

# True Greatness

Mark 10:35-45

## Human Desires

In our last lesson, we listed things that people desire. The list included position, power, control, recognition, reputation, popularity, talent and success. These things sound like characteristics of “greatness.” What did Jesus teach about “greatness?”



## Greatness of Jesus

Certainly, Jesus was (and is) great! (*Luke 1:32; 7:16-17; Hebrews 4:14; 13:20; Titus 2:13*) During his earthly ministry, Jesus revealed he was the promised Messiah in the coming kingdom. Thus his followers expected him to become a great and powerful ruler. But Jesus kept saying things that did not seem consistent with him becoming a great ruler.

During his last year of earthly ministry, Jesus predicted his death on three occasions.<sup>1</sup> On his last journey to Jerusalem, Jesus told his disciples he would be delivered over to the Jewish leaders, condemned to death, handed over to the Gentiles, mocked, spat upon, flogged (humiliated), and executed (killed); then three days later he would rise (*Mark 10:32-34*).

## Desire for Greatness

Overlooking or misunderstanding Jesus’ predictions of suffering and death, the disciples looked forward to Jesus’ glorious rule in the coming kingdom, and they had desires related to his rule.

1. Read Mark 10:35-41. What do James and John request of Jesus? (v. 37) What do they really want? What attitudes are evident in their request?
2. How does Jesus respond? (vv. 38-40) What does it mean to ‘drink the cup that Jesus drinks,’ and ‘be baptized with the baptism Jesus is baptized with?’<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> The first prediction was about one year before his death, after Peter’s confession (*Mark 8:31-32*). The second prediction was about six months before his death (*9:31-32*). The third prediction was made on his last journey to Jerusalem (*10:32-34*). Each prediction was made to the 12 disciples but they obviously missed the point (*9:32*).

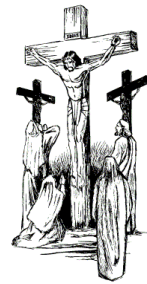
<sup>2</sup> The Old Testament uses ‘cup’ as a metaphor for God’s wrath against human sin (*Isaiah 51:17-23; Jeremiah 25:15-28; Mark 14:36*). The ‘baptism’ points to the overwhelming suffering Jesus would face as he suffers and dies for *our* sins. Jesus is basically asking James and John, ‘Do you realize that when you ask to share in my glory, you are asking to share in my suffering?’ (because suffering is the only path to true glory.) James and John *would* suffer for the sake of Jesus (*Acts 12:2; Revelation 1:9*) but they answer ‘we can’ without fully understanding what it means.

3. What is the attitude of the other disciples when they hear about James' and John's request? (v. 41) Why do you think they feel this way?

### *Way of True Greatness*

4. Read Mark 10:42-45. What does Jesus explain about true greatness? (vv. 42-44)<sup>3</sup> What contrast does Jesus make? What do you think about this teaching?

5. In this passage, in what way is Jesus the supreme example of service? (v. 45) Why is Jesus' service so important to us?<sup>4</sup>



Jesus is the way of true greatness. His humble service led to his exaltation in glory (*Philippians 2:5-11*) and provided the way for our salvation and glory (*Colossians 3:1-4*). When we follow Jesus, we follow the way of true greatness.

### *Reflection & Application*

- Do you want to experience greatness? If so, what path are you pursuing? How will you get there? Is "greatness" in the eyes of the world fully satisfying?
- Jesus said true greatness is through the path of humble service. Do you believe that? Why or why not?
- Jesus is the Supreme Servant who gave his life for our spiritual freedom. If Jesus (who did nothing wrong) was willing to suffer and die for us, what should we do in response?
- Jesus is the supreme example of humble service, and he tells his disciples to follow his example. If you are a Christian, are you following his example? To what extent are you willing to follow? In what specific ways are you serving? In what ways can you better serve?

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<sup>3</sup> The principle of humble service may be appreciated in various religions and philosophies. However, Jesus is not speaking of serving others apart from serving the God of the Bible. The "first and greatest commandment" is to love God with all our being (*Matthew 22:36-38*). The Bible says, "Fear the LORD your God, serve Him only" (*Deuteronomy 6:13, cf. Matthew 4:10*). For the Christian, serving others is an essential part of serving God.

<sup>4</sup> Jesus 'gave his life as a ransom for many.' A 'ransom' is a price paid for release from captivity and/or punishment. Jesus had to suffer and die to pay the 'ransom.' Jesus taught with authority. He performed miracles. He showed people how to live. But the primary part of Jesus' mission was to die – to give his life as a ransom for many. Who is released and what are they released from? The 'released' are those who receive Jesus Christ through faith. They are released from captivity to sin and God's punishment of sinners. This applies to each one of us since 'all have sinned' (*Romans 3:23*) and all need to be released!