

June 15, 2003  
AM Service – Father’s Day  
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Greatness: Humility and Ministry”  
Mark 9:33-35

"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

## 1. Greatness: The World’s View

How would we normally fill in this blank: If anyone wants to be first, he must \_\_\_\_\_ ?

I think most would tell us: If anyone wants to be first, he must work and push his way to the top. He must only be concerned about himself and his ambitions. He must not worry about who he hurts, crushes or passes along the way. He must do what ever it takes, lie, cheat, prostitute himself ... whatever it takes get to the top. He must move to NY because if you can make it there you can make it anywhere. He wants to wake up in a city that never sleeps and find he’s king of the hill, top of the heap. Because when you’re at the top people wait on *you* and serve *you*. When you are on top you can do whatever you want to do and go wherever you want to go. When you are on top you come first and everyone wants to please you.

The first are first and served by all.

Jesus says, just the opposite. He seems to do that a lot... say the opposite of what we usually hear in the world. His words are often contrary to common belief. His words even seem contradictory. The first are last, the last are first; the ruler is the servant, the servant is the ruler. Confusing!

[At teen talent show Joe Herrmann and Mike Caiazzo did an old Abbot and Costello routine. It’s an illustration on how confusing words can be sometimes.]

Jesus’ words can sound like an Abbot and Costello routine. Costello says, “Hey Abbot, I want to be on top, I want to be first. How can I be first? And Abbot says to Costello, “If anyone wants to be first, Lou, he must be the very last!” And Costello says, “How can I be first if I’m last?” I’m not saying there is anything wrong with being ambitious, but when position and prestige come before obedience and service it becomes sin.

The disciples were talking as they were traveling through Galilee. They certainly should have been discussing something other than what they were discussing. For (v31) Jesus had just told them that He, their leader, was going to be betrayed, killed and in three days He would rise. They should have been discussing that. Instead they were arguing and trying to keep Jesus from hearing what they were saying. But when they got to Capernaum (probably Peter’s house) Jesus asked them what they were arguing about. No one wanted to say. They all kept quiet – it was an embarrassing, uncomfortable silence -

because they hadn't understood Jesus' words about his death or they ignored His words. They still only thought of Jesus as an earthly king. They interpreted what Jesus said as an indication that He was preparing to establish His Kingdom. So on the road they argued about which one of them would be the greatest in His Kingdom. I wonder how Jesus felt that those He loved and those who loved Him were more concerned about their ambition than their affection. They were more concerned with their superiority than Christ's suffering. Jesus was ready to sacrifice His life and they were thinking of the status of theirs. Jesus did not question them on the road but waits until they get to Peter's house. Now, the tongues that were busy arguing on the road are silenced by His question (Because something that may not seem wrong shows it's true character when it is brought into the presence, knowledge and judgment of Christ).

When the disciples wouldn't answer His question Jesus does not condemn them or start yelling at them but as a good teacher/leader would He sits down (for Jewish teachers sat to teach) and calls them over (to sit at His feet). He is going to use this as a teaching opportunity. He knew what they were arguing about – greatness!

## 2. Greatness: The Lord's View

Then Jesus teaches what true greatness is. Jesus teaches that the road to true greatness is humility (this is what He meant when He said put yourself last) and the nature of true greatness is ministry (this is what He meant when He said be a servant of all). Humility and ministry are signs of a true leader. And both are needed. To be humble yet not serve does nothing for others. To serve and do it without humility is incomplete. Neither ought to be the aim of the Christian. To put yourself last – to put all others ahead of yourself – is to be first in God's eyes. And the leaders that God wants are those who will be a servant to all - Rule by serving. Greatness is determined by servanthood. True leaders place his or her self and needs last. Jesus was an example of this in His life and death. Being a "servant" meant having an attitude of life that freely attended to others' needs without expecting or demanding anything in return.

Serving others is real leadership. Jesus described leadership from a new perspective. Instead of using people, we are to serve them. Jesus' mission was to serve others and to give his life away. A real leader has a servant's heart... Don't approach life expecting high positions, honors, and special privileges. Look instead for ways to help others. (from The Life Application Commentary Series copyright (C) 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 by the Livingstone Corporation. Produced with permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved.)

This applies to all of us. But can I speak to the dads/husbands today? Men, you are the leader of your family, of your household. This does not mean everyone waits on you. It does not mean you always get what you want or always get your way. You must be a loving leader – the leader God wants you to be. This means you put yourself last and you serve all in your home. It means you humble yourself and minister to you wife and children.

Can you imagine how it would change our homes and all our relationships if not only dads but everyone of us would be willing to put others first; if everyone of us were willing to serve others rather than be served. Someone once called it “Basin Theology.” Not basic theology but “Basin.” He explained it this way, “Remember what Pilate did when he had the chance to acquit Jesus? He called for a basin and washed his hands of the whole thing. But Jesus, the night before his death, called for a basin and proceeded to wash the feet of the disciples. It all comes down to basin theology: Which one will you use?”

In Christ’s Kingdom there is no higher and lower but all are one and equal. And we follow Christ’s example of ministry – servant hood and service becomes a delight. Not that it is always easy to serve but we find joy in doing it for the Lord. The world does not accept it and some Christians have not learned it yet; but it is still where true greatness is found – humility and ministry.

### 3. Greatness: A Child’s View

In v36 we read that after this teaching Jesus took a child into His arms, perhaps Peter’s child. In doing this He was ending His teaching with an illustration. His action clarified His words in v35 ("If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.").

The Aramaic language has the same word for "child" and "servant." Thus when Jesus took a little child into his arms the explanation of greatness was made even clearer.

When my son was in grammar school they had a fair just before Father’s Day. My son bought me a trophy. It said, “World’s Greatest Dad!” I’ve since come to learn that other Father’s have received trophies and other objects declaring them, “World’s Greatest Dad.” I guess most kids think their dad is the world’s greatest. And you know, kid’s many times judge greatness the same way Christ does. The dad’s Christ and kids judge as the greatest are willing to put themselves as the very last, and be the servant of all.