

True Greatness

[Announce Text] Please Open your Bibles to Luke 22:24-30. [Page 881](#)

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship where we exist to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. We are continuing our series through the book of Luke.

[Prayer for illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] I don't normally do this, but we have someone very special with us. Someone truly great. Oh, they don't think I've noticed them, but I have. This person, in all of my interactions, has been an example for us to follow. They've felt a bit on the outside because of their age and their stage of life, but it is truly an honor to have them here and they deserve this attention. When there has been a need of wisdom beyond their years, they have it. When people have needed a friend, they've been it. I trust this person implicitly. Okay, enough, enough. We have a reporter here from the local news and I don't want to waste any more of their time. And this person, one of the truly great, is...

Now, what's going on in your heart right now? Do you hope I say your name? I've felt that way. Do you feel sorry for yourself because you know I won't say your name? I've felt that way. I'm trying to make us all feel something is at work in most of our hearts. A desire for greatness, and fame, and regard, and praise. And most of our desires are off. Like an old car with no engine, abandoned in a field. The problem is inside us, so it's not like a coat of paint will solve the problem, we need a whole new engine. We need to be rebuilt into true greatness. So that's what we're after today:

[Proposition] Be rebuilt into true greatness.

I attempt to have a bit of application in the main idea that can flow out of what Christ has done for us. This week is no different. Be rebuilt into true greatness. We'll look at three things: Why we need true greatness. The One who brings true greatness. And the future for those with true greatness. True greatness: Why we need it. The One who brings it. The future for those with it.

[Main Point 1] Why we need true greatness.

We see at least two reasons we need true greatness in these verses.

[Reason #1] We're preoccupied with false greatness

Let's read v. 24

A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

Here we are, on the night Jesus is betrayed, and we see the disciples acting horribly. Selfishly. Preoccupied with themselves. Their reputations. How others are meant to think about them. We see them acting, well, like us.

[Illustration] How would you feel if I did something to you that totally ruined your reputation? I deleted all the work you did over the last month so that your teacher or your boss thinks you've done nothing. Would you be concerned with what others think about you? What if someone botched your recipe and fed it to royalty with a note that it came from you? What if it's three minutes before your big speech and you've just spilled black coffee all over your white clothes?

This bothers us because we want to be regarded as great. We want others to think that we're great. Here's the test: Would you love to be regarded as the greatest, Christian or worker or parent or athlete or volunteer or driver or musician or student or home renovator or whatever *even if you know that you aren't that great?*

All or most of the disciples wanted to be *regarded* as the greatest. It was so important to them that there was a dispute about this. Like elementary school boys. We, like the disciples, are preoccupied with false greatness. That's reason #1 with why we need true greatness. We need to be rebuilt into true greatness. We need true greatness.

[Reason #2] We see examples of false greatness

Let's look at v. 25

And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors."

There are some awful and brutal leaders in the world today. And there were some awful and brutal kings in the past- in Jesus' day. Many of them would hide their

brutality by donating money to causes or having special buildings built. This sort of thing still happens. And they would take the title of “benefactor.” They would manipulate public favor by giving gifts but it was all so that they could have their status and do what they want and be regarded as great leaders. So even their generosity is all meant to be a means to abuse authority.

These are the examples the disciples had. These are the examples we have. The greatness we see in the world at large is almost entirely false greatness.

[Illustration] When I had cancer the first time, everyone was wearing these yellow wristband-type bracelets from Lance Armstrong’s Livestrong foundation. There he was, the cancer survivor, nearing the end of winning seven consecutive Tour de France cycling championships. But then we learn that he was doping the whole time. Or Mark Driscoll, preaching so powerfully. Challenging so many of us. Encouraging us to see Jesus. A church in Seattle. Seattle! Exploding in growth. But then we hear behind the scenes. Domineering. Abusing his authority. Refusing to submit to church discipline. And he's probably not qualified to be in ministry. Ravi Zacharias, persuasive apologist. Powerful storyteller. Seemingly finishing his race unto death. And then news starts to break. All these women with stories. Adultery. Abuse. Deception.

[Warning] One of the reasons I think Hell will be so horrible. If there are interactions between individuals in Hell, it may well be an eternity of people and Satan and demons wanting to dominate others. And abusing others. And God pouring out wrath on all who are outside of Christ. Being treated exactly as they treated others. They tried to assert and control and harm others. So God now has treated them with justice. He asserts and controls them, not in a manner of blessing, but in a manner of perfect justice and punishment.

[Application] This is why we need true greatness. We see people preoccupied with false greatness and they become examples to us. And we follow them. But here’s the thing, we can’t avoid the desire to be great. Why is that? Friedrich Nietzsche, philosopher from the 1800s, says that we have an irrational force driving all humans which he called “the will to power.” We want greatness, status, power, so that we can get what we want and have the world revolve around us. He is onto something. This is a picture of what the Bible calls pride- though Nietzsche hated the Bible and Christianity. But the question is, where did this

force within people come from? Why does everyone want to be great in some way? The Bible gives an answer: the image of God.

God built us and bestowed on us a title of greatness: “One made in my image.” A man in my image. A woman in my image. The greatest of all creation. We didn’t need rebuilt initially because we were perfectly built. We’re meant to rule the world. To be viewed as vice-regents under God’s rule. The trees and whales and wolves and mushrooms and other humans are meant to look at us and go, “Wow! I see *God* in him! When I look at her, I see something that makes me want to bow down to God and worship!” We’re made to be great. So kids, do your schoolwork with excellence! Earn all the gold stars! Get all the stickers! You’re meant to be great. Athletes, train yourselves so that your team gets the gold. Push through the pain. Writers, write and edit until you are published and there’s a book with your name on the cover. Parents, model godly ambition, and when you do something well, point it out to your children to follow your example. Men, start companies and don’t be afraid to have your name be visible. Climb corporate ladders. Elderly, you often know better than us. Don’t be afraid to share your wisdom. God has made us to be great! We need true greatness. But these things could be examples of false greatness. In fact, most of what we do is false greatness. So we need rebuilt.

Be rebuilt into true greatness. We need true greatness. Now second

[Main Point 2] The One who brings true greatness.

To be rebuilt is in passive language. I am not saying, “rebuild yourself.” To be rebuilt is to have Someone else show us what true greatness is. And transform us. Jesus is and brings and models true greatness. And when we see Him, He rebuilds us into true greatness.

[Way #1] Jesus rebuilds us through correction

Let’s read vv. 25-26

And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the one who serves.

Jesus is the One who brings true greatness. Jesus corrects the disciples here. And He corrects us. If we're the old car that needs rebuilt Jesus is looking at all the cars that have come out of the factory and said, "Those axels are no good. Those windshields are broken. Those motors will burn up. So don't be like them." We're meant to aspire to greatness, but Jesus corrects us. If you're great, become like the little child. You know, the youngest one. Who knows she's a child. Whom the older siblings need to pick up, or drag by the hand. The one who can't talk, so she lives with whatever is given to her. Oh, and be great! Be a leader, but here's how you lead. You serve. As one commentator says

"Greatness is not determined by how many serve you, but how you serve others."

Jesus rebuilds us toward true greatness through correction. That's the first way we learn from the One who brings true greatness. Now

[Way #2] Jesus rebuilds us through His example

Let's read v. 27

For who is 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.

Here they all are. At the Last Supper. Reclining around the table. And John has told us that when they came in, nobody. No one. Not a single one of the twelve disciples, volunteered to serve by helping clean the dirty, filthy, stinky feet of the others. And Jesus did. He let them recline at the table and He served. This is true greatness. Serving. And Jesus is the prime example of this.

[Gospel] There really are two types of ways we go astray in our desire for greatness. We can be irreligious. We can be like the disciples were in this moment. We can do nothing good and expect others to consider us great. And want others to build their lives around us. We treat those around us like they exist for us. She should do the dishes. He needs to wash my car. We can seek our own pleasure. She's my wife, she better fulfill my fantasies tonight whether she feels like it or not. The cops better not pull me over, I was speeding, but I have better things to do than sit in traffic. We make up our own minds. And other people can deal with us. "Self-care," we say. "Sorry, not sorry," we say. I think we've all gone astray in our desire that way. And Jesus rebukes that. And history has proven Him

right. That people who seek greatness this way destroy others. So Jesus corrects us.

There's another way we go astray in our desire for greatness. At least a lot of us do. We build a religion. We make offerings to little gods we create. We buy gifts for the grandchildren, or nieces, or child and we don't care if the kids like what they get so long as they think well of us as gift-givers. Or we apologize over and over again that we want them to know that we want to do more. Or we show up at church. We're on the greeting team or music team or production team after all. And we serve and we serve and we serve. We make it to every workday. What will they think about me if I'm not there?! And hopefully everyone notices. Especially the pastors. We hear Jesus' words about serving, and we hope that we can use that as a way to gain influence or power. We're doing so much for Jesus!

But here's the issue for the religious. You can't be a Christian and be the greatest servant. To be a Christian, you must have Jesus serve you. Jesus stripped Himself of His clothes to wash the disciples' feet. He lived like their slave. But He had still more serving to do. He would willingly allow Himself to be betrayed. And falsely convicted. And beaten almost to death. And paraded naked through the streets-mocked the whole way. And crucified on a public road. Because He was serving His people. He was doing their work. We should have to make up for our sin. We should have to be punished with the wrath of God for our sin. We should have to spend an eternity trying to make it up to God through pain. But Jesus served us. He did that for us. And not just as an example. As our substitute. If you're religious, you can't serve enough. Jesus must serve you. He must be regarded as the Greatest. And you must humble yourself before Him.

If you are irreligious, Jesus must serve you as well- and Jesus rose bodily from the grave. With a power unseen anywhere in history. Revealing His greatness. And this power should transform your desire to have everyone serve you, and instead you should be humbled that God has served you. That you've been served enough by the Greatest in history. And that resurrection power, when you believe will now be at work transforming you from the inside out. So it's you doing the dishes. It's you volunteering your day off. By helping your siblings clean up the messes they've made. Because you recognize that true greatness comes by serving. And yet you realize that you are always being served by Jesus more than you could

ever serve Him or anyone else. And you'll be so amazed that He would serve you that you *want* to be like Him. And you become a servant like Him almost without trying.

So the gospel is how we're rebuilt. And we're rebuilt, like an old car, from the inside out. The Holy Spirit shows us Jesus in such a way that He transforms our hearts. God does the work to start the rebuilding process. And you become Great because the Greater One served you and put you in a lower place.

[Application] This transforms everything. When the game is on the line and you care more about serving that being regarded as great, you can say, "Coach, Mike's the better player, maybe you should sub him in for me." And when he says, "No, I like you for this play, we need you." You can think, well, if Jesus could serve by dying so that we succeed, I can serve by playing my hardest for our team to win, and if I get blamed for it, I did it to serve them, so that's okay." When you get the promotion, you can sit down with your employees and ask them what they suggest. Parents serving children. Children serving parents. Husbands serving by leading.

Be rebuilt into true greatness. You can't rebuild yourself. We've looked at why we need true greatness. We see the One who brings true greatness. Now, quickly

[Main Point 3] The future for those with true greatness

There is an amazing future for those with true greatness. Those who are rebuilt by Jesus and become servants for the sake of God and others. The first aspect of the future is this

[Blessing #1] The Greatest gives you a new status

Let's read vv. 28-29

"You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father has assigned to me, a kingdom,

We all want titles. We all want position. We all want status. But the people who give us titles and positions come and go. So our status can change quickly. He was given a cabinet position by President Bush. Pff, President Bush, I don't care what President Bush thinks. Or, he was given a job by President Obama. Oh, President

Obama, well, we know President Obama made some mistakes, maybe this guy was just another one.

Jesus looks at his disciples. In all their bickering. All their pride and worldliness. Totally missing the point that Jesus is about to die. And He thinks about how they have stuck with Him. He talked about eating His flesh and drinking His blood- so many left, but not these guys. The Jewish leaders said He was casting out demons by the prince of demons, but these men stayed with Him. They saw the suspicious looks. The gossip. The lies. And they stayed. And Jesus says, "I'm going to give you a status. Not because you've earned it, because you'll all abandon me in the next day or so. I'm going to give it. And it's going to come from me, and I'm eternal, so nobody can take it away from you." All other greatness is fleeting, today's heroes may be tomorrow's villains or just be forgotten.

[Application] Some of you are wanting so badly to be called "great" by the right person. You want them to say, "Husband" or "Wife" or "General" or "Mother" or "Manager" or "CEO" or "Millionaire" or "4.0 Student" or "popular one." But those can be lost and those can be taken away. When Jesus rebuilds you into true greatness, there is a status that comes from the all-powerful and unchanging One. The opinions of others won't matter as much anymore. Your old status as "loser" or "dummy" or "failure" will be gone forever. That's your future if you are in Christ.

Blessing #1 is that the Greatest of all will give you a new status. That's your future with true greatness. Now,

[Blessing #2] Fellowship with the Greatest

Let's read v. 30

"...that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

The exact meaning of these verses will be revealed in the future. It could mean that the 12 apostles will now be the means of leading God's people, just as there were leaders among the 12 tribes of Israel. It seems to show continuity like the church, which is led by apostles, is in the same stream as Old Testament Israel. Like there's one people of God, not two. Maybe there will be special status in the New Heavens and New Earth. But here's what's decisively clear:

Luke always uses meals and dining together as a picture of fellowship. That's the main idea. And all those who are truly great will have close friendship and fellowship with the Triune God. That will never end. Love that never fails. A welcome that never wears out. Joy that is never dulls, but only intensifies. Everyday. Forever. The holidays are coming and many of us will enter them with wounds because we're missing people who can't be with us. It casts a bit of darkness over the light of the holidays. But whether we realize it or not, the person we most want is Jesus. And here He promises a time when we will always be present with us. In deep relationship and fellowship. Always.

[Conclusion] One day I was driving down Nevada Street and I saw a kid in a sweatshirt walking to Longfellow Elementary for school. He looked like a friendly fellow. And the sweatshirt he was wearing was very big. It hung way past his waist and the sleeves seemed about 8 inches past the end of his fingertips. They kind of whipped and flapped as he swung his arms.

When we believe the gospel, the doctrine of justification by faith alone tells us that Jesus' perfect righteousness has been credited to us. Like clothing. So we are wearing robes or sweatshirts, so to speak, of Jesus perfection. And that's what God sees when He looks at us. So, we're viewed as great. We don't need to perform to be accepted by Him. But I bet that the reason that boy's sweatshirt was so big is because whoever bought it expects him to grow into it. The same goes for us. We justified believers are clothed in Jesus' righteousness- who was always truly great. But now He's rebuilding us to grow into true greatness. We're growing into the righteousness we're clothed in.