

WHETHER IS GREATER

LUKE 22

Text: Luke 22:27

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²⁷ For whether *is* greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? *is* not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

Introduction:

In Luke 22, at the table of the Last Supper, the disciples began to bicker about which one of them was the greatest. Hearing their silly argument, Jesus took the opportunity to teach them that true greatness, at least in the Kingdom of God, belongs to those who serve.

In verse 27, Jesus posed a question to His disciples. He asked them, “[Which] is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth?” That’s a good question.

Jesus teaches us that in the Christian life, it is always better to serve than to be served.

There are three truths we find in this passage that help us to see the greatness that can only come by being a servant. Notice first of all, in this passage that:

1. JESUS EXAMINES THE CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Most of the teachings of Jesus run completely counter to this world's way of thinking.

For instance, Jesus taught that you should love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and be glad about persecution.

Those kinds of concepts are in direct opposition to a world that says enemies are to be attacked, curses are to be matched, and persecution is to be avoided at all cost.

In our text, in order to show how differently the world operates from the kingdom of God, Jesus makes an observation about the culture of this world.

In verse 25, Jesus says, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors."

Notice with me a couple of things we draw from this cultural perspective that Christ examined. Notice first of all that Jesus points out:

A. How the World Views Power

In verse 25, Jesus says:

Luke 22:25

²⁵ And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

In verse 25, Jesus pointed to this type of ruler and how they used their rule. Notice the phrase “exercise lordship over them.” It comes from one Greek word, and it means to “lord over someone”.

Jesus pointed to the kings of His day and how they used their power to control the people under them. They “lorded over” the lives of their subjects.

According to the world, power is an opportunity for control. If a person can get power, whether in a government or in a company, the world says that power is the perfect vehicle to control people, and tell them what to do.

History is full of examples of what our Lord referred to. Hitler, Mussolini, Lennon, Stalin, Castro, Chairman Mao, Saddam Hussein. These are just a few of the names of men who used power for control.

Jesus was merely pointing out a philosophy that pervades human culture. That is, if you can get power,

you can use that power to make people do what you want them to do.

Notice something else Jesus pointed out as He examined the cultural perspective. Notice not only how the world views power, but also:

B. How the World Views Position

Luke 22:25

²⁵ And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

Jesus goes on in verse 25, and says, “...they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.”

This is an interesting phrase.

Jesus says that those who hold positions of authority are called “benefactors”. The word “benefactors” comes from a compound of two Greek words and it literally means “good workers”.

In other words, Jesus says that in this world’s system, those that hold positions of authority are looked up to, admired, and regarded as someone who has done something right.

We live in a world that equates position with achievement. If a person has climbed the ladder,

moved up, and succeeded, we are apt to celebrate them, even though they may have achieved their success by doing unscrupulous and unethical things.

Can you imagine working for a company among whose employees, 29 have been accused of spousal abuse, 7 have been arrested for fraud, 19 have been accused of writing bad checks, 117 have been involved in bankruptcies, 3 have served time for assault, 71 have bad credit, 14 have been arrested on drug-related charges, 8 have been arrested for shop-lifting, 21 are currently being sued, and 84 were arrested for drunk driving in one year?

What kind of company is that? It is the United States Congress. However, in spite of their largely “scoundrel” status, people will still gush and fawn over politicians for no other reason than the fact that they hold a position.

Jesus heard his disciples arguing over greatness, and He pointed them to the world’s perspective on power and position.

Notice a second truth:

2. JESUS EXPLAINS THE CHRISTIAN POSITION

Luke 22:26

²⁶ But ye *shall* not *be* so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

Notice with me the opening words of verse 26. Jesus said, “But ye shall not be so...” The world wants and worships power and position, but that is not supposed to be the case for the Christian.

The disciples disputed about which one of them was the greatest. In verse 26, Jesus explained to them that greatness is measured very differently in the kingdom of God.

Jesus contrasts the Christian’s worldview with that of the culture in which they live. Notice a couple of things He reveals about the Christian’s position on greatness. Notice first of all:

A. How the Christian Understands Achievement

In verse 26, Jesus says, “But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger...”

The world says that greatness is found in climbing to a position above others where you have the power to tell them what to do. Jesus says that for the Christian,

greatness does not come from climbing, but from condescending.

Notice that phrase, “let him be as the younger”.

Throughout Israel, the unpleasant tasks were often given to the youngest son because it would be beneath...the oldest to attend to menial tasks.

Most people would think that achievement is getting to the point where you don't have to get your hands dirty by doing the servant's chores. Jesus says that for the Christian, achievement comes from doing those things that nobody else wants and likes to do.

Illustration:

Somewhere, a wealthy CEO settles in to his favorite chair, as a butler serves him a gourmet meal. On the other side of the world, a missionary woman cuddles an African infant, dying of AIDS, in a dirty hut, with a small plate of rice, and a bottle of powdered milk.

Which picture do you equate with success and achievement? Our Lord says that in His kingdom, achievement looks more like a missionary than it does a millionaire.

Illustration:

In 1745, David Brainerd was a weak, depressed, and slowly-dying missionary, sleeping in a tent in the cold forests of New England, trying to reach the Native Americans. Within two years, he would die of tuberculosis, no doubt made worse by the environment in which he ministered.

The hardship of his life did not deter him. Brainerd wrote in 1747, "O I longed to fill the remaining moments all for God! Though my body was so feeble...yet I wanted to sit up all night to do something for God."

Brainerd died with very few converts from his ministry. Some would say his life was not a success. Yet, the countless missionaries that have been inspired by his diary and letters would certainly disagree, as would, I believe, the Lord Jesus.

Notice not only how the Christian understands achievement, but also:

B. How the Christian Uses Authority

Luke 22:26

²⁶ But ye *shall* not *be* so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

Look back at verse 26. Jesus says, “But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.”

Notice that phrase, “he that is chief”.

It comes from a Greek word that speaks of one that leads or rules. The word “serve” comes from a Greek word that gives us our English word, “deacon”. It literally means “to wait tables.”

Jesus says that in the Christian community, those that lead and have authority over the body ought to be the ones waiting the tables, and performing the acts of service.

In the Kingdom of God, authority and leadership are opportunities to serve. For the Christian, leadership is not a license to give orders; it is a chance to serve others!

Illustration:

During the Revolutionary War, a man in civilian clothes rode past a group of soldiers trying to repair a defense barrier. Their leader was shouting commands as the men struggled to do the job. The man on horseback stopped and asked the leader why he wasn't helping his men. The man barked back, “Sir, I am a corporal!”

The stranger apologized, then dismounted his horse and proceeded to help the men fix the barrier.

As he was about to ride off, he said to the corporal, “Next time you have job like this, and not enough men to do it, go to your commander-in-chief, and I will help you again.”ⁱ The stranger was George Washington, and the corporal was embarrassed.

The Christian understands that achievement is measured by the service you give, and authority is used as a means of performing that service.

There is one final thing we draw from this text. Here, not only do we find that *Jesus examines the cultural perspective*, and that *Jesus explains the Christian’s position*, but notice also thirdly that, in this text:

3. JESUS EXEMPLIFIES THE CORRECT PRACTICE

Luke 22:27

²⁷ For whether *is* greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? *is* not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

Look with me a verse 27. Jesus asks a question that seems to have an obvious answer. He asks, “For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat?”

In essence, Jesus asks, “Which one is greater; the one sitting down and being served, or the one serving?” Jesus knew that to the world, it would appear that the one being served was the greater of the two.

However, Jesus again goes against the thinking of this world, and says in verse 27, “...but I am among you as he that serveth.”

Jesus had taught His disciples true greatness comes through service. He did not just preach this principle. He portrayed it with his life.

Notice a couple of things about the example our Lord gave us. Notice first of all:

A. His Selflessness

If anyone had a right to sit down and be served, it was Jesus. He was the God of the universe. His Word had brought the world into existence, and His power had held it together throughout the ages.

Yet, we find Him setting aside His heavenly garments, leaving the praises of heaven’s choirs, and clothing Himself in the humble wrappings of a peasant, surrounded only by a few shepherds and some smelly livestock.

He left the streets of gold to walk the dusty roads of Galilee. He left the Father's side to eat next to the likes of Peter, Thomas, and Judas.

He descended from His Heavenly throne to be lifted up on Horrific cross in front of jeering crowds and spiteful spectators.

Men should have served Him; but they slew Him instead. He could have claimed the world for Himself, but He gave Himself for the world instead.

Notice something else we find in our Lord's example to us. Notice not only His selflessness, but notice also:

B. His Service

In verse 26, Jesus told His disciples that the leaders in His church must be the ones who will serve. Then in verse 27, He declared, "...but I am among you as he that serveth."

Luke doesn't record it, but John tells what happened after this discussion, however John does. Notice:

John 13:4-5

⁴He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. ⁵After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel wherewith he was girded.

Washing the feet was a necessary practice in that day, but it was one that only the slaves and servants were expected to perform.

Jesus talked to His disciples about service, and then He demonstrated for them the kind of work a servant would do.

Illustration:

A man once talked to his pastor about one of the principles he had preached about. The man said, "It comes down to basin theology." The pastor was a little puzzled, and he said, "What is basin theology?" The layman said, "Remember what Pilate did when he had the chance to acquit Jesus? He called for a basin and washed his hands of the whole thing. But Jesus, the night before his death, called for a basin and proceeded to wash the feet of the disciples. It all comes down to basin theology. Which one will you choose?"

Jesus left us a clear example of what it means to be great in His kingdom. Those who serve are always greater than those who sit.

Close:

Jesus asked, “Which one is greater? Is it the one who is served, or the one who serves?” For the Christian, the answer is found in the example of our Lord. Let us serve, instead of sit.
