

Following Jesus' Example of Greatness

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- [0:00] You know, it's interesting the names that we give ourselves, how we identify who we are. At the church I went to go speak at last week, they asked me to give a small bio, and I made sure to let them know I was the Reverend Dylan Murray.
- But if you think about your work email, we like to maximize our titles, which maximizes the roles that we do, to say how great and important we are.
- For example, if you're a salesman in your business at work, you don't put salesman on your email, you say business development executive.
- Sounds a lot better. A shop assistant, they are a customer experience enhancement consultant. A petrol attendant, he's a petroleum transfer engineer.
- Makes it sound much better. And I was Googling all of these, and my favorite one, you're not a street cleaner, you're a highway environmental hygienist. So, that's a good job to have, I reckon.
- [1:09] But Christians can easily fall into this habit as well, of maximizing who we are and what we want to be. We like to be hashtag blessed, or hashtag highly favored.
- I don't know what the hashtags are for, everyone younger than me knows. Or we like to think of ourselves, I'm a chosen son or daughter of the king. I'm adopted, I'm healed, I'm forgiven, I'm signed, sealed and delivered.
- Amen, praise the Lord. Now, those are all true, but we like to just stay with those things and be with them. You know, there's one title that we don't often hear bandied about, and that is that as a Christian, I'm a slave.
- A slave. A slave. You might get to call yourself a servant of God. Many of us like that sounding, a servant of God, and we often hear about what we can look forward to as we face the judgment, and then we want to hear those words, well done, my good and faithful servant.
- You've often heard that. Interestingly, in the Greek, the word there is slave. There's two Greek words, one for servant and one for slave. And so the words that we're actually going to hear, well done, good and faithful slave.
- [2:33] Servant sounds good. Servant sounds better. Until you realize what a servant is in the Bible. But a slave, ooh, that's going a little bit too low.
- Doesn't sound right. Does the Bible even talk like that? Well, on occasion it does. In our passage today, Jesus says you'll never make an effective disciple if you don't understand what it's like to be a slave or a servant.
- Because that's exactly what Jesus became in order to make you a disciple. And so we're in the passage of Matthew where we're following Jesus up to Jerusalem.
- And in this part, we're following Jesus' example of greatness. What does greatness look like in the kingdom? Is it the same as what it looks like in the world? And so the first part, we're going to look at Jesus' example of greatness.
- Jesus' example of greatness. Now, Jesus is the greatest king in the cosmos. And yet he came not to be served, but to be a servant to others.

- [3 : 47] And he explicitly says that he did this as an example for his followers to emulate. The whole point of the Gospel of Matthew is to tell us that Jesus is the promised Messiah.
- The greatest king that God's people have ever had. What kind of king will he be? They've got a bunch of great kings that they can compare him to in the Old Testament. They've got a bunch of great kings in the world around them.
- Do you remember when Israel wanted their first king? They said, ooh, we want to have a king like the people around us. Well, here's one of those kinds of kings, Alexander the Great.
- Literally known as Alexander the Great. Great king, to be sure. But one who was responsible for up to a million deaths.
- At one point, crucifying 2,000 civilian survivors after the siege of Tyre, which is just up the road to Jerusalem. He was on his way to Jerusalem, and he took out that city of Tyre.
- [4 : 46] And they held out, and he was so mad at them that he had to do the siege, that when he finally broke through the walls, he took the survivors, and there weren't many of them, and he crucified 2,000 of them.
- Civilians. Alexander the Great. Jesus is going to be the exact opposite of this kind of greatness.
- He's going to identify with the kind of people that get crucified, not the kind of king that does the crucifying. And that's because he's going to be one of them.
- He's going to be one of the people that gets crucified. So he says in verse 18 and verse 19, We're going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law.
- They will condemn him to death, and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked, and flogged, and crucified.
- [5 : 50] We can read this, and we'll read it over quickly, because it's such a normal part of our Christian understanding of who Jesus was meant to be.
- But just think how shocking this would have been to the disciples. Remember, a few chapters ago, we saw at Jesus' transfiguration in Matthew 16, the Son of Man is just about the highest title that Jesus could be given.
- Remember, it's from Daniel 7, where he says, One like a Son of Man was coming with the clouds of heaven up to heaven, ushered into the presence of the Ancient of Days, and the Son of Man was given authority, glory, and sovereign power.
- All nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. It's unthinkable that that person should be treated like a fugitive slave.
- And a slave is exactly what Jesus has in mind when he talks about being crucified. In the ancient world, you would never crucify a freeborn citizen.
- [6 : 56] It just wasn't done. Crucifixion was the most brutally humiliating way to treat a human and to demean them. To bring them as low as possible before you end their life.
- It was reserved as an object lesson for slaves. So why does Jesus say this is going to happen to him? The reason is because Jesus' greatness is found not in killing people, but in saving them.
- And it's his death, his crucifixion, that is going to make that happen. Towards the end of our passage in verse 28, Jesus says this, Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
- The word ransom means to buy back. But what's interesting is it's the word that's used in the slave trade. It's the technical word for the price you pay to free a slave.

A technical word for the price you pay to set a slave free. Jesus is going to be the freedom price for slaves.

[8:14] And this is a thing that makes him truly great. Our king is the suffering servant who gives his life as a ransom for the very people who are going to betray and kill him to set them free from the penalty of the sin that it cost to kill him.

It's an amazing promise. And the amazing central proof, central truth of the gospel. Jesus gets this, or we get this, from Isaiah 53.

I'm just going to read it for us. It should be on the screen. It says this about the servant of God. In the Old Testament, they didn't give that name to Jesus. It's just a title, the servant of God.

And that's why Jesus talks about himself as being a servant. He's talking about Isaiah 53. Because he knows Isaiah 53 is talking about him. This is what it says.

After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied. He's going to die. And as Jesus prophesied, after three days, he's going to be raised back to life again.

[9:27] By his knowledge, my righteous servant, there's the word, my righteous servant will justify many. In Matthew 28, Jesus says he will give his life as a ransom for many.

And he will bear their iniquities. That's how it's going to work. That word many is an important word. Jesus doesn't say, I'm going to be a ransom for all.

He's not a ransom for everyone. He's a ransom for many. It means he knows who's he going to ransom. It means he had you in his mind when he went up to the cross.

As I continue, Therefore, I will give him a portion among the great. The servant, and a servant is the lowest of the low. It's like barely one step above a slave.

But this servant, because he does what I say, because he's going to take the iniquity, because he's going to suffer death, verse 12, I will give him a portion among the great.

[10:35] He will divide the spoils with the strong, because he has poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.

For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. Even here, in Isaiah, Jesus' pattern of leadership, his pattern of greatness is established.

He will be lifted up among the greatest that the world has ever known, the greatest that the world has ever known, but only because he's willing to go down all the way to death to pay for their sins.

There's a bunch of things we can get from this passage, from Matthew 20, and combining it with Isaiah, combining it with the Son of Man of Daniel 7, but I want us to focus on two things.

The first is, to get the benefits of Jesus' death, you need to realize that you're a slave. And we don't like to think of ourselves as slaves.

[11:47] We don't use that word anymore. We've had, slaves have been free since the 1800s, mid-1800s. And so it's quite difficult for us to realize what a shameful thing it is to be called a slave.

In the ancient world, that was the biggest divide between people groups. Yes, whether you were Greek, or Latin, or Egyptian, or Persian, that was one of it.

The other one was, are you a free person, or are you a slave? But for us to get the benefits of Jesus' death, we need to realize we're a slave.

If Jesus' death is the ransom price, and he says it is, and if the ransom price is payment for slaves, it means the only way you can get these benefits, if you realize that you are the slave, that Jesus has freed.

You can't be a freed slave, if you don't think of yourself as a slave. If you're too high above thinking of yourself as a slave, then someone offering you a slave ransom won't mean anything for you.

[12:57] In order to be freed, you have to know you were not free, and needed freedom. But we are free. So why did we need freedom? Why did we need to be set free?

From what did we need to be set free? Well, as 1 53 tells you, he bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

He bore their iniquities. He took away our sin. You say, okay, what's that about? Why is sin such an issue? Well, Jesus teaches why sin is such a problem.

In John chapter 8, he says this, Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

And he goes on to say, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. And so the problem is that sin is an enslaving force in this world. Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

[13:58] If you think about it, we all know that this is true. Think about how many things in your life capture your attention and are almost impossible to break free from. The love of money.

The hurt from your past. Your own heart that looks for stuff that you don't even want it to and yet it just reaches out and grabs at you. Almost powerless to stop it.

Money. Sex. Power. Influence.

To be number one. To be the greatest in your life. To get the accolades. To want the stuff of this world. In fact, we pray the prayer in our collect to free us from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Those are three powerful forces that we cannot beat on our own. We can't even beat the sin in our own heart. We can't even correct our own mind and its thinking.

[15:03] And then there's this powerful being, the devil, and then there's this construct around us, the world, that constantly invites us to feed our own selfish desires.

Everyone who sins is a slave to sin. The only way to be freed is to have someone pay that price. In the ancient world, slaves didn't just decide for themselves, you know, I'm tired of being a slave today.

Thank you so much, I'm out of here. No, you would take five steps, they would catch you, and they'd crucify you. If you were lucky, they would do that.

Other times, they would brand you, and you were marked as a runaway slave for the rest of your life. There was only one way to be set free as a slave in the ancient world, and someone to pay your ransom price, the slave payment, and then you were free.

But, what's interesting, is that you weren't totally free. The way that you were freed in the ancient world, is, you were actually given your own money to free yourself, and then you would go to a temple, and pay that money to a temple, and you became the property of the God of the temple.

[16:23] In effect, you were being freed, because the priests wouldn't worry too much, and they'd say, okay, you're the slave of this God, but you're not the slave of the person who owed you anymore. And we're not going to tell you what to do, so you effectively are free.

But you were still owned by someone. And that's the next point that we need to think about, is, firstly, to get the benefits of Jesus' death, you need to realize you're a slave.

Secondly, because Jesus has paid the freedom price for a slave, it means you belong to him. Are you saying, hang on, doesn't Jesus say, I'm free?

Well, the New Testament doesn't let us off the hook, and say we can live our lives as free agents. We are free from our old slave master, our own sin, our own heart, the devil, the past, but now we belong to a new slave master, Jesus.

One of the number one titles of Jesus in the New Testament is Lord. Slaves call their masters Lord.

[17:37] Lord. That's the point of being a Lord. It's someone that you owe obedience to. Now, we don't often think of ourselves like that, but the New Testament uses this word slave over a hundred times to describe the Christian's relationship to Jesus.

I'm just going to give one example. It's Paul writing in 1 Corinthians 7. He says this, For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person.

Similarly, the one who was free when called to be a Christian is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price. Don't become slaves of human beings.

It's actually saying if slaves can get their freedom, they must do that. But notice what he says about free people. If you're a free person, when Christ calls you, you become his slave. In fact, it's Paul, James, and Jude.

James is Jesus' brother writing in the New Testament. They very often start their letters and in our translations we'll have Paul, a bondservant of Jesus.

[18:51] James, a servant of Jesus. It's not the servant word. It's the slave word. James, a slave of Jesus. And in the ancient world they didn't get those two words mixed up.

You didn't just say, oopsie, now I meant servant. No. It's the word slave. John MacArthur, in an interesting talk about this whole topic, says this, being a slave of Christ may be the best way to define a Christian.

We are, as believers, slaves of Christ. you do have a personal relationship to Jesus, you're his slave. Which is, isn't that a different way of thinking about our relationship with Jesus?

Because we've been freed, but because Jesus describes that freedom as a payment, a ransom price, a ransom price, it means we owe Jesus a debt of service.

He wants us to follow his example of servant leadership in our relationship with others. Martin Luther summarized it like this, he says this, a Christian is an utterly free man, Lord of all, and subject to none.

[20:03] That freedom that Jesus talks about, the freedom that the cross gives us. But then he says this, a Christian is an utterly dutiful man, servant of all, and subject to all.

Because we've been bought, we're owned, and we've got to obey our Lord. But how do we do that? What is it that Jesus wants us to do?

And so the first part of this talk is about Jesus' example of greatness, and now we're going to talk about following Jesus' example. How do we follow Jesus' example of greatness?

Jesus wants the people that he has saved by paying the slave price for their freedom to show their gratitude by being like their new Lord and Master. Christians are to practice the same upside-down greatness that Jesus did for us.

We're to help others by being their servants and slaves. Now Jesus had to explain how leadership in his kingdom works, because as usual the disciples had got it all wrong.

[21:10] In our passage in Matthew 20, they're going up to Jerusalem. Jesus just said, you know, I'm going to go up to Jerusalem, I'm going to get killed, and James and John's mother sidles up to Jesus.

Hey, Jesus, hey, I need to ask you something. My sons, yes, what about your sons?

And she says this, say that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom. Well, you just don't ask a king things like that.

He tells you who's going to sit where, least of all, your mom. it's just embarrassing to get your mom to ask Jesus these kinds of things.

This gets the other disciples all grumpy, probably because they hadn't thought of it first, not because they're upset, oh, who are you guys to ask those questions? They wanted to be there first.

- [22 : 25] And they are, the word indignant is that they're actually outraged. It actually caused a huge problem in the party of the disciples going up as they were walking along.

And Jesus sees how much they need this teaching about servant-style leadership. And so, from verse 25 he says this, okay, boys, you've got it all wrong.

Let me explain it again. Just to make the point, this idea of greatness, this question of greatness started way back in chapter 18 where Jesus starts his journey up to Jerusalem and they ask that question, hey, Jesus, who's going to be greatest in the kingdom?

Do you remember his answer? You've got to become like a little child, someone who can't do anything. And so, here they are, yet again, hey, you're going to be a king.

You've promised us thrones. Hey, who's going to, who's, just checking, who's going to sit with you when the whole thing works out? Jesus actually gives an interesting answer.

- [23 : 42] Saying, well, number one, that's not my position to give, which is interesting. Even Jesus is subservient to the will of his father as to who gets to sit next to him. Even there, he's the greatest king of the world, he's beneath God, in one sense, God, his father.

But then he says, well, I'm going to, there's this cup that I've got to drink, and if you sit next to me, you've got to drink it as well. Ah, now we can drink it, they say.

It'll be easy. They don't know what they're asking. The next time, this phrase about someone being on his right and his left is used at the crucifixion. So he realizes, no, they don't get it, I need to help them.

So from verse 25, Jesus says this, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise of authority over them, not so with you.

Instead, whoever wants to become great, among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave, just as the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

- [25 : 10] That just as, that's the hinge, like me, that's what you've got to become. Christians are not to relate to others by pushing them down.

The operative word in lord it over and exercise authority over is down. That word over gives you that understanding. They're on top, but they're doing it by pushing others down.

This is heavy-handed, bully-type language. Jesus' words are emphatic, not so with you. You don't do that.

If you're going to be my follower, you don't do that. Why? Because I don't do that.

Because he doesn't do that. You don't go up in Jesus' kingdom by pushing others down.

you go up by first going down and helping others up. You lead by being a servant. How is that going to look in our everyday life?

- [26 : 23] This is one of those teachings that every Christian knows about. You must be a servant. Jesus is our servant king. We must be servants. It's honestly one of the hardest things to do.

It's impossible actually without the help of Jesus. Recently, we heard about the death of Charlie Kirk in America.

I watched the commemoration and an amazing speech by his wife. If you haven't seen it, it's worth watching. She talked about their relationship.

They would spend Saturday realigning re-centering themselves. They kind of did it as a Sabbath. As great as a leader that Charlie Kirk was, she says, they would take a moment, they would sit with each other and then he would ask, how can I serve you better?

It wasn't a gimmick, it wasn't a gag, he meant it and they lived it, she said, he lived it. That's a great question for us to wrestle with.

[27:41] And so, I'm just going to look at a few examples of that. How can I serve you better? Bosses in business.

What are you doing to show servant leadership? How are you showing servant leadership? leadership? Maybe you need to soften on certain issues, maybe micromanage less, maybe micromanage more.

What I mean by that is take the time to help someone who's not quite getting the job done properly, maybe take the time and explain step one, step two, step three. It's easy for you, maybe they don't know, don't get irritated, just go and help them.

I was in a pipe band and we've got what's called a pipe major, he's the leader of the band, these are military bands. You just have to play the tune properly and if you're not playing the tune properly you just get shouted at, play it properly, I don't know how to play it properly, show me, I don't have time to show you play it properly.

Take the time, help the guy. Oh, that's how you play it, hey thanks, I really appreciate that. Here's a challenge for you as a boss, go and ask your workers, hey guys, what can I do to serve you better this week?

[29:07] Try that, see what happens. Workers, if you want that raise you've always been asking for, go and ask your boss, what can I do to serve you better this week?

They will love you for it. They don't expect that. They expect you to do the job. Hey, how can I serve you better this week? One of the ways, don't grumble in the work that you've been given, not like the disciples.

In fact, it's the number one way to show that you don't have the same servant attitude, the number one way that you can show that you don't have a servant attitude is by grumbling.

So swallow that. Go into your work. How can I serve my boss better? How can I serve my business better? How can I serve my fellow workers better?

But here's a challenge. Go to your boss. Hey, how can I serve you better this week? But don't just use words.

[30:16] You know, you then must step up and go and do it. Let's think about serving at home for a bit. Men, how are you showing servant leadership at home?

Servant leadership. You've got to show leadership. We know that. Even there, that's an important reminder to lead, but how you lead is important.

In fact, men, you're always going to lead, either well or not so well. But servant leadership at home. You cannot lie down on the sofa while the wife does all the chores.

You probably don't anyway. Ladies, don't say anything. So, but men, you need to lead by example, especially for your boys, so they can see how a man leads when he's led by Christ.

Men, if you want to radically improve your relationship with your wife, take her side, look deep in her eyes, ask, how can I serve you better this week?

[31:30] Those are the magic words, I reckon. How can I serve you better this week? Ladies, how are you showing servant leadership at the home?

How are you modeling humble obedience to your husband? I've got South African friends who have moved to England and they loved pranking their English neighbors because they're kind of new South Africans are slightly more conservative in the home than English people and when they would come around for a braai, the wife would come out and say, hello my husband, hello my wife.

Everyone's looking, what are they talking? Is there anything I can get you? Yes, we need some beers. How many beers would you like? Gentlemen, and they would go around and English people could not, huh?

And then they'd run off giggling and it was a huge joke. But you can model humble obedience to your husband, let your kids see that you choose to submit so they can see what a godly wife looks and sounds like.

Again, especially for the daughters. And ladies, if you want to radically improve your relationship with your husband, take him aside, look lovingly in his eyes and ask, how best can I serve you this week?

[33 : 03] And then lastly, kids, if you want to utterly surprise your parents and make them wonder now, but who are you and what, where, take them aside and say, hey, what can I do to serve you better this week?

By the way, you can do that for your brother and sister as well. We all know it's impossible to do these things on our own.

That's why we must constantly remind ourselves of the example of Jesus and the lengths he went through to save us. even the son of man did not come to serve but be served and give his life as a ransom for many.

There's a famous passage in Philippians chapter 2. Maybe just turn there. I don't have it up on the screen. Philippians 2 and we'll just end our time as I read that for us.

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. You're in that part of the New Testament. Philippians 2, I'm going to read from verse 6. This is what we must remind ourselves of when we're struggling to be a slave.

[34 : 27] Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage, rather he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.

Being made in human likeness. That son of man from Daniel 7, the son of God becomes a human.

man from God. That's low for a God. And he goes lower. Verse 8, being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Putting himself in the place of slaves. putting himself in the lowest possible position in the world. And because he did that, verse 9, therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Now we're good at bowing our knee to Jesus. Jesus wants you to bow the knee to others. Men, bow it to your wife. Wives, bow it to your husband.

[36 : 04] Children, bow it to your parents. Bosses, bow it to your workers. Workers, bow the knee to your boss. In fact, there's a challenge. Don't just go and say, how can I serve you?

Go down on the knee and see what happens. Okay. Why does Paul write this in Philippians? He says why. Before that, verse 6, he says this to the church.

From verse 3, do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves. Not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. I'm sure you agree with me.

It's impossible to do by ourselves. We need Jesus' help. Let me pray for us. Lord Jesus, we cannot really truly comprehend the price you paid to give up the glories you had with God the Father in eternity to take on human form and then to die on the cross.

[37:31] We can't understand that fully, but we do know something of that. Lord, will you in your grace and mercy give us this vision of you, of the cross, of you as our ransom, and so that we can serve others as you have served us.

Give us the grace to do that, Lord. We need your help for this, and we know that you will help us because your word says you will. Help us to trust it and to do it. Amen.

Amen.