

Between the Upper Room and Gethsemane pt 1

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Luke 22. Let's go there together. Just one other reported update right quick. I was going to the funeral service for Brother Ron Akers and please continue to pray for that family, if you would, and Tommy Singleton was telling me about their trip to Austria and when they were helping the little church in Austria, some young men, maybe they were families, I've forgotten exactly, but they had traveled four hours to come to church there from Germany and they said they were thrilled to hear that the church was there in Austria because they had been traveling seven hours to church looking for a glory of God focused, Christ honoring, Bible saturated local church. And in talking to these young men from Germany who traveled seven and four hours just to find a healthy church, they have been watching our services on the internet and so you just never know, do you? Our goal has been to get out the truth and trust the Holy Spirit to use it for those who are hungry for the truth. I just don't think you can grasp...we do know how shallow and weak and how difficult it is to find a healthy church in America, even more so in Europe but yet through the internet, we're able to be an instrument God is using to encourage these little bands of faithful believers. Can you imagine what it would be like if you really loved God and really loved the truth and could not find a place that held to those things? It would be unbelievably difficult.

And, again, on just the needs of things, our cameras and our equipment are terribly antiquated. When I use the metaphorical phrase "we hold things together with duct tape and bailing wire," that's just about literally true with our audio and video equipment. It's very, very old. You can't buy parts. Tim has to find people who specialize in old used parts. I mean, we're way away from digital and high-def. We are still back, we've got the big beta machine things, the big old tape things, you know, back there which they are useless. So you wonder what to do about that. I'm not burdened about it. I'm not heartbroken about it but I do think God wants our broadcast to be out there and this is an hundreds of thousands of dollars thing. It's not a cheap thing but getting the preaching of the word out of the context of a healthy church is the most important thing on earth. It is. I'm sorry, it just is. God has ordained the preaching of his word in healthy or true churches as the centerpiece of what he's about and when we have gotten that out, God has used it.

So it's just another area to pray about. I don't know what to say other than just to say these are good needs to have. We still are functioning the way we're functioning but

eventually we're going to have to get updated equipment. I mean, what is it, pushing 20 years old and they tell us that in about six or seven years in the way technology advances, you're already antiquated. Well, we're three times that. So just another thought and another prayer and I'm going to that funeral. I had no idea that conversation was going to be there but it just struck in my heart again there is a need for us to keep getting the message out and you're going to get to heaven one day and I'm convinced time after time after time after time in glory, God will say, "God used your church and your message and your preaching to help us in places where there was not any." Anyway, just a thought and a prayer.

We are now in Luke 22 and we are between the upper room and Gethsemane. It's Thursday night. Jesus will be crucified on Friday and some interesting things happen and some wonderful teaching and exhortation is taking place in this small band of Jesus and his apostles. Luke 22:24,

24 And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. 25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' 26 But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. 27 For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves. 28 You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; 29 and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you 30 that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 31 Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; 32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." 33 But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" 34 And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me." 35 And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, "No, nothing." 36 And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. 37 For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'and he was numbered with transgressors,'; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment." 38 They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough."

Again, it's Thursday night. The Passover meal has been taken by Jesus and the disciples. He has transformed the Passover into our Lord's Supper. He will be in just a few moments heading out to the garden of Gethsemane. A few moments later, betrayed by Judas Iscariot, taken into custody, headed to the cross.

I. in our outline as we unleash the truths of this text one verse at a time: true greatness is seen in a heart of humility and service. True greatness is seen in a heart of humility and service. Now, in the previous section of Scripture, we have just been commending these disciples for their healthy expression of godly humility. You remember, Jesus was dipping his bread in the sop and as he dipped it, he said, "One of you is going to betray me." And they began to discuss very humbly and rightfully, "Is it I? Am I the one?" And we commended them for that. That's the kind of healthy humility that marks of maturity. But the Passover meal is barely finished and how quickly they fall into diverse temptations because verse 24 says, there is a dispute among them now as to which one is the greatest. How quickly things change. You might remember that the mother of James and John has already asked Jesus to give her sons a prominent place in his kingdom.

Now, in balance, some grace ought to be given to these guys because Jesus has with increasing passion even, been telling them, "I'm fixing to die. I'm going to leave you." So perhaps they're wondering in Christ's absence who is going to be the leader. Maybe that's part of it. But nevertheless, seeing them in a contention, if you will, and that's what the word means here, a dispute about who's the greatest, this does remind all of us of how weak we are in the flesh. I mean, he has just finished the meal where he in the most solemn way said, "I'm going to die for you," and the next moment they're arguing about who's the greatest. Ambition, pride, and lust for popularity are ever lurking in the fallen hearts of men. We are no different. I'm no different.

Verse 25, "And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called "Benefactors."'" Now, the world is full of those who have an office of rule and authority over others and the world is full of those who misuse that office of authority and power to oppress those under them. As a matter fact, in verse 25 when he says, "You know how it is out there in the world among the Gentiles, their rules and authority lord it over them." The phrase "lord over" simply means oppression. They oppress the people under them. Now, let's be careful and be balanced, all authority and all power is not evil. Of course it isn't. God has ordained the authority of husbands, the authority of the civil magistrates, the authority of parents, the authority of pastors, and the authority of employers. The Scripture clearly teaches that God has a structure of command, of submission and authority for society to function by and for his church to function by. He even had a leadership structure among the 12. To the sick room of Jairus' daughter, to the Mount of Transfiguration, and then to the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus didn't take the entire 12 of the disciples, he took only Peter, James and John. And it can be argued as you see the listing of disciples, it typically seems to be three groups of four with Peter, James and John at the head of each group. Peter was obviously the leader among all the rest of them so he was already developing a chain of command, if you will, an authority structure, so authority is not wrong. The point here Jesus is making is the misuse of authority. That's what is evil, and he's saying, "You disciples know this so well because you have seen it among the Gentile leaders." Caesar after Caesar after Caesar comes and every new Caesar promises, "This is a new day. I'm going to have the power and the authority and the control and I'm going to take care of all of you." It sounds like a political campaign for the American presidency, doesn't it?

Jesus said, "You know that's the way it works." In verse 25 he even says they call themselves benefactors. Now, that was actually what many of them referred to. The ancient pharaohs were sometimes called "the benefactor" and what they meant was, "We exist to benefit all of you," and the record of history is that they would build of monuments and coliseums and temples "for the people." But the point Jesus is making at the end of the day, they often just demanded more subservience from the people and they abused their power over them. So Jesus said, "You know how it works. They promise to bless you and take care of you and then they misuse their power." Brothers and sisters, as we are in this political season, remind yourselves that men's hearts are totally depraved. The ones who claim they care more and will do more for you do not have less depravity than the others. All men are corrupt and capable of misusing power and authority. If you really want the centralized government to have more rule and control and help everybody, then you must pray diligently you get to a true and godly Christian man in that position because only the Gospel has the power to change that fallen, power lusting, controlling, selfish heart. Only the Gospel.

So Jesus is saying, "You know how it works." So he's making a contrast here because in verse 26 he says, "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant." So Christ is telling these disciples in this context of them disputing over who's the greatest, that the Christian family or the Christian church must function according to higher principles. "It's not this way with you." The point is the Gospel has changed you. The Spirit has regenerated your heart. You have a God capacity within you to understand and to serve others and not be so consumed with self-interest. You have a humility that other people do not have. So he's saying, "Be great in your humility, be great in your service to one another. Let it not be known among you that you abuse what power and authority might come your way for your own selfish gain."

You know, a life centered in humility and service is the pathway to glory. It is the old path. It is the safe path. I've known a few people who grow old and really made it there modus operandi in life to serve others and they just seem to die well. They just seem to die well. And the people who live on the opposite of that, "What can I get? How can I get what I want? How can I not miss out?" they die hard, harsh, angry and frustrated. It's the old path. It's the safe path. It's the happy path. And it's the holy path. But as I always say to you, let's be biblically balanced. Don't take one section without the balancing of all the systematic truths on this topic. The context here again is the disciples are arguing over who is the greatest and I think Jesus' point would be, "If and when God gives you an office or a position of rule and authority," and by the way, he's going to give them that. These guys are going to sit on the 12 thrones in the new kingdom. He's going to give them great authority and rule. But his point was, "To be truly great as a Christian means you serve with a heart of humility and service. Even when you have the rule and authority, you make sure you administer that to the end that God is glorified and the people under you are blessed and helped."

Now he gives them an illustration from his own life, "For who is greater, the one who reclines," verse 27, "who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who

serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But," that's the way we all view it in the world, the serving the table guy is the lowest guy, the guy reclining is the household owner or the master whatever it might be. The last phrase of verse 27, "but I am among you as the one who serves." Now, Jesus led them with authority. We do know that. But in his heart was a heart of humility and service. You see, Jesus was perfectly balanced. The key was the heart motive. When he exercised his authority and rebuked them or gave them commands, it was out of a heart motive of service to them and for their good. Philippians 2:7 reminds us, "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant and being made in the likeness of men."

Now, an additional note that is so important because this is so warped so often in Christian teaching, and that is that when Jesus served others, now listen, he served others by a complete yielding to the Father's will. He did not serve others yielding to the ever-changing and frequently evil desires of men. He did not sit down and say, "What do you want me to do for you? That's the way I'll serve you." No, he said, "I'm going to do what my Father says to do for you because that's the best way to serve you." So as we serve God and serve each other, we must always do it biblically, not according to whatever sentiments and feelings and emotions that may float around. You understand, your heart is desperately wicked and deceitful; if you follow your heart, you're going to be in bad trouble. We don't follow our hearts, our hearts can't be trusted, we follow this book. I don't love my wife the way I feel like by my emotions, that's all over the place. I'm to love her by the book. Wives, you're to love your husband. You don't love your husbands by what you feel like, you love him by the book. And on and on we could go. That's what Jesus would always do. Over and over, these disciples and others said, "Jesus, do it this way. Jesus, do it that way. Jesus, don't go to the cross." And he would say, "No! I'm going to serve you according to my Father's will. That's going to be best for you."

So keep that balance in your minds as you hear the modern liberal pastors and theologians warp and twist what real service and caring for mankind is. It's when we do what the Bible says when it's true service and humility because in honoring the Father's will, he humbly entered into the service of the office of Savior and his condescension in that role was beyond comprehension. Philippians 2:8, "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." So he says between the upper room Passover meal and going to Gethsemane, "Guys, remember, true greatness is when you function with a heart of humility and service one to another."

II. Exceeding great rewards are ours in the coming kingdom. He's going to progressively tell them that things are going to get hard. Increasingly, he's unfolding to them that, "You're going to be the off scouring of the world. You're going to be hated and persecuted and mocked and ridiculed, falsely accused over and over." But I want you to know something, in Grace Life Church of the Shoals, it's this anew in the bone marrow of your soul, we are not home yet. This is not the world we live for ultimately. Now, be balanced. There are fanatics who get out of whack here as if you can't enjoy the common graces of this life. That's not true. It's just that when we enjoy some of the common graces of this life, we are ever more mindful in the reservoir depths of the truth of our

hearts that the great joys, the great pleasures, the great thing I'm living for is another kingdom, not this world. That's what's wrong with our world today. Our world has become radically, increasingly secular. There was a time in American history when even unbelievers to the great majority, believed in the truth that it's about God and that it's about a new kingdom. Read the old authors of English literature. They had more of a God centeredness, even if the individually might have been unconverted. But today we are radically lusting for and connected to the base ,fallen, temporal pleasures instead of looking forward to the future glorious pleasures. That's what he's going to say to them here.

Look at it in verse 28, in verse 28 he says, "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials." So he has rebuked these guys to some degree about their contention about who's the greatest but now he commends them and he's going to load them with wonderful gifts. He says, "First of all, you stood by Me in My trials." Now, they had failed, for sure, but they always got back up and followed Jesus. Jesus' entire life was a life of trial. He was in painful conflict with a Satan-run world system from the moment he came into this world. I mean, Satan and the world opposed him on every front, but these men unlike so many others, were teachable and stayed yielded and did not take offense at him. They stood with him. Failing at times, weak at times, but they always seemed to land right at the end of the day and stayed with Jesus and he says, "Since you have been shown to be true disciples, you have stayed with me through my trials," he goes to verse 29 and says, "and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you." So this is a parting legacy to his little but beloved flock. Now, in worldly esteem as Jesus comes to the end of his earthly life, he has nothing to leave these disciples. He doesn't even have a decent garment to pass on. To take the Passover meal, his last meal on earth, he had to borrow a room and borrow a table, yet in his worldly poverty, he had heavenly riches because he is granting these men a royal inheritance with him.

Verse 30 the first part here, "so that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom." Now, that's special to anyone but in the ancient Jewish mindset, to be called to eat at a table was a symbol of highest commendation and dignity. In this world, again, Jesus had to borrow a room and borrow a table for his final meal but there is yet a world coming in which he will sit as head of an all-glorious table. Here's what he's telling them, here's what he's telling you and you and you and you and you and you and me: if you follow me faithful and be a true Christian and a true church, there are going to be some tough days in this present world but you're not living for this present world. Thank God for the seasons of blessing and the blessings of children and grandchildren and deer hunting and buying a nice suit of clothes or whatever God may allow. Praise him for that but you always remember this is not my life. This is not my end game. I'm about another kingdom. That's why if I could get back to the contemporary culture, that's why we can say to people and it used to be the common spirit of the culture, "Don't give yourself over to the lust of sexual immorality. Don't give yourself over to the lust of sexual perversions. We know as fallen people those lusts are very strong and those lusts are very real but you're not going to lose anything as you say no to those and fight the fight against those because this life and it's pleasures is not the end. There's a better life and better pleasures to come." We have to live with that reality. That's what he wants these men to hold onto.

He says in verse 30, the last part, "you are going to sit on thrones." That's the position of authority that I told you he was going to give these guys. Of course, that's going to be in the regeneration. They are going to be in an all-glorious condition there before the Lord but it does speak very clearly of a great and glorious exaltation to those who die to the values and principles of this fallen, wicked world and choose to live for Christ and for his church. Now, I'm always going to throw in the church because you don't get the option of saying, "I'm going to live for Christ my way." No, he has designed how we live for him and we live for him primarily by our families making the church the centerpiece of our lives. We do other things but that's the centerpiece of what we are. The world says that's foolishness. Modern, trendy, relevant evangelicalism even says that's foolishness. "We've got to redesign the church is where all it is an hour, an hour and 15 minutes on Sunday morning and we've got the most fantastic show in town going on every Sunday. There's no body life. There's no accountability. There is no responsibility. Just enjoy a good time on Sunday morning with a little spiritual recreation and that's all we ask." That is a lie. Christianity is people who have been changed and so radically changed we radically love each other in the church and we say no to our wandering lusts, we say no to our natural lazy streak, we say no to an overabundant concern for the pleasures of this world that we might be faithful in our service to each other in Christ's church. And Jesus said, "You've been faithful with me through all these trials so I'm going to let you sit on these thrones."

Now, again, he knows they're going to be mocked, they're going to be ridiculed, they're going to be scorned, they're going to be laughed at, their doctrines and their devotion is going to be deplored. They are going to be seen as hindrances to progress. Never has there been a greater oxymoron than these modern liberals calling themselves progressives. Progressing where? To depravity? Progressing to the judgment of God? It's not progression, it's digression. Matthew 5:10-12 Jesus said the same thing basically, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Notice the contrast. In this world, that's what Jesus is saying here again, in this world, persecution but there's a kingdom coming for you. Verse 11, "Blessed are you when," not if but when, "people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me." That means because you want to be loyal to me and honor me above everything else. Verse 12, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great." There is a great, great blessing and reward for you later, "for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

So Jesus is now between the Passover meal and Gethsemane. It's Thursday night and he tells them, "Let me remind you of what true greatness is. True greatness is a heart of humility and service." And that's a great little place for us as we're going into getting ready for promotion. You say, "Well, promotion is not until August." Well, it's not in the church office because right now in the church office and Brother David will be moaning and groaning and rolling around in the hallway and I slap him around a little bit. I'm teasing but, you know, Brother David, why it's difficult? And it's not impossible, we have a lot of folks willing to work but it's always difficult because you've got to organize who goes where and who doesn't go where. It's a many months challenge. But the reason why it's difficult is because the entire body of Christ here is in small groups. We don't have

just 40 percent of our members in small groups. That's hard. You can talk to churches that have 40, 50 percent of their membership coming to small groups and they'll tell you it's hard to get teachers. It's hard to get leaders. Well, try 95 to 100 percent of your people in small groups. That's a wonderful problem to have and before you get full of ourselves and thinking we're something, no, we're just barely normal. Just barely normal. Stay humble. Nothing special. Just barely normal. But small group leader, or a person who's thinking, "Should I dive back in this year?" Look, I understand well after 35 years you've got to have some down seasons. I would not be your pastor today if I hadn't taken some down time. It's just the facts because God needs me to realize and you to realize, "I'm not the guy. God's the guy." We're all weak, amen, and feeble and limited and finite. He's the infinite one. But as we go into this next getting ready for a new small group year, listen to the words of Jesus. Have an attitude of humility and service in the body of Christ.

You would think that one of the very last things he says before he goes to the cross is the most very, very important thing he's going to say so let's have that spirit in our hearts. And as we think about intentionally organizing our lives so that ministry for Christ and in his church is a prominent central part of our lives, now listen, that means you must intentionally say no to some things. Now, here's where we are at Grace Life Church. I have no desire to browbeat you or guilt you into doing something. I want you to so know him and love him you can't help but want to do something. And we worked very, very hard for 30 years to organize this church in a thoroughly biblical way so that if you will give your energies to our functioning structure, you will be fulfilling God's will for your life in his church and that centers around small groups. So think in terms of, "I need to say no to two or three things maybe," but as we think about serving the body, you've got, listen, listen, you've got to intentionally, now again, there are seasons, you may be at a place with your kids maybe, I don't know what it is but you have to back off for little bit but that should be the rare exception, not the rule. Some of you have been on a down season for a long, long time. You're going to have to intentionally say to yourself, "My reward is not here. My greatest blessings aren't here. I'm not living for this earth." That's why we always win. That's why when godless tyrants or authorities take our rights away as believers, we can just smile and say, "Hallelujah for this anyway. Now, I would rather have a blessed life and not have those trials but if it happens, I'm not living for this world." Well, those, I've chopped this thing in half because I knew I wanted to get very thorough...when Jesus tells Peter, "Satan has requested to sift you like wheat but I have prayed for you," boy, that's pregnant with truth and I want to have plenty of time to deal with that next time we're together.

Let's just pray together, alright?