

The Story of Greatness

Our study finds Jesus in his last days, saying his final words. Last week Jesus gave them a meal and modeled and spoke to them about forgiveness as well as other things. As we continue our study, we will notice that Jesus is laser focused on the truths and nature of the Kingdom of God, specifically true leadership, true greatness.

1. The Back Story: Arguing about who is the greatest

“A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. 25 Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. 26 But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. 27 For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.’” (Luke 22:24-27)

Pride always results in juvenile behavior and we see it in full bloom here. It’s hard to imagine that people would sit around arguing about who was the greatest.

In their culture this was the norm, the people of that time would have *“Benefactors”*. This would be people around them who could benefit them in society. Jesus tells them; *“But you are not to be like that”* he was being very clear about this subject.

They had just celebrated the Passover, the first communion and he is telling them about his sufferings and that one of them would betray them...then this argument breaks out?

In the Roman Empire where you sat at the table was everything. It was all about status, where you sat at the table said everything about you. It’s no different today; all we have to do is watch an award show and the red carpet. In our culture people are asked; “What are you wearing”. Just like the seating of old, this also is all about status. Jesus will turn this upside down and end this argument not with his words but by doing something, modeling something.

2. The Story: The greatest became their servant

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“It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” 7 Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” 8 “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” 9 “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” (John 13:1-9)

The greatest in the room became the servant of all. The key thing Jesus modeled was *humility*, as seen in Philippians 2 a picture of God that descends as opposed to ascending.

As we see in our passage, Peter initially refused the offer from Jesus to wash his feet. This may have been pride and rebellion, but it may have also been *shame*. When we ask Jesus to wash us we realized that we would be exposed, where we have walked and where we have been. Even today we need to ask ourselves if we can give him the ugly part of our lives?

3. The End Story: I have set you an example

“12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. 13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:12-17)

○ Love one another as I have loved you

○ Serve a need

○ Say ‘thanks’

○ Share your heart

- **Share your heart**
- **Speak the truth**
- **Say ‘you’re sorry’**

- **Love one another so that everyone will know you are my followers**

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)

- **Love one another so others can see God**

This is tied to your capacity to love Jesus, before it can be for others it has to be good for us.

“If you aren’t loved and served by Jesus, you’ll never be able to love and serve others”.

Jesus didn’t talk much about how much he loved them, in fact there is no passage where he looks at them and tells them he loved them, but he showed them.

“No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” (I John 4:12)

We need to be part of his church family. We shouldn’t come to the table to consume, but to give. This serving by Jesus looks very practical; in the same way our love will show people the Gospel.

Discussion Questions

- 1) In the *Backstory* we see pride in full bloom as a juvenile argument breaks out between the disciples. First, what part did the current culture play in this argument? Second, how did Jesus initially respond to them?
- 2) We know from last week that Jesus had just finished the Passover meal with them, talked about his sufferings, shared the first communion and told them that one of them would betray him. Unbelievably after all of this, the argument breaks out. So what does this statement mean to you; “he ended this argument not with words but by doing something”.
- 3) In the *Story* the greatest in the room became the servant of all. We see an interesting contrast; please discuss this difference between the humility of Jesus and the apparent pride of Peter when it was his turn to have his feet washed.

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- 4) In this same vein, please discuss the possibility that Peter may have been experiencing shame. Have you ever hesitated letting Jesus wash you because where you had walked would be exposed? Have you ever hesitated to bring your ugliness before the Lord?
- 5) Finally the *End Story*, in a practical way, how do we love one another the way he loved us? Also ponder and discuss these statements:

“Love one another so that everyone will know you are my followers”

“Love one another so others can see God”