



JESUS AND TRUE GREATNESS

Part 90 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 22:24-30 | September 18, 2011

Luke 22:24–30

24 A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. 25 And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. 26 But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. 27 For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

28 "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, 29 and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, 30 that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

WORLDLY GREATNESS VS. GODLY GREATNESS

The music is so dramatic. The *Seattle Times* recently said we're building an empire, and it kind of has that sort of Storm Trooper soundtrack to it. *[Imitating dramatic music]* I'm actually in a pretty good mood, so I'll tell you a story.

I've got three sons, small, medium, and large, and they all play baseball, which means I get to spend a lot of time at Little League practice and Little League games, and I get to have, you know, chats and conversations with the parents and such. And invariably they all ask, "Oh, so what do you do for a living?"

Recently I had one of those conversations with a gal who works in politics, really nice lady, and she helps with political campaigns and with various bills that come up for vote and such. She was telling me about her job, and then she inevitably asked the question, "So what do you do?" And I was like, "Ah, man." That's usually the conversation-killing question. Pastor, right? Kind of say it like I'm sneezing, like, "Pastor."

I said pastor, and that did not dissuade her. She proceeded to continue to ask questions, which is very rare. Usually as soon as I say pastor, they fake like they got a phone call. Like, "Oh, I got to take this. Goodbye forever." And they walk away. But she didn't do that. She actually said, "Oh, so what church are you a pastor at?" And usually when that happens, I feel like one of the defenders in a soccer free kick. Like, I just am like, "Well, you know, I'm the pastor at Mars Hill." Just expecting to get it.

She said, "Oh, well I've heard about your church." And she didn't go for her handgun, she didn't, you know, get a crazy look. And I thought, "Well, this might not be too bad." So she asked some questions about the church and we had a really interesting conversation.

She asked, "Well, you guys are a pretty big church, right?" I said, "Well, we've got some people. God's been good to us." She said, "But I heard you guys don't all meet in one big building." I said, "No, we don't. We got to meet in all kinds of buildings all over the place." And she said, "Well, don't you want a big building?" I said, "Yeah, if you've got one, we'll take it." I'm not opposed to big buildings. I said, "But it's just never opened up for us. We pursued some opportunities, you know. That's just never happened for us so we spread around and it seems to work good 'cause we can get out into various communities and serve and love those communities."

And she said, "Well, don't you want a big building?" I said, "I don't know, why?" She said, "Well then, that could be a tribute, a monument. Then when you're dead some day, that can be there in your legacy and honor." I said, "Yeah, that's not really a motivating factor for people at Mars Hill." She said, "Well, you know, if you're a politician, you leave something like a bridge or a monument or a statue or a building or a school, and you fight for it and you raise the money for it and you open it and you put your name on it and it's a monument that lives in your memory."

I said, "Yeah, I don't think the people at Mars Hill would go for that." Like, a space needle of me, you know? I don't think so. I said, "If I said, hey, I want to build a monument to my glory and we took an offering," I said, "no one would give. Not even my wife." No one would give to that.

So I tried to explain to her. I said, "Well, you know, for us as Christians, this is kind of how it works. Like, it's not about us, it's about Jesus. And if we're going to leave anything, we're not opposed to real estate, but what we really want to leave is people who love Jesus and love each other and their lives are changed. And if we're going to leave any legacy, it's just people who met Jesus and their lives were changed." She said, "Well, people then won't talk about you when you're gone." I said, "Well, I hope my kids remember me. Beyond that, you know, it doesn't matter whether or not people remember a particular leader years down the road. If they're talking about Jesus, then the leader did his job." That's really the whole point of Christianity.

I said, "In your world, it would be like saying Jesus is kind of like the leader and the job of the church is to simply be the one running the campaign. Getting the word out and letting everybody know about who the leader is." I said, "For us, we're not the leader." I said, "For example, the last presidential elections, I don't know who the campaign manager was for each candidate. And if we were still talking about them, they probably didn't do a good job." Instead, their job was to get the name out of the leader. And I said, "As a church, it's kind of like that, to use your job as an analogy. Our job is to tell people about Jesus."

I tell you that story not to say, "See, Mark nailed it again. He always nails it." 'Cause I don't. But to say that it was just one of those really curious conversations—and the woman was very nice and it was actually a very helpful conversation—but it shows the difference between what I'll call worldly views of greatness and leadership, and godly views of greatness and leadership. There's a real different approach, biblically speaking versus culturally speaking, as to how we perceive and pursue greatness, and the motivation that drives leaders forward. And what the world really needs is more godly leaders—not just more leaders, but godly leaders.

THE STUPIDEST ARGUMENT IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD

And the section in Luke today that we're going to be studying is Jesus having a conversation with his leaders, his twelve disciples. So this is Christianity 1.0. Alright, this is the beginning. These are going to be the leaders who then set the precedent and pattern for Christianity all the way up until our present day. Jesus knows he's going to die, rise, ascend back into heaven within weeks, and he's going to hand off, through the power of the Holy Spirit working through these leaders, the forward progress of the Kingdom of God on earth.

So he's going to have a discussion with them about greatness and leadership and how it is to be done in a way that is godly and not worldly. And so if you've got a Bible you could turn to Luke 22:24–30, where we look at Jesus and true greatness. And if you're new, it's like, "Why are we in the middle of Luke or the end of Luke?" This is our ninetieth sermon in Luke. Ninetieth. Ninetieth. So we've been in this book for a few years. And our view is that God wrote a book and we love it and so we want to study it, so that's what we're doing. It will culminate with the one hundredth sermon right around the time of Thanksgiving, and it'll take, in total, one hundred sermons to go through Luke.

This week we get to hear the stupidest argument in the history of the world. That's pretty fantastic. It's the stupidest argument in the history of the world, and it's an argument that they already had in Luke 9, but they're going to have it again. They have it in the other gospels, it's an argument that they keep having, and that is about who is the greatest.

We read in Luke 22:24, "A dispute also arose among them," the twelve disciples of Jesus, "as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest." Do you see where this is the stupidest argument in the history of the world? There are thirteen guys: twelve disciples, and one Jesus. And the argument among the twelve is, "Which one of us is the greatest?" That's a stupid argument, right?

Were I Jesus, in that moment, I would use it for comedy and shame. That's what I would use it for. I would say something like, "Well, that's a good question. Alright, on the count of three, everybody whose mom was a virgin, raise your hand. One, two, three! Ha ha, just me, alright. Round two. Alright, on the count of three, everybody who created the universe raise your hand. One, two, three. Ha ha, me again! And, round three. I'm going water skiing without a boat. Who's with me?" Right, like . . .

It's pretty obvious who's the greatest. Well, it's Jesus. I mean, you don't even have to be smart to go, "I think Jesus is better." You don't even have to be a Christian to figure that out. They're having this argument and they keep having this argument. And you know it's interesting, we keep having this argument. Jesus said in the end of Matthew's gospel, "I'll be with you always, to the end of the age." So the truth is, Jesus, even though he's in heaven, he is to some degree with us wherever we go. But we have the same stupid argument, don't we? "I'm better than you." "No, I'm better than you." "I could have done that better." "That was stupid." We jockey in position among one another, rather than looking to Jesus saying he's the greatest and we need to learn from him.

JESUS REDEEMS GREATNESS

Now, here's what I find curious. Jesus never rebukes them for desiring greatness. He never says, "How dare you. What a horrendous pursuit. I'm so ashamed of you. Don't you know any better?" He doesn't rebuke their desire for greatness; he redirects it. He never rebukes them; he always redirects them. And so what this means is we need to redeem the pursuit of greatness.

If you're new to Mars Hill, there are three categories that we tend to work in and filter everything through, whether it's money or sex or power or greatness or leadership: receive, reject, redeem. Can we receive this? Must we reject this? Or should we redeem this? Here Jesus is going to redeem greatness and leadership. He's going to redeem greatness and leadership. He's going to show us what greatness truly is, and he's going to teach us how leaders should truly lead.

This is important because every one of us is a leader of someone. Some of you are formal leaders, you have titles and offices. Some of you are informal leaders, people just come to you for advice and seek council. Some of you have big influence, a lot of people look to you. Some of you have little influence and it's a smaller circle. All the way down to parents, who are leaders of their children.

And let me ask you this question: Do you want to be great? It's a hard question, isn't it? Some of you, in your mind, you're thinking, "Yes!" Okay, you're probably proud, selfish, and arrogant. "Yeah, I want to be great!" And then some of you say, "No!" And I would ask you, "You don't want to have a great walk with God? You don't want to have a great marriage? You don't want to raise great kids? You don't want to participate in a great

church or help build a great company?" You say, "Well yeah, I do."

It's hard, isn't it? Because if we receive leadership as the world does, if we receive greatness as the world does, we're probably going to be arrogant and selfish and proud. And if we reject it, well then we're not going to really help people. So what do we do? And Jesus, he redirects them. He redeems the ideas of greatness.

Some of you need to aspire to more. Some of you, in the false name of humility, have not tried your hardest, have not done your best, have not presented yourself for leadership in your school or in your church or in your place of employment or in your community. And some of you say, "Well, I just want to be humble." No, you also want to be helpful. And to be helpful means you need to pursue greatness. You need to be the best version of yourself, by the grace of God, you can be. You need to maximize your skills, talents, and abilities so that you might help as many people as well as possible. But we always need to be careful that we pursue greatness in a way that is godly and not worldly.

SEEK GODLY GREATNESS

So again, Jesus says not just to seek greatness, but to seek godly greatness as opposed to worldly greatness. Luke 22:25–27, "He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles,'" right, the non-believing leaders, "'exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you.' He's distinguishing godly and worldly greatness. "'Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest,'" that's the lowliest position, "'and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.'"

So he's saying, alright, aspire to greatness, and inasmuch as you're able, lead. But not in a way that is worldly; in a way that is godly. And here's how he redeems it. First he tells us to reject worldly views of greatness and leadership. He says that worldly views of greatness and leadership are all about the leader. You lord it over people. You intimidate, boss, bully. You're mean, cruel, harsh. They exist to honor you, to obey you, to tend to you, to serve you. To use theological language, to worship you. And you are the center. It's all about you. And then you can become a benefactor, he says, which means you're rich and powerful. And you can confer on people wealth and power. But they need to beg you, they need to grovel, they need to ask, they need to deserve it. And that's how you control people. Now what's interesting is some things never change. This is still how the world works.

Jesus says, "Not like that." This doesn't mean you shouldn't be a leader. If God should give you an opportunity to lead in a big or small capacity, pursue it. But not like that. Jesus says, "I have a godly way for you to do that, not a worldly way for you to do that." Because see, one of the attributes of God is that God is great. And we want to mirror or reflect the greatness of God by pursuing greatness in a way that reflects the character of God, not the culture of the world.

Now, here's how our world works—it's just like the days of Jesus. The goal is to make as much money and have as much power as you possibly can so that everyone would serve you and you wouldn't have to serve them, right? Right? This is how our economy works. There's a guy, James Gilmore, for example. He wrote a cool little book called *The Experience Economy*. He's a business leader. He's also an evangelical Christian. He's become something of a friend. He's a really great guy. And he says we've had a transition in our economy. There was a day that most people worked with commodities—these are natural resources from the earth like, you know, you want lumber? There's a tree, go cut it down and make lumber. You want coffee? Grow some beans, harvest the beans, you know, go ahead and then also grind the beans and make yourself a cup of coffee, but you've got a lot of work to do.

Then it transitioned from a commodities-based to a goods-based economy. Now you can go to the lumberyard and buy your lumber. You can go and buy your coffee beans wholesale and grind them yourself, or even buy it pre-ground. And he said what happened then is we shifted to a service economy. So today, the majority of people who are employed are employed in the service sector. And that is that somebody takes the commodity, turns it into a good, that then turns it into a service so that you can be served. And the goal is to make enough money and have enough power that you have a lot of servants. Sometimes these are people who work for you, and sometimes these are people that you temporarily employ.

I'll give you some examples. Baristas. Alright, I think "barista" is the Greek word for "punching bag," right? What happens is, people who otherwise have no power walk into a coffee shop, and all of a sudden they are king and lord. And they treat the barista like some right-less slave. It's amazing. Have you ever been to a coffee shop and just listened to how people treat the barista? They just make demands. Crazy demands. And if those demands are not perfect—"I said 97 degrees! This is 96!" Like, you brought a thermometer? What kind of weird mocha Pharisee are you? Wow! "It's too much whip, it's too much foam." I'll whip your foam. Like, hey! It's amazing. "Go get your manager!" Which is, "Now wrath will come from on high because he who must be obeyed has not been obeyed." And they get loud and they make a scene about it. Unbelievable. Jesus says not like that.

Have you ever been to a bank and just see how people talk to the teller? It's unconscionable. "You stole my money!" Obviously he didn't, otherwise he would not be working at the bank. He would be on vacation not getting yelled at.

My favorite is the ticket counter at the airlines. There should be an IQ test before you can get in the line at the airport. There should be. People come up—I mean, it's amazing. "Where's my airplane?" You know, and the guy's like, "There's not a string on the plane. I can't just bring it down here for you. I don't know." My favorite is when people walk in and they're like, "Where's my luggage?" You know, the guy's just looking at him like, "I wasn't in it. I don't know. I don't know where your luggage is." "You stole my luggage!" "Yes, I had to have your underwear. I had to have it."

But see, this is how it happens. And some of us have real powerful positions, some of us don't, but occasionally we get to be a powerful position person, meaning someone's our servant and, man, we are going to give them decrees, we are going to lord it over them, we are going to make it hard for them. We're going to give orders to them. And Jesus says, "Not like that. Not like that. Be a leader, pursue greatness, but not like that."

Jesus, himself, is the quintessential perfect example. He says elsewhere in the Bible, "I did not come to be served, but to serve." Wow. That's different. You don't hear a lot of people saying that who are rich and powerful. "I didn't come to be served, I came to serve." I mean, that's counter-cultural. That's kingdom language. That's not a God we invented. That God would be humble—I mean, Jesus comes to the earth humbly. He's not born into a rich family, but a poor family. Not a big city, but a rural town. He grows up in obscurity, working as a carpenter with his dad for thirty years. That's humble.

It's not a sin to make money, it's not a sin to have a title, it's not a sin to be in authority, but Jesus says, "Don't achieve that status in a worldly way. And if you do achieve that status, don't behave in a worldly way. Pursue that status in a godly way, and if you achieve that status, continue to operate in a godly way."

Here's the big idea: Greatness is simply service. Greatness is simply service. And so Jesus says, you know, if you look at it and let's say there's a table and a meal and everyone's feasting and eating. Say you go to a really nice restaurant and the banquet room is reserved, to use the image that Jesus uses. You say, "Wow, look at all those people at this really nice restaurant." And they're sitting down. And all the servants and all the waiters and all the waitresses are waiting on them. You and I would look at that and say, "Those are great people." And Jesus says, "The waiter, the waitress, if they're humbly serving to the glory of God, they are great." What they're doing is an act of worship. It is honoring. And Jesus said, "I came to the earth, not to sit at the table, but to be the waiter."

This should even affect practically how we treat people when we go out to eat, when we employ them, when we deal with customer service opportunities. It means we shouldn't treat them like slaves and we're lords. We should treat them as image-bearers of God and we're servants. Even if they are serving us, we want to serve them with our attitude and our disposition, with our generosity and with our kindness.

So Jesus says, "You know what? I'm not like the other leaders." And he's not. He's not. Now, for some of you, this is really new because you're new to Christianity. And it's going to take you a long time to learn this. And the truth is, even if you've been a Christian for a long time, we need to continually relearn this, because everything in our pride and our sinful nature and our culture propels us to be anything and everything but a servant. And Jesus says no, that's the essence, that is the essence of greatness.

GODLY GREATNESS

So, I put together a little list of questions for you. I want you to think about these, ponder these. We'll post these. You can discuss these with your family, friends, roommates, your Community Group. Want to think a little bit about godly greatness.

So, number one, do you welcome Jesus to serve you? Now, this is really important. Don't make the mistake that so many people do and simply see Jesus as a great example but not a great God and Savior. What some people do, they'll look at Jesus and say, "He really served. I want to serve so I can be like Jesus." That's not a bad desire, but in and of itself it is a hopeless desire. Because see, you and I are sinners and Jesus came to serve us. Unless we allow Jesus to serve us, we can't truly serve God and we can't truly serve others, not in the way that Jesus serves us.

So first things first, before you serve you must be served by Jesus. He served us by making the heavens and the earth. He served us by humbly entering into the creation he made as a human being to identify with us. He humbly served by living without sin. He humbly served by dying on the cross, paying the penalty for our sins. He humbly served by rising to conquer Satan, sin, death, hell, and the wrath of God. He humbly serves by giving salvation, giving grace, giving love, giving mercy, giving eternal life.

Jesus loves to serve. Jesus just wasn't a servant, now he has ascended into heaven, he's King of kings, Lord of lords, he's in glory, he's the same yesterday, today, and forever. I have good news for you: He still delights in serving. He does. And so if you come to Jesus, he'll serve you.

For those of you who are not Christians, saying, "Where do I begin?" Jesus serves you. That's where Christianity begins. For those of you who are Christians, you know that Jesus serves you, but sometimes, friends, you're going to feel bad. You're going to say, "I've made a mess of this, I've sinned, I made a mistake, I did it wrong, I'm embarrassed of how my life is." And what we try and do is get our life cleaned up and figured out so that we can come back to church and come back to Jesus and present our life. And that grieves Jesus because Jesus would say to you, "I want to serve. I like to serve. I'm here to serve. You're suffering? Come to me. You're sinning? Come to me. You're struggling? Come to me. I like to serve."

You need to know this about Jesus: He delights in serving you, and when you come to him and say, "I need your help, I need your wisdom, your forgiveness. I need your empowerment. I need your people," Jesus says, "I know. And I love you. And I like to serve." The heart of God is a heart of service and humility. The heart of God is a heart of service and humility. Jesus is never too busy for you and there's nothing he can't handle.

See, I'll give you my perspective. I'm a dad. I've got five kids. I love my kids. I would never look at one of my kids and say, "Stuff's a mess in your life. Figure it out. When you get it together, come and show me so that I can be proud of you." I would never say that. I would tell my kids, "When it's the worst, run to me. I want to help. I love you. I'm here for you. I delight in you. It's not a burden for me because of my affection for you. Let me help! You need help and I want to help." That's the heart of God.

So I don't know what you're struggling with, friend. I don't know what you're carrying. I don't know where you're hurting. Bring it to Jesus. Let him serve you. He wants to serve you. He likes to serve you. And you know what? Jesus doesn't regret serving any of us. He's not bitter about it, he's not frustrated by it. His heart is a heart of love and he loves to help. And so let him serve you. That's where it all begins.

As we allow Jesus to serve us, he gives us a new nature. He renews our mind. He gives us the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We then get new

desires where we say, "Man, Jesus serves me so humbly and well. I want to learn how to serve others like Jesus served me. Not so that God will love me, but because he already does. Not because I have to, because I love Jesus and I get to. Not so that other people would be impressed with me, but so that other people would experience his love through me." It all starts with being served by Jesus.

Number two, do you humbly allow others to serve you? Now, some of you are this way. You say, "I like to serve; I don't like to be served." And so you're hard to serve. People say, "Oh, let me do that for you." "No, no, no, no, I got it." "Let me buy that for you." "No, no, no, no, I'll pay for it." Or they do something for you and then you have to do something for them. You can't just receive. They give something to you, you have to give something to them. One of the ways we serve is by allowing others to serve us.

True or false: In his life, did Jesus allow others to serve him? He allowed others to serve him. His friends Mary, Martha, Lazarus, two sisters and a brother, he was often at their home. He would let them take care of him. They'd give him a place to sleep, they'd cook him a meal. He allowed them to serve him. Jesus did serve others, he did serve them humbly, but he allowed others to serve him, as well.

Some of you are hard to be married to, for a whole bunch of reasons. But one might be you project that you don't need anything, that you can take care of everything. The truth is, you're robbing your spouse of an opportunity to serve you, right? Some parents are like this. They do everything for the kids, they don't teach the kids to do anything for anybody else. That's how you get spoiled kids. Not just kids who are spoiled, but kids who are acting spoiled.

Do you allow others to serve you? You know, you're going to see it coming up, but before he goes to the cross, Jesus allows a woman to serve him. She's a woman who comes to him, repenting of her sin, brokenhearted. She brings all of this perfume. Very expensive. She breaks it and she pours it over him. And all the disciples and those who are present, they say, "That's too much, that's too lavish, that's too expensive." And Jesus says, "I receive it. I receive this generous gift and this deep expression of sadness and sorrow over sin. This woman wants to serve, I'm going to allow her to serve." It's great. See, that was a healing, cleansing moment for her. And Jesus welcomed that and he received that. That was a generous moment for her, but he welcomed that. He received that.

And then he went to the cross and he died. I believe that because of the amount of perfume that was upon him, the scent in the nostrils of Jesus was the gift from the repentant woman who was generous to him, as he would have smelled that perfume as it was upon his skin. He allowed her to serve him.

As well, Jesus humbly served others. There's an occasion in the Bible where he takes the position of a servant or slave. They'd been walking on the road and, if you know the story, the roads are dirt and people tread on them and animals and there's feces and junk and mud and it's gross. And you wear sandals and it gets in your feet and under your toes and it's really nasty. And when you'd come into someone's home what they would do as an act of hospitality is clean your feet. Not them, but rather their servant or slave. There's an occasion in the Bible where Jesus is eating with his disciples and others and no one volunteers to clean the feet. So what does Jesus do? Gets a basin of water and a towel, and he starts cleaning his disciples' feet. God is cleaning the feet of his disciples. So Jesus does serve, and he allows others to serve him.

Do you allow others to serve you? Because a servant is not just one who serves, but allows others to serve them. Imagine if I told Grace, my wife, who has the spiritual gift of service, "I don't need anything. You can't do anything for me. There's no place in my life for you to make a contribution." It would destroy her.

Number three, do you humbly serve others with selfless motives? With selfless motives? Now the truth is, we never have entirely pure motives, right? But when you serve, is it, "I'm going to get a promotion! I'm going to get a raise! I'm going to get a boyfriend! I'm going to get a girlfriend! I'm going to get a husband! I'm going to get a wife! I'm going to get a trophy! I'm going to get some sort of award! I'm going to get recognition! I'm going to get a thank-you card! I'm going to get an 'atta boy!'"

If it's only for that, that's not the heart of a servant. It's not bad to get a "thank you," it's not bad to get a promotion, it's not bad to get an "atta boy." But if that's what you're in it for, you're not having the attitude of a servant. And you can tell because when those things don't happen, do you stop serving and/or do you get bitter? "They didn't even say thank you! They didn't even send a thank-you card! They didn't even notice that I did that! I've been doing that forever and they've never even recognized it!" Ah, so it's about you and your glory and you're not being glorified and so now your wrath is coming.

There will be times that people, quite frankly, should have said thank you, and they won't. Or they should acknowledge your contribution, and they don't. And those are opportunities for the essence of our character, our true heart, to be revealed. Do I say, "Well, that's okay, I love the Lord and I love people and I'm trying to honor the Lord and help people," or do we become sad or bitter or angry or frustrated or do we quit?

That's why sometimes people struggle with serving because there's no pay in it, there's no remuneration. I think that's even part of the situation that causes churches to struggle. People say, "I get paid to do my job, but I'm not volunteering any of my time in an unpaid capacity because what do I get from it? There's no remuneration."

There are other people that have the attitude of a servant and they say, "You know what? Love Jesus, love his people, love the city I'm in, I want to make a difference, I want to help, so I'm going to give a certain percentage of my money, my time, my skill set, for the Kingdom of God." And this is where the motivation for the Christian is not the compensation, but the affection. Say, "Whether it pays or doesn't pay, I love Jesus, I love people, I want to make a difference. I want to make a difference."

This is why even a ministry like ours is really different than a job. How many of you, if you went to work tomorrow, let's say, and your boss said, "I

have bad news and I have good news." You say, "Okay, give me the bad news first." "We cannot afford to pay you." "Okay, what's the good news?" "You can still have your job." You'd say, "No thanks." But if you love Jesus and you love his people and God's placed a desire to help some people on your heart, you walk into the church and you say, "I want to help. Give me a place to help." "Alright."

People don't do this for corporations, right? How many of you? You run a company. There's not a lot of people coming in, saying, "I have ten hours a week I'd like to give." Because what compels the Christian is affection for God and affection for people, not just compensation for work that is done. It's not a sin to make money, it's not a sin to be a leader, it's not a sin to have a position of authority. But Jesus wants to know why? What's the deep underlying root motivation?

Number four, are you willing to do menial tasks? And what's interesting here is Jesus uses the word "servant" and "serving." It's the same root word—in the Greek text that the New Testament was originally written in—for "deacon." These are male and female leaders in our church. They lead by serving. Menial tasks, simple tasks, humble tasks.

That's where you know if you're a servant, right? If it's public and if it's praise-worthy and if it's a big deal, it's not so hard. The menial stuff, right, Mom? How many moms are in the house? Part of the job of a mom is to do menial tasks, right? And sometimes this means it's outside of your spiritual gift. Sometimes God does give us spiritual gifts, innate capacities to do things, but sometimes that gives us an excuse to not do things that we don't want to do. "Well, that's not my gift." I've never met a mom who says, "My gift is poop-cleaning. That's my gift. And now this child has provided this amazing opportunity for my gift to be fully utilized thirty or forty times a day. It's fascinating."

You know what a mom does? A good mom does whatever needs to be done. Wipe the nose, clean the diaper, burp the kid, feed the kid, change the kid, get puked on by the kid, repeat the whole process. That's what a mom does. Three in the morning, she gets up. She doesn't say, "Hello, I work 9–5, it's 3 a.m." A mom does whatever needs to be done. The essence of motherhood is the essence of service. And here he is saying that God's people should all aspire to the heart of a deacon. That's a servant. Menial tasks.

I'll tell you what. For me this is convicting 'cause I feel like I tend to do pretty good at the big stuff. I pay the bills and take care of the family and look after everybody and keep everything organized. It's the little daily menial decisions that sometimes I fail at. Like yesterday, I'll give you an example. Traveled this weekend, got home, and it was really sunny and nice out yesterday. And so I was lying out on a hammock. It was wonderful. And Gideon, my five-year-old son comes up, "Hey Dad, want to play Legos?" "Uh . . ."

'Cause see, he's five, so he's really into Legos. I'm forty, I'm really into hammocks, right? So we have a real dilemma 'cause I would need to get off the hammock to do the Legos. Those are the points where I struggle. If he came to me and said, "Dad, help me with a theological question. Dad, help me to find a career." "Yes!" But, "Get off the hammock . . ." "I'm preaching tomorrow so I will, but normally I don't know if I would." That's the heart of hypocrisy in me. Sometimes it's the menial stuff.

Number five, are you lazy or disorganized? You say, "I don't know." Then the answer is yes. I hate to break it to you. If you're lazy, you're not going to be a good servant, right? You're just not. 'Cause you're not going to inconvenience yourself and go the extra mile. And if you're disorganized, you may be serving a lot of people but not very effectively. You may be doing a lot of things, but maybe not the right things. Your priorities are out of order. One way you can serve better is by not being lazy, repenting of that if it's a sin for you, and getting organized. "Okay God, who am I and what am I supposed to do and where do you want me to focus my energies? And let me put first things first."

Number six, is your life marked more by giving or getting? Giving and getting, this is really important because for most people it's all about getting. Are you consumed and primarily motivated by what you get? Praise, money, power, possessions? That motivates you, that's what you're thinking about, that's what you're consumed by, and if you don't get it you're devastated. Or are you primarily motivated by giving? "I can give my money to this person or this cause. I can help these people. I could serve in these ways." What gets you happiest? What motivates you most? What devastates you and why?

I'll give you one simple example. I was talking to a ministry leader from another church recently, and I won't name the church or the leader 'cause they didn't want that. I said to him, in a conversation, I asked, "So what's got you most excited lately? Tell me the coolest thing that's happened or what you're most encouraged by." He said, "It's not a big deal. I don't want to talk about it. It's kind of personal." I said, "No, tell me a good story."

He said, "Well, I've always wanted a certain kind of car and I finally got it. Like this vehicle I wanted. And I was driving it and I was enjoying it and I've had it for awhile, then I felt like God talked to me and said, 'You know that person—'" I think it was a single mom, if I remember the story correct. "'She really needs a car and I want you to give her your car.'" And he said, "I was bummed, like, how about, like, I could get a junky car or we maybe have an old car or I could find somebody who's throwing away a car and I could give it to the single mom to the glory of God." And the Holy Spirit just impressed on him, "No, give." So he said, "That's what I did. I drove the car to the house and I signed the title and I handed her the keys." And he said, "To see her joy and the joy of her child," he said, "That's the happiest I've been in years."

Jesus says it this way, "It's more blessed to give than receive." Is it a sin to have a car? Is it a sin to make money? No, it's not. But there's joy in sharing, there's joy in giving. There just is. That's why some of the most miserable people are some of the greediest people. And some of the most joyful people are some of the most generous people.

Do you love to give? See, the Bible says that God so loved the world he gave. See, it's an act of love to give. You parents, on Christmas, are you happiest opening your gift or watching your kids open their gifts? It's easy, right? Oh yeah, when they open their gifts that's way more interesting. Grandparents, on Christmas, your happiest moment, is it, "I got to open my gift!" Or, "I got to watch the grandkids open their gifts?" See, a servant has

the heart of God. A servant delights to give. A servant finds joy not just in what they get, but watching others get. That's the heart of generosity.

Number seven, would you rather achieve a status or make a difference? Achieve a status or make a difference? It's not a sin to become a leader, to be called the president or the pastor of something, or the CEO or the CFO or whatever it is. It's not a sin, but there's something more important than achieving a status, and that's making a difference.

See, during his earthly life, Jesus never held a political office, he was never the head of a company, he never ran any official organization, he never achieved or accomplished a particular degree from a noteworthy institution. He didn't achieve a status, but you know what he did? He made a difference. Has he made a difference in your life? Still making a difference, right? Ascended in heaven right now he's making a difference in your life and mine. Jesus has made the biggest difference in my life, by far.

I think Jesus would encourage us, as we're thinking about a worldly and a godly way to pursue greatness and leadership and influence, he'd say if it's all about your status and what you put on your resume and your title and where you're at on the org chart, you're probably going to end up in the wrong place. If it's all about making a difference, helping people, making an impact in their life, you may or may not get the title. You may or may not be in a certain place on the org chart. But who cares?

At Mars Hill, there are thousands of servants. They may not achieve a status, you may not know their name, but they make a difference, right? I'll tell you the group that comes to mind: the Community Group leaders. If you're not in a Community Group, we have Community Groups, you should get in one. There are about five hundred Community Groups.

Now, to become a Community Group leader, as one example of servants in Mars Hill who make a difference, they have to become a member of the church, which takes a while, and then they have to apprentice under a Group leader as a volunteer, and then they have to open their home, they have to open their fridge, they have to open their schedule, they have to open their heart and open their life and open their wallet and welcome people in. Some of them they don't even like. They love them, but it's hard to like them.

They welcome in their neighbors and Christians and non-Christians. And when people are hurting they pray for them. And when people are in the hospital they visit them. And when the mom is pregnant, they throw a shower for her. And when the baby is born, they bring meals to her. And as there are needs they give generously and they help and they care and they serve and they pour out hours every week.

And you know what? They do it 'cause they love people. They do it because they have the heart of Jesus. They do it because they want to make a difference. There are other places they could put their time and their money and their ability, maybe even in a place where they could have a title and a position. But what they decide is, "I want to make a difference. I want to help somebody." And they get to see people become Christians on their couch. They get to see lives changed. They get to see people maturing in Christ.

We could do a better job as a church of just simply saying thank you, right? We want to seek greatness; we want to seek godly greatness. And when we see those who are seeking godly greatness, here's what I would encourage us all to grow in the habit of doing: saying thanks.

Otherwise what happens is we have a worldly mindset when it comes to church. We walk in and we don't remember all these people are servants. They're brothers and sisters. Hardly any of them are paid. They're all just doing this 'cause they love us and they love our city. And so we can't even walk into church saying, "Well, I don't feel like that was up to par. I don't like the way I was served." It was free! For free it was incredible! Right? It was incredible.

So on your way out, thank the greeters, thank the people at the info desk. If you've got kids, hey, thank the security guard, thank the Sunday school workers. If you go to a Community Group, thank the leader. Thank the band. Thank everybody. We can encourage. And for those of you who are here and you're serving, I want you to hear from the heart of Jesus, "Thank you." Be encouraged.

SEEK ETERNAL GREATNESS

Jesus tells us one motivating factor to maintain our encouragement as servants, and that is to seek eternal greatness. Eternal greatness. Luke 22:28-30, "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Here's what Jesus is saying. This life is not all there is to your life. We need to think in a godly way, not a worldly way. It's not that I need to be all I can be and get all I can get and do all I can do and receive my glory so that in this life I can sit on my little throne. Maybe it's just a corner office or it's a comfy chair at your house, whatever your throne is, the goal is not to sit on a throne in this life; the goal is to wait, to wait for the seat that Jesus would assign us in the kingdom.

That's what he's saying. He's saying, "You're going to die and then you're going to rise and you're going to enter into an eternal kingdom." And that kingdom is going to be like a huge feast. Do you like to feast? Do you like a nice dinner party? You like it when somebody else pays for it? That's called the kingdom of God. And Jesus is going to have this huge feast and all the saints from all the nations and all the tribes and all the tongues from all the ages will gather together and feast.

You know who's going to be at the head of the table? Jesus. This stupid argument will be better: which one of us gets the big chair? Um, the resurrected guy. That's his seat, right? And then Jesus will assign to each of us a seat at his proverbial table for the kingdom banquet. Some of you are going to sit in thrones, some of you will sit further down the table, some of you will be at the kiddie table.

I don't know where the seating chart is going, but here's what I know. Wherever we sit with Jesus is better than anywhere we sit without him. I know that for sure. You can sit on a throne on this earth, and if it's not to the glory of God in friendship with Jesus, it pales in comparison to whatever seat he would give you in his eternal kingdom at his eternal feast.

Jesus is saying, "Have the long view of things. Be humble. Pursue humility, by the grace of God. Take on the attitude of a servant. Make a difference. Help some people. And then when you stand before me, I'll tell you how you did."

Let me say this, for those of you who are serving. People may not say thanks; you may not get the acknowledgement that, quite frankly, would even just be encouraging in this life. But there will be a day when you will die, you'll stand before Jesus. The Bible says you'll see him face to face. You're going to see love in his eyes. You're going to see a smile on his face. A smile on the face of Jesus. And if he says this, while putting his hand on your shoulder, "Well done, good and faithful servant," won't that really be the only thing that matters? Jesus said good job.

I mean, just—I'll be honest with you, just thinking about that day I'm emotionally choked up. I want that for you. I want that to be the best day of all. Jesus may say, "They didn't say thanks and it didn't go like perhaps it should have had things worked out justly, but well done, good and faithful servant. Welcome to my kingdom. I have a seat here for you. You're going to receive eternal rewards. I love you. I was glad to serve you, and I was glad to serve with you. Thank you." I promise, you won't regret pouring your life out to the glory of God and good of others. 'Cause here's the truth. When we live a life that glorifies God and is good for others, we receive joy in this life and eternal rewards in the life to come. Everybody wins.

SELFISH OR SERVANT?

So in closing, let me give you a simple little exercise. You can do this for yourself, you can do this if you're married with your spouse, or with your roommates if you're single, or with your Community Group, or with your children. There is a continuum from selfish to servant, right? So we'll start way over here at zero. You're really selfish. It's always only about you. Whether it's your spouse or your friends, they're going to eat what you want to eat, they're going to go where you want to go, they're going to do what you want to do, they're going to watch what you want to watch because you always get your way. You're selfish.

And then there's a continuum over to servant. You give, you contribute, you consider others, you try to make their life blessed. We all live somewhere on this continuum. So here's what I want you to do. Think about it in particular categories 'cause the truth is some of us are selfish in one category and servants in another, right? Right?

So, number one, how about, if you're married, with your spouse. Would you say, yeah, I'm more toward the selfish or more toward the servant? And here's the dangerous assignment: ask your spouse. And spouse, don't use this as a nuclear opportunity, okay, to declare, "Negative 37!" Right? "Ah, I finally got to say it." Don't do that, right? Don't condemn them, but invite them from selfish to servant in your marriage.

How about if you're a parent with your children? Selfish to servant. Where would you rate yourself and where would your children rate you? Recently did this with Grace and the kids.

Category number three: what about your friends? Not all your acquaintances, but your close friends. Would they say you're just really selfish? "I call you, you don't call me. I take care of you, you don't take care of me. We all have to work around your schedule and do what you like 'cause you're bossy and inconsiderate." Or would they say, "You're helpful, you're encouraging, you're generous, I'm blessed to know you, thanks for being a good friend"?

Category number four: your church, Mars Hill. Would you say, "I'm selfish. I don't give, I don't serve, I don't participate. I download the free stuff from the Internet. I might show up to the class. I'm glad that somebody cleaned the building and ran the sound and I'm glad you guys are open so that I could show up whenever I feel like it, but I'm not giving anything. I'm a taker, not a giver." Or would you say, "Inasmuch as I'm able, by the grace of God, I do feel like I'm a servant. I do care and I do give and I am participating."

And I'll tell you what happens. The most faithful people sometimes condemn themselves. I've seen some of the most faithful servants say, "I don't think I do enough, I don't think I give enough." Let me just tell you, if you're serving and you're giving, don't condemn yourself. Yeah, we could always do better, but praise God. Look at the fruit of your labor. And we love you. And on behalf of Jesus, I want to say thank you. Be encouraged. And for those of you who are not, this is not a condemnation, but an invitation. This is not, "Look what you've failed to do!" It's saying, "Look in the grace of God what you could do." I don't want this to be guilt; I want this to be glorious.

Number five, how about your place of work? Selfish? You're like, "Look, I don't volunteer for anything. I try to hide. I'm really good at Solitaire." Or servant, "I want to get my work done. I want to help them get their work done. I'm looking for ways to make the company better. You know, if there's an opportunity in the grace of God, I want to humbly serve and do the best I can to make this a great company."

And number six, how about school? Some of you are students. School's back in session. For the younger students—I've even talked to my kids about this, "Hey, school's starting now, find ways to serve your teacher. Find ways to help out. Hey, when you go to recess, the new kids always feel a little left out. Serve them, be the servant, welcome them, include them, you know, help them find their way around the school. Be a servant." Same thing in college, right? There are lots of opportunities to serve. Some of them are formal, some of them are informal. "You're hurting, you're struggling, you're broke, I love you, Jesus loves you, what can I do to help?" Where would you rank yourself?

And lastly, with your neighbors. Those who live in proximity to you. Would they say, "Man, you're selfish. You don't talk to us, you don't know us,

you're not involved." Or would they say, "You're friendly, you're available, you're generous, you care, you're kind, you bring the love of Christ to our block"?"

And the truth is, we're all selfish in some areas and servants in others. So I've seen people who they are servants to their family, but they're selfish toward everyone and everything else. I've seen people who serve everyone except for their spouse or their children.

In the grace of God, I want to invite you to receive some correction from the Holy Spirit and those you live life with. Again, not to walk out of here condemned, like, "Man, I have a lot of work to do," but to walk out of here compelled. "Jesus serves me. I need Jesus to serve me and change my heart and change my attitude so that by the grace of God I might be a giver, not a taker. I might be one who makes a difference and helps others."

My job is to teach the Bible. Your job is to respond to Jesus. I really love you, Mars Hill. We are in a season where things are going well. We're in the threshold of the fall, which is our growth period. Lots of new people coming. And then in January I do believe in the grace of God, next year will be the biggest year we've ever had. And here's what I want. I don't want a bunch of volunteers to be recruited through guilt. I want to invite a bunch of servants to get in on the action and make a difference; to see people meet Jesus; to see lives get changed. For those of you that are already doing it, thank you. And for those who are not, welcome.

Father God, thank you so much that your heart is a heart of generosity and service and humility and love. Lord Jesus, thank you that you are the servant, the humble, suffering servant. Jesus, that our God would be a servant, that's a remarkable, remarkable truth. Some of us have heard that many times, but perhaps we haven't fully felt the impact of that great truth. Jesus, I want to say thank you for serving me. You keep serving me. Thank you for serving Mars Hill. You keep serving us. Jesus, thank you for changing the hearts of people from selfish to servant so they can serve their spouse and their kids and their church and their community and their neighbors, and take the opportunities that you give to make a difference. Holy Spirit, please encourage those people who are serving. Please encourage those people who have the heart of a servant. And, Holy Spirit, please compel those who are selfish to consider that maybe some of their loneliness and maybe some of their misery and some of their discouragement is due to the fact that they're simply living contrary to the way that they were made; that they're not reflecting the God of the Bible. Holy Spirit, I pray that this would not be a condemnation for them, but an invitation for them to be served by Jesus and to serve with Jesus and to serve like Jesus, in whose name we pray, amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.