

It Shall Not Be So Among You!

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[0 : 00] Who is the GOAT? It's this sports term for greatest of all time. Tom Brady, five-time Super Bowl winning quarterback of the New England Patriots, often called the GOAT the greatest of all time by many of his peers and many fans around the country and world.

Usain Bolt, perhaps the fastest man who ever lived. No one ran a 200-meter sprint like him. Some athletes are even nicknamed the Great One, like former hockey player Wayne Gretzky, or self-proclaimed it as they're preparing for a heavyweight boxing fight like Muhammad Ali, who called himself the greatest in the world, the greatest fighter the world had ever known.

In other circles, of course, celebrities are valued for their social greatness, their status amongst mere mortals like us, who, unlike them, don't get the red carpet treatment, don't have paparazzi taking photographs when we're eating dinner at the local restaurants.

We're not ending up on the late-night TV shows like they are. We're not getting book deals. We're not the front-page news and the gossip columns. It's hard to imagine American life apart from ranking almost everything, isn't it?

We want to know what the best burger joint in Kenosha is. We sort of argue even over the best Christian preachers, the best smartphone.

[1 : 38] Are you an Android person? Are you an Apple person? And that sort of defines your worth in our culture. And then once you've got the phone, what service provider is going to provide the best coverage for your network?

We want quality products. We want great products. We want to feel important ourselves. We want to be well thought of. We want to be great.

We aspire to be great, even if it's in our own sort of self-defined ways. We want to be great. We want to be recognized. We want to be important. Before we know it, the world's way of defining greatness and status and importance has crept into our Christian experience.

It skews our worldview. It bends how we think. And it messes with our value system. Well, we recognize our need to be reoriented around a different understanding of how things work, a different understanding of status, a different understanding of greatness.

We need to redefine and pursue greatness as defined and exemplified by Jesus Christ and no one and nothing else.

[3 : 06] If we embrace our culture's definition of greatness, which is found through success and ladder climbing, our kingdom usefulness plummets.

But if we listen to Jesus' definition, we can pursue true greatness. We can find real value and true esteem in what God says is great.

So let's read this text together and consider this morning what Jesus exactly is calling us to as his disciples. This is Matthew chapter 20, starting in verse 17.

And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the 12 disciples aside and on the way he said to them, See, we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified and he will be raised on the third day.

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons and kneeling before him, she asked him for something. And he said to her, What do you want? She said to him, Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left in your kingdom.

[4 : 33] Jesus answered, You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? They said to him, We are able.

He said to them, You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.

And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave.

Even as the Son of Man came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him.

[5 : 40] And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, Lord, have mercy on us, son of David. The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent.

But they cried out all the more, Lord, Lord, have mercy on us, son of David. And stopping, Jesus called them and said, What do you want me to do for you?

They said to him, Lord, let our eyes be opened. And Jesus, in pity, touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.

Well, we can think of our text this morning kind of like a sandwich. Any good sandwich has two parts. It's got the bread on the outside and the fixings on the inside. So we're going to look at this passage just like we would examine a sandwich.

We're going to first look at the bread. There's a slice in verses 17 to 19. And then the other slice is in 29 to 34. We're going to see specifically what that has to say about Jesus.

[6 : 49] And then we're going to look at the fixings. We're going to see how, in light of who he is, and in light of his character, and in light of what he's done, what that calls us to as his people, and his followers.

So first, the bread. Here's the main idea in 17 to 19 and 29 to 34. Our king, Jesus Christ, is a suffering servant.

Our king is a suffering servant. From the outset of Matthew's gospel, he wants to set the record straight about this guy. We see in the very first verse, Jesus the Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

A little bit later, he's Emmanuel. He's God with us. As the story has progressed, we've seen Jesus' power on display and miraculous healings and the exercising of authority over creation, calming seas, healing paralytics, giving sight to the blind as we see even in our passage today.

Matthew is asking and getting us to ask the question, who is this guy that is calling us to follow him? What's his identity?

[8 : 12] What's his character like? What's his mission on planet Earth? Well, his identity, of course, is the Christ, the anointed one of God, the one who is inaugurating the saving reign of God throughout all of the world.

His character, we've seen time and time again that he's full of compassion. He's full of mercy. He reaches out to those in need.

For those who cry for help, he answers. In his mission, we can summarize it as destination, Calvary. He's headed to the cross.

He's on a mission to die in the place of sinners. Well, this passage in Matthew is perhaps the clearest statements yet where Jesus' identity and his compassion and his mission sort of align. And they come together and Matthew really focuses in in these verses. And it's the close proximity of this identity and character and mission that's going to bring clarity to who this guy is.

[9 : 24] So first, we look at, there's two titles that we can see. The first is in verse 18. See it there? The Son of Man. Right? And this is Jesus' self-proclaimed title.

This is how he references himself time and time again in Matthew's Gospel. We see that this comes from Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 and 14 where one like the Son of Man is brought before the Ancient of Days, before the throne of God.

And interestingly, he's given an everlasting dominion, an indestructible kingdom that all nations should come and serve him. That's the first title, the Son of Man.

But then also, if you notice in verses 30 and 31, there's a different title, similar, but it's on the mouths and lips of the blind men.

Son of David. Son of David, have mercy on us. Interestingly, every time that this title occurs in Matthew's Gospel, it's in context of healing.

[10:36] people are imploring Jesus to heal them, to relieve their suffering or their pain or their physical needs. And so they call out Son of David.

Well, this is, of course, a title that is seen as the fulfillment of a prophecy from 2 Samuel chapter 7, specifically verse 16 where the prophet Nathan comes to David and says, your offspring is going to be on your throne forever.

These blind guys in our passage seem to realize a little bit of the extent of what this title means. Here's the one, the prophesied king, the son of David who would come and take the throne forever and ever and ever.

He's the son of man. He's the son of David. He's an eternal king. His kingdom and his dominion have no end and cannot be destroyed. These titles in our text show us that Jesus is the legit heir of King David and that he is the divine, eternal king who will rule all people forever.

forever. But we don't just see titles, right? We see his character displayed especially in verses 29 to 34. He's on the way to Jerusalem.

[12:08] He's already pointed this out. He's from the beginning said, hey, I'm going to Jerusalem. There's all this commotion. There's all this energy. It's the time of the Passover. So all the Jews are converging on this city.

Energy is maxed out and especially this time because the prophet's coming. The promised Messiah is coming. He's going to take his throne.

So everybody's worked up and excited and here come two pesky nobodies and they start killing the vibe.

That's how the world sees them, right? That's how the crowd sees these two blind guys. We see that from the rebuke. In verse 31, they say, shut up.

King doesn't have time for you. He's on the way to his throne. Leave him alone. Get out of here. He has no time for these blind men, doesn't he?

[13:10] Thankfully, the crowd's there to help him out, right? They rebuke him for begging. King has more important duties. Just keep quiet here. Well, thank God that Jesus does not respond to these two blind men the way that the crowds do.

See in verse 32, stop it. He takes time out of this procession that's all about him. It's all about his movement towards Jerusalem, his kingly arrival.

He stops. He calls them and he says, what would you like me to do for you? He listens to their request and notice in verse 34, he has pity on them, compassion, mercy.

He stops the procession that's all about him to serve two guys that everybody in that crowd has deemed to be no one, of no consequence, of no value to the king and yet the king stops and serves them.

He heals them. He gives them sight. Merciful power on display. It's amazing. Jesus is eager and able to stop what he's doing to care for these two men.

[14:30] Friends, you and I are never, ever, ever going to meet anyone as consistently compassionate as King Jesus. He's amazing. He has time for even the little guy.

He's a merciful king. But this king, the son of man, the son of David who has compassion, he's on a mission. Right? We jump back to that first slice of bread now, verses 17 to 19.

We see what that mission is. Destination, Calvary. He's got a one-way ticket to suffer and die on the cross. This king, the son of man who gives mercy to blind guys, will be delivered to the high priests and scribes, verse 18.

They will condemn him to death. They will hand him over to pagans because these Jewish rulers don't have the authority themselves to put Jesus to death.

So they'll bypass that by handing him over to the Romans where he will be mocked and flogged and crucified.

[15:46] Well, what happened, you may ask, to the throne of glory and the throngs of angels that he's been talking about upon his return? We see as recently as chapter 19, verse 28.

Jesus says, Truly I say to you in the new world, when the son of man will sit on his glorious throne, he's coming into a kingdom, and yet now he's talking about suffering and a brutal death on a cross, condemned to die as a criminal.

Well, right, there's a reason that this is now the third prediction of Jesus' death in Matthew's gospel. how hard it is for our human thinking to see and conceive of suffering and crucifixion as the pathway to the throne.

It's folly to us unless God gives us ears to hear and eyes to see. We're never going to grasp it apart from his grace.

It's a despised and rejected notion. One that the world stumbles upon over and over. I will not bend the knee to a crucified Messiah.

[17 : 11] But it's the path our king traveled. Jesus' mission ended in a death deserved by criminals, not by the innocent lamb of God.

it's not because of his guilt but because of ours. The sin of the world took him on that mission. A mission of sacrifice and ultimate suffering.

A unique and lonely mission. Our king is a suffering servant. Matthew has brought this identity and this character and this mission together to speak of the guy who you and I follow.

Who is this guy? He's our king. He suffered for us. His path of sacrificial service brings us life.

He is the one we orient our lives around and we gladly worship. He's the suffering servant king who reaches out to us in mercy. That's who he is.

[18 : 24] But he also calls us to follow in his footsteps right? Matthew doesn't just tell us this stuff about Jesus so we can go yep that's who he is but so that we would follow him.

That we would obey him. So we got to look at the fixings now of our sandwich. Verses 20 to 28. to calling us to embrace a different pathway to greatness.

Not calling us to reject greatness as some substandard sort of worldly thing but to reorient our minds around how God defines greatness.

And to spend all of our days seeking that which God says is truly great. Servanthood. verses 20 to 28 can be summed up in this point.

For the Christian servanthood is the true measure of greatness. For you and I if we follow Jesus faithfully and obediently then we define our greatness by serving other people.

[19 : 36] So we remember the context as we get into these verses into our sandwich fixings. In verse 28 Jesus has told his 12 disciples verse 28 of chapter 19 excuse me he's told his disciples that he's coming to sit on a throne of glory and these 12 original guys who have been with him first from the beginning are going to get 12 thrones too.

That's a pretty good deal for James and John and Andrew and Peter and the rest of them. But what we see immediately in verses 20 to 28 right up front is there's another blindness at work in our passage.

Not a physical blindness that causes these guys to cry out for mercy but a blind ambition that causes the disciples to seek glory and honor and recognition.

Unfortunately this blind ambition has caused quite the selective hearing children for James and John the sons of Zebedee. They get their mom to come ask Jesus a question.

They're so fixated on these seats of power and influence that the best way I can describe them is like that cartoon wolf right who's so hungry that he sees every sheep not as a sheep but like a steak on a plate.

[21 : 03] That's how they are with his glory. That's how they are with the honor. They're like that wolf that just looks out over the flock of sheep and goes steak, lamb chops, pot roast.

They're blinded to what they're even asking. And it's amazing right? It's amazing that so close to Jesus telling them what his mission was going to be and why he was nearly at Jerusalem.

Jericho, a day's walk. He's almost there. He's almost there. And in earshot of that and in complete abandonment of what Jesus has just said, these two sons and their mom come up.

They want their glory and they want Jesus to secure it for them. Now it makes sense maybe that James and John would do this, right? They're two of the first disciples chosen.

Peter and Andrew first and second, James and John third and fourth. They must be super important, right? They've been there from the beginning and they've walked with Jesus.

[22 : 08] They've helped him out on his mission. He sent them out and they've probably even maybe cast out some demons themselves. These two guys were on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured before them.

Moses and Elijah showed up. They're kind of a big deal. Plus their mommy thinks they're the best two sons in the world. Well she starts out somewhat okay, right?

She goes low. She takes this humble position, at least body position, but of course we can see through that humble knee bending posture because this request comes from a heart full of pride.

In fact, it comes from three hearts full of pride. We see that in verse 22 when Jesus answers the request of the mom with a address directed at James and John.

You too do not know what you are asking. And they said to him, we are able. Three arrogant hearts wanting a position of power and prominence in the kingdom.

[23 : 25] She wants her sons to have the top spots. Humbly at least she lets Jesus decide which sits on which side, right? Well at least, Jesus, you can figure that one out.

But here's what this request is. It's an audacious, self-centered, heartless display of pride.

Jesus has just told them about the horrific fate that awaits him in Jerusalem. And these two are only concerned about where they sit in glory.

But we're not surprised at this point in the gospel, are we? Because time and time again, we've seen the disciples stumbling over this same way of thinking. Peter confesses Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, the Holy One of God.

And then immediately Jesus says, yeah, I'm going to Jerusalem and I'm going to suffer and die.

And then Peter goes, no way, Jose, not you. To which Jesus says, get behind me, Satan.

[24 : 29] You're setting your mind on things of men, not things of God. chapter 18, verse 1, Billy preached on this.

They want to know who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. They're sitting there when Jesus is kind of maybe just out of earshot going, man, how do we get great? How do we get Jesus to say, you're great?

And so they ask Jesus, well, how do we become great in your eyes? He says, well, hold on, folks.

Unless you turn and humble yourself like a child, you're not even going to get in my kingdom.

Whoa.

And then we see these same disciples rebuking people for bringing kids to be near Jesus. You don't have time for them, little guys. Get them out of here. Just like the crowd rebukes these blind guys in our text.

Well, friends, it's easy for us to look on the disciples' folly as if through pharisaical eyes.

[25 : 36] We sit back kind of arms folded, jeering and scoffing at their pride and their arrogance.

But we in our human nature are exactly the same.

we all want the celebrity. We all want the glory. We all want the mountaintop experience of everybody just celebrating us and patting us on the back and telling us how wonderful we are. And we all tend to be blind to the road that must be traveled to true greatness. But the disciple remembers. The one intent on following Jesus remembers that it's a narrow gate and a hard road. They're so enamored by glory, like the cartoon wolf is enamored by lamb chops, that they don't hear about the path required to be followed.

Jesus has already told his followers in this gospel that you'll be hated by the world, that you're going out as sheep among wolves.

[26 : 49] And then in chapter 16 he issues the most fatal blow to self imaginable. If you would come after me, you must deny yourself.

You must put self in the grave and pick up a cross of suffering and follow me. Self is not only merely a threat to our position in the kingdom of God.

Self is a threat to entering the kingdom of God and we must slay all notions of self as followers of Jesus. We must see our own tendency to grasp for positions of power and prestige in the disciples' request or else we're missing the point for us today.

Amazingly in verse 22 Jesus responds kindly it seems. He doesn't kick him in the shins and shoo him away.

But even in his kind response they're still clueless. They're still blinded by their ambition and thoughts of glory. But Jesus says you don't know what you are asking.

[28 : 00] following. Followed by are you able to drink the cup I am about to drink? Well we know this cup. It's a cup of suffering.

It's a cup of being mocked and flogged and crucified by Gentile rulers. Hated by everybody it seems.

But James and John as one commentator puts it they don't see this cup as a cup of suffering. They think it's a golden goblet of glory and power.

They think the cup is exactly what they're after. The Messiah is coming to town. This cup is one of glory and prestige and honor and fame.

Jesus says you have no idea what you're talking about. If you had heard my words just in the previous three verses you would know. But you've been blinded by your ambition.

[29 : 05] It's a cup of suffering that Jesus offers to anyone who would follow him. That's how he explains it to James and John and that's how he explains it to you and I.

They'll truly suffer even though at the moment they don't recognize that that's what Jesus is getting at. church history says James was martyred, John was exiled, died on an island probably mostly alone.

But alas, even though they will get the suffering, they will end up on thrones, it's only the Father who grants these seats of honor. Jesus himself does not even have the authority to do that.

Well, at this point in our story, the disciples pop back up on our radar in verse 24 and we see how seethingly angry they are at James and John for this request.

They've been kind of listening and judging and condemning from the background. To be clear, they're not mad for self-denying kingdom-seeking priorities.

[30 : 21] They're mad because they want the honor for themselves. And James and John thought of the idea first. James and John are creeping in on the other ten's turf and they're mad about it.

What a great teaching moment for Jesus. To reorient his disciples around what truly matters. And in a culture like ours that exalts good looks and money and cars and power and influence, celebrity, in a culture who makes TV shows called the Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous, in a culture that defines popularity and status by how many friends one has on Facebook and how many Instagram followers one might have, that thinks great things of those who make platinum records and win Grammys.

These are some of the most important words we could ever hear Jesus say to us as his followers. He's speaking to us too.

Look at him again. Verses 25 to 28. Jesus calls all of his twelve together and says, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles, by Gentiles he means the pagans, the godless.

You know that the godless rulers lord it over them and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you.

[32 : 04] Not if you're going to be in my kingdom. Not if you want greatness as part of my community. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

And whoever would be first among you must be your slave. And then here's why. Even as the son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Pagan leaders, godless men have the power and exert the authority and push their weight around. Those great in the kingdom are servants and slaves.

The world says blessed are the powerful. Jesus says blessed are the meek. The world praises the go-getters, the hard chargers, the ladder climbers.

Jesus says to be great you must be a servant. It doesn't mean that we reject the notions of career advancement or anything of that nature but it does reframe how we see it and how we pursue it.

[33 : 25] Humble heart does not seek promotions, church offices, things of that nature in order to feel more important. in order to exert more authority.

That's pagan thinking. It's to be cut out of the heart and mind and life of the disciple, the one who follows the suffering king.

A humble heart does not despise any opportunity to serve. There's no task beneath the servant, the one who is great in the kingdom's eyes.

As kingdom citizens, those of greatest status, those that God looks upon with particular gladness, are those who have glad hearts eager to contribute to the mission.

Pride and self, they seek importance, glory, opportunities to exert authority and power over others.

[34 : 37] Humble servants seek to build others up, to consider the interests of others as more significant than their own. Do you aspire to be great, Christian?

Then adopt the heart and mind and lifestyle of a servant. None of us are that important. But Jesus says we can be great, great in the kingdom's eyes, but only through servanthood.

Let's remember one last time what that type of service entails, right? It's in the same vein as our crucified, suffering king. It's a cup of suffering, sacrifice, self-denial.

That's kingdom greatness. That's what Jesus puts his finger on in this passage. Notice, again, who it is that's calling us to it. It's the one who gave his life as a ransom for many.

Verse 28. He didn't come to be served. He's not looking to have palm fronds waved over him in the hot summer days, grapes fed to him.

[35 : 53] He comes as a servant, one who suffers and dies for us. He calls the shots about how we now live our lives. See what God's saying in this text?

Servanthood must be your measure, Christian, of true greatness because King Jesus became a suffering servant for you.

Servanthood must be your measure for greatness because King Jesus became a suffering servant for you. The one who calls us to self-denying sacrificial service is the one who emptied himself. Emptied himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. His servanthood ransomed you and I out of darkness and into his marvelous light and calls you and me as Christians to esteem servanthood above all.

You want to be great? Serve. Servanthood must be our measure of greatness because Jesus suffered in service to us.

[37 : 19] So as we close, let me just offer a self-diagnostic for us as we examine our own hearts and the ways that self is competing with servanthood.

and then I want to speak to two groups of people in particular. First is self-diagnostic. Speaking to me too.

Servants don't get upset at dirty dishes. They clean them. Servants don't see certain tasks as beneath them.

They link arms and they do it. Servants don't gauge their time to be more valuable than that of other people's.

They put others before themselves. Friend, would you ask God today to show you the areas of your life in which your heart, mind, and lifestyle resemble much closer to the pagan Gentile rulers than that of a disciple of Jesus?

[38 : 27] would you ask him for the grace to change? I think we're all in that boat in different ways.

Examine your heart and your life. In closing, two groups. I want to speak to husbands and I want to speak to leaders.

First, husbands. I'm going to venture a guess that for each of us in this room who's married, there are patterns of thinking and acting that exhibit self rather than servanthood, that exhibit pride, not humility.

Christ calls us to service at the expense of self. After all, Jesus gave his life for the church, Ephesians 5.

You don't boss, you don't get grumpy, you sacrifice, you serve. leaders. Those holding offices here at the church, elders and deacons and pastors, life group leaders, Sunday school teachers, event organizers, beware of the feeling of self-importance, the feeling that you're irreplaceable.

[39 : 56] Beware of the temptation to despise a fellow Christian from prideful notions of superiority. Make no mistake that your value, it's not in how much authority and influence you exert, but it's linked to your willingness to serve.

It's linked to a heart posture that says, I'll give of myself for the sake of God and his kingdom and his people. In the end, self-promotion will profit you nothing.

self-denying service is everything. Our text today calls us to something challenging and above each and every one of us.

And yet, the good news is God gives grace. God does not call us to something that he is not already determined to see brought about in the hearts and lives of his people because the suffering servant is reorienting and establishing a community of people that follow him, even to death, follow him in sacrifice and humility and service to one another and to the world.

It's what Jesus has called us to. He's called us to value servanthood above all things in this life. life. It must be how we as Christians define and measure greatness because we follow a king who suffered and sacrificed himself for us.

[41 : 34] Jesus served us all the way to the cross. So we serve others in his footsteps. Let's pray. Father God, we thank and praise you that the community of people you are creating is not one that looks like the world, but one of service and humility.

God, I pray for all of us that you would help our hearts and our minds and our lives resemble that of our servant king, the one who suffered and died for us. In the state of this, would you give grace? We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.