

# Humility - True Greatness

by C.J. Mahaney

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*True greatness is not about personal achievement or recognition, but about serving others for the glory of God.*

**Duration:** 56:54

**Scripture:** Matthew 16:16, Matthew 20:26-28, Mark 10:32-39, Mark 10:41-45

**Topics:** "Humility"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the topic of true greatness. He begins by acknowledging that the pursuit of personal greatness was a strong desire for the disciples. However, he encourages the audience not to be consumed by this desire. The preacher then gives four recommendations for parents to instill the ambition for true greatness in their children, including being an example of true greatness and defining greatness according to scripture. The sermon emphasizes the importance of modeling and teaching biblical principles of greatness.

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## Transcript

Please turn with me in your Bibles if you would to Mark chapter 10. Mark chapter 10. And I will begin reading in verse 32.

And they were on the road going up to Jerusalem and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed. And those who followed were afraid.

And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, See, we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him. And after three days, he will rise.

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you. And he said to them, What do you want me to do for you? And they said to him, Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left hand, in your glory. And Jesus said to them, You do not know what you are asking.

Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? And they said to him, We are able. Jesus said to them, The cup that I drink, you will drink. And with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.

But to sit at my right hand or my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant. And whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. Let's pray. Lord, once again, we find ourselves on holy ground this morning as we consider your word.

And once again, I find myself in this position of responsibility. And once again, I encounter my weakness. And once again, I feel my inadequacy.

And once again, I call out to you and I ask for mercy. I ask for divine assistance. I ask for divine assistance to serve those I love with this unique passage about your Son.

A passage filled with implications for each and everyone gathered here this morning. So, kind Father, assist me now as I attempt to proclaim your Son, to glorify your Son, to serve your people. Assist me now by your Spirit so that I might please you in the proclamation of your word, so that you might perform your word as I proclaim your word, so that your people might be edified, so that you might be ultimately pleased and glorified.

I pray and I proceed with confidence in your character and in your promises. And I thank you in Jesus' name, Amen. I don't think there is a more appropriate passage to begin this series on serving than the passage before us that will occupy our attention this morning.

The title of the message this morning is True Greatness. True Greatness. And I have three points to bring to your attention from this text.

Greatness desired. Greatness defined. And greatness demonstrated.

And we begin with greatness desired. Greatness desired. For the disciples, the pursuit of personal greatness was a pronounced passion.

Their desire for greatness wasn't subtle and it doesn't appear to be occasional either. Three times in Mark's Gospel, three times he informs the disciples of his impending death. And after informing them of his impending death, following each announcement of his impending death, there is some display, some overt display of selfish ambition by the disciples.

In Mark chapter 9, if you just turn with there briefly please. In chapter 9 verse 31, he was teaching his disciples saying to them, the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill Him. And when He is killed, after three days, He will rise.

Verse 33, they came to Capernaum and when He was in the house, He asked them, what were you discussing on the way? But they kept silent for, listen, on the way, on the way, they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. He announces His death. They begin to argue among themselves about who was the greatest.

Now, obviously, as we encounter the disciples in Mark chapter 10, the Lord's example and teaching didn't resolve the previous argument so described in chapter 9. James and John, it would appear, are apparently in agreement with each other about their greatness. And they approach the Savior. They approach the Savior with a special request.

They approach the Savior with a special request apart from the other ten disciples. And you'll also notice apart from Peter. This will be the first time in Mark's Gospel that you will see James and John identified without Peter being identified as well.

There is a clear separation taking place. Possibly we could speculate some jealousy for in just a few chapters previous, the Savior has commended Peter as he declared of the Savior that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. So a separation now has taken place.

And James and John approach the Savior apart from Peter and apart from the other ten. Also, interesting note that probably the main source for Mark's Gospel, the main source for this narrative for Mark's Gospel was Peter. So no doubt he didn't forget what took place here.

They appear here to have assumed that the Savior shared their assessment of their greatness. There's no lack of confidence. No lack of confidence evident.

In verse 35, they boldly say to the Savior, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. In verse 37, the request is made. We want to sit one at your right and the other at your left in your glory.

You can make the final determination, Lord, as to who sits where. We don't have any preferences there. We just want to occupy the right and the left.

And then when he asks them if they can drink the cup, the cup that he would drink, in verse 39, they said to him without any hesitation, we are able. Now just examine for a moment the content. Examine the tone.

They expected that as they were proceeding to Jerusalem, that upon arrival in Jerusalem, the Savior would establish his kingdom. He would establish it militarily. He would establish it politically.

They would, in effect, enter his glory. He would enter his glory upon arrival in Jerusalem, and they would enter his glory with him when they arrived in Jerusalem. And they wanted a prominent place when this all came down.

They wanted a prominent place and they assumed, James and John assumed, that a prominent place for them was appropriate in light of their greatness. Now the other ten were no different. In verse 41, we are informed that when they are informed, they become aware of this special request by James and John.

They became indignant. And so their indignation reveals that their ambitions are no different. And it also reveals the presence of self-righteousness.

So sadly, they are no different. Now, my concern this morning isn't for James and John. And my concern isn't for the other ten.

My concern is for me. Because I see myself in this photograph. I appear here as well.

I am aware how often motivated by selfish ambition, I approach God in prayer with a similar attitude. And say to God with similar content, I want you to do for me whatever I ask. How different that is from Thy will

be done.

How different. And I have to wonder how often the Lord responds to my prayers similarly and says to me, CJ, you don't have any idea what you just asked. You don't know what you are asking.

And actually, right here, this moment, in this passage, I want to do something very unusual. I want to pause for a moment and I want to thank God for unanswered prayers. I want to thank God for the prayers I have prayed motivated by selfishness, motivated by selfish ambition, ultimately for the purpose of self-exaltation.

I want to thank God for not answering those many prayers. I want to thank God. I want to thank God that He is sovereign and not sentimental.

I want to thank God that He has withheld answers to prayers I have prayed, motivated similarly to what we observe here in James and John. They were motivated by selfish ambition. It was ultimately for the purpose of self-glorification.

That was their passion. That was their purpose. And listen, they wanted the Savior to be a means of achieving that passion and that purpose.

They wanted Jesus to assist them and to be the means, ultimately, of achieving that passion and that purpose of self-exaltation. And they appear before us this morning as a sobering reminder that that same tendency still lurks in our souls as well. To use God as a means of self-exaltation rather than serve God ultimately for the glory of God.

Greatness desired. Second, greatness defined. Greatness defined.

In response to yet another blatant insensitive display of pride and selfish ambition, our Lord seizes this moment and creates, in effect, a teaching moment. Seizes this moment to teach them about true greatness. Now, you are beholding the patience of God in this passage.

You are beholding the kindness and the patience of God in this passage. The disciples are stuck on stupid, and yet in their mind and in their arrogance and selfishness, the Savior calls them together, and He defines for them true greatness, and He contrasts for them greatness as culturally and sinfully defined with true greatness as biblically defined. Look carefully again at verse 43, where the Savior says, but whoever would be great among you... Look carefully.

But whoever would be great among you... He does not categorically criticize or forbid this desire or ambition, but what He does is He purifies it. He redefines it. He redirects it.

But whoever would be great among you... And here's the definition that He provides. Must. Must.

You always want to pay attention to every time must appears. You must be born again. Worship must be in spirit and in truth.

And whoever would be great among you must be your servant. Now, perhaps you have become overly familiar with these words, this phrase. I can assure you that the original audience was not overly familiar with these words and this phrase.

I can also assure you they were not prepared for this. This statement would offend all Roman and Greek sensibilities. It's not difficult to imagine individuals present upon hearing this statement smiling and shaking their heads at this radical redefinition of true greatness that is being introduced here by the Savior.

This is a divine perspective. This is a divine definition of greatness being introduced by the Savior. This is wonderfully captured by William Lane in his wonderful commentary on the Gospel of Mark, where he writes the following, in relation to this passage and this statement and this announcement, the reversal, look carefully, the reversal, the reversal of all human ideas of greatness and rank was achieved when Jesus came not to be served, but to serve.

There is a great reversal taking place here. There is an historic reversal. A reversal is being revealed.

A reversal is being announced. The reversal. The reversal of what? The reversal of all, all, categorically all human ideas of greatness.

Behold the reversal in this moment through this Savior, His example and His teaching. Behold the reversal. Behold the inauguration of a dramatic reversal, an historic reversal, a divine reversal of all human ideas of greatness and rank.

In his commentary on the Gospel of Mark, James Edwards writes the following, Greatness belongs to the one who is not great, according to culture. The diakonos, the ordinary Greek word for waiting on tables. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

Jesus redefines greatness and he relocates greatness. Must be your servant. It's as if he took us to a fine dining establishment and he said, Do you see the owner of this exclusive restaurant? He's not great.

Now, do you see the wealthy individuals having dinner in this restaurant? Wealthy, famous individuals? They aren't great. I want you to view this restaurant with new eyes. You know who's great in here? It's the busboy.

The busboy is great. That's what's happening here. There's a reversal being announced.

There's an historic reversal being inaugurated in this moment. Now, the conflict described here continues to this very day. The conflict between the pursuit of gratefulness as culturally or sinfully defined, that would be self-sufficient individuals motivated by selfish ambition, ultimately for the purpose of self-exaltation or self-glorification.

That would be a cultural or sinful definition of greatness. There is a conflict between that definition of greatness and the pursuit of greatness as biblically defined here, which is serving others for the glory of God. Serving others for the glory of God.

I want you to feel the effect of this historic reversal of all human ideas of greatness and rank. True greatness. Biblical greatness.

Here before us is what it means to be great in the eyes of God. To be great in the eyes of God means that one is serving others for the glory of God. Before us is God's definition of greatness.

This is what it means to be great in the eyes of God. What makes a man or woman truly great in the eyes of God? Well, what makes a man or woman truly great in the eyes of God is if that individual is serving others for the glory of God. That is true greatness.

That makes them great in the eyes of God. And this, this, this must be the distinctives of our lives individually and the local church corporately. In our lives and in this church, there must be, there is to be the distinct absence of selfish ambition.

Jesus would say to each and every individual Christian and each and every church, not so with you. Not so with you. So the distinct absence of selfish ambition and the distinct presence of servanthood.

Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant. Now here's the good news for me. Here is the good news for me.

Thank you, Lord, that this is so true. So evidently true of this church. That's the good news for me this morning.

When I read this definition, when I think about this reversal of all human ideas of greatness and rank, I think of what I observe here on a daily basis. I can come confidently to this church knowing that I believe this is God's assessment of this church. Now, so there's no misunderstanding.

That is all by grace and is ultimately all for his glory. This is not some exercise in self-congratulation, but it is a celebration of God's grace for God's glory in our midst. In the eyes of God, I believe this church is truly great because this church is populated by people who are not motivated by selfish ambition, but instead daily serve others for the glory of God.

That permeates this church. Wherever you look in this church, wherever you go in this church, whoever it seems like you're interacting with in this church, it for me begins right here with the men seated to my right just a few minutes ago. There is a God-pleasing absence of selfish ambition among those men and a God-pleasing presence of serving others for the glory of God.

And I feel God's pleasure as I have the privilege to stand next to them and sit with them. And I benefit immeasurably from their example. And it extends.

It extends to the Covenant Life Church administrative staff. It extends to the school staff. It extends to the administrative staff of Sovereign Grace Ministries.

It extends to care group leaders. It extends to ministry team leaders. It extends to every member of this church.

It is by God's grace a distinctive here. And it is noticed by those who visit. They can't always define the distinctive, but they are perceptive and affected by this distinctive.

The absence of selfish ambition for self-exaltation and the presence of humble servants who delight in serving others for the glory of God. This is by God's grace in our history to date a distinctive here. And I thank you for it.

I cannot thank you enough. If I wasn't limited by time, I would take an extended period of time to thank you in many more specific and detailed ways. But I have other purposes I must fulfill this morning.

It is a distinctive. I'm profoundly grateful for this distinctive. Here's my concern.

My concern is that it remain a distinctive. My concern is that this remain a distinctive in Covenant Life Church and for it to remain a distinctive in this church. I think the parents in this church have a particular

privilege and responsibility.

The parents of this church have a particular privilege and responsibility to maintain this distinctive and transfer this distinctive to the children of this church. And actually, this particular passage is frighteningly relevant to parents since we are informed in Matthew's Gospel that it was not just James and John who approached the Savior. We are informed in Matthew's Gospel that Mom came with them.

And actually, it appears that Mom didn't merely accompany them. Mom wasn't present as a mere observer. It would actually appear that Mom was the most vocal one present among them.

And Matthew not only informs us of Mom and Mom's presence and Mom's vocal presence. Mom is demonstrative. She kneels before the Savior and makes this request of the Savior.

On behalf of her boys. Now, how appropriate for Mother's Day. How appropriate.

Mothers, you are deserving of all honor that was communicated earlier. And you know that for us in this church, every day is Mother's Day. No day we set aside.

We're glad to draft along behind the culture today and subsidize Hallmark for another year. But Mother's Day is every day in this church. And we honor mothers every day in this church.

But mothers, it would be important for you to listen up and look carefully at the example of the mother of James and John. I find her influence on her boys very sobering. And I think each and every mother here, well, and father, we need to consider your influence on your children, your responsibility for your children.

See, make no mistake about it. The mother of James and John was ambitious for her boys. What are your ambitions for your children? What are your ambitions for your children? Every parent has ambitions for their child or children.

But not every parent has ambitions for their child or children that are biblical ambitions. So what are your ambitions for your child? What are your ambitions for your children? What are they? College education, college graduation, particular degree, in particular, school, recognition in some form? What are your ambitions for your child? Probably whatever you just started thinking about a moment ago when I began to make this point. You've got ambitions.

Are they biblical? Are they godly? Or are your ambitions divorced from true greatness as defined here in scripture? Do you have any ambitions for your child that are more important than servanthood? Than humble servanthood? Is your ambition for your child biblical greatness? True greatness. Greatness as God defines and describes. Ask yourself this.

Are you more interested in temporal recognition for your child or eternal reward? Listen, parenting, the essence of parenting is preparing your child for that future day of judgment. Fathers, mothers, sons, this is our preeminent responsibility. There is a day of judgment approaching.

Scripture informs us that everyone will stand before God on that day. Your child will stand before God on that day. Godly parenting involves preparing my child today for that day in hopes that on that day, he stands before God as heavenly Father and not holy judge.

What are you doing today to prepare him for that day? And what can you do today that will serve him or her on that day and that will survive on that day God's judgment? God's assessment of them and their life

and their motive and their purpose. I dare say on that day, there's going to be a number of parents filled with regret. Sadly, I don't want you to be numbered among them.

Are you parenting today with that day in view? What are your ambitions for your child? And how can we adopt this ambition for true greatness as our parental ambition for our child? How can we do that? I want to adopt this one. This is the one I want to adopt. This is the one I want to transfer to my children.

This one. How can I do that? Parents, let me just give you four recommendations. Let me just make four recommendations to you as a fellow sinful parent.

Four recommendations. How can we transfer this ambition for true greatness? Number one, be an example of true greatness for your child. Be an example of true greatness for your children.

See, modeling always precedes teaching. Before you teach, you must model. Not model perfectly, but model to some degree so there is integrity in your teaching.

Teaching really involves explaining to children what they are observing in your life. What they are already observing in your life. Teaching is explaining what children are already observing.

And biblical instruction cannot and should not ever be divorced from some degree of personal example and personal modeling. All teaching begins with modeling. All effective teaching is preceded by, to some degree, an authentic model.

So, be an example of servanthood to your children and evaluate whether you are and invite others into that evaluation process. Number two, you must define true greatness from Scripture for your child. Does your child understand the biblical definition of true greatness? How would your child answer the question, What is true greatness? Define greatness for me.

What constitutes greatness? What constitutes true greatness? How would your child answer? Find out. Ask your child. Ask your child at lunch today to define true greatness.

Number three, we must teach our children to discern and admire true greatness. And we must protect them from the cultural definition of greatness and the influence of culture as relates to greatness. We must teach our children to discern true greatness and to admire true greatness.

In a moment, we return to a culture that daily draws attention to and celebrates those who are not great in the eyes of God. Now, I want to talk real carefully here. I do not want anybody, particularly guests, to misunderstand.

In making these comments, I do not consider myself morally superior to anyone in our culture. Oh, and actually quite the contrary. I would consider myself the worst sinner I know because I am more familiar with my sin than I am anyone else's.

So, these comments are, to my knowledge, not motivated by an attitude of self-righteousness. I don't assume a moral superiority. But I must make these comments because I live in a culture and we live in a world and I am a pastor in this church of a church that lives in a culture that has a different definition of greatness.

A dramatically different definition of greatness. And derived from that definition of greatness is a celebration of those they determine or deem great. And it takes place every day through various mediums

in our culture.

You cannot escape this influence. But you can be discerning of it. And you can teach your children to be discerning of it.

And you can teach your children who to admire and why. And humbly who not to admire and why. And we must work hard at this.

Parents must work hard. From example, with a clear understanding of what Scripture teaches about true greatness, we must impart the ability to discern and admire true greatness to our children. And we must protect them from admiring those who are not great in the eyes of God.

Because if they admire them, they will want to emulate them. And they will be influenced by them. This has... I mean, we could spend hours just on practical application of this.

You name a realm. It can be politics. It can be education.

It can be music. It can be athletics. It just applies across the board in all of life for parents to educate their children.

Parents, never be passive with your children. Do not merely stand by observing life go by. Equip your children with discernment wherever you are, so that they might understand the difference between greatness as sinfully defined and greatness as biblically defined in the eyes of God.

This is a very active part of my training of my three older girls when they were home and my younger son now. It is an active part. It is just... It is an active part of my training because I've got that day in view.

So it influences everything. Chad and I... He had a gift certificate to Galleons recently. We're there.

We're looking through various clothing that he was interested in because he has an interest in basketball. We're walking into a section where there are jerseys of professional players. I inform him.

We're looking. I say, son, I'm not sure we're going to find somebody who we can identify with here. So I don't just forbid.

I teach. Well, he had already been taught, and he was very aware of that. We went through one jersey after another.

No, we're not publicly identified. I know. We have a culture that celebrates that individual.

I trust humbly, we won't celebrate that individual, son. Because we're not going to celebrate arrogance. We're not going to celebrate selfish ambition for the purpose of self-exaltation.

Not going to do that. There was only one jersey that I thought, well, from what I know of this individual, and I don't know details, and to my knowledge, he is not a professing Christian, but the way he conducts himself when he plays is certainly worthy of some admiration. So we got Tim Duncan's jersey.

But I want you to see the process we're walking through. Because we're not going to have any trash-talking, arrogant individual's jersey on your back. Not going to have that.

Not going to have that. So it will just influence, it will influence so many decisions you make about so many areas. And what's wonderful is it provides biblical discernment, and then it delivers answers to you, regardless of the context or the decision.

Thank God for the wisdom of Holy Scripture. Have you taught your child to discern and admire true greatness? We must teach our children to discern and admire true greatness. Here's how to discover what you've taught your child.

Ask these questions. Ask these questions. This is first of you as a parent.

Who do you admire and why? Who do you admire and why? Secondly, who would your children say you admire and why? If I had lunch with your child this afternoon and I said, who do you admire and why? How would they answer? And then parents ask this, who do your children admire? Do you know? Have you perceived? Ask. Who do they admire? And then as important, why? Who do they admire and why? And pay careful attention as they grow who they admire and why. It can be revealing of their heart whether there's foolishness or wisdom governing their lives.

And children, you know, I should, let me have a word with you. Uncle CJ wants to have a word with you because you are in my neighborhood this morning, alright? This is where I live. I'm glad you do too.

Because I know many, if not most of the parents in this room, I can say with a certain confidence to the children present here that most likely seated next to you right now is in God's eyes someone truly great. Your mom. Your dad.

Now listen, my concern isn't how they are viewed in God's eyes. I know how God views them. My concern in this moment is how do you view them? See, when God commands us honor father and mother, what he's saying is discern true greatness.

Discern true greatness. You know, a few moments ago I was saying I wanted to address the parents and said parenting is about preparing your child for that future day of judgment. If I was to try to prepare children, this is what I'd say to you.

I want to prepare you for the future death of your dad and mom. For the majority of you, your dad or mom will die before you die. In other words, there is a day in your future where you will stand before their casket and you will observe the lifeless form of your mom and your dad.

That day is coming for every child here and you don't know when. Now, what are you doing today to prepare for that day? See, on that day you will grieve and that grief will be a gift from God. Here's what I don't want you to experience.

Regret. There's a big difference between grief and regret. And you will have regret on that day if you don't honor them from this day to that day.

You should see some moment every day to thank them for their example, to thank them for the way they serve you. And there is no one you should speak of with more enthusiasm or passion than your dad and your mom if they are truly godly and truly servants. No one.

There's no one you should admire more. There's no one you should be more enthusiastic about because there's no one you've seen live more unselfishly than your dad and mom. And you've been the object of

their affection and therefore you should make it your purpose to fill their hearts with your gratitude from this day until that day that you stand before their lifeless form.

Honor your father and mother. If you have neglected this, it could be because of ignorance. It's probably because of arrogance.

You now have discernment so let the honoring begin. Look for ways to thank your mom and your dad for their example, for the way they serve, for being truly great and make it your passion and purpose to do this so that when they close their eyes upon death, they do so with hearts filled with your appropriate, grateful expressions of appreciation for the example they have set and the way they have served you. So be an example, parents.

Define it for your children, true greatness. Teach your children to discern and admire true greatness. And then number four, teach your children to serve.

Teach your children to serve and where possible, serve together in the church. What a privilege we have here in this church. See, the local church is where true greatness is on full display.

And what a privilege it is to be able to bring our children up in a church where there is true greatness everywhere you look. Do not view involvement in the local church as adversarial. View involvement in the local church as a gift from God and the wisest investment, not only of your time personally, but of your time as a parent.

For it is here that you will impart the definition of true greatness. It is here that you will transfer this passion to your child that will prepare your child for that final day. It is here that your child will be observing examples that will provoke your child to conform and emulate to those who are truly great in the eyes of God.

All that's happening right here. Therefore, don't just look through that wonderful book that you'll be given of all ministry opportunities personally isolated from your children. Think of ways you can be involved with your child so that you model true greatness for your child, so that you transfer that example to your child so that parents, when you are dead, you have transferred godly wisdom to your child.

You have transferred a definition of true greatness that outlives you and affects future generations you will never see. When the day comes that you're no longer here, your child will still be here. Teach your children to serve.

Greatness desired, greatness defined, now finally, our remaining moments, greatness demonstrated. Greatness demonstrated. True greatness is only attained by emulating the Savior's example, listen, but true greatness is made actual or made possible only by the Savior's sacrifice.

I don't need long to develop this because of previous sermons, but I must bring this to your attention. Listen, He is exhorting them to follow His example. He is exhorting them, He is defining for them true greatness.

He is exhorting them to follow His example, but He also in this passage clearly clarifies the uniqueness of His sacrifice and its purpose. It's very clear here. He alone came to give His life as a ransom for the sins of many.

So listen, this has life transforming potential, and this must inform all that takes place for the rest of this series and in the future history of this church. Servanthood abounds here. Acts of service abound here.

All servanthood and all service present here are the effect or the evidence of His unique substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. So every time you drive on this property on a Sunday morning and you see somebody serving you and serving you with joy regardless of the weather, you should not only admire true greatness in its present form before you, but you should be reminded of the Savior's sacrifice for that individual represents really the evidence and the effect of the Savior's sacrifice for their sins and for our sins. Our service is the evidence of His unique sacrifice.

Donald English has written that at the source of all Christian service in the world is the crucified and risen Lord who died to liberate us into such service. So the only appropriate way to conclude is the way the Lord concluded in verse 45 for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom. That's how He describes His death there.

Now listen to why. He describes His death as a ransom. We're not familiar with that description with that image in our culture.

They would have been. The original audience would have been very familiar. Ransom spoke of a price paid to liberate a slave.

They would have been very familiar with that. John Stott insightfully writes about this redemption image that the emphasis of the redemption image, listen, is on our sorry state. Indeed, our captivity in sin, which made an act of divine rescue necessary.

This mention of dying as a ransom really reveals our plight. It reveals our state. It reveals our sinful state.

It reveals our miserable bondage to sin, which is graphically illustrated, is it not, by the disciples in verses 36-41. We have a graphic illustration of their sorry state and of our sorry state right in this passage. They are captive to selfish ambition for the purpose of self-exaltation.

They are so captive that they don't even get it when He announces that He is going to die and die on their behalf. An argument erupts among them as to who is the greatest. That's how captive they are.

They can't even be sensitive for a moment. He's just informed them He's going to die. What? It's the height of insensitivity.

Why? Because they are captive to sin. A ransom must be paid. There is a price that must be paid for freedom from this sin.

And what is the price? The price is the life of God's sinless Son. The atoning death of God's Son Himself. Paid to God the Father who is the offended party for the purpose of setting us free from the effects and the power of sin and one day by God's grace the very presence of sin.

And so God accomplishes the humanly impossible by sending and sacrificing and substituting His Son for ambitious disciples and ambitious souls like you and me. And here's the effect. The effect of His death is the ransom, the liberation from slavery to sin of many and the transformation of many.

Listen, this is the effect. Many, many, many, many who were once motivated by selfish ambition, self sufficient individuals motivated by selfish ambition for the purpose of self exaltation become instead

ransomed and liberated and forgiven and transformed and they have a new motive and a new purpose. They want to serve others for the glory of God and by grace they become great in the eyes of God.

Like James and John. James and John would be forgiven of their sins because of this very ransom spoken of here. James and John would be forgiven of their sins and they would be transformed.

They would be transformed from the self confident men motivated by selfish ambition in this passage for the purpose of self exaltation when asked in this passage can they drink the cup? Yep, we can. We are able. No problem.

Not a problem. They're going to be transformed into humble men. They're going to be transformed into humble men who would suffer for the gospel.

Their suffering is different. It's distinct. There is no redemptive character to their suffering.

But they would be transformed. They would be transformed by his death as a ransom for their sin. Liberating them from selfish ambition.

Liberating them by grace to be servants of God. That's what would happen to them. It did happen.

James would be the first. He was the first apostle to drink the cup of martyrdom. In Acts chapter 12 verse 2 we read it was about that time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church intending to persecute them.

And he had James the brother of John put to death with the sword. It says in Psalms that precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. Tell me that death wasn't precious.

That arrogant ambitious man poised to die by sword. One has to wonder if in those remaining moments James didn't reflect back on this encounter. Grateful beyond words for the one who died as a ransom to liberate him and transform him.

So now it was his privilege to die for another. He lived for the glory of another. Now he died for the glory of that same one.

John was transformed as well. He escaped martyrdom but he was in effect a living martyr. He suffered persecution.

He was banished to the isle of Patmos. And John ultimately got it as well. For we read in 1 John 3.16 the following.

This is how we know what love is. Listen. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

Echoes of Mark 10.45. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. True greatness. Serving others for the glory of God as an evidence and effect of the Son of God who was ransomed for our sins.

He got it. Two men. Two men in this passage who appear to us motivated by selfish ambition for the purpose of self glorification.

Two men transformed. Two men transformed by the Savior and his death. Two men who became truly great in the eyes of God.

You know actually sinful individuals, individuals who are motivated by selfish ambition, they're the raw material the Lord delights to work with. And let's be honest. It's the only raw material available.

But we are raw. His death ransomed many and his death transformed many. Those once selfish are forgiven of their sins and they gradually become servants.

So listen. In just a moment there's just going to be an army of people who either have served or will be serving us. Every time you observe them, observe somebody who is now, you are informed biblically, truly great in the eyes of God.

And when you observe someone serving, it should remind you of the cross. It should remind you of the Savior's sacrifice. Because what you're observing is the effect of that sacrifice and could not and would not take place apart from that sacrifice.

So let us glory in that sacrifice as we observe individuals once arrogant and motivated by selfish ambition, now humble and desiring to serve. What a Savior. What a sacrifice.

What an effect in our lives. Lord, Lord, first I thank You for I thank You for the true greatness that is before me in this room. I thank You that that has been my experience in this church from day one.

I thank You that there is a wonderful culture of servanthood in this church and I pray that it might be continued through the transfer of example and teaching by parents. And Lord, as we now give attention to this critical topic, I pray that You would reveal any and all selfish ambition in our hearts so that it would truly be said of this church, not so with You. I pray You would impart a fresh desire to serve in light of the Savior's sacrifice to ransom us and liberate us from selfish ambition.

I pray Lord that every time we observe somebody serving, we would be reminded of Your sacrifice. Lord Jesus, thank You that You did not come to be served, but to serve and to give Your life as a ransom for many. Thank You.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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