Satan beguiled our first parents. We, their sons and daughters, have to contend with that same drive and emotion.

This drive and will is not restricted to a certain group of people, for instance, the unbeliever, but is to be found in all people. It is lodged in our hearts also. It rises again and again in the form of pride and self-righteousness, in dreams of greatness and importance, and is a part of hurt feelings and insulted lives.

As children of God, we are human, too. We have the Old Adam to contend with in our daily walk of life. We have these same desires and drives, these same dreams of greatness and ambitions in their mental and emotional make-up. In fact, we notice from the Bible that even the great and noble men of God had to contend with these feelings and urges.

We must, then, be on guard against the false drives of self and the vain ambitions of the flesh. However, we should seek to aspire to the one and only greatness which is in harmony with the will and plan of God. Our Lord tells us what this greatness is.

Today is the last Sunday of the Church Year and our thoughts are turned toward the realisation of the ultimate plans of God in heaven. Therefore let us learn from our Saviour the true greatness and glory which should motivate and fill our lives with a holy ambition. Let us consider “Greatness in the Kingdom of God.” May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Greatness In The Kingdom Of God Is Not Measured According To Human Standards

As we look at our text, the first thing that strikes us is the mistake which the disciples of our Lord made in considering the kingdom of God and their position in that kingdom. How very human were these disciples and followers of Christ! How much like them are we!

It was the night of our Lord's betrayal and arrest. He had gathered in the Upper Room with His faithful few to eat the Passover with them and to give to them the seal of the new testament, the Holy Sacrament of His body and blood. They had gathered at the table when our text begins. They began to argue and quarrel. "*Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.*" They were striving with one another for the positions of honour and glory among them. They were more concerned about their place in the Kingdom than they were about being with their Lord.

This was not a proper or commendable thing for them to do. They stand forth in all their weaknesses and frailties, true sons of Adam, filled with the unholy emotions and drives of pride and self-importance. How petty this all seems to us! Here were the great men of God, the disciples whom the Lord had chosen, fighting for a little honour and vain-glory!

But how human, and how very much like them we all are! Even we church members are still at times driven to seek our own glory and honour, thinking that we must have a special place. How many men and women in the church are motivated at times by such wrong emotions!

A person seeks an office in the church or in an organisation of the church, or even in a civic organisation, for no other reason than that he desires honour and praise. Many a faithful member has at one time or another felt insulted and hurt because no one noticed that little deed which he had done. People have even quit the church because they felt they were not recognised properly and were not given a place of honour corresponding with their real worth. How many people have become jealous and envious because another person received a small measure of praise, and they did not!

Next we learn that the Lord distinguishes between human concepts of greatness and kingdom greatness. The Lord Jesus must have felt sad when He saw this vain and idle controversy going on between His followers. He had worked so hard to teach them, and still they were so weak. How patient the Lord

was with His frail disciples! He turned to them and said, *“The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’* ²⁶ *“But not so among you.”*

The human concept of greatness is not the same as that of the Kingdom. Among men, greatness is figured and reckoned in terms of power and authority which a person or persons can wield over others. The Saviour took the kings of the Gentiles as examples of such human standards of greatness. When a king is able to control people by force, then he is said to be great. If he could not control them, he would not be great. In fact, he could not even be king. And they are called benefactors by the people, even though they may be feared by them.

The Lord, no doubt, had in mind the Roman emperors, who exercised their authority over the people by force and with the help of the invincible soldiers. They were called benefactors. They even called themselves gods, who were great in their own power and in their own might. No doubt the disciples, who then did not yet understand the real nature of the kingdom of God, had the model of the Roman Empire in mind. They were human enough to imagine that someday they would rule with Christ as kings and powerful princes over the people.

Such greatness and such glory was the content of the disciples’ dreams and ambitions. But the Lord Jesus says, *“But not so among you.”*

Truly, the kingdom of God is not like the kingdoms of this world. It is different, for, as Jesus says, it is not of this world. It has powers and principles operating in its confines different from those that operate among men. What seems greatness in this world is nothing in the kingdom of God. What seems nothing, what is most undesirable among men, is great in the kingdom of God.

The Christian must learn that Kingdom position and Kingdom honour is not what proud and selfish man thinks it is, and he must always realise that the standards of men and of the kingdoms of this world cannot be imposed upon the kingdom of God. The standard is altogether different in Christ’s kingdom. Therefore it is *“not of this world.”*

2. Greatness In The Kingdom Of God Is Measured In Terms Of Humble Service

The Saviour gently but firmly corrects His disciples and establishes the standard for all of His followers. How simple, yet how hard for the human spirit to attain, is His formula! Listen to Jesus, *he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves*. In one simple statement the Lord smashes away all the vain striving and idle ambitions of men. In the kingdom of God the attitudes are so different, and the motives and the goals are not at all like those of the world.

The right spirit and attitude is that of humility and service. *He who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger*, expresses the humble and submissive attitude that children of God should take toward one another. Instead of driving for glory and honour, for position and prestige, the Christian seeks to please and to give honour to those around him, just as a proper young man is always respectful and kind to his elders.

The Apostle Paul expresses it in this way, *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.*² Many of the problems of people, the petty jealousies, the hurt and insulted feelings, and the silly frustrations would all disappear if everyone followed this injunction of the Saviour.

How much better the world and even the Church on earth would be if the spirit of humility would pervade all, instead of the spirit of arrogant ambition and the seeking of glory and praise! And to this spirit of humility is added the spirit of service. It must of necessity accompany it.

The spirit of service to God and our fellow man is the very heart of Christianity, and it is a part of the essence of the sonship of God. God made man to serve. But sin ruined this desire of service to God. However, when the Lord Jesus Christ came at the appointed time to save us from our sins and to redeem us to God, He restored us again to the position of sonship, which through sin we had lost. He saved us to serve.

We have not been redeemed and called to God to live to ourselves, but, as the Lord tells us by His holy Apostle, *“He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”*³

Dr. Martin Luther very appropriately puts it this way in the explanation of the Second Article of our faith, *“Christ has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil ... that I may be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.”*

How inconsistent, then, is the spirit of pride and arrogance, the drive for greatness, for honour, for recognition, for glory, with the nature of the true child of God! We read in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.* That means, then, that his attitudes, his ambitions, his drives are new, too. He is eager and happy to serve his Lord and Saviour.

He also seeks to serve his fellow men. Jesus told His disciples on this very same night, *“These things I command you, that you love one another,”*⁴ thus indicating how He expected His disciples to live for one another and to serve one another. They understood this later, and in love they did serve one another. They stood by one another in every trial and tribulation. They sacrificed all. They gave of themselves, even themselves and their lives, in the fulfilment of this service.

How much we have to learn here from our Lord! The world has always been a cruel place in which men seek selfishly their own advantages. In such a world the children of light at times are forgetful of their true nature and of the attitude which the Lord expects of them in His kingdom.

Let us now look at our Lord’s own example of greatness. That the disciples might know, that we might have an example, the Lord gave a practical demonstration and made the necessary application. He showed what He meant by this Kingdom greatness of service.

He said, *For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.* Jesus had washed the disciples’ feet and made them sit down at the table and there had served them. Now, He was the Lord, the Master. He should not do that. He was the highest among them. Yet He served them all. He demonstrated the spirit of the kingdom of God.

However, this was not His greatest and only demonstration. The greatest example of service was and is His suffering and death on the cross. Christ’s

whole life and work is one of service. *“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.”*⁵ He left His heavenly throne and became a poor and humble man that through His divine sacrifice, His service of love, we might be saved from sin and destruction.

Is there any greater service anywhere in all the world? Is there anyone greater than Christ anywhere, in heaven or in earth? Did not the greatest become the least and the Lord of all, the Servant of all? How clear, then, is our Lord’s illustration of service!

Truly the person who wants to be great in the Kingdom shall be a servant of all. How simple, yet how hard! How easy, and yet how difficult to carry out! Only a sincere recognition of all that Christ has done, only by a genuine faith, only by a full heaven-born love, can we thus live in the Kingdom and attain to such greatness.

3. Kingdom Greatness Reaches Its Wonderful Climax In Heaven

The disciples must have been somewhat confused and disappointed when Jesus told them about service and humility and thus punctured their bubble of anticipated greatness. How masterfully the Saviour then encourages the disciples and us, setting before us the vision of wonderful glory, prestige, and power that will someday be ours! Listen to Jesus, *“But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials.”*²⁹ *“And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me,”*³⁰ *“that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”*⁶

Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of Glory, the Kingdom delivered from this evil world. What may seem as dishonour here, but in reality is faithfulness to Jesus, will become glory hereafter. The weary servant will become the glorious heir and prince of a great kingdom. It is significant to see, however, that Jesus does not make this glory to come dependent on the service and humility rendered, but makes faithfulness to Himself the condition of this coming glory. *“You are those who have continued with Me in My trials”* He said.

In other words, because the disciples had faith in Jesus, although at times it was weak and somewhat disturbed and confused because of ignorance, but

because they remained loyal to Him, they were to have this glorious position in heaven.

It is still the same with us. He who believes in the Lord Jesus shall be saved. He who remains loyal to his Lord shall overcome and win the victory. ***“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life”***⁷ said Jesus, and again we hear Him say, ***“he who endures to the end shall be saved.”***⁸ Thus those who love and trust the Lord and in humble and holy service live to Him by faith shall enter into the kingdom above.

To them Christ gives assurance of greatness and honour forever. They shall sit at the table of Christ in the kingdom of heaven. They will be completely satisfied. For them there will be no frustration ever again. Their hunger and their desires shall be satisfied. They shall be given a position of power and glory, for Jesus says that the disciples shall ***“sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”*** They are sharing with Jesus the glory and the exaltation which is the Lord’s.

May our love for Jesus and our gratitude for our salvation move us nobly to live in humble service, as He instructed us to do.

On this last Sunday of the church year, as we fix our thoughts on things to come and on the blessed kingdom above, may we be drawn closer and more perfectly to our Lord in faith and love, and more completely into His service in His kingdom. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Genesis 3:5

² Romans 12:10

³ 2 Corinthians 5:15

⁴ John 15:17

⁵ Mark 10:45

⁶ Luke 22:28

⁷ Revelation 2:10

⁸ Mark 13:13