



Who is the Greatest?

January 8, 2017

Scripture Passage: Mark 10: 35-45

We all have deep desire to be number one in everything! We work hard and become very competitive.

In this important passage, the disciples were doing just that.

Why do we crave to be number one?

Why do we push others down in order to make us look good?

Why do we judge as to who is good, who is not?

Why do we compare and rank people in our own way?

Remember, the Corinthian church was plagued with this problem! When you try to answer these questions, we are forced to go deep into Psychological analysis here. Perhaps people like Dr. Phil could come up with some good insights concerning this superiority problem. But such people cannot offer good solutions.

But the Word of God not only identifies the problem, it gives a clear cut solution also. Jesus our Lord shows us very clearly how we can truly be great in God's kingdom.

Let us pay attention to these important passages and try to understand what God is telling us.

Mark 10: 35, 36. 35 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." 36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

James and John came to Jesus privately. Gospel of Mathew in chapter 20 says that the mother of John and James approached Lord Jesus along with her sons and requested.

The Zebedee brothers wanted a blank check! Whatever they wanted, they wanted Jesus to fulfill! Jesus did not allow them to manipulate Him. He asked, what do you want me to do for you? Our Lord did not let them beat around the bush. He wanted them to specify exactly.

Mark 10:37 They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory."

Let me stop right here and ask you this question. Right now if Jesus wants you to petition just one thing, what would that be? (Discuss)

Psalm 27:4 One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek:

That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,

To behold the beauty of the LORD



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And to meditate in His temple.

David's wish was beautiful. He sought after spiritual matters of God!

Luke 10:42 but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Mary chose the best part, the Word of God.

My personal wish. To stay close to God's presence and love Christ dearly who gave it all for me!

But John and James went for the earthly powers! We often mistake this passage. We think that John and James were jockeying for the powers of heavenly kingdom in heaven. No! They were dreaming of actual earthly Israel national Kingdom and Jesus as King of Israel triumphantly defeating Romans and conquering the whole world eventually? Just like people trying to get high position in President Elect Trump's future cabinet, James and John also tried to secure their spot!

But Jesus didn't scream at them or get angry. He was actually compassionate toward their foolishness. He asked a very poignant question!

Mark 10:38-40. 38But 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?" 39They 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. 40"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."

When Jesus asked, are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized the same way He meant, "will you be able to drink the cup of the horrible suffering on the cross? Are you willing to be baptized or immersed in your own blood?"

Another way to look at it: will you be able to step into My shoes and play My leadership role in My kingdom which is based upon self-denial and martyrdom!?

The brothers answered without understanding the intent, they are able.

Jesus prophesied here that these two brothers will die the same way as He died. James was beheaded, but John's story is unknown! John outlived everyone. Some say, he died as a martyr. Others say that he died naturally. I believe he must have been martyred because Jesus predicted so.

Jesus says that to sit right or left is not His decision and it is already preordained by His Father!

Mark 10: 41Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John.

Obviously! We would have been upset also. No one likes the idea of their own companions bossing around them. Christian bossing is totally different as per our Lord Jesus Christ! We lead from behind. We do not compete for positions. We just go and fill the holes. Worldly



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people go after the glamorous position. But the true disciples of Christ gracefully move toward the needs of the church and fill the holes. It is something beautiful to watch those people in this church. These people don't do it for the sake of doing. They just glide and gracefully finish the job. We can see that week after week, before the worship begins, or before the meal begins or after the meal and these people do it joyfully! There is indeed lot of love in this church. You will not see a long face any day. Please do not do anything for the Lord with a long face. Move out of that place and do not volunteer. Friends, Serving the Lord is a great privilege. You are not doing a great favor for the Lord. It is the Lord who is showing you favor to allow you to work for Him and He blesses immensely. Because of their servanthood they really reap the blessings from the Lord! You don't just come to sing, or pray or preach or teach! You must come to serve also. God wants us to roll up our sleeves. If not, something is missing really in your life. See what our Lord has to say about seeking leadership.

Mark 10:42-45. 42Calling 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. 43"But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; 44and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. 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."

Worldly leadership is totally different. There has to be a master in any organization and they must carry a stick to make the people listen. The people who serve under them are paid hirelings and they can be fired at will. They rule by fear of termination and punishment. Everything is measured by dollar.

But on the other hand, the house of God has just one master and that is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We all work for Him and work under the supervision of Holy Spirit. He raises each congregation and equips people to become the servants of God. He equips each one individually for good works that they may arise, shine, and share the

love of Christ to all people. There must be absolutely no competition among the people. Jesus says, if you want to be great among the people of God, then you must be a servant (diakonos) to all. Literally, diakonos means "kick up dust as you hasten! In Tamil, Thuzh kilappurah! We must be kicking up dust when we praise and worship. We must run and dance joyfully. We must kick up the dust when we preach. We must kick up the dust in fellowshiping with each other. There must be lot of joy in everything. If you want to be the first, then you should become a slave (doulas) of all. It is one of the rare passages where we can see the difference between the servant and the slave! Servanthood is a voluntary submission. But slavery is involuntary. We come to Christ as a servant, but then we become a slave for Him. We start obeying Him in everything!



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If you go back to the last chapter we can see that the disciples had already argued about who is the greatest!

Mark 9:33,34 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

The disciples jockeying for power were all about the earthly kingdom and glory. Not only were Peter, James and John contending for this position, but the zealots, true warriors like Simon the zealot, and Judas Iscariot may have fought for it too. Judas Iscariot was already a treasurer and so he had more weight. Perhaps He would have bought the votes with his money power! Also there may have been charismatic leaders, people with government experience like Mathew, could have jockeyed for it too. We see that today in our election process! We see blood spilling everywhere. Egotistic pride can destroy a community in no time.

- Why do we crave for power, fame, and glory?
- Why do we crave for others to serve us and we do not want to serve anybody. Is it beneath our dignity?
- Why do we jockey for power?
- Why do we become cut throats in pushing each other down?

We really need to see the real reason for this behavior and get to the bottom of it! The big "I" wants to be The Lord, and expects everyone to bow down and submit and serve. This craving happens only when we are in a group. We strive to get the attention, look at me, I am something special. I should be the greatest among you. When one starts showing off another tries to show off and prove that he or she is better than the previous one. That's when the spirit of comparison starts.

Sometimes the group becomes the source of this problem. Remember David and Saul story? The women started **singing Saul killed thousands, but David killed ten thousands!** Comparative spirit is an ugly spirit and it breeds jealousy. Sometimes parents compare their children. Joseph story is a classic one. There was no need to dress up one child, Joseph in a multi-color coat, which led to jealousy among the siblings.

Sometimes we judge and measure ourselves and esteem ourselves better than others. Let God be our judge. There is no need to judge others. Jesus said judge not at all! A simple solution to all these problems. No need to waste your money on a Psychologist! If we do not judge, we will not feel inferior or superior!



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Is your greatness based upon worldly achievements or based upon the Kingdom of God expectation?

The disciples could have easily brought their question to Jesus' attention and He could have resolved it. But they wanted to decide it in a sneaky manner. They deliberately walked behind? They were jockeying for power behind His back. We do the same thing in our work place! We tend to play politics! We try to gain power over others through money, knowledge, success, charisma, charm, and experience. We do not want to be controlled by anyone but we would like to control everybody. Isn't that amazing?

We haven't escaped that egotism even within the ranks of the church. Within the church no one seems to want to rush to be the janitor, or do menial job. Instead, the place of recognition and honor is sought.

Let us enter as a winner who will be crowned and called, "well done my faithful servant!" The criteria for winning in the kingdom of God is not the same as winning in this world. It is not a cut throat competition. We do not have to push someone down so that we may climb up. The two kingdoms are totally opposite and it is a paradox. If you strive to be first in the earthly kingdom you will neglect God's Kingdom principles. If we really go after God's kingdom we become insignificant in this world.

Let's see this Kingdom of God principle in Mark 9:35

Mark 9:35. Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."

If you want to be first in God's Kingdom you must become last and become a servant of all!

The problem is no one wants to serve. Everyone wants to be served.

This was a radical teaching! The one who serves the needs of others is the greatest person. Our whole life should revolve around meeting the needs of other people. Instead of focusing on other people's needs and serving them, we tend to focus on forcing others to take care of our needs, ambitions, and aspirations.

Can you see clearly the difference between selfish living and selfless living?

Can you see the difference between a group dynamics of manipulation and power versus just being happy to be together and to meet the needs of people by serving?

Blessed is the church that has these servants as their congregation members.

The hero of the church is not the pastor but the person who takes the trash out.

The person who cooks painfully and serves us.

The person who is all about identifying the needs of the people and meeting those needs by being their servant is the greatest person!



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Here Jesus gives us clear direction to be first in the Kingdom! Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave! He not only taught us this wonderful lesson, but also demonstrated it in His life. He virtually stooped down to wash their feet as their slave! Dear ones, Our Lord spoke so much **about servanthood** we have no excuse but to walk in His way!

So who is the greatest among us?

The greatest is the one who serves others always with a humble spirit!

The greatest is the one who always obeys the will of our Lord!

The greatest is the one who really knows and loves His humble Savior and loves one another!

Love is actually an act of submission to the other.

No one seemed to want to be No.1 in following Jesus to the cross of suffering. But God's way is, first the cross of servanthood, then the crown, and no crown without the cross of servanthood. Yes, let us be real winners. Let everyone become a deacon and deaconess, in other words servants in God's kingdom and be a real winner in meeting each other's need! Yes, the person who stoops down to serve others is the greatest in God's kingdom! Let us go after the crown of glory just like our Lord did!

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