

Message #107

Luke 22:24-27

The tallest building in the world is located in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates. The building is Burg Khalifa. It was completed in 2010 and is 2,722 feet high, which is more than ½ mile high. What most people don't know is that to reach this height, builders had to go 164 feet down to pour tons of concrete for the foundation. So to go up, they first had to go down.

If you have ever gone to the top of the Sears Tower in Chicago, it is interesting that to get to the elevators that take you up, you must go down. If you have ever gone to the top of the arch in St. Louis, the same is true. To go up you must go down.

When Jesus Christ was in His final hours of life on earth, His disciples got into a “dispute” (v. 24) which means they got into a very contentious and heated argument about which one of them was the “greatest.”

Now there are some logical, contextual reasons why they got into the argument:

- 1) Two of the disciples (Peter and John) had specifically been singled out for an assignment (22:8).
- 2) One of the disciples was predicted to turn out to be a traitor (22:21-22).

It seems reasonable that in view of the fact that two seemed to be the best disciples and one would be the worst disciple, they might get into an antithetical discussion over the one who would be the best disciple.

But this is sad because Jesus had just taken them through a very important and very moving symbolism of His own death and what was about to happen to Him (22:19-22). That broken bread and that cup symbolized His own sacrifice He was about to make and in that very context, these guys are discussing which one of them is the greatest disciple.

William Barclay captures this point when he writes: “It is one of the most poignantly tragic things in the gospel story that the disciples could quarrel about their precedence in the very shadow of the cross” (*The Gospel of Luke*, p. 267).

But Jesus does not chide His disciples; He teaches them that the way to get to the top is down. What He teaches them is this:

THE ONE WHO WILL BE THE GREATEST DISCIPLE IN ETERNITY WILL BE THE MOST HUMBLE SERVANT ON EARTH.

This was not a new theme that Christ teaches them (9:46-48), but this was an important theme of which He needed to remind them. Jesus wanted His disciples to clearly understand that the key to greatness is humility. Those who will be elevated to the highest levels in heaven will have been humble servants on earth.

Jesus decided to use their heated discussion to present to them two main keys to heavenly greatness:

HEAVENLY GREATNESS KEY #1 – Great disciples will not have an attitude of lording domination. **22:25-26a**

Great disciples of Jesus Christ are not power-crazed people who demand authority and honor and obedience. This really would have been an interesting matter for Theophilus (1:3) to read, because he himself held some high-ranking “most excellent” position in government.

During the time Jesus is having this discussion, the political world was dominated by a major Gentile power which was Rome. The religious world was being dominated by power-crazed, arrogant, religious hypocrites—Pharisees, Scribes, Chief Priests, Sadducees.

There are two specific qualities that great disciples will have:

Quality #1 - A great disciple is not after power. **22:25a**

Great disciples do not want power and don't like power. Those words “lord it over” indicate what the Gentile and even Jewish religious leadership were doing. They were continually lording, mastering and dominating those under them. In both the religious and political world, the leaders were power-crazed and authoritarian.

Great disciples of God will never be like that. Great disciples of God are not those who continually want to dominate people. Great disciples of God do have to lead and they do have to govern, but they want to do it God's way, not their way.

Great servants of God do have authority, but they are not authoritarian. Great servants of God at times must dictate, but they are not dictators. Great servants of God do not dominate by continual lording, but by humbly serving and continually leading.

I was at a Bible conference years ago and a Pastor told the story of a husband and wife who really paraded themselves and projected themselves to be spiritual giants. He said they really thought they ran the church and the people. They came to him and the board and demanded that something be done their way or they would leave. The leadership did not buckle to their pressure and the couple left. Later, the children of that couple went to the Pastor and told him and the board that their parents have always done that in various churches. Their children said they always push people around as if they are the authority.

They actually think they are great servants of God; they are pathetic because great servants lead and don't lord.

Quality #2 - A great disciple does not demand recognition. **22:25b**

The words “called benefactors” indicate that those who lorded over things over the people continually demanded that they be identified as being those who are of great benefit to the world. Some of the Kings, particularly those of Egypt, were specifically given the epithet “benefactors.”

What this title suggests is that there are people who receive a great egotistical boost by having a reputation that they are of great benefit to the world. They are driven by a desire to have people look at them as great blessings and benefit and they demand that people identify them that way.

Having people identify us as being of great benefit is not the same as having God identify us as being a great blessing.

- 1) A person could be identified by people as being a great Christian, but not be before God.
- 2) A person could be identified by people as being a great musician, but not be before God.
- 3) A person could be identified by people as being a great leader, but not be before God.
- 4) A person could be identified by people as being a great minister, but not be before God.

The issue of greatness is not how we perceive ourselves or how other people perceive us, it really comes down to how God perceives us. Greatness is not determined by titles, but by faithful, humble service.

There is certainly nothing wrong with being able to say, “follow my example,” but there is something wrong with someone who demands public recognition.

HEAVENLY GREATNESS KEY #2 – Great disciples will have an attitude of humble service.
22:26b-27

In these verses, Jesus gives three comparative illustrations of greatness in God’s estimation:

Illustration #1 - Great disciples will be like the younger, not the older. **22:26a**

The Greek word “younger” (newteroꝥ) is one that refers to youthfulness, especially as it is compared to elderliness. New in time as compared to old in time. The word “younger” is the antithesis of the word “older,” which is translated “elder” in this exact contrasting context in I Peter 5:5 - “you younger men, likewise be subject to your elders.”

Now Jesus is not teaching that there won’t be older people who will end up great disciples. What He is teaching is that the one who will be the greatest in heaven will be like the one who maintained a youthful vigor for the things of God on earth.

Great disciples will be those who are always learning and growing. They will not be those who walk around with some pseudo-pious stuffed shirt spirituality as some dried up spiritual giant. Pharisees and Scribes were known for this.

Great disciples of God maintain a youthful zeal; a youthful intensity; a youthful excitement and youthful freshness for the things of God.

Young people are always on the move, learning, growing, and stretching. I think we have many great disciples in this church. They love to come and learn and even though they may be older in age, they are still youthful in focus.

Illustration #2 - Great disciples will be like the servant, not the master. **22:26b**

Jesus says the greatest disciples in eternity will have been the greatest servants on earth. That noun “servant” and participle “serve” is obviously the key word because it shows up three times in two verses (22:26-27).

The specific Greek word used here is “diakonos” (diakonoꝝ) from which we get our English word “deacon.” This word specifically places its emphasis on the “work” part of service.

The word “leader” is one that primarily has to do with leadership and management.

What we understand this to mean is that those who will be the greatest in eternity will not have been those who continually walked around as some big shot leader, but one who continually and faithfully did the work of God for the glory of God.

There is no doubt that these Apostles held prestigious positions and power. With all of the apostolic power and authority, it would be easy to rest on your laurels of your position and reputation. Jesus is telling them to never stop working for God and serving God.

In my opinion, it is imperative that ministers keep studying and expounding new books of the Bible and not rely on their own sermons.

Illustration #3 - Great disciples will be like the waiter, not the diner. **22:27**

Now Jesus gives His own Personal illustration as to how God views greatness. The illustration is that of a restaurant scene.

Christ says when it comes to eating a meal, who is greater, the one who dines or the one who serves? In a restaurant setting, who is more prestigious, the one who dines or the one who serves?

In God’s mind who is the more honored person, the one coming to eat at the restaurant or the one who serves at the restaurant?

Almost everyone would say the one who is dining is the greatest. The one who is eating is the most honored and most important. The one who is dining comes wearing fine clothing.

He has money. He sits down and enjoys being served. He enjoys the atmosphere and ambiance and the food. He is the really important one.

Christ says that isn't the way God sees it. When it comes to the things of God, the greatest is the one serving, not the one dining. The greatest is the one who is giving and not the one who is taking.

Mary and I were at breakfast last year at Ellie's diner in Florida and a Limousine pulled up in front of the restaurant and out came this entourage of people, and into the restaurant came some impressive young woman we didn't recognize. This young lady was obviously someone important because she was being treated like a queen.

Now if you were to ask who the most important person is in that diner at that moment, I doubt too many would say that Limo driver or that waitress. But in all reality that is the way God sees it.

Christ says if you want an example, take a look at Me. I am like one who serves. In fact, He came to serve, not to be served. He came to offer Himself as a sacrifice.

Great disciples will have an attitude like Him.

This world is backwards. It tends to say that when a person reaches a level in which people wait on him, he has really arrived. Jesus says in God's world, when a person reaches a level where he wants to continually serve, he has really arrived.

I will never forget an early morning doctrine class I had with John Miles. The doctrine was Pneumatology and he offered a doctrine class that started at 7AM. Surprisingly, there were quite a few who took that class. I would get there about 6:15-6:30 to drink a cup of coffee and gather my thoughts. One morning I arrived at about 6 and there was Mr. Miles vacuuming the floor. Here was a great man of God, a President of a Major Theological School, a man who had literally travelled and spoken all over the world, a man who had influenced thousands of people and at 6 in the morning he is vacuuming a school floor.

Do you want to know why he did that? Well for one, the floor was dirty and not up to his standards but second, he was like Jesus Christ. What a servant.

Great servants are like that. They vacuum; they wash dishes and floors; they serve meals; they clean toilets and mop. They visit the sick and help where they can. Those are the greatest disciples you will ever see on this earth.

The way to the top is down. We step up in greatness in God's world by stepping down in service in this world.