

Kingdom Greatness

Mark 10:32-45 (07/19/15)

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Everybody wants their life to count for something. Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote in *The Psalm of Life*:

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.*

The reality is, your footprints will wash away pretty quickly as you leave this world. One hundred years from now few will know you were here. Sure, the great men of history have left their legacy for better or for worse – that’s why we love biographies – but few if any of us will ever be considered “great” in this world.

But here’s the good news: you can live in such a way that your footprints will be remembered forever in the gold dust of eternity! Surely you want your life to count for something! Will your life count for Christ? That’s what we’re examining in our passage this morning. We are closing in on Christ’s last week on earth that ends with the cross and resurrection. As the disciples walk with Jesus toward Jerusalem, they are concerned again about “who’s the greatest?” So Christ teaches how to live a life that will count for eternity.

Be sure your life is committed to the right Person and Mission – vv. 32-34

They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. "They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again."

Jesus and His followers are on the other side of the Jordan and will be coming into Jericho shortly. Jerusalem is always “up” because of its elevation. So up they go with Jesus out in front, ahead of them. This reminded me of the picture of General Douglas MacArthur as he returned to the Philippines, wading through the water to the shore, assuring the Philippine people, “I have returned.”

Here is Jesus, out ahead of them. His steps are firm; His face is set like a flint to go to Jerusalem, knowing what is waiting for Him there. He’s marching like a Warrior to the final conflict. He isn’t a victim. No one is forcing Him to go. He’s in charge every step of the way.

What a picture. From eternity past He had accepted this Mission, to enter into the human race to save all the souls the Father had given Him. He knew this was the only way to rescue this great multitude of sinful human beings and bring them to the Father. He would shrink back in horror on that awful night preceding the cross, but here He goes with great resolve, right on time, with all the right circumstances in place to defeat the devil, death, and sin forever.

But His disciples and these followers are really clueless about what is coming. They were full of amazement and fear that He was heading right into heavily infested enemy territory, where the vipers were lying in wait in Jerusalem, ready to sink their venomous fangs into His flesh and be rid of Him forever! But on He walks, fulfilling His mission! And what were the disciples expecting? Luke 19:11 says it clearly, “They supposed the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately.” That’s all they knew; that’s all they expected. They are like people today who think Jesus is going to heal all their diseases and fill their wallets with money! They are completely and utterly clueless about what awaits Jesus.

So Jesus again stops to explain, in far more detail, what lies ahead. The detail of these two verses is amazing, down to the spit. Seven hundred years earlier in Isaiah 50:6 this spit was foretold, "I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting."

And now Jesus clearly lays out the events to come, "Listen up, fellows. You are about to witness the greatest event in human history." We're going to Jerusalem, the center of Jewish religion and My opponents.

1. I'm going to be delivered to the religious leaders, betrayed by Judas.
2. They're going to condemn Me to death for blasphemy, a completely trumped-up charge.
3. The Jews will hand Me over to the Romans.
4. The Roman soldiers will mock Me. Have you ever been really mocked, scorned?
5. They'll spit on Me. Ever been spit on? This is the hellishness of the human heart! Let's just get a foretaste of this coming ordeal from Mark 15:16-20 –
The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him.
6. They'll scourge Me. Ever been scourged by a Roman scourge that rips your skin right off your bones?
7. They'll kill Me. Ever faced death head on? Jesus lived with this awareness every day of His ministry. What the religious leaders don't know is that Jesus is in complete control. He allows them to kill Him. But what He really dreads is His Father's wrath poured out on Him in the place of sinners! That's the ultimate horror of the cross.
8. In three days, I'll rise again! Don't miss this!

Did they understand what He just said? No, not at all. Luke 18:34 shocks us when re read that in spite of this clear explanation from Jesus, "...the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said." This is the most amazing thing!

Be sure you are following this Man and committed to Him and His mission. Do you understand why He came and what really happened to Him? There is no greater event in human history and no greater Person in human history. Has this reality sunk into your heart and gripped you and caused you to follow Him by faith?

Let's move on to the second way to be sure your life counts for eternity.

Be sure you are asking the right questions about your mission – vv. 35-41

James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John.

It is hard to believe these two characters are asking this question. Jesus is talking about being utterly abused and murdered, and they are consumed with who will be first! Matthew 20:20-21 actually says that their mother came up to Jesus to ask Him this! How could they possibly be so impertinent in their question?

So human! So typical. It's all about us, right? It's like you're at your father's side, he's about to die of cancer, and you say, "Hey dad, could I have your golf clubs?" Here mom is saying, "Boys, Jesus is going to set up His kingdom very shortly. Get in there and get first dibs on where you're going to sit in the kingdom. I want to see you right up front." Not to mention Peter was their cousin and there was probably some family rivalry, maybe jealousy involved. So human. So sinful, so self-focused! "We want top tier seats in your kingdom!" We are naturally a part of that "Me First and the Gimme Gimmes" band.

By the way, notice Jesus' patience and tenderness to these guys in verse 36 in spite of their impertinence: "What do you want Me to do for you, boys?" Of course He knew exactly what they meant.

Beware of the lust for prominence and recognition. "We want to be important. We want to be on the front page. We want to be on TV. We want to be recognized as great. We want to be your chief vice-presidents in the kingdom." These guys were right that the kingdom and the glory was coming and they would have a place in it, but they had no idea at this point that before the glory, suffering would come. Jesus assures them they would drink the cup of suffering and go through the baptism of persecution. James would have his head chopped off and John would be exiled to Patmos. They saw glory coming, but Jesus says, "In this world you will have persecution. Plus, who sits where is the Father's business, not mine." End of discussion.

In verse 41 the other fellows got all upset with James and John, but not about their request. No, they wanted to be first in the kingdom, too. They are just like us today, "Me first, gimme, gimme, I want the biggest, I'm first, me, me, me!" Even as they gather in the upper room and Jesus washes their feet and tells them one of them will betray Him, they continue their dispute, "And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest." (Luke 22:24) Sheesh! They all wanted to be the greatest. They are all jockeying for position. Let's learn from these verses. Be ever careful to guard your heart about wanting to be noticed and honored and the greatest! Remember Cassius Clay? He said, "I'm not just great. I'm greater than great! I not only knock 'em out; I even call the round!"

Be sure you understand true greatness in Christ's kingdom – vv. 42-44

Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all."

Wait a minute, fellows. Or like the great theologian Barney Fife would have said, "Andy, we've got to nip this in the bud, now!" Jesus stops and huddles with them in their ignorance and self-centeredness. It's time for some serious counsel on what true greatness really is. Can you imagine His patience? His humanness may have asked, "These are the characters I'm going to entrust My church to?" And so He gives them this wonderful teaching about kingdom greatness.

Greatness by this world's standards means having power over people. Tyrants have their subjects serve them, even grovel and fear them. I thought of three world rulers: Henry VIII, Lyndon Johnson, and Stalin. Well known as the blot of grease on England's history, Henry VIII had his six wives, "Divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived." Lyndon Johnson was well known for his power lust. One biographer wrote, "He relished the act of dominance." Johnson said there are two types in the White House, "(expletive deleted) ants and elephants. I'm the elephant!" Then there was Stalin, the man of steel. Surely he was one of the most demonic rulers ever. Anyone who opposed him was either exiled or more probably shot. He had millions of poor Russians executed.

Compare these worldly rulers with Jesus in John 13 on His knees washing His men's feet and in Philippians 2 where He took upon Himself the form of a servant. He explains greatness to His men. He doesn't say, "It should not be like this" but, "It is not this way among you!" Greatness in Christ's kingdom means serving under people. Do you want your life to count for Christ? Do you want to leave your footprints in the gold dust of eternity? Be a servant! There's nothing wrong with having ambition and zeal and passion, but it must be directed to serving others! That's kingdom greatness!

Making your life count for Christ and being a great Christian means being a great servant! Read the biographies. The Hudson Taylors and Jim Elliots and David Brainerds and Campus Laborers and the Houghtens and Davis' and Judi Wampler...all pouring themselves out into the lives of others.

Make your life count by living in such a way that when you are gone, they will say he or she lived in such a way as to help and encourage others in their walk with Christ. Elizabeth Elliot died recently. She was a servant, committed to encouraging God's people. She lived in the joy of the Lord and left a joyful, servant's heart memory behind. Surely she will hear her Lord say to her, "Well done, you good and faithful servant!" Great Christians are great servants.

In her book *A Place of Healing* Joni Eareckson Tada tells about Pam, a recent believer living in Elsie's Home, a place for druggies and abused women somewhere in Hollywood. She bears the scars of a rough life. Joni writes, "I was immediately struck by her genuine and overflowing joy when she explained to me her new role in Elsie's Home. 'I scrub the toilets and the bathrooms!' she exclaimed with great enthusiasm. 'That's my job, and I love it.'" Wow. That's my job and I love it.

I am so blessed to be part of a church of servants. By the grace of God, we have so many here hungry to serve. Some of these younger folks come up and say, "Are there any ways I can serve here at FBC?" Yes, I'm sure there are. As long as there are people, there's a place to serve.

Listen, spiritual growth always bears the fruit of serving others. Galatians 5:13 says, "Through love serve one another!" Jesus here in Mark uses the two words for pouring out your life for others – servant (*diakonos*) and slave (*doulos*). There are shades of difference, but both mean living for Christ first, and then others in whatever way you can. God has gifted us for one thing – to serve others in love.

But be careful. There's a difference between serving and having a servant's heart. You can tell when you lost that servant's heart. Jealousy and pride creep in, you try to impress people, become critical, expect appreciation. Jerry Bridges said the test of being a true servant is if you are willing to be treated like one. Roy Hession in his book *Calvary Road* has a chapter on being a servant. There he gives five marks of a true servant. A true servant is willing to do whatever the Master tells me to do, without being thanked, without being critical of others, without being proud of my serving, confessing we've only done our duty (from Luke 17:7-10)

Above all, be sure you understand exactly why Christ came and what He accomplished – v. 45

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

This is the key verse of Mark. Christ came as the ultimate Servant-Leader. What does the perfect example of a human being look like? He or she looks like Jesus Christ in His serving character. Jesus is the greatest of men. Becoming like Christ means growing in servanthood. You see Him washing feet, loving and serving children, and serving needy people. He came to serve us! Even the Son of Man! If God Almighty came into this world not demanding us all to line up and serve Him but to serve us, what should we do? You younger guys, you are naturally tempted to be pretty self-focused, right? You want the best seat, to be first, highly regarded, the biggest piece, right? You want what your brother or sister has. Will you make your life count for Christ by being a servant? How about starting right at home by serving your mom and dad? And your brothers and sisters! Jesus calls us to be servants. Let's obey Him.

Jesus' service extended all the way to the cross – paying the ransom. That word ransom is the Greek word *lutron*, the price paid to purchase the release of a prisoner or a slave from the slave market. To what extent did Jesus serve us? He came here to purchase sinners out of the slave market of sin. When He went to the cross, it wasn't only the physical sufferings that saved us. The heart and center of His mission was to purchase us from our sin by enduring the wrath of God poured out on Him in the place of us – a ransom "for (in the place of) many." His ransom price was to propitiate or satisfy the wrath of God that we should have experienced! That is how we can be saved. Romans 3:24 "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption, the ransom price being paid, which is in Christ Jesus, whom God publicly displayed as the propitiation, the satisfaction for our sins, in His blood through faith."

So What?

What a Servant-Savior we have – humbling Himself to serve us, to the point of mockery and spit and the death of the cross! This is greatness, Kingdom greatness.

What are you concerned about? Do you serve so others will think you are a great person and how well you can serve people? Or do you serve even when you aren't recognized or honored? We need to set our hearts not on worldly greatness, but on kingdom greatness! Will your life count in eternity? Are you serving joyfully like Christ? Or like Pam who found great joy in scrubbing those toilets and bathrooms?