

True Greatness

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[0 : 00] Well, questions on the screen. If you could ask Jesus to give you one thing, just one thing, what would you ask him to give you?

Well, in our passage this morning, James and John, they get to do just that. They get to ask Jesus to give them something.

Have a look at verse 35. Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him, came to Jesus and said, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. What do you want me to do for you? Jesus said.

They come to Jesus and they want him to do whatever they ask of him. And Jesus says, okay, sure, what do you want me to do for you? It's very gracious of Jesus to let them do that.

What could be coming? Well, it's there in verse 37. They replied, let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in glory.

[1 : 24] What they would like Jesus to do for them is to, when they get to heaven, is to let them sit at the highest places. Right next to Jesus. One of them on his right and one of them on his left.

In other words, they want greatness. They want power. They want thrones. They want us to get to heaven and look up at where Jesus is and think, wow, aren't James and John pretty great?

They're sitting right there in the places right next to Jesus. They must be pretty special people. Well, you might as well ask.

You've got Jesus there in front of you. You might as well ask. And you know what? Jesus has literally just been telling them that he won't be around much longer.

So they take the opportunity to ask Jesus of this whilst they can. But what has Jesus just been telling them?

[2 : 37] Have a look there in 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.

Jesus said, we're going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the 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. Jesus is going to be mocked. He's going to be spat on.

[3 : 40] He's going to be flogged. And he's going to be killed. Are James and John seriously responding to this news by asking Jesus to give them the highest places in heaven?

Jesus, God in the flesh, is going to be mocked and spat on and flogged and killed. Jesus, who's spent these last few years with these disciples, showing his great love to them.

He's going to die. And all James and John can respond to this news is, give me greatness, give me power. When we get to heaven, give us the thrones.

Jesus is going to die. It's the very opposite of greatness and power. It's not a throne, it's a cross.

We've been singing about Christmas in our service, about Jesus being God made low, a baby born in Bethlehem. You see, James and John, and I think we need to see this morning, we need to learn with them who we're following and how we're to follow.

[5 : 07] Who we're following and how we're to follow. So the first point this morning is just that, who do we follow? The short answer is Jesus.

And they totally get that they are following Jesus. They totally get that he's God, that he's got power, that he's going to be in heaven, that he's going to sit on a throne in heaven.

They totally get that. And they ask too, that they'll be seated high up with him in his glory. They want to share in the power and the glory.

They're confident that they'll be there with him. As will all of us who are following the Lord Jesus. But between now and then, we need to see who we're following, how he wants us to follow him. Because Jesus, he's not seeking after the greatness that the world looks for. Thrones and palaces. No, he didn't come down in great glory, at least not great glory that we would look for.

[6 : 30] We know the story, don't we? We've been singing about it. Jesus came down from the throne of glory to be born in a manger, born to a young virgin girl named Mary.

This is Jesus. God made flesh. God come down to be with us. Emmanuel. And Jesus here shows us in this passage, he is treading the pathway to the cross.

God that's who we're following. Not the pathway of seeking to love himself, but loving others.

And that's the way we're to walk too. Earlier this year, I was running the Brighton Half Marathon. It was probably about a year ago I was signing up to it.

This is what it looks like when you sign up to the Half Marathon. You have to choose the time that you expect you're going to finish. And as I saw this choice, I looked at it and I thought I could go for gold.

[7 : 48] Sub one hour twenty Half Marathon. I've got three months to get ready for it. or I could be realistic and click about two hours run at a pace and a time that I know I can run at that probably nobody's going to notice.

Jesus didn't come to choose the pathway of glory in this world. not glory as we would see it. He didn't choose to look great.

He didn't choose to be the most handsome man, to have the most followers on Instagram, to live in great luxury and wealth. No, the glory would come later as he goes back to heaven but firstly it's a cross.

Jesus chose the pathway to a cross where he would be mocked, where he would be spat on, flogged and killed.

Jesus is the great ruler of all things and he chose to be handed over to the chief priests and teachers of the law. to be condemned to death on a cruel wooden cross.

[9 : 20] That's who we follow. And so that's why he says to James and John you just don't know what you're asking. Have a look at verse 38.

You don't know what you're asking Jesus said. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?

He talks about cups and baptism. Why does he talk about those things? When he talks about cups he's not talking about going to get a cup of water to drink.

No, the cup represents the cup of God's wrath which would be poured out upon Jesus on the cross. His wrath for our sin that Jesus would face in our place. He talks about baptism, the waters of God's judgment which Jesus would go under for us in death because he could then rise out of those waters of judgment as he rises again three days later.

[10 : 50] And he asked them what really I think should be a rhetorical question. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?

Have John and James got it yet? Well, no. They say, yeah, of course we can. Bring it on.

Probably they thought the cup was the wine, the great feast in the kingdom of God and the baptism, some sort of washing ceremony before they could sit on those nice thrones that Jesus was going to have prepared for them.

You see, their eyes are on greatness. And maybe that's where our eyes are on tea. We're following Jesus, but we forget the magnitude of Jesus coming down from his throne of glory to a manger.

We forget that the symbol of Christianity is a cross somewhere where someone was going to die.

We want to be comfortable and safe and secure.

[12 : 11] We want wealth and we want to be looked at by other people and think that we're great.

We want other people to think we're great. We want to be happy. We want to be We want We want to be But that's not the way of the cross. That's not who we're following.

Jesus explains to James and John this as we read on through verse 39.

Jesus said to them you will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with. Jesus does say they will face this cup and baptism this suffering not as Jesus is going to face it on the cross but the way of following Jesus is suffering.

We're to expect it if we're following him. Here we see the greatest leader who's ever lived telling his followers that he is going to give up his life but his followers just want the glory.

[13:31] Glory is coming. We have a glorious future ahead of us but first it's the cross. Have a look at verse 45.

Jesus says this 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.

This is what Jesus came to do. He came not to be served by us though he would have every right to be served by us. No he came to serve to give his life up for us.

The one who was condemned to death beaten beaten mocked flogged and killed for us for you for me.

This is who we follow. It's so good this evening that we have another opportunity to be taking communion together.

[14:49] if you are able to join us do come. As we look at the symbols of bread and wine we're not coming and looking at a throne no just taking a bit of bread but reminding us of his body which was spat on which was nailed to a cross and they're killed.

The wine a reminder of blood that he shed. As we take and eat we're reminded of who we are following.

The son of man who's come to serve us even by giving his life as a ransom for us. Jesus has served you so that he can save you.

This is who we follow. Jesus the servant king and he calls us now to be following him.

Secondly we see how do we follow. Ask us a question at the beginning if you could ask Jesus to give you one thing what would you ask?

[16:22] I think there's two ways we're probably going to answer that. One is in a James and John way. Give me greatness. In other words a selfish way.

Something for me. Even if we're asking something for other people probably we're really asking it for ourselves. A selfish way.

The other disciples they said this in verse 41 when the ten heard about this they became indignant with James and John. And so Jesus calls them together.

Why are they indignant? I think because we see Jesus calling them together and said you know what they're cross because they wish they had asked this first.

They want to be sitting on those two thrones as well. That's the first way we could answer this question. The second way is the Jesus way.

[17:29] Lord help me to be a servant. Help me to follow you. a way that's not selfish but focused on serving our Lord Jesus on honoring him.

So it's give me a throne or help me be a servant. Help me in my selfishness or help me to serve ye. Well let's hear what Jesus has to say.

Verse 40 T. 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.

Jesus says you know the way the world works. Leaders they love power and position. People we love power and position and when we get it we lord!

it over ourselves. leaders rise and leaders fall. They have their time of greatness but it doesn't last.

[18:43] But Jesus has a kind of upside down kingdom. Completely different path to greatness. But it's a kingdom that lasts and stands forever.

And it has a completely different path to greatness and it involves Jesus going to a cross. And so Jesus says to his disciples this isn't to be so with you.

We don't seek after greatness as the world seeks it. Verse 43 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.

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 says don't seek after a throne.

Don't seek after power. Come follow me and to follow me you need to be a servant. Someone whose interest is directed towards others not self.

[20:00] Someone who loves others and is willing even to lay down their life for others. That's the way of Jesus.

That's how we follow Jesus. For even the Son of Man in his greatness did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Let me tell you about a story of someone that I've read about and is a great hero of mine.

It's someone who was born just up the road in a village called Hurstford Point. Many of you know that's where I'm from. And on September the 3rd 1847 he was born.

And his family he owned a department store in Brighton which he went to work for for a while. A few years later he ended up going to a train for Church of England Ministry in Oxford.

[21 : 15] Here is the guy by the way. I'll tell you his name in a bit. He became the curate in charge at St. George's Church in Hurstford Point. A few years he went on to be a missionary in Uganda serving the Church Missionary Society.

However, he had to return home for a while because of ill health. But he was able to go back again and he ended up being a bishop. The first bishop of eastern equatorial Africa.

his last expedition was into Maasai territory with a group of about 200 people and also some fellow clergy with him.

It was called The Journey of His Army of Peace and it left base on July the 23rd and then by October the 12th he decided to leave this main party with 50 other men to go and visit some missionaries in Uganda and about 10 days later his group of people that he was with was ambushed and his journal tells us what happened next it says this suddenly about 20 ruffians set upon us they violently threw me to the ground and proceeded to strip me of all valuables thinking they were robbers I shouted for help when they forced me up and hurried me away but then they tried to throw me down a precipice which was close at hands

I shouted again in spite of one threatening to kill me twice I nearly broke away from them but then I grew faint and struggled and was dragged by the legs over the ground he was violently attacked and he was struggling suffering great agony in spite of all that he says as he was being dragged away to be murdered he sang safe in the arms of Jesus and he laughed at the very agony of the situation my clothes were torn to pieces he wrote and wet through and being dragged on the ground he was strained in every limb for a whole hour he was expecting to die hurried along dragged pushed at five miles an hour until they came to a hut eight days later he was killed aged just 38 it's the story of a man who gladly laid down his life for the service of

[24 : 28] God who knew what it was to follow the way of Jesus to come to serve rather than be served and the man's name is Bishop James Hannington and there's a church just down the road who's named after him not named after a great important royal person but named after someone who serves the Lord Jesus who understood what it is to be a servant James and John didn't really understand it here nor did the other disciples but they would go on tea after Jesus laid down his life and in 1 John chapter 3 verse 16 John himself wrote these words this is how we know what love is Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters too

John got it in the end and this is the Lord Jesus that many of us this morning are following the Lord Jesus who came not to be served but to serve by giving his life as a ransom for many he knew John knew what it meant to follow in the end and so how are we going to serve for some of us that will mean that we need to come and ask me or someone else at the church how can how can I serve here where can I serve for others of us maybe it means we're going to pick up one or some more of the invitations to the carol services and we're going to take it and give it to someone who does not yet know the

Lord Jesus it may feel risky it may feel like putting our lives on the line of relationship with them in danger but Jesus calls us to be a servant and it may just be the start of someone coming to find salvation from our servant saviour Jesus for others of us we've seen this morning that we're a bit like James and John in this passage we're seeking comforts our own selfish desires just trying to look after ourselves rather than serve the Lord Jesus but Jesus shows us the way of following him is to be a servant we need to ask Jesus to forgive us and to help us many of us do serve the Lord Jesus so faithfully and I've seen that over these last few months thank you let's keep following our servant saviour Jesus remembering that it's a cross before the crown because in the end Jesus does go to a throne Jesus does go back to his throne in glory not one in this world but one with his father in heaven and one where he is gathering a servant hearted people from all over the world to be with him in a new creation Jesus in one of the letters to the churches in revelation says be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life faithfully serve me and you will get the crown

of life which isn't greatness as this world would see it but it's to enjoy life forever in that new creation
life forever with our faithful servant king the
Lord Jesus where we with all his other servants will gather to praise him and to serve him forever
thus the way Jesus goes the way of a servant and it's the way we're called to go as well let's pray