

Great
Together for Better Week 3
February 4, 2018: North Chatham

Welcome/intro/vision

This is week 3 of a 3-part series called Together for Better

All of us hunger for a great life in some way, shape or form—we might have different ideas of what the outside package looks like, but all of us want a great life

One of the revolutionary and counter-intuitive things that Jesus taught was that a great life was found not as we get more stuff but as we give more of ourselves away

So we're looking at how Jesus forged his first and closest 12 disciples together as a community for the sake of the better of the world around them

And each week of this series we've been interviewing someone who is serving in some different corner of the church to have them share something of how serving has shaped them in positive and constructive ways

And then today after the service, just like we talked about earlier, we've got our Connection Celebration

where we're going to invite anyone who hasn't found a place ***and who's been here longer than a few months*** to serve to explore where you might put the gifts God's given you to work

If you're still new, still trying to figure out if this is the place for you, then no worries, kick back and relax, we're just glad you're here, welcome!

And as you're getting to know us, it's important for you to know that a big part of our church's culture is that we invite everyone to help make this whole thing happen in some way, shape or form

In large part because Jesus taught us that serving is the somewhat surprising place where we find real life

This week to share her story of how she's experienced this, going to bring up Lynn Makor, welcome Lynn! Lynn has served in Chatham Kids for a couple of years now

Lynn and her husband Manfred are also in my small group, so I have the privilege of knowing their family—Thanks for coming up here with me!

1. **Volunteer with Chatham kids, but that's not your day-job, what do you do for your day-job?**
2. **How long Chatham kids? What ages?**

3. **Tell us a little bit about your church background—both growing up and as an adult-- because I think a good number of folks here might relate to it.**
4. **You've shared with me that you've loved teaching the kids, can you give me a snapshot or a story of what you've loved about it?**
5. **How would you say that you've personally grown as you've served with Chatham Kids these past couple of years?**

PRAY a blessing over Lynn and our Chatham Kids ministry

This morning, all of us are coming in here with a hunger for a great life—however we might define that—and this morning, Jesus is going to help us to find our way to greatness

Bible/no Bible/Mark 10 Before we read today's passage, Important set a little context, which we'll start with a question:

Have you ever had a VERY serious conversation with someone where you're telling them about something VERY important

you've been thinking and thinking about it and you wait for just the right time and then you pour your heart out or finally you say that really hard thing that you've been rehearsing in your mind for days and days and days

And after you're done saying that really important, really hard, really difficult thing, the person's very next comment tells you that they weren't paying attention to ANYTHING you just said?

How'd that make you feel? Like you want to pull your hair out, right?

This happens with parenting all the time, right mom and dad?

In Mark chapter 10, Jesus is getting nearer to his eventual execution in Jerusalem, which he knows is coming

And so he pulls his 12 disciples aside and very somberly tells them about what's to come.

Guys, listen up: we're going to go to Jerusalem and on the worst night of my life I'm going to be handed over the authorities, and they're going to mock me, spit on me, flog me with whips, and kill me and on the third day, I will rise again

This is going to be the most difficult thing he'll ever do, the most difficult thing that anyone could ever do

And he wants his best friends to be with him in it, helping him through it, to share some of the pain of it with him, to be great friends in the darkest hour of his life

Here's what happens immediately after Jesus finishes telling them about this horrific thing that's going to happen to him

35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

Jesus has just shared that he's going to literally be tortured and executed and who are James and John thinking about? THEMSELVES!

The way this story is told in this and other biographies of Jesus, James and John are definitely grasping for the top of the food chain here, trying to leap frog the other 10 disciples

Do you think they heard ANYTHING that Jesus just said about his torture and execution he's about to experience?

No! Why? Because there was too much static inside their heads to hear anything or anyone else.

And that static sounds a lot like ego, pride, selfishness, even as one of their closest friends shares his deepest grief and sorrow

And before we get all self-righteous and roll our eyes at these guys, let me ask you this question:

Have you ever heard those voices of ego, pride, selfishness, vanity, and glory, inside your own head before? Have you ever ACTED on or SAID something that was motivated by ego, pride, selfishness, or grasping for your own glory?

The Scriptures tell us that in the very beginning humans were made in God's image but we chose to forfeit that grace in order to essentially live a life of ego, pride, selfishness

And so all of us, in one way or another, have to deal with some variation of those voices in our own heads and those desires at work in our hearts

And the options are to either just embrace those desires and follow those appetites, feeding our egos or vanity or pride

OR we'll spend our lives doing battle against those desires and those hungers and those voices

Here's ***why it's worth it for you to do battle against ego and pride***

Even though it goes against the grain of what often comes most naturally to us

Because those voices are not a reliable guide to the truly great life.

That great life that we talked about all of us wanting a few minutes ago? Your ego doesn't know how to get you there. Your pride doesn't know that path

Jesus taught this and the Scriptures repeat it over and over again, but you don't even have to believe in Jesus or believe in the Scriptures

you can pull back and look throughout history at people who have spent their entire lives feeding ego and pride only to discover it's like drinking salt water—you just get thirstier and thirstier, it's never done

But not only are the voices of your pride and my pride, your ego and my ego, NOT reliable guides to the truly great life

Ego and pride distract us and cut us off from the Reliable Guide to the truly great life.

James and John hear the voices of pride and ego inside their own heads, and those voices are so loud, they can't hear Someone else talking

And that someone else is right in front of them and HE holds the secrets to the truly great life, he's living in real-time the Truly Great Life right in front of them

This one life is going to impact more people than any other single life in all of history.

And they have a front row seat to experience it, to learn from it

But *our own pride and ego always cut us OFF from the wisdom around us rather than open us up to the wisdom around us*, doesn't it?

Jesus has just told them that he must go to Jerusalem to die, and James and John unknowingly demonstrate exactly WHY Jesus must go to Jerusalem to die

Because ego and pride have cut us off from the God that we were made to love and serve and hear and follow

And so forgiveness must be extended, that sin must be absorbed, it's toxic, so that the broken relationship might be restored

to bring us back into a right relationship with the one true voice that can lead us into true greatness

So this morning to start with, I want to ask you this question: ***What's your relationship like right now with your internal voices of ego and pride?***

Are you mostly just following their lead further and further AWAY from the place of real greatness, real joy, real peace, real genuine impact on the world?

OR are you taking up the battle to fight it, daily, maybe hourly

in order that you might clear out THOSE voices to hear the voice of the Truly Great One who calls out to you over and over and over again?

James and John allow ego and pride to enter into and do violence to this meaningful moment of Jesus baring his soul and inviting his friends into his darkest moment of his life

Here's how Jesus responds to their request:

38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" 39 They replied, "We are able."

James and John, you have no idea what you're saying—I'm about to be flogged, mocked, executed—can you hang with me, can you experience that with me? "Oh yeah Jesus! We totally got that!"

Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

Have you ever said something that you regret? Maybe something that you said that later came back to haunt you?

I want to suggest to you that *when pride and ego are driving the bus of our words and our actions, it often leads us to the land of regret*

Probably less than a decade after this conversation, James is one of the first Christian martyrs—one of the first people to be killed for his faith.

And my guess is in the time between this conversation and his death, James probably replayed this conversation a couple of times in his head and cringed just a little bit at how foolish and obnoxious he was

Meanwhile, many decades after this conversation happens, John is an old man

And so far as we can tell, he is the last and longest living of the original 12 disciples. He's been imprisoned and flogged and beaten and faced all sorts of opposition and persecution

And my guess is that there are some days when he ALSO looks back on this audacious, self-assured assertion that he made to Jesus that he could handle whatever Jesus was about to face

And he rolled his eyes at his younger self and was a bit ashamed at his audacity—he wondered why he ever said such a thing with so much self-assured confidence.

When pride and ego are driving the bus of our words and our actions, it often leads us to the land of regret

And some of what that regret is all about is how our pride and ego end up disrupting the relationships all around us, how pride and ego hurt the people we love the most, which is what happens next as this story continues to unfold:

41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.

How many of you have siblings? How many of you have younger siblings?

How many of you have younger siblings who if you're honest and we won't ever tell them you admitted it, they're smarter than you?

I've got a brother who's just 16 months younger than me and growing up he was clearly the smarter one, totally annoying

And it didn't matter that I got really good grades, what was maddening to me was that he got BETTER grades and got them EASIER than I did!

And it's this comparison and competition that got me all tangled up from time to time and it's comparison and competition that makes pride so incredibly destructive to ANY community: your school, your workplace, your family, your marriage

C.S. Lewis makes this point about pride: that it is ***Pride is Essentially Competitive***

Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than [someone else]... We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better looking than others. If every one else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud, the pleasure of being above the rest.

Whenever we introduce pride into the ecosystem of relationships—it's like introducing a parasite, like kudzu, it has the potential to over-run and undo and suffocate anything that was previously healthy.

Which is EXACTLY what's happening here with the 12 disciples as they catch wind of what James and John have asked for

Do you know how many well-intentioned groups and movements that had so much potential for good in this world have been utterly destroyed because of PRIDE?

Jesus has been forging these 12 guys into a new community, a new family, and pride is threatening to un-ravel it, could LITERALLY destroy this work, so here's what he does:

⁴² So Jesus called them [first come to Jesus meeting!] and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

Now what Jesus is referring to is the Roman empire—the Romans have over-run all of Israel, all of the Middle East, all of Europe

They are the biggest, baddest, most imposing empire the world had seen to that period of time

And the way that you got to be great in the kingdom of Rome was by striving, plotting, and grasping.

You got to be great in Rome by obeying the voices of pride, vanity, and ambition BETTER than the other people around you did who were all doing the exact same thing

These were all Jewish guys, their whole country for their whole lives had been occupied territory, they had experienced how Rome worked: ambition, pride, self-assertion.

As his group of 12 guys starts to fracture and grumble due to James and John inserting the parasite of pride into it

Jesus calls them together and he starts with a common point of reference: y'all know about how Rome works, right? Power, lording it over, asserting authority, you know all about that

Okay, now that you've got that picture in your mind, here's what we're going to be about:

⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

Some friends of mine adopted a girl from an orphanage in Russia at around age 12.

And they shared with us how incredibly difficult it was to convince her that she no longer had to hoard food, that there would be plenty

Everything about her life from birth to age 12 had taught her that resources were scarce and she better get every single thing she could in order to survive because it might not be there for her the next day

And her process of moving from orphan mentality to daughter mentality was a long, hard road.

Jesus here is having to convince these guys to move from orphan mentality to child mentality. They knew Rome, Rome seemed to dominate everything their entire lives, that economy of grasping and hoarding and power-plays had been all they knew

But Jesus is inviting them OUT of the orphanage of ROME and into a new real HOME—into what he called the Kingdom of God

And the Kingdom of God always was and will run on a different economy and a different way of achieving greatness than any of the kingdoms of this world

whether it's the kingdom of Rome or the kingdom of the United States of America

And just like the 12-year-old girl had to learn new, never-before-seen realities in order to thrive in her new home

so, too, are the disciples and you and I going to have to learn to embrace new, larger realities in order to thrive in the Kingdom of God

Because when it comes to greatness and what makes a person truly great, you can't get any more different than this

Notice first, that Jesus doesn't dismiss the desire for greatness.

Given how much pain and sorrow that striving for greatness has caused in this world, you wouldn't have blamed Jesus if he'd dismissed the desire for greatness altogether!

But instead, Jesus AFFIRMS this desire for greatness, he just turns it on its head, draws an entirely different economy, and an entirely different map for how to get there

You want to be GREAT? GREAT! SERVE! That's how greatness is achieved in the Kingdom of God.

That's totally the opposite of what LOOKS like greatness either in the kingdom of Rome or in the Kingdom of the United States of America

It kind of looks weak, it kind of looks like you're the low person on the totem pole, it looks small and insignificant and not all that...well....not all that great!

And just like orphans moving into a new home where food abounds, we need proof, don't we? We need proof about this NEW place and this new home in order to shake our old habits and it better be good, it better be incontrovertible

Jesus knows this, so he circles all the way back to the conversation he was JUST having with his disciples that James and John couldn't hear through all the noise and ego in their own heads.

You want proof that you don't have to strive to advance yourself and push yourself ahead, you want proof that this new kingdom and this new home can and will provide for you? Here you go:

⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

You know why it's safe for you to switch your mindset from an orphan mindset to a son or daughter of the most high God who will take care of you?

Because the king enthroned in THIS kingdom is the servant king, the king who himself lays down his life as a ransom to rescue us from sin and death and the pride at work in our hearts

Jesus himself is the one who is sent by God not to be served, not to self-assert, not to attach himself to pride and ego and build up his own empire like the Romans

He has come literally, to lay down his life to save the many, to forgive sins, to buy us back from death and darkness in all its forms

And then Jesus calls us to walk in his way. He invites to each of us: come follow me, walk in my way, it's the new way to greatness of life

And it's going to take some work to enter into this economy, it's going to feel a little strange, because the whole thing operates differently from what you've experienced or grown up with

But here's why you can trust it: because, Jesus says, I've done it. I've lived it. He followed God's way all the way to the grave and what did God do for him? Raised him from the dead!

That's how much you can trust God

Jesus has come and established a kingdom that introduces an entirely different economy, an entirely different way of thinking

And if you follow it, you will discover what true greatness really is

Jesus wants to form a community that will be TOGETHER FOR BETTER

But ***the only way that Together actually leads to the better is if we're willing to be truly great. [repeat/riff]***

Jesus is trying to build his disciples and ultimately his church, that's us, into a TOGETHER that leads to a BETTER, but the only way that TOGETHER actually leads to the BETTER is if we're willing to be truly GREAT as Jesus defines Greatness

Throughout history there have been all sorts of attempts at bringing people together, to attempt to do good things, WONDERFUL things, over and over and over again, and they have failed over and over again

And PRIDE has been the culprit to those failures over and over and over again. And so the only way that TOGETHER leads to the BETTER that we have potential for is if we're willing to be TRULY GREAT as Jesus defines greatness, to embrace the Jesus way that he established

This morning, **your take-WITH** is simply this:

If greatness is found in serving, what steps do you need to take this week to live the truly Great life?

The opportunity to volunteer here at the church is not just something to keep everyone busy and out of trouble, we're all busy enough!

The opportunity to serve here is an invitation to actually live the great life Jesus calls us to

But we gladly recognize that here is not the only place where we can live this truly great life. There are opportunities for many of us in our homes to serve the family members around us

There are opportunities with neighbors. There are needs in our larger community. There are places where your gifts and passions match the world's needs

But all of them require our willingness to embrace a different way of understanding greatness, a different mindset, a different understanding of how the economy of greatness actually works

Because Jesus wants to take your desire and my desire for a great life

And he wants to infuse it with new energy, new definitions, new pictures, a new map of how to get there

And the reason why you can accept his word over all the other voices screaming at you is he has done it and proven it

The path Jesus took to Greatness led through serving others, the greatest sacrifice the world has ever seen.

The meal we celebrate this morning is a tangible reminder of the path Jesus took to greatness, and it's an invitation for all of us to walk in the Jesus way, to follow the path that led to this bread, and this cup