

Luke 22:24-30 "Who Is the Greatest?"

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Preacher: Derrick Harris

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

There's accolades, there's attention, there's status, there's popularity, greatness. Maybe you can see it in the desire for your college team to win the national championship.

You want them to be great. Maybe you can see it in the desire for your pro football team to win the Super Bowl. Maybe you can see it in your kids' education, right? They have to be the best and go to the best so that later they can get all those great things.

Kids, teenagers, maybe you can see it in your desire to be number one, that pressure at everything you do where you've got to have the best friends, you've got to have the best reputation so that everybody realizes that you're the coolest, you're the prettiest, you're the smartest, you're the greatest.

Perhaps it's seen in the need to broadcast your life and your feelings on social media, only posting pictures that really make you look good and fun and happy, like your life is the greatest, but you crop out the rest of your life that's probably the most part.

[1 : 14] Or maybe you're too good for that, so you only post the pictures of the bad parts of life because you're too good to post the superficial ones, but you're still wanting those likes.

Perhaps it's your desire to be right all the time and for everyone else to know that you're right too. Or maybe it's that job that you just haven't gotten yet, that one that's going to give you everything you ever wanted, and the company car, and the expense account, and that house with that white picket fence.

And once you get it, once you get that job, everything's okay. Whatever it is, we have a culture that strives for accolades and things in a way that is sometimes just overwhelming, and just a lot of noise.

But if we had all these things, would we really be happy? Would we really be fulfilled? Would we really be complete? Well, let's ask Tom Brady. Tom Brady. Tom Brady, the quarterback of the New England Patriots, is not only one of the NFL's best players, he's one of the NFL's great stories. At the tender age of 30, he has already won three Super Bowls, an accomplishment that ranks him with some of the best quarterbacks ever to play the game. And he's having one of the greatest seasons in pro football history.

[2 : 35] When we first reported on him back in 2005, he seemed underrated and almost overlooked. He doesn't have the arm of Peyton Manning, and he doesn't have tattoos, and he doesn't take steroids.

And he's never held out for more money. All he knows how to do is win. It's what you always wanted. You're right. You're right. It has. And I didn't think it came with all the other baggage, though.

In addition to his success on the field and his sex appeal off it, there is also the \$60 million 10-year contract to play with the Patriots. I mean, I'm making more money now than I ever thought I could ever make playing football.

But with all that money, fame, and career accomplishments, we were surprised to hear this from it. Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there's something greater out there for me?

I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, hey, man, this is what it is. I reached my goal, my dream, my life is... Me, I thank God. It's got to be more than this.

[3 : 37] What's the answer? I wish I knew. I wish I knew. There's got to be more than this. All right, and that was three Super Bowl titles ago.

I'm not trying to pick on Tom, but I would think most of us would say that's probably the greatest thing you could ever achieve. And here's a guy having that and saying there's got to be more. Or comedian actor Jim Carrey says this, I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer.

If we're longing for something that this world can never give us, then we are made for another world, is what C.S. Lewis says. John Calvin describes us as perpetual idol factories where we're always putting other things in the places that are really meant for God.

But Derek, if I could just walk around with Jesus and see him face to face, just like the disciples did, then it would be different. It'd be easier. Or would it? And that's what our passage today gives us an opportunity to see.

So let's look at this together. Luke chapter 22, verses 24 through 30. A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

[4 : 51] And he said to them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the one who serves.

For who is the greater? One who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Father, let your word penetrate our hearts. May it change us. May it fall on fertile soil, and may it sprout to eternal life in us today, I pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. You see, you're not alone in the struggle for greatness. And if you were near Jesus, walking around with him, you would have been doing the same thing that disciples are doing. If not, then why is it in the Bible?

It's there so that we know that we're not so different. And here Jesus, the maker of all things, he's giving us the words of life. The lamp for our feet, right? That's his lamp. The light for our path.

[6 : 07] And in doing so, he answers three important questions as we talk about this. The first is, what is the posture of paradise? If you're going to be there, what do you got to be like? What's the proper understanding of greatest, and what's the purpose of it all?

First, what's the posture of paradise? In verses 24 through 26, So Jesus, remember, we heard last week, he's just finished the Passover meal, and in another account, he's just washed the disciples' feet.

He's saying his temporary goodbyes to his beloved disciples. And remember, he just told them that one of them would betray him, and they started arguing about him. But as the dispute arose, it led to a quarrel.

And this shouldn't surprise us, because I can't confirm what Jesus felt, but I bet it didn't feel good, but he had seen this before. Okay, it shouldn't surprise us.

Imagine here, all the people that he spent the past years of his life with, he's about to give his life for them, he's washed their feet, and they're bickering about who's going to be the greatest in heaven.

[7 : 30] Now, in the Greco-Roman society where they were banquets, okay, they were all about places of honor, where you sat at the table. Your seat at the table, right?

Closer to the front kind of mentality. Closer to the speaker. And little did the disciples realize that this, where they were sitting, is actually the most important seat of their lives.

Okay, because they're seated next to the king of all kings. They're bickering about who's the greatest. But they wanted more, right? Just like we would. And I don't think it would have surprised Jesus, because, like I said, it's a discussion that they had had before.

Let's look at Luke chapter 9. So, after that, in Luke 18, the disciples again say, keep the children away from Jesus.

And he says, no, no, no, no. Let the children come to me. For to such belongs the kingdom of God. So, this is a very common theme with the disciples. Who's the greatest? So, how does Jesus respond?

[8 : 52] Well, if you look at verse 25, he says right there, the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors.

What does he mean by that? Well, he's comparing the disciples' attitudes to that of the Gentile kings. Okay? And in the society there, they were called benefactors. Those were the people that

gave. And they gave to get.

So, if you ruled, you typically had money. And you got the places of honor. And you gave money to get those places of honor. That's how you got to where you were. And that authority was typically abused and lorded over all of the people that were in these cities.

And it was only the wealthy who got these spots. And they got incentives in return for their benevolence. Okay? So, Jesus is basically saying, you're being like them, but not so with the kingdom of heaven.

See, that's not the posture of paradise. So, he continues his response by illustrating the true posture of paradise. By bringing in the example of children. And this time, he adds the example of servants.

[9 : 53] And we think of servants. Think in this instance of waitstaff. But think of those that are serving those in the places of honor. Okay? And those who follow King Jesus should learn from children and servants.

Children, you're so important. You hear that? Jesus says that we got to learn from you. That's a pretty big deal. Don't ever underestimate your importance. Okay?

But these places in society of children and waitstaff, so to speak, they were the lowest places of honor. But Jesus says, let the greatest among you become as the youngest and the leader as the one who serves.

So, what's the posture of paradise? The posture of paradise is the same as it was with children when they came to Jesus. It's dependence. It's humility. Dare I say, in the world's eyes, it's humiliation.

Where weakness is strength. Okay? And life is about giving rather than taking. Giving without expectation of return. Serving King Jesus without a desire to be the greatest in our heart.

[11 : 01] But rather a desire to give the greatest. The love of Christ to those around us. Why? Because that's what our King does for us.

So that means leaders. We must learn to become like those that serve us. That means adults. We must become like children.

How do we do this? By remembering first that we are all kids of the King. No matter how old, how young, how successful, how desperate, through faith in Jesus Christ, we are adopted as sons and daughters of God, which makes us kids of the King.

Yahweh is then our Father who art in heaven. Jesus is our King and our brother and our defender and our mediator, our Lord of Lords and our Messiah. He's also our brother, right?

And His Holy Spirit then empowers us to live with the posture of paradise, dependence, humility, which is otherworldly in the world that we live in today.

[12 : 10] Where we lay our lives down as we offer them to live for the sake of another. Father, this is what worship is. And we have to take then our reputations, we have to take our desires for all of the greatness, our accolades, our honors, our idols, to Him.

And we have to ask Him to crush them and replace them with more of Him. That's the posture of paradise. But we also get to deal with the question of what is the proper understanding of greatest in this passage.

Let's look at verse 27. For who is the greater? One who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table?

But I am among you as the one who serves. Jesus here is teaching us that the only way to really answer the question and understand greatest is to look at Him.

So He asks that rhetorical question about honor. And the obvious answer is that in their eyes, the place of honor is the person who's seated at the place of the table.

[13 : 20] The greatest place of the table. Not the servant. Think about it. In America, the more money you have, the closer you sit to the front row, except in church.

At the Grammys, the most famous people are up front. At the Super Bowl, the wealthiest are in the best seats. Kids, teenagers, the most important and popular people are the ones who throw the parties at their house or invite you to the party.

But what about those who aren't wealthy? What about those who are living in the parking lot of the stadium? What about those who are the hot dog dudes of the world?

Serving those sitting at those places. Ice cold Dr. Pepper here. That dude. Right? Those are closer to who Jesus is saying that we need to understand and be like.

Here's what it looks like. Let's look at Matthew 15. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, son of David.

[14:28] My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon. But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, Send her away, for she is crying out after us.

She's bothering us. Get her away. She's not important. He answered, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But she came and knelt before him, saying, Lord, help me.

And he answered, It's not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. She said, Yes, Lord. Yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table. And then Jesus answered her, O woman, great is your faith, be it done for you as you desire.

And her daughter was healed instantly. So this woman had such great faith because she realized that in relation to Jesus Christ, we are all dogs waiting for crumbs.

And he saw that. And he tested her. And he acknowledged that she was right. But crumbs from the table of our king are more fulfilling than the best meal that this world has to offer.

[15:36] But Jesus offers us more than crumbs, doesn't he? He offers us a seat at the table and he offers us a meal, a feast. So many times, our desire for greatness, it's really founded in good things.

Okay? You know that idols is the word used for this. They're usually good things gone bad. It's not bad to want your child to do well. It's not bad to have money. It's not bad to want a career, a house, and a car.

But if it becomes the ultimate place where you find all of your satisfaction, it can ruin your life because you start to live everything and give everything that you have to attain that thing.

And it then becomes your identity and your life. And in that sense, you begin worshiping it. Tim Keller, who needs a soundbite every time he's quoted, Keller, Keller, Keller.

He's going to get two today. He says that an idol is anything more fundamental than God to your happiness, your meaning in life, or identity. Idolatry is the inordinate desire for anything, even good things, especially good things.

[16:46] Therefore, anything can be an idol. Career, family, achievement, political cause, physical attractiveness, romance, financial security, or anything.

But how do you know what your greatest idol is? You can ask this question, where are you desiring the places of honor in your own life?

But that's not going to get you too far because you're probably going to answer something really good like, well, my family, or my friends, or God. I just love God too much right now.

Famous Dr. Alfred Adler said this, that simply asking that question isn't enough because we're going to answer with typically good sounding things. He says, if you really want to identify your idols, then look at your nightmares.

What's your worst nightmare? Tim Keller Keller says again, what thing, if it were absent, might take away your very desire to live? That's your idol.

[17:48] That's where you are living for the wrong thing. That's where you're substituting a thing for God. That's what you're defining as greatness. That's what you have to take to Jesus and ask him to replace with more of him.

To live is Christ than to die is gain. If we fill in the blanks with anything besides Christ, we get the wrong answer. And we fill that blank in with idols. Jesus says, I'm among you as the one who serves, and there he is redefining greatness.

And here's what it looks like. Luke 14 says this, He said also to the man who had invited him, When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

And when one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.

[18:58] Luther says this, Martin Luther, It's important that you correctly understand what Christ is saying here. If you are in a higher position or above others in some way, realize that God has given it to you.

Don't make the mistake of bragging about it and lording it over others as if you were better than them in any way or in God's sight. Rather, God has commanded that you should humble yourself

and use your position to serve your neighbor.

Who's your neighbor? Anybody that God puts in your path in your daily life. And he's probably going to call you to serve where your car is parked the most. Okay? That's going to be where you spend the most of your time.

Okay? What's the proper understanding of greatest? Jesus is. Let's look at him from Philippians. Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[20 : 28] We need him to save us from us. We need him to save us from our idols. We need him to identify where we are giving things the glory that only he deserves.

And we need God the Father to help us identify those idols and then crush them. We must lay them down before him and ask him to replace them with more of him.

Well how do we do that? Derek? Well I can only speak for me. And when I speak for me I use Easter eggs. So let's start there. So I asked the Lord recently to help me identify my idols.

Probably about three weeks ago. Small group you were there is when we talked about idols. And I confessed what I thought my idol was that night and I had to go home and process it. So they're the things that if absent in my life if they were taken away that I would lose my very desire to live.

Right? For me it is hands down my wife and my son. That's where I start. Underneath that is another idol I've found.

[21 : 37] It's another idol to be secure and safe and close. Have them close to me. Good things gone bad. Underneath that is another idol. Reputation where I find myself in them.

Underneath that has been the greatest of all. Pride. It's underneath every idol. It's the one that sent Jesus to the cross. It's the one that caused sin to come into the world. Right?

Adam and Eve thinking they could be like God. That pride. But underneath every idol is another idol. So I asked the Lord to help me identify them and I started seeing these ridiculous things in my life.

For instance Pringle cans at my house. No Pringle. I started noticing that I don't take the whole top off. I leave this thing on and it causes two major problems.

I think it increases the freshness of the Pringle but it doesn't. It deceives me to think that there's a full can and then also if I try to pull this out it ends up breaking it and I'm not allowed to get all the Pringles out.

[22 : 42] I've found that in a very sick demented way I'm serving this idol of security. I'm creating these illusions of things that create freshness in my life. Even in these little stupid things.

I do it on yogurt tops too. And it's ridiculous. So I'm serving my idol if I'm serving it through a Pringles can my idol for control how much worse when I serve it through my wife and my son.

Right? Anyone here ever played Donkey Kong? I know some of you have. What about Super Smash Brothers Ultimate? Okay that's for the younger generation.

Well you can get this hammer in there and it lights you up when you get it and it starts smashing everything and it plays this really fun music. That's what it's like when God smashes our idols.

Okay? When we ask him to crush it he comes in with that hammer and it all starts to go away. He's going to take everything down that you're trusting in besides him if you really trust him but you're not going to lose your life in the process.

[23 : 50] You're going to gain it. And as he crushes them you're going to find a lot more underneath. And they're going to get smaller and they're going to get more manageable because his power you're going to find is bigger and bigger and bigger.

So strange enough when I started asking God to break the idols in my life especially my wife and my son and I asked permission to share this story we get the news that the doctor finds a lump in my wife's body literally right after I started praying this and it needs to be tested to see if it's cancer. Boom. Loss of control. The thing I love most dear I have absolutely no control over. Right? They're waiting. So you know it came with that fear humility but a strange peace because I had no way to change the situation.

I couldn't control it. My wife told me one of the hardest parts of visiting the doctor is sitting in the waiting room after you've had a test waiting to hear the results. I'm sure we all know that. Experience that. You're helpless. You're sitting there with other people with that helpless look on their face too and you're just waiting to see this doctor hoping that they will show you the way. Thank God for you doctors in this room.

[25 : 16] Thank God for you. Well that's the posture of paradise. That's the dependence I'm talking about. That's the humility I'm talking about. When we lay our idols before our Father in heaven we ask Him to crush them it leads us to that place.

Jesus though is the great physician. Right? And He's told us that we're all dead and that we need life eternally and that we need a relationship with God that isn't severed by sin and we need forgiveness and He says the difference is here that the great physician takes our disease and He dies in our place on the cross and then He gives us His life and all that's required to receive this gift this free gift is to believe that it's true.

Offering us more than crumbs from His table but a place of honor at the table the great marriage supper of the Lamb. And praise the Lord that what my wife had was nothing.

But that period of waiting I'm thankful for because it's made me more thankful for life. The great marriage supper of the Lamb is where God offers us a place.

Let's look at that revelation here. Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder crying out Hallelujah for the Lord our God the Almighty reigns let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.

[26 : 53] That's Christians that's the church. It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen bright and pure for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints and the angel said to me write this blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb and He said to me these are the true words of God then I fell down at His feet to worship Him but He said to me you must not do that I'm a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold the testimony of Jesus worship God.

What's the purpose of it all? An invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb. That is the greatest thing that this passage teaches us.

are you on the invite list? Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.

We must become like children. We must become like servants. Even the angel said I'm a fellow servant with you. This is an angel right? Who's tempted to worship because that's what we do.

We try to worship all these things. But worship God. Who is the one who's like the servant? Jesus is. We have to become like Jesus.

[28 : 16] How do we do that? Well when you put your faith in Jesus Christ you are immediately forgiven of all your sins past, present, and future and you are immediately adopted as a son and a daughter of the King.

This is called justification. You are justified through the payment of Christ's death on your behalf mending that broken relationship with God the Father uniting you to Christ through his spirit who comes to live inside you and nothing can take that away from you thereby then giving you the power to live as the least of these on earth to care for the least of these to say no to sin yes to Jesus Christ by the power that's at work within you which is also the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

The power to proclaim Christ Jesus as the Lord of your life with your life as you live as a citizen of another world until you actually arrive in that world in glory which will happen at the resurrection of the just.

You see the greatest things in life are not what we think they are. They are the things that are yet to come but knowing this truth sets us free eternally and transforms our lives here on earth.

Through faith in Jesus Christ you are promised paradise. You will be in paradise and the posture of paradise is dependence upon Jesus. You will dine at his table and on earth that changes everything.

[29 : 48] As we eat and we drink of Christ here we actually are a part of changing the world he says. Our life then becomes about the least of these where we must first realize that we are the least of these.

We are striving for a seat of greatness when we have already been given the greatest seat at the marriage supper of the Lamb if we have faith in Christ.

The only way to change that is to ask him to change us. So where are you seeking the greatest seats? In America it's been said that we are born on third base.

Do we ever think about those who were born in the parking lot? Perhaps leaving the stadium is the beginning for us. Realize that we don't deserve what we have and what we have is meant to be used to love others in our life.

To serve them and to wash their feet as Jesus did for us but we must become like them we must understand them because in God's eyes we are them.

[30 : 55] If you're here today and you're like Tom Brady and you're thinking there's got to be more than this hear this there is.

Nancy Guthrie says here's the supernatural experience that God's promised. The power of Christ coming down to rest on you to fill you up so that you can trust him when the worst thing you can imagine happens to you so that you can be genuinely if not yet perfectly content even if he does not fill up the empty place in the way that you've longed for at least not yet.

The ability to live life only for the only idol Jesus. He's the only one that's worthy of worship. God the Father God the Son God the Holy Spirit.

So seeker would you let Christ into your heart today? I'm just going to ask you. You know who you are you know where you are and God wants you and he loves you.

Quit running. Would you let him into your heart? Will you accept the invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb? Christian will you pray a dangerous prayer with me?

[32 : 18] Lord show me my idols break them and replace them with you. May it be so. Let's pray.

Father in heaven save souls break idols reign on this earth through us as your people bring light where there is darkness bring life where there is death only by the power of your spirit change us and use us to change this world praise you Abba Father in heaven thank you in the holy name of your son Jesus Christ Amen.

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Thank you.