

Your Notes

“My lines have been changed!”

:35-45 JESUS TEACHES WHAT BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP IS. Mt.
20:20-28

:35-40 The two wanted to be **great** and thought those two positions would get them there. Their problem was they were blind to the **‘way’** to that glory. The Father prepares us by the **cups and baptisms** He puts us through. Nothing is wasted. Everything is significant.

:41-45 Jesus is still focused on greatness but on God’s path to it: **servant leadership**. Greatness in the kingdom is not measured by how many serve you, but by how many you voluntarily serve. True greatness arises out of servitude, **meeting somebody else’s need**. The point is not to ask what is on the cutting edge (the latest leadership style) but to ask what is true from the Word of God. Jesus is the **example** of that kind of greatness.

Greatness isn’t to be sought. If it comes from God, it comes through serving. The way or path of being great is the way of the cross, the way of the servant. Work out what it means for you to be a servant in your world—your home, your neighborhood, your workplace, your school, your church.

If you have a position of leadership, don’t try to write your own script! We are to be committed to following Jesus’ example, for the good of the whole, voluntarily practicing servant leadership. Look up and meditate on the verses on the “Servant-Leader” handout. After learning what it is and looks like in practice, begin to apply it in the Spirit’s strength.

FOR NEXT WEEK: Please read Mark 10:46-52. Here is an opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate servant-leadership. In :46-48, draw the picture of the scene. In :49-52, how did Jesus deal with the needy beggar? From these verses, what do you learn about Jesus? About the man? About the crowd? What do you learn about you?

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What about those who give up everything to follow Jesus? Jesus promised rewards and eternal life. He even promised thrones to His 12. Read Mt. 19:27-30.

Madeleine L'Engle, in her poem *Act III, Scene ii* writes: "Someone has altered the script./ **MY LINES HAVE BEEN CHANGED.**/ The other actors are shifting roles./ They don't come on when they're expected to,/ and they don't say the lines I've written/ And I'm being upstaged./ I thought I was writing this play/ with a rather nice role for myself,/ small, but juicy/ and some excellent lines./ But nobody gives my cues/ and the scenery has been replaced./ I don't recognize the new sets./ This isn't the script I was writing./ I don't understand this play at all."

Two apostles wanted to write their parts in God's script. They came together to make a personal request, following Jesus' third declaration of His death (a script written by His Father!).

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:35-37 :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?" :37 They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory."

:35-37 READ. James and John had heard John the Baptist declare Jesus as the Lamb of God. They had even been present with Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration and heard a voice from heaven say, 'This is My beloved Son; listen to Him!' They had heard Jesus' words of **Mt. 19:28** about thrones. They were convinced of who He was; they just didn't like His path!

Since it was now clear that Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, they expected His messianic glory to be revealed there. Yes, they had also heard His words about His suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. But they only followed up on the words they liked! They were seeking a blank check signed by Jesus.

:36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" :37 They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory."

:36 READ. James and John want nothing less than the right and left hand next to Jesus' throne when He reigned in glory. They still believed in Jesus, but they were thinking of a physical kingdom and maneuvering for position! **THE TWO WANTED TO BE GREAT AND THOUGHT THOSE TWO POSITIONS WOULD GET THEM THERE.** They had completely failed to understand Jesus and the path for following Him (**:31**). There's nothing wrong with wanting to reach your potential, even wanting to be great. **THEIR PROBLEM WAS THEY WERE BLIND TO THE 'WAY' TO THAT GLORY.**

:38 But 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?"

:38 READ. When our Lord replied, He didn't rebuke them. Instead, "You are asking with no understanding of what is involved." Why? Because the way to greatness is servanthood. To ask for such a position was a request to share His suffering. Remember, suffering and death come before glory and life.

Are you able to drink the cup that I drink? Remember His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane: **14:36 Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.** Jesus wanted His Father's will but even He agonized over the path! Jesus was to bear the wrath of God's judgment against sinners. He would be made sin.

Or to be baptized with the baptism? Baptism means to dip, to place into, submerge, a figure of something that would overwhelm His soul. **Lk. 12:50 (READ).** He would be immersed in it so completely that it would touch and affect everything about Him, inside and out. Add those two images together!

:39-40 :39 They 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."

:39-40 READ. "Yes, we're able." These disciples didn't realize what they were asking Jesus for. And sometimes neither do we. James was the first apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:2). John endured many years of persecution and exile (Rev. 1:9).

: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."

:40 READ. "But the positions for which you're asking, they are My Father's responsibility" (Mt. 20:23). THE FATHER PREPARES US BY THE CUPS AND BAPTISMS HE PUTS US THROUGH. NOTHING IS WASTED. EVERYTHING IS SIGNIFICANT. 'For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison' (2 Cor. 4:17). Stop jockeying for position and start sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to Him!

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

:41 READ. "Jesus sees the cross waiting for Him; James and John see thrones waiting for them; and what do the other ten see? They see James and John!" Their response indicated they too harbored those selfish ambitions. And they kept it up. They all wanted to be great. "Christian position is only a prize to be grasped at by those ignorant of its nature and cost." Now the path!

:42-44 :42 Calling 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; :44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.

:42-44 READ. Jesus calls them all to Himself. He chooses to teach them the meaning of greatness by contrasting the human standards of power and control with the standard of greatness in God's kingdom which He was launching. His disciples were thinking like the earthly kingdoms around them. He knew they needed an eternal perspective.

An earthly organization's structure is a chain-of-command. Men measure power by how many are *under* them. They measure greatness by the number of people they command and control. Look at the great power and authority of Rome. When the emperor in Rome spoke, entire armies moved. That's authority!

:43 "But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant.

:43 READ. *diakonos*, waiting on others, service voluntarily rendered. JESUS IS STILL FOCUSED ON GREATNESS BUT ON GOD'S PATH TO IT: SERVANT LEADERSHIP, what it is and what makes it distinct from the world around us. It's not domination but servanthood. The world's ways don't work in God's kingdom. Jesus overturns the value structure of the world, contrasting 'ruling over' versus 'serving under.'

GREATNESS IN GOD'S KINGDOM IS NOT MEASURED BY HOW MANY SERVE YOU, BUT BY HOW MANY YOU VOLUNTARILY SERVE. If earthly power and control are standards of greatness in any church or Christian organization, ambition and jealousy will rule. Jesus' followers didn't know how to recognize true greatness.

TRUE GREATNESS ARISES OUT OF SERVITUDE, MEETING SOMEBODY ELSE'S NEED. Greatness is based on how many hearts you have impacted by being a servant to them. Furthermore, the One you encourage them to follow is not you but Jesus.

Those who have positions of leadership in the body of Christ should be those who are most committed to service. Servitude isn't a very popular word today. It's not a management model. Yet if we are truly respected, it's because we have demonstrated sacrificial, loving service, not because we have paraded our title around and said, "I'm in control! You do what I say."

By rank, a servant is last of all. In power, a servant has none.

:44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.

:44 READ. We're called not just to servanthood but to slavery (*doulos*) of all. *Slave* of all—the most despicable social status in the Roman empire. A slave didn't own himself; he forfeited his own rights in order to serve others. For the Christian, everybody else is someone to serve. "It's *descending* into greatness, a commitment to last place." (:31) Earlier He encouraged them to become like children. Now He tells them they must be slaves – of all.

Greatness, leadership, and influence come from learning to serve people, to meet their legitimate needs. THE POINT IS NOT TO ASK WHAT IS ON THE CUTTING EDGE (THE LATEST LEADERSHIP STYLE) BUT TO ASK WHAT IS TRUE FROM THE WORD OF GOD.

: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.

:45 READ. JESUS IS THE **EXAMPLE** OF THAT KIND OF GREATNESS. He both tells and models the way. Even the One who received power to rule an everlasting kingdom did not come to earth to be served. The Son of Man relinquished His privileges (Phil. 2:5-8) and gave His life as a selfless sacrifice to serve others. The One who had *every right* to authority became the One who gave up *everything* to meet our needs. Jesus was the ransom payment by giving His life. Every heart He influenced was won by sacrificial love.

We see His love for His disciples by giving Himself as an example to follow. He goes before, is with us, and stays while we learn. 'Emptied Himself of all but love, And bled for Adam's helpless race!'

Ransom means the buying-back of people from slavery or prison or death by paying a price. Substitution. The ransom price satisfied God's justice and holy wrath against sin. In paying it, Christ bore our sins in His own body on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24, 2 Cor. 5:21). The great number of those ransomed by His service and death, by His servant-leadership.

GREATNESS ISN'T TO BE SOUGHT. IF IT COMES FROM GOD, IT COMES THROUGH SERVING. THE WAY OR PATH OF BEING GREAT IS THE WAY OF THE CROSS, THE WAY OF THE SERVANT. WORK OUT WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU TO BE A SERVANT IN YOUR WORLD—YOUR HOME, YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD, YOUR WORKPLACE, YOUR SCHOOL, YOUR CHURCH.

IF YOU HAVE A POSITION OF LEADERSHIP, DON'T TRY TO WRITE YOUR OWN SCRIPT! WE ARE TO BE COMMITTED TO FOLLOWING JESUS' EXAMPLE, FOR THE GOOD OF THE WHOLE, VOLUNTARILY PRACTICING SERVANT LEADERSHIP. LOOK UP AND MEDITATE ON THE VERSES ON THE "SERVANT-LEADER" HANDOUT. AFTER LEARNING WHAT IT IS AND LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE, BEGIN TO APPLY IT IN THE SPIRIT'S STRENGTH.

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:35, whom Jesus had nicknamed 'Sons of Thunder,' had been disciples of John the Baptist.

:35 Matthew added that their mother came with them and spoke for them (Matt. 20:20-21). She was Salome, probably a sister of Jesus' mother. If so, then James and John were Jesus' first cousins. According to Matthew, Salome approaches with her sons, prostrates herself, and intimates that she has a request to make. Matthew 20:20 adds the interesting point that it was Zebedee's wife who was behind this request. Was it from a masterful woman that James and John took their fiery nature? If she was Jesus' aunt, the 3 undoubtedly hoped to capitalize on the family ties, suggesting that they had talked her into making this presentation. A little family pressure!!

:35 They saw a window of opportunity to position themselves favorably.

:35 *He* was going to the Cross. *They* had their thoughts centered on self-advancement in the kingdom. Rather than hearing what was important to Jesus, they approached with their own agenda.

:36 Jesus had just been talking about His death! "This would be like hearing that your best friend has cancer and, following a quick prayer, you look him in the eye and say, 'Can I have your watch?'"

:38 See the patience, kindness, and love which is exhibited by Jesus for His disciples, when at this crucial and terrible moment in His life, they asked such a question.

:38 The Lord will show that if they realized the true meaning of their request, they might have refrained from making it!

:38 The symbol of the cup in OT evokes the terrible image of God's wrath (Ps. 75:8, Is. 51:17, Jer. 49:12, Ezek. 23:31-34).

:38 He would even be forsaken for a time by God the Father.

:38 Add the image of baptism to the cup and you can feel yourself drowning in a flood of judgment.

:40 James and John would suffer like their Master, but that in itself would not earn them the honors they desired.

:41 "If the rest of the Twelve were not present, the report naturally reached them and it at once revived the spirit of jealousy which had been checked by the teaching of 9:35."

:41 "Even titles can be very divisive: pastor, elder, deacon. These are Biblical titles, but they can be used to exercise authority without an understanding of the servant role that they represent."

:42 And He gave a description of those who are great—from the world's point of view and from God's.

:42 The worldliness that is being condemned is competitiveness, self-promotion, controlling, looking down upon others.

:42 Although it produces all kinds of rivalry, competition, skullduggery, politicking, conniving, maneuvering, manipulating, and trying to undercut everybody else. They measure greatness by the distance between them and their subordinates,

:42 Human organizational chains of command are problematic unless they're from the bottom up.

:42 Galba was to sum up the heathen idea of kingship and greatness when he said that now he was emperor he could do what he liked and do it to anyone.

:43 When we commit ourselves to meeting somebody else's spiritual need, something remarkable happens. There is a voluntary response of loving respect. We honor leaders whom we've learned to respect and trust because they've served us, not because of their titles or their place in some organizational definition.

:44 The establishment of God's healing, loving rule on earth.

:45 D.A. Carson says, "The one dies, the many find their lives 'ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven'. Because of that, Jesus has been exalted."

:45 (Ro. 8:1-3, 1 Cor. 6:20, Gal 3:13, 4:5, Eph. 1:7, Titus 2:14, 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

CONCL Do you want to be great? Then you must drink this cup. Do you want to be great? You should, because you were made for greatness.

CONCL Greatness is theirs if they follow the Son of Man—His words and His example. It may seem like too much to give up. Without Christ at work within us, it is a total impossibility. (Phil. 2:3-5)