

Who is the Greatest

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into Luke chapter 22, focusing on the disciples' dispute over greatness and Jesus' teaching on servant leadership. Jesus emphasizes that in His kingdom, greatness is found in serving others, contrasting it with the world's system of power and authority. The disciples' struggle with pride and ambition is highlighted, leading to a reflection on humility and obedience to God's will, following Jesus' example of humility and servanthood.

Duration: 40:48

Scripture: Luke 22:24, 1 Peter 5:6, Philippians 2:6, James 4:6

Topics: "Servant Leadership", "Humility in the Kingdom of God"

Description

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Transcript

So Luke chapter 22, Luke chapter 22 and we'll read 24 through 30, Luke chapter 24 through 30. So this is in the upper room. We've looked at the institution of the Lord's Supper in the last couple of weeks and this is still as they're around the table that this little scene plays plays off.

So verse 24 of Luke chapter 22. Now there was also a dispute among them as to which of them should be considered the greatest and he said to them the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them and those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors but not so among you on the contrary he who is greatest among you let him be as the younger and he who governs as he who serves for who is greater he who sits on the table at the table or he who serves it is not he is it not he who sits at the table yet I am among you as the one who serves but you are those who have continued with me in my trials and I bestow upon you a kingdom just as my father bestowed one upon me that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel now Luke is very brief in his explanation of what happens he just makes this reference John goes into tremendous detail a lot more detail and the other gospel writers also what we know it had happened just before the meal is that there was a question concerning the washing of feet and as we know the the job of washing feet was the task of the least among them it would be the youngest or the one least in status and they would none of them

would wash the feet because their argument was you know I'm better than you are and so they sit there they're looking at each other they can't begin to eat until the feet have been washed and no one's getting no one's doing it and we know how that Jesus then puts aside his garment and he puts a towel around him takes on the form of a servant and he brings out the dish and he washes the feet of each one of his twelve disciples including that of Judas but Luke just makes the statement there was a dispute among them as to which of them should be considered the greatest so the previous verse spoke about the fact that they were looking amongst themselves to say who is it that's going to betray Jesus but at the same time they're looking and they're talking and they they're arguing I mean yeah when it says there was a dispute among them they were arguing about who was greatest I mean we're a little more subtle than that we think these things but we don't always say them but but these guys were actually sitting around the table now again we must understand the the context the environment Jesus is about to be crucified this is the this is the darkest hour in his earthly life this is the in a sense the the the greatest moment in history as Jesus would be crucified on that cross and and all they concerned about is I'm more important than you are and we know that there was a part of the argument was who's going to sit on your right and who's going to sit on your left when you when you come into your kingdom it may also have been part about a part of the the issue about who's going to sit around the table that may have been where it began because it began with saying well I'm not going to wash my feet so your feet because I'm more important than you are and then of course the way that they sit around the table was significant of who was more important Jesus was at the head of the table nobody was arguing about that and we know that John the Beloved ended up on the right-hand side and Judas may have been on the left we're not we're not sure but but there's an argument about that and and you know it's it's it's not even a matter of some of them recognized well I'm not number two and I'm not number three but but you know I don't want to be number 12 I need to be somewhere higher up and you know we would look at that and we'd say well you know so that's ridiculous and yet it's not ridiculous it's it's something which is very common to to man in general and I remember in the Air Force when you went to a formal dinner you were seated very strictly according to your rank and not just according to rank but to your seniority within that rank and so if you if you sat at a particular position and the guy on your right sat closer if you were on this side of the table set closer to the chief of the Air Force at the head of the table the guy on your right even though he had the same rank on his shoulders was senior to you the guy who said it sat on the left even though he had the same rank he was less than you were he was not you were senior to him and and the whole culture was built around who goes through the door first who salutes first who's but we bring and and of course that's the world the world is looking at this all the time and the world is concerned about this all the time and yet this is what comes into the church it's it's it's not just the world that does these things it's the church that does these things and and you know pastors are the worst of all when when pastors get together it's it's it's looking at one another and and you know how big is your church my church is bigger than your church and you know I'm my church is in a better area than your church you know my church has more educated people than your church and and all of this kind of stuff but it comes down to to to us and the pews as well there's there's there's always a you know as I said we don't talk about it we don't speak it but it comes out in our actions sometimes it's about who's going to sit where in the in the in the in the church and you know in the Bible days the most important seats were in the front these days the most important seats are in the back and so you know we in some churches the more important people sit up front here folk what are we on about what were these disciples on about and the problem was this was not an isolated incident when you analyze the questions that they were wrestling with all the time there were two questions all the time the one question was about the kingdom when is the kingdom coming is it now and you remember that even just before Jesus ascends at the mouth of on the Mount of Olives they finally still ask the question is it now so so that was

the number one question that preoccupied them and everything Jesus said and did they they analyzed it in terms of is he now going to reveal himself as the king is he going to set up the kingdom now but the second question which was equal to the first is who is more important and the two questions were connected because as a band of disciples they were obviously somewhat respected because Jesus was respected and popular and the crowd was following him and so they some of this rubbed off on them but but they what they really wanted was real authority to be able to rule Israel and to rule the world and and so when they asking the question when is the kingdom coming part of it was nationalistic and political but part of it was selfish because they understood that if Jesus was the king and he was going to establish the kingdom well they're going to get to be his cabinet they're going to get to be he's in a circle and they're going to get these important positions and and this is what occupied them all the time and so I just look at this and I say Lord you know what what were these guys on about and and Lord what are we on about when our only concern is how we look to others how important we are and the fact that we will not do certain things because it makes us look not so great not so important and so he said to them the kings of the Gentiles now this was true of Israel obviously also but he is saying this really shouldn't be part of Israel and therefore not part of the church but the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them the word lordship there the the word master they are their masters they are their rulers now of course I and and I'm not I'm not going to make comments about a democratic system where the rulers should be servants but in the end aren't servants but he's talking about a monarchy where you were an empire where you have a king and he he rules and he makes the decisions and he calls the shots and he doesn't need to talk to anyone and so the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over the people they the people and those who exercise by the way he's not making any statement here about different forms of rulership or earthly forms of governance he's simply saying that's the way it is out there and those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors so what what Jesus is saying these guys are super bosses they are masters dictators they exercise lordship they exercise authority and yet people call them benefactors the word benefactor those who do good so if somebody is involved in in giving money for various projects for for the poor and for the needy and for education we call them benefactors they are they are people who do good so can you see the contrast Jesus is these guys are abusing the people they they rule them with a rod of iron they exercise authority over them and yet the people say they're good guys they are benefactors I think that we had an illustration of that this last week when Putin appeared on that stage and people were interviewed and everybody says he's a great guy and yet he is a despot he is a it's not there no words for for but but the people who are under him say he's great he's good and what Jesus is saying is this is the world's mindset we've just spoken about Zimbabwe and about the incredible corruption and and and yet at least half of the population will vote for the same government that has cheated them literally out of their own hard-earned money kept the country in absolute poverty and in in a terrible state and yet the same people will vote for those same people again and again and again year after year since 1981 and and it's something that blows my mind I can't get my mind around how do you keep voting for the same people who keep stealing literally stealing your money and I'm not going to get into the details of how they do that but that's the point Jesus is making they look at these people they say there are benefactors they are good people now remember the argument is who's the greatest so why does Jesus make the statement he's saying because this whole concept of who is greatest is corrupt it's all skewed because and it's so skewed that those who do least good are regarded as those who do the most good that's how perverted the world's system is and yet you want to bring that system into the kingdom that's really what Jesus is saying he's saying look how it works out there or how it doesn't work and yet that's what you want to bring in here and for here's the problem is that churches are ordered and churches are structured on worldly management systems which are in essence corrupt that don't operate on kingdom principles and then he

says but not so among you so the kingdom of God does not function the way the world functions and that's the problem is that that more most churches function and operate on worldly systems worldly ways of doing things who gets to be the chief the chief well the one who sells himself best is that a qualification for greatness certainly not in the kingdom it is in the world the one who can sell himself best will become the next mayor of LA I mean that's just the way it is I'm not saying it's that's the way it is the one who can convince everybody else that he is better than everyone else and we know that years ago in our democratic system elections was about proving that I'm better than the next guy and that's become hard to do because nobody's any good anymore so now what we do is we prove that he's worse than I am and on that basis we choose our rulers now but that's the world and that's the way and I'm you know but you you choose who you want to vote for whether you want to vote or don't want to vote that's your that's your decision but that's how badly it works in the world it just doesn't work doesn't work in democracies and it doesn't work in in autocratic systems it's all corrupt and yet we want to bring that into the church Jesus says it's not to be that way don't learn from the world don't bring the world's values into the church don't bring the world's way of setting up leaders into the church but he says on the contrary in other words the kingdom of God people have referred to it as the upside-down kingdom I don't like that idea because the kingdom of God is not upside down it's the world that's upside down the kingdom should be the right way up and now he says here is how it should be working he who is greatest among you let him be as the younger he uses different words in Matthew and in in John but here he speaks about those who want to be who is greatest let him be the younger remember that in that environment in that culture as in in our various cultures 30 40 years ago age was a indicator of status if you were young you had less status and if you were older and you had a gray beard you had more status you were more respected because of your age we know that even that's been turned upside down now and those of us who are old are disrespected and those who are young have all the answers and but be that as it may in this in in Jesus's environment those who were youngest were seen to have no experience they have no have not proven themselves and so they are least respected and so even if the disciples let's put that into practice the disciples 12 of them come together who's going to wash the feet well if there was no other marks of seniority then the youngest of them and I don't know who they were probably John I would imagine but the youngest of them would be the one who'd have to wash the feet so it's he's just saying he who is greatest among you notice not he who wants to be because in that lies a contradiction already if you want to be great there's a problem in that you say well shouldn't we have aspirations yes we should have aspirations in and I'm speaking about the kingdom not talking about the world what should my aspiration be to be like Jesus it has nothing to do with wanting to be a leader wanting to be a pastor wanting to be whatever I should have one desire one goal one aspiration I want to be like Jesus I'm going to come back to that in a few moments but he who is greatest so Jesus recognizes that there are some who are more important greater than others by virtue of their gifting by virtue of their work by virtue of their calling and remember that even in the kingdom when the physical kingdom is the millennial kingdom will be set up one day there will be the levels of authority the idea of levels of authority is not an ungodly thing it's established right from the very beginning God says to Adam you have authority over the of the world and you need to run the world that's your manage the world that's your your business in the earth and so the idea of seniority is is not an unbiblical thing we know that even in Jesus establishing the the pattern for the church there are those who are called elders as opposed to those who are younger and they have a responsibility to oversee they have a responsibility to lead the church so we're not talking to the problem here is that there is an overreaction and people say well you know people have brought the world system into the church and so you have the big chief the pastor and then you have the elders and you have the and these guys rule and they abuse and they have their authority what have you we won't have anything like that and so we have nothing that is not biblical

either the the New Testament clearly establishes a principle of leadership but the problem is when those who not be leading want to lead and when those who should be leading are disqualified because of some other some moral failure and so this is not against the idea of leadership this is not against the idea of seniority there's clearly a pattern on a principle of leadership and of seniority but it not on the basis of having grabbed that authority I think that an example of this would be Saul the first king of Israel remember he ended up terribly but he didn't begin so badly because when Samuel is sent out to go and anoint him as the king of Israel God had chosen him as the as the first king and remember that wasn't God's will to begin with but be that as it may he was hiding between all the the luggage between the the baggage and that you go and fish him out of there so that he could be anointed as the king and even the next King David the greatest King Israel ever had he was just out there looking after the sheep the prophet had come to anoint the next the next King Samuel had come and the sons are all paraded one after the other obviously again in order of of age and Samuel comes to the last one he says no not none of these there's someone is missing Oh David yeah he's not important he's out there looking after the sheep but David was the man that God had chosen not not one of the other of the other brothers so he who is greatest if you believe that you have a gift if you believe that you have a calling if you believe that that you have a role to play let him be as the younger don't take the top position be as the younger and he who governs as he who serves now there's a problem here because the flip side of the coin is that true leaders are servants that's really what he's speaking about and and we we have this phrase churches bandy this phrase around all the time a servant leadership but mostly it's just a phrase it doesn't mean anything it doesn't mean that those who are in leadership really serve in a true sense of the word and we'll see what Jesus is talking about here in in in a moment but the flip side of it is that unfortunately Christians are generally so carnal that when a man or a woman abase themselves humble themselves and do servant work they get abused now that's a real problem because it results in leaders not being willing to serve because they don't want to be abused and so they protect themselves by taking on position claiming their name their title their position their authority in order to protect themselves from abuse now that shouldn't happen either and yet that is what happens the church should be a safe environment where everyone is willing to serve and nobody's going to look down on those who serve and nobody's going to abuse those who serve and so he who governs let him be as one who serves now he asks a question which is related to the practicalities of all of this for who's greater he who sits at the table or he who serves I mean it's a simple question and it still applies in our in our environment today and obviously this doesn't apply to those who are waiters in or whatever the PC term for that is these days what is it servers in restaurants they're doing a job but in the context of a household where you have servants who serve at the table and so who is more important who's greater the one who sits at the table or the servant nice how well that's a stupid question but obviously there's a there's a catch to the question and I think that they understood what Jesus is saying is it not he who sits at the table the answer the answer is evident and yet Jesus gives the answer now he says yet I am among you as the one who serves there was no debate as to who was the most important when it comes to the 12 plus Jesus the question was simply amongst the 12 but Jesus position was established he was the rabbi he was the teacher he was the Christ some of them had come to recognize that he was indeed the anointed one the Christ that he was God in the flesh I don't think they fully grasped that idea but I think some of these ideas were beginning to penetrate and so there there is Jesus their leader and yet he washed the feet and that was the point he is making so here's the problem the problem is that we will agree with the theory of what I've said up to now I don't think anyone will disagree with what I've said up to up to now but the problem is how do we put this into practice that's where the rubber meets the road who is actually going to wash the feet who's going to clean the toilet who's going to vacuum the floor who's going to wash the windows who's going to actually do it and this is

the problem of course with all of our faith is that it's easy to to have theological concepts about humility about whatever about holiness but to put it into practice is another story and of course to say well Jesus shouldn't be washing the feet there should be there should be a rush amongst the disciples say no Lord we'll do it and yet exactly what I spoke about earlier that true servants are abused Jesus should never have been allowed to wash the feet of his disciples all 12 of them should have been fighting one another to get the job and that they say now Jesus can wash the feet I'm gonna sit on the right hand I'm more important than Peter I'm gonna sit on the left hand oh no I'm not the one who's gonna betray him and as we'll see next week I think Lord they'll all deny you but not me everyone is looking at how important he is in the pecking order and is still saying something needs to be done let me do it but you are those who have continued with me in my trials now Jesus is changing the the picture so he says you've been with me up to now in my trials that the rejection he's experienced up to that point and we understand of course that the real trouble was about to begin that night as he would be betrayed and would be tried and and crucified then he says and I bestow upon you a kingdom just as my father bestowed one upon me so he's saying you need to be servants but he says there is a kingdom and and this is the this is the thing there are both these sides he says I give you that kingdom that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom now remember what what his question was who is important he who sits at the table and he says you will get to sit with Mike be on my table not not the table of the Last Supper where they were at that moment but at his table in the kingdom because remember he's just he just said I'm not gonna eat the the bread I'm not gonna drink of the what by the wine until I do so new in the father's in my father's kingdom he says you're gonna sit with me on that King at that table not only that but you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel and we know that that will literally happen that the New Jerusalem there are twelve levels of foundation twelve foundation stones and they are named after the twelve disciples excluding Judas Matthias having taken his place so what is Jesus saying he's saying the time that you will rule is coming but it's not now the same answer to the kingdom remember I said there are two questions they keep asking when is the kingdom Jesus says the kingdom is coming but it's not now I have to suffer first when I come again the second time I will set up my kingdom but it's coming the next question is do we get to sit on your left and your right he says yes but not now there is so much teaching in churches today about taking your proper place and taking positions of authority and all of these kinds of things and and a lot of the stuff about guys promoting themselves is a based around this this idea of saying well you know we're part of the kingdom we need to we need to move this thing along no Jesus is going to establish his kingdom and it's not now it's coming so where should we be now where Jesus was at that point in his humiliation and so I'm going to close with one Peter chapter 5 verse 6 because this really sums this whole thing up therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time when is due time in the context of what Jesus was saying to the disciples at the end of time that would be the right time being exalted at that point was not the right time because what was happening it was a time of suffering Jesus would suffer the disciples would suffer with him in a sense many would forsake him as we as we'll be seeing in the next next few weeks that wasn't the time to want to be the greatest there was a time to serve I remember that from the supper room they would go into the into the garden and Jesus would be praying and he takes three of the disciples the three that were closest to him and he says pray with me Lord we want to sit on your left and your right Jesus isn't just pray with me and they couldn't even do that you see here's where the where the rubber meets the road it's not what I want to do it's what he wants me to do and what he wanted for them at this time was just to be with him remember when we we got into the upper room a couple of weeks ago he says with desire I desire to eat this Passover not just to eat the Passover to eat it with you he just wanted to be with his disciples but they were just arguing and bickering about who was more important what did God what did he Jesus want from them at that point just

to be at peace and just to have fellowship for this last time and they couldn't even do that and then they go into the garden and he asks them a simple thing just pray with me they couldn't even do that and yet they want to rule now I thank God for his grace that in spite of the terrible failure and they know worse than we are we're just as bad as they are if not worse but in spite of their terrible failure he says you'll rule with me one day not because they were great or any good but because of his grace and so the time will come that we will rule with him the time will come when we will be exalted but it will be in his time but what we need to do is humble ourselves remember it was James and said that when you come into the meeting place don't look for the most important seats because maybe somebody more important is going to come in and they're going to say brother can you vacate your seat because we have a more important person you need to go and sit down there he says rather sit in the least important seat and they'll tell you come come and sit up here that must be a terribly embarrassing thing to take the most important seat and then for the host to say no you know you need to go and yet that's really what happens all the time we take these positions but God's not honoring up our claim and he's putting us down as we promote ourselves God resists the proud but he gives grace to the humble look at the end of the day there's only one question we've about what should my ambition be my ambition should be like Jesus even in the washing of the disciples feet even in the willingness to be the least that's the only ambition we should have and there's only one question we should ask it's all very simple what does God want me to do not what I want to do not what I think would make me look good what does the Lord want me to do in a few moments we're going to share in the potluck he's going to want some to wash dishes it's going to ask some to pack away chairs mop the floor what does he want me to do what would Jesus do that's a stupid little armband thing but what would Jesus do in this situation is he going to stand with his hands in his pockets and wait and see oh who's gonna who's gonna do it no Jesus gets out the towel and he just does it in fact the the principle that God will exalt in due time we know how Paul speaks about Jesus who though he was in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God humbled himself became obedient to the cross but God has highly exalted him same principle if we humble ourselves God will exalt us if we exalt ourselves God will humble us I've said that we need to be like Jesus remember that this whole issue of pride and this whole issue of asserting ourselves is where all the trouble began to begin with Lucifer said I will be like the most high I will be like the most high and and the contrast between Jesus and Lucifer on Satan are there are many contrasts the one is light and one is darkness one is truth the one is like the father of lies but the one was selfish ambition and the other said I'll wash the feet who are we like Jesus or Lucifer father we pray that you'd help us Lord the theory is easy the practice is hard Lord it's hard for us to abase ourselves it's hard for us to take the lowest position it's hard for us Lord to acknowledge others ahead of ourselves and yet Lord that's what Jesus did thank you Lord that the kingdom of God is not built on worldly principles of self-promotion and ambition and pride and arrogance but it's built on truth and Lord you know the condition of each one of our hearts and Lord at the end of the day it doesn't matter how many gifts or abilities we have but if there is selfish ambition you you're not able to use us help us to be like Jesus we pray Lord this is this is not something that is humanly possible because everything within us shirks from from humbling ourselves none of us want to be humbled and yet Lord that is the path to greatness we pray that you'd help us to understand help us to live help us to do in Jesus name I pray Lord that you would continue with us as we fellowship in the meal now Lord that we may know your presence that we may know the joy of our salvation Lord that it may be a sweet time of fellowship we ask this in Jesus name Lord for those who may leave us now we pray that you'd go with them and keep them and protect them we ask this in Jesus name amen

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