

Intro: Who is the greatest? That discussion comes up quite frequently in life. Who is the greatest quarterback of all time? Who is the greatest president in the history of the US? People often desire to be the greatest and sometimes go to great lengths to achieve that status. More than once the discussion of who was the greatest or who could be the greatest came up among Jesus' own disciples. We have one of those instances in our text today. In this instance, Jesus took the time to explain to his disciples what being the greatest was and meant among those who followed him. He explained to them **How Greatness is Achieved in God's Kingdom**. He explained to them that greatest in God's kingdom is achieved **1) Not by one's exercise of authority over others 2) But by one's service rendered to others.**

**I. Not by one's exercise of authority over others (35-37,41-43)**

- A. The disciples' desire for earthly power
  - 1. James and John's request of Jesus
    - a. **(Mt 19:28, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.")**
    - b. Jesus spoke those words shortly before our text took place
    - c. with those words of Jesus fresh in their minds, James and John made a request of Jesus
    - d. without even letting him know at all what they were going to ask
    - e. they asked Jesus to grant whatever request they made
    - f. they said to Jesus, **"Let one of us sit at your right hand and the other at your left in your glory."**
    - g. by requesting positions at Jesus' right and left in his kingdom of glory
    - h. James and John were requesting places of the highest rank in this culture and at this time
    - i. they were requesting positions of great power and authority
  - 2. the reaction of the other disciples
    - a. when the other ten disciples heard about James and John's request
    - b. **"they became indignant"** with them
    - c. in other words, they were angry with them
    - d. not so much for their request
    - e. but for the fact that they had beaten them to the punch, if you will
    - f. because they, most likely, had the same aspirations of power and authority
- B. Jesus' rebuff of their request
  - 1. worldly power
    - a. sensing that this situation could soon explode into an all out confrontation
    - b. Jesus called all of the disciples to himself
    - c. and he told them, **"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them."**
    - d. Jesus told his disciples that their request for and their desire for positions of power and authority were ideas of the Gentiles, that is, of the unbelieving world
    - e. and not of those who follow him
    - f. to the unbelieving world greatness is achieved when one exercises authority over others
    - g. when one expends one's energy to get to the top
    - h. and then causes others to feel the weight of that authority

- i. when one has people beneath him and is served by them
  - 2. but that is not greatness in God's kingdom
    - a. but **"Not so with you."** Jesus declares to his disciples
    - b. 'For those of you who follow me,' Jesus says, 'this is not what greatness is all about.'
    - c. Jesus tells his disciples that one's greatness is not achieved when one exercises authority over people
    - d. or has control over them
    - e. or imposes his will upon them
    - f. or has people under him who serve him
    - g. that is not greatness in God's kingdom
- Trans: Greatness is not achieved in God's kingdom by one's exercise of authority over others. Instead, greatness in God's kingdom is achieved by one's service rendered to others.

**II. But by one's service rendered to others (38-40)**

- A. It is not about you!
  - 1. Jesus' cup and baptism
    - a. after James and John made their request to Jesus for positions at his right and left, Jesus asked them
    - b. **"Can you drink of the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"**
    - c. the cup and baptism about which Jesus is here speaking is his impending suffering and death
    - d. you will recall Jesus' words to his Father in Gethsemane **(Mt 26:39, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.")**
  - 2. suffering is essential to greatness
    - a. with this question, Jesus was redirecting James and John's thoughts
    - b. he was telling them to forget about exercising authority over people
    - c. and telling them that if they wanted to be great
    - d. they would have to be like him
    - e. if they wanted to be great they would need to be willing to suffer
    - f. because suffering, self-denial if you will, is the way to achieve greatness in the kingdom of God
    - g. Jesus had already told his disciples much the same thing when he told them, **(Mk 8:34, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.")**
    - h. so, how is one to achieve greatness in the kingdom of God?
    - i. the path to greatness, Jesus says, goes through suffering and self-denial
- B. Be a servant and slave to all
  - 1. it's about others
    - a. the path to greatness also goes through service
    - b. listen to Jesus **(43b-45)**
    - c. in God's kingdom greatness is achieved when a person is unconcerned about himself
    - d. and when a person does do for himself
    - e. instead, greatness is achieved when a person is concerned about others
    - f. and does for others
    - g. in God's kingdom greatness is achieved when a person disregards himself
    - h. and assists, helps, and tends to the needs of others
    - i. Jesus told his disciples in **(Mt 23:11, "The greatest among you will be your servant.")**

- j. and again Jesus said, (**Lk 9:48, “For he who is least among you all-he is the greatest.”**)
- k. Jesus made it clear to his disciples that greatness in God’s kingdom is achieved through service to others
- 2. Jesus is the supreme example of service
  - a. and then pointed to himself as the supreme example of service to others
  - b. he did not come to this earth to be served
  - c. even though he had every right to be served
  - d. he did not come to exercise authority over others
  - e. nor to achieve greatness for himself
  - f. but to serve others
  - g. and that is what he did
  - h. when he came to this earth and **“gave his life as a ransom for many”**
- 3. all enslaved by sin, the devil, and death
  - a. by nature, all people are sinful
  - b. and, as a result, are enslaved to the devil and to sin
  - c. they must do as the devil says
  - d. and they cannot help but sin
  - e. and, because all are sinners and violate God’s holy will
  - f. all are enslaved by death
  - g. all must die
  - h. because (**Ro 6:23, “The wages of sin is death...”**)
  - i. this includes all of us who are gathered here today
- 4. Jesus ransomed all sinners
  - a. but Jesus ransomed sinners
  - b. he set them free from sin and death and the devil
  - c. the ransom price he paid to set them free was his own life
  - d. showing a total disregard for his own life
  - e. and only concern for others
  - f. Jesus sacrificed his life on a cross
  - g. and his death was a substitutionary death – a death died in every sinner’s place – including yours and mine
  - h. and the ransom price he paid, he paid to God
  - i. since it was his holy will that was violated
  - j. and since it was he to whom a just payment for sin was due
  - k. and the ransom price Jesus paid was paid for many, a number too numerous to count, for all people
- 5. Jesus ransomed us
  - a. with his sacrificial and substitutionary death, Jesus has ransomed us
  - b. he has set us free from sin
  - c. we are no longer under its curse
  - d. and no longer under its control
  - e. he has also set us free from the devil
  - f. he is no longer our master nor do we have to listen to him
  - g. and Jesus has set us free from the threat of physical death and eternal death in hell
  - h. Paul states it quite simply in (**Ep 1:7, “We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.”**)
  - i. Jesus ransomed us so that we will be set free from this sinful body and this sinful world at the time of our death
  - j. to receive our heavenly inheritance in his kingdom of glory on the Final Day

- k. where we will live as those who are great in the company of he who is the greatest of all
  - l. and, finally, Jesus has set us free to live lives of service to others
  - m. according to the example he has given us
  - n. as we receive the strength to do so through the indwelling of his Spirit
  - o. and the gospel in Word and Sacrament
- Concl: Who is the greatest in the kingdom of God? He is who is the slave and servant of all.