

The Least is the Greatest

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're now going to read in Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 9. Two sections. First of all, from verse 21 to 27, and then from 43 down to 48.

So Luke 9, 21 to 27, first of all. And he and Jesus strictly charged and commanded to tell this to no one, saying, The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

And he said to all, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death, until they see the kingdom of God. And then into verse 43. While they were marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, Let these words sink into your ears.

[1 : 4 2] The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men. But they did not understand the saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it.

And they were afraid to ask him about this saying. An argument arose among them, as to which of them was the greatest. But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side, and said to them, Whoever receives this child in my name, receives me.

And whoever receives me, receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great. And may God add his blessing to these two portions, these readings from his holy word.

As we see in the sermon title, as you see on the screen there, the least being the greatest. And three points we're going to look at this morning. The sorry reflection, the disciples as they're thinking of themselves rather than focusing on the glory of the Lord Jesus.

as truly a sorry reflection on who these disciples were at that point in their lives. But then secondly, we're going to look at a special illustration as Jesus takes that little boy beside him and uses that boy as an illustration of, well, the theme, the least being the greatest.

[3 : 1 0] And then the standout definition that Jesus gives of the person who truly follows him. As you'll see as we read there in that last verse that we read, for he who is least among you all is the one who is great, the least and the greatest.

Some months ago, I happened to post something on the congregation's Facebook page. And it was a little thing about a G-O-A-T. Well, not, of course, the animal, the animal G-O-A-T, but the acronym for greatest of all time.

And I wrote that in the context of the Super Bowl, the Super Bowl winning quarterback, Tom Brady, who had just won his seventh title, his seventh Super Bowl title.

And he was deemed the G-O-A-T of American football. Then a few days later, the England bowler, the cricket fast bowler, James Anderson.

And he was applauded in the papers as England's G-O-A-T. He had made a tremendous spell of bowling in the test match against India.

[4 : 24] And it was these emphases on the greatest, the best, the highest performer, the most successful, having abilities beyond the ordinary. Of course, when we think about G-O-A-T, the greatest of all time, it's not a quarterback.

It's not a fast bowler. It's the Lord Jesus. Because Jesus' greatness, his greatness isn't measured by success and short-lived victories.

But Jesus' greatness is seen in his power. We might say his power and weakness. That power and weakness that was, of course, demonstrated ultimately on the cross.

And Jesus gained that victory over sin, over Satan, and three days later, and is rising from the dead, that victory over death itself. He is the greatest because of who he is and what Jesus has done to show where greatness truly lies.

Because greatness lies in service. Service to God. Serving our Lord, our God. Serving God as Jesus served. Served God the Father.

[5 : 37] Because Jesus served his Father in his suffering. As the suffering servant. And his greatness lay, as we see in Scripture, his greatness lay in his humility.

That ultimate humility when Jesus came from heaven to earth. And Jesus came in human form. Jesus denied himself. And remember, just before Jesus was put in trial and before Jesus was crucified, Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, not my will, but your will be done.

Jesus showing his greatness. Greatness in the removal of any vestige of self-pride. Jesus denying himself for the sake of others.

And it's for that greatness that each one of us surely should praise him for and contemplate, even as we think on Jesus.

Think in him. Think in his greatness. And seek to be like the Lord Jesus. Seek to live in humble service for God. Denying yourselves. Taking up your cross.

[6 : 47] And following Jesus. But of course, in saying all these things, there's always the temptation. Always. That temptation to want to glorify yourself.

In other words, there's always that temptation to put self first. To seek first the kingdom of self. And whenever that temptation becomes a reality, you're dishonoring God.

Dishonoring the Lord Jesus. Doing that in your heart and your mind. And it's not only dishonoring dishonoring the Savior, the one who is the greatest of all. The one who truly did deny himself.

But you're actually showing a loveless heart against fellow believers. That's what we see here with the disciples there as we read from verse 46. We read of them arguing amongst themselves.

Who's the greatest of them all? And it's really that argument we want to look more closely at. And see Jesus' response to their argument. Because the more that we see Jesus' response to what the disciples were arguing about, the more you'll see the greatness of Jesus and the foolishness of pride, self-pride.

[7 : 59] As we see in that illustration of Jesus placing a little child beside him. Well, let's look at the passage more closely and see the sorry reflection.

The sorry reflection. That's why we read from verse 20, the earlier verses from verse 21. Because we read there Jesus telling his disciples about what was shortly to happen in his life.

He's going to suffer many things. He's going to be rejected by the religious leaders. And he's going to be killed. And three days later, he'll rise again.

So in other words, the shadow of Calvary, the shadow of the cross is getting closer and closer. And Jesus is about to pay the ultimate price for your salvation.

He's about to give his life so that the lives of those for whom he's giving his life, so that these lives are benefited eternally. Sinners like me, sinners like you, sinners who deserve absolutely nothing of that great salvation.

[9 : 08] And sinners, of course, including these disciples. I mean, these disciples have heard Jesus speak from his own lips. They've heard him tell about his suffering. They've heard Jesus telling them to deny themselves and if they're going to follow him, to deny themselves and give themselves for the Savior.

So are the disciples going to respond in denying themselves? Aren't they going to be the more humble and reverent before Jesus? I mean, Jesus is about to give himself sacrificially.

Will the disciples give their lives sacrificially for the Savior? Certainly not in the immediate context. All they can think of is themselves and their status.

Because all that's troubling their hearts, it's not the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. What's troubling their hearts is about themselves. Who's going to be given the top jobs in Jesus' kingdom?

Who's going to have the greatest power, the greatest status? Who's going to have the most responsibilities? And what's gnawing at the disciples' hearts is pride.

[10 : 23] The pride of self. And you know, isn't that such a sad reflection on these disciples? These disciples who've been with Jesus really for the entirety of Jesus' public ministry.

They'd heard Jesus preach. They'd heard him teach. They'd seen Jesus give honor to God the Father. They'd seen Jesus live in poverty, having nowhere to lay his head.

Even the closest of the disciples, Peter, James, and John, these three disciples who'd seen Jesus transfigured on that mountain. Even they're thinking less of the sacrifice of Jesus and more about themselves, more about self-glory.

But, you know, before you even start to point fingers at these disciples, I have to, you have to, we all have to take a good, long, hard look at ourselves.

Because somebody's written this. Of all the sins, there's none against which we have such need to watch and pray as pride. Because pride's so rooted deep in our sinful natures.

[11 : 35] Because pride cries out, me, I, I. Pride says, not your will, Lord, but my will be done. And pride goes totally against what we read in Scripture of thinking of others better than yourself.

Pride says, I'm at the center of my life. Pride says, I decide, I choose, I define what's right and what's wrong. Pride says that, you know, I'm at the center of the universe.

Pride says, there's actually no God. But actually, pride does have a religion, the religion of self. And, you know, pride in self.

It's such a horrible sin that, well, Jesus taught against that on more than one occasion. You know, the well-known parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. And listen to the words of the Pharisee.

Listen to the self-centered pride in the words of his prayer, so-called prayer. God, I thank you that I am not like other men or even like this tax collector.

[12 : 42] I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all I get. But in contrast, the tax collector, you see him praying in the humility of his heart, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.

And Jesus' verdict on these two individuals, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted, the least and the greatest.

You see, any time we promote self-pride, it totally goes against the grain of humble service in the name of the Lord Jesus.

That's why each day, you know, pray, Lord, keep me from pride. Keep me humble. Keep me from seeking glory for myself. But let me see your glory.

You know, the wonder of the grace of God is surely this, that yes, when we do come before and we even have pride in our hearts and you confess that sin, he forgives you.

[13 : 48] He comes beside you, he shows you your sin and when you cry out, Lord, create within me a clean heart, then God answers that prayer. And we see how, you know, the response of God to the sin of pride, well, we see that in the illustration here, this special illustration, as we read there in verse 47, but Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side and said to them, whoever receives this child in my name receives me and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.

and let's never cease to be amazed at the, well, we might say the gentle chastising of Jesus towards his disciples.

I mean, well, Jesus knew in their hearts, he knew what they were doing. They'd shown this horrible pride in themselves. They're completely ignoring that we're true greatness lies.

They're ignoring completely the Lord Jesus and we're just seeking greatness for themselves. But is Jesus going to somehow rage at them for their sin? Is he going to somehow just abandon them, tell them to go away and I'll take another 12 disciples with me?

No. Jesus is going to teach them where true humility lies. And he's going to teach them that greatness lies, well, doesn't lie in self, but greatness lies in what's least.

[15 : 28] He's going to show that truth. He's going to do it by doing something special. He's going to show and he's going to illustrate where greatness truly lies. And he's going to take a child, a child that would be in the crowd with a parent, he's going to take that child, a child that so happens to be standing close by.

And by Jesus' gentle hand, a hand that shortly is going to be nailed to the cross, well, that same hand is going to take that little child and that hand's going to place that child beside him.

And Jesus is going to give the most wonderful illustration where true greatness lies. Because what we read of next actually is truly amazing. Because Jesus says that that little child, it sounds incredible to say this, but he's saying that little child is him.

Now, of course, not literally, but symbolically, symbolically, that little child represents Jesus. Because that child in all his simplicity, all his lowliness, he's not seeking power for himself.

He's not seeking attention for himself. He's not seeking some kind of high status for himself. That little child there before Jesus represents Jesus.

[16 : 48] Because Jesus came into the world. He came like that child. Jesus came not to gain power for himself, but Jesus already had eternal power.

He didn't come to gain some kind of worldly status. In other words, the kind of status that the world sees as great. No, Jesus came to serve.

Jesus came to give himself as the suffering servant. Jesus came in humility. In the very fact that Jesus came into the world in human form. Even the birth of Jesus, speaking of Jesus' humility.

Humility that spoke of his greatness. So that little child there, that little boy standing beside Jesus, representing Jesus in the greatness of humility.

That's why Jesus says, whoever receives this child in my name, receives me. That's not all that Jesus said. Notice, Jesus goes on to say, whoever receives me, receives him who sent me.

[17 : 57] In other words, to receive Jesus, to receive Jesus as your Savior, to receive the suffering servant, to receive the greatest of all, is to receive God.

And you see what we might call these steps, steps of greatness. The child, first step, the child represents Jesus. Then Jesus represents God.

Jesus is God with us, Emmanuel. There's none greater than the greatest of all. There's none greater than Jesus. See, the disciples, they thought of greatness in terms of power and status.

But true greatness, we might say, was even standing beside Jesus. True greatness, in fact, is Jesus. True greatness is the one who came as servant of all.

And that's so important just to grasp. Think of Jesus in his greatness, in his greatness, the greatest of all, in how he showed that greatness and service.

[19 : 07] This is the Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God. Jesus, in his greatness, Jesus divine, the divine Son of God, the second person of the Trinity.

That greatness of it had existed from all eternity. There was never a time when Jesus wasn't greater than his eternal being. But Jesus left the glory of heaven.

Jesus came from heaven to earth. He still came as the glorious Savior, veiled in flesh, the Godhead saved. Jesus made himself nothing. Jesus took upon himself the form of a servant.

That's what the Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 2. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

And again, as you see Jesus in his greatness, that greatness is evident even in the glory of heaven itself. God, because when Jesus returned to heaven, he took with him his physical form.

[20 : 14] He took that form of a servant, because the nail-pierced hands are still nail-pierced hands. The spear-pierced side is still the spear-pierced side.

The feet that walked the earth that Isaiah prophesied of, these beautiful feet that brought good news. We still have the nail-pierced holes that kept Jesus on the cross.

But by faith, see Jesus in heaven, the one, the Lamb who was slain, and worship him. Bow before him, bow at his greatness, and realize that I, none of us are anything in his sight.

See him, see the Lord Jesus, see him who lived for you and died for you and did so in his greatness. Praise him. Think deeply on that greatness.

Think nothing less of Jesus than what he truly is. He's not just any religious teacher out of many religious teachers. He's not just one holy man out of many holy men.

[21 : 25] No. He is Lord. His greatness is above all. but what if you're seeking to be as Christ?

I mean, what are the practical consequences of Jesus' words when he gives the standout definition of greatness when he said, for he who is least among you all is the one who's great.

You're hearing Jesus speak with wisdom that the world knows nothing of. You see, the world's wisdom says something like this. He who's among you is the greatness.

In other words, he who has the millions is great. He who acquires more letters after his name than anyone else's is great.

He who has or she who has the following of millions in social media is great. He or she who exceeds the expectations of many and fame and status and popularity is great.

[22 : 30] But that, these definitions of greatness, these aren't the defining principles of the kingdom of God. Because the defining principle of the kingdom of God is humility, powerlessness, poverty of spirit.

And that's what Jesus taught when even in his life he taught that principle by his life. That life of humility, life of service, life of suffering, the life of self-denial, it all spoke of his greatness.

If that's the case with Jesus, what about you? Because if you're truly and genuinely seeking to follow the Lord Jesus, then you have to be prepared, I have to be prepared, to be the least in the kingdom, to suffer in the name of Jesus and to serve in his name.

And yes, to be willing to be associated with him and not be ashamed to be associated with the Lord Jesus and to give yourself to the one who gave himself for you.

And yes, to be like Jesus in his compassion for the weak, for the lost, the spores, the poor, the lonely, the sick, the needy, because the true disciple of Jesus, the true follower of the greatest of all time, well, that follower is not recognized, you know, by how he honors those who are important in the world's eyes, but the true follower of Jesus is identified by how he responds to those who have no power, no status.

[24 : 16] In other words, like children. It's only when you show that compassionate love to the least that you're truly following the Lord Jesus, because Jesus welcomed the least.

He welcomed and he brought the least into the kingdom of God, the least who are now exalted, because the greatness of being a follower of Jesus is possessing what truly is of importance and value, that eternal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you know, we can even say this, it's how you are towards those who are on the margins, that really indicates how you are towards Jesus. As we finish with these words of Jesus, when did, well, words towards Jesus, when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?

When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the King will answer them, truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord, our God, our Heavenly Father, we give you praise and thanks for your word towards us, that teaches us where true greatness lies.

[25 : 44] as we look to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus, may we have that strength, that enabling to see him in all his greatness.

He who came to give, to give of himself for us. Lord, enable your people to give, to serve, to follow, to deny self.

And Lord, help us, we pray, in our weakness, to honour and glorify you. Hear us, Lord, as we continue before you in praise. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.