

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our Lord and Savior: Jesus Christ. Amen.

³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

³⁶ He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Friends,

I want you to take a minute and think about this question. “If you could change things about yourself – what would you change?” And a follow-up to that question might be, “Why?” I’m sure the answers will vary but I would guess that at the heart of all the answers is a desire to make changes so people will admire you, or look up to you, or to somehow make yourself look great.

In the portion of scripture before us today, Jesus gives His disciples a lesson on greatness, and that should interest all of us, because... **“Who Doesn’t Want to Be Great?”** We’ll take a look at, **“The person who already is ‘great’ ... in the eyes of God,”** and also **“Little Children and those who welcome them in God’s name.”**

I. Who doesn’t want to be great? The disciples wanted to be considered great. They had been arguing about it on the road as they traveled and yet when Jesus asked them, **“What were you arguing about on the road?”** They kept quiet because their argument was about pride and ego and it wasn’t a God pleasing thing to be arguing about. They tried to deflect the question Jesus had asked with a question of their own, **“Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”**

We are a lot like the disciples. We want to be great also and at times boast about the gifts God has given us and how we use them. We like to let our pride build up our ego and yet as we do that, the focus is all about us and our measure of greatness is according to the world’s standards. This idea of greatness also affects our view of human life and those around us.

If someone isn’t like us we tend to think that they are less than us or if someone speaks differently or has trouble learning or dresses differently we once again think they are less than us. We can get to be a very judgmental person without even trying.

We like to label people “normal” or “gifted” or “handicapped.” Who really decides what is better? Who decides which person is “great” and which ability would make them “great.” Jesus had an answer for us and His disciples.

Who is great? The one who doesn’t want to be great. The person who humbly considers themselves last. Jesus said, **“If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the**

servant of all.” If you want to be great, you must not only be last, but you must also live to serve.

Do you know anyone who is really like that? If this makes people great, then no one would be great in God’s eyes, not even the disciples... But there is One, who would not have raised His hand if the question were asked, “Who doesn’t want to be great?”

Jesus didn’t seek greatness. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Philippians, “[**Christ Jesus**], **being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”** (Philippians 2:6-8). Jesus humbly considered himself last for our sake. He did that to replace our pride with his humble obedience.

Jesus served us all by paying for our pride with his perfect sacrifice. **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** (Mark 10:45).

We can’t genetically engineer or alter a person to be ‘great’ in the kingdom of God, because it isn’t a quality in our DNA. We’ll never be able to weed out the ‘pride’ gene. We can only suppress that attitude with the help of the Holy Spirit. The servant’s attitude that Jesus was talking about can only come after we have been called to faith and want to serve our Lord out of thankfulness.

That kind of attitude doesn’t label one’s life but rather values every life as worthwhile for us to serve, no matter if that life is young or old; quick to catch on or a little slow; famous or not well known at all. This is part of the humble service we’ve been called to.

This isn’t easy for us to do but as Jesus instructed his disciples about greatness, He didn’t call for some great person like King Herod or the Roman governor Pilate or some other famous leader to stand before them...He invited a little child.

II. Herod and Pilate would not have answered a summons by Jesus. They were too great. Why would they bother? But this little child humbly went to Jesus’ waiting arms. He didn’t wait for multiple invitations or say, “Just a minute.” He had no authority issues – he didn’t even think about being ‘great’ in the eyes of anyone. Not this little child.

Jesus used this example of a little child because little children have the least to offer and yet they have the most to offer. Children have nothing to offer in the way of greatness. When you help a child with their childish problems, can they help you with your adult problems? If you tie their shoe, can they fix your car? If you bandage their knee, can they save your marriage? If you comfort them after a nightmare, can they tell your boss to give you a raise?

Little children can’t make people great – they can’t vote them into office, they can’t even remember to close the refrigerator sometimes. So when you help a child, welcome a child, and

you do it out of love for your Savior, not simply to get a hug or a child's love, you're serving the way the Lord wants you to serve – purely for love's sake.

Jesus said, **“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”** When you set the welcome mat to your heart before little children, don't be surprised when it's God who steps in. Service isn't easy: it takes time [God has plenty of it to share], it takes effort [God's strength is all-sufficient], it takes love [not all of humanity could use up God's love], you won't get out of it, as much as you put in [you'll get more, because God rewards us as perfect sons and daughters].

Sometimes when people realize they aren't great, they cling to someone who is. God tells us to do the opposite. When you see your own failings and pride, embrace those who can't help you, who can't give you a single thing in return, do it in the name of the One who forgives you, and watch what blessings flow forth; watch how greatness becomes unimportant, watch how life finds its true value in God and in service.

So... who doesn't want to be great? Thank God, Jesus Christ was not looking for greatness... otherwise He never would have left His throne in heaven, but the First became Last and the servant of all, so that we might enjoy the greatness of heaven, so we might stop striving for what we already have, and settle down to the business of people who are great in the kingdom of God: serving others.

No one is too insignificant for us to serve. As Christ welcomed children, welcome those around you in the same way – with open arms looking to serve them and share Jesus our Savior with them. We don't do it because that's 'what Jesus would do,' but because that's what Jesus DID for us, he stretched out his arms for us on the cross so that he could save our lives from eternal destruction and he did it willingly.

Look to the cross and to our Savior, Jesus Christ, and you will see what greatness is all about. Thank God he sent his Son to serve us and to save us. Now we know what greatness is all about because we have experienced the greatness of our Savior. May you reflect that in your lives. Amen.