

## HOW TO BE TRULY GREAT

Luke 22:24-38

Key Verse: 22:26

*“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.”*

Last week, we learned about the new covenant in Jesus’ blood. The blood of Jesus has the power to wash away all our sins. It has the power to change us from the inside. We become the children of God when we accept by faith this redeeming blood of Jesus. And we begin to live as the new covenant people. What does this mean? How can we live as people with the new covenant? Let us open our hearts and listen to Jesus!

### I. SERVE OTHERS FOR THE GLORY OF GOD (24-27)

At the Last Supper, as Jesus and his disciples shared bread and wine together, Jesus told them that one of them would betray him. They were shocked. They lost their appetite. They began to question who would do such a thing. One by one they asked Jesus, “Surely not I?” (Mt 26:22; Mk 14:19) Each one was sure about his own commitment to Jesus. Given their past failures, however, they knew that it was possible for anyone of them to betray Jesus. As they pondered about this, it was comforting for them to recount the shortcomings of the others. Thinking about Peter’s failures, James perhaps said under his breath, “Well, at least I am not as bad as he.” Bartholomew, pointing to Simon the Zealot, said, “He always talks about politics. We can’t trust people in the politics.” In the past, this way of thinking would often escalate to the argument about who was the greatest among the Twelve. Sadly, this happened again on the night of the Last Supper.

Look at verse 24. *“A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.”* What a surprise! Jesus just finished teaching them the meaning of his suffering and death on the cross. It was a solemn subject. And now they began to argue about who was considered to be greatest! It sounds so juvenile. I cannot imagine how much Jesus was hurt when he saw his disciples behaving this way. How about us? I think we also make Jesus sad by behaving like immature children. God has blessed us to serve our student ministry together, in obedience to his command, “Do you love me? Feed my lambs!” But if we argue with each other about little things and procedures, hurting each other in the process, rather than focus on helping young students to come to know Christ personally, we are just like the disciples in this passage.

There is no doubt Jesus was disappointed by their dispute, but he did not rebuke them. He understood their desire to be great. Everyone wants to be great. Everyone wants to be number one. No one wants to be number two. In school or at work, we feel happy when we are ahead of others. Is it wrong to have a desire to be great?

In Genesis 1, we learn that God created each of us in his own image. The great God created us in his own image. So we have the inborn desire to be great. It is not

wrong to have a desire to be great. God wants us to be great. Jesus wanted his disciples to be great. However, they had a wrong concept of greatness. We often misunderstand this as well. Our concept of greatness is based on the value system of this world. We have a wrong concept of greatness. So we don't know how to be truly great. Jesus took the opportunity to teach them what it means to be great and how to be truly great.

Look at verse 25. *Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors."* Jesus says that there are two wrong ways people of this world try to be great. First, the kings of this world "lord it over" others. The young leader of a hermit kingdom tries to be great by flexing his nuclear muscles and killing his opponents with anti-aircraft machine guns. Publicly his people call him a great leader, out of fear. But privately they call him a ruthless tyrant. He is not great. Second, some leaders of the world exercise authority over others and call themselves "benefactors." Caesar Augustus in Jesus' time exercised his authority as the powerful Roman Emperor. When he declared a census, Mary, who was in her full-term pregnancy, had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register as a taxpayer. The Emperor had a slogan called *Pax Romana* which meant Roman peace. He called himself a benefactor. But it was only for his own glory. Many people suffered under the slogan, while he had many marble statues erected to honor him. This is not the kind of greatness God wants us to have.

Let us read verse 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."* The youngest refers to a person who is humble in attitude. Unlike the people of the world who seek their greatness in their positions of hierarchy, a disciple of Jesus should seek his or her greatness in humility before God. Philippians 2 teaches us that our attitude should be like that of our Lord Jesus. Though he was the Son of God, he lowered himself to become a human being in order to serve sinners like me. He humbled himself even further, going so far as to die on a cross. So God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name. St. Paul urges us to learn from Jesus. He says we should be humble, thinking of others better than ourselves (Php 2:3).

Look at verse 26 again. *"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."* Another mark of a great leader is that he rules like the one who serves. The greatest among us is the one who serves? This is not how people of this world view greatness. The disciples did not think this way. Jesus knew this. He said in verse 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."* If you attend a wealthy man's dinner party, you will see the host sitting at the head table and his servants serving the food. Who would you say is greater, the host or the servants? Of course, you will say the host. You don't want to be the servants. Jesus knew this. But he said that he was among them as one who served. John's gospel chapter 13 tells us that at the Last Supper, Jesus, with a towel wrapped around his waist, washed the feet of his disciples, one by one, drying them with the towel. Jesus the Son of God washed the smelly feet of the disciples! Then he said, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should

wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (Jn 13:14-15).

The greatest among us is the one who serves. This is a revolutionary teaching of our Lord Jesus. And the life of Jesus testified to this teaching. He said in Mark 10:42-45: "... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Still, we find it very difficult to obey this teaching. In our sinful pride, we want to be honored and served by others, rather than to serve and honor others. Brother Lawrence (c. 1614-1691) was appointed the abbot of a monastery that was notorious for all kinds of infighting among the monks. When he knocked on the door of the monastery, many young monks came to the door. Noticing a white-haired old man standing there, they said, "What have we here? An old monk candidate. You can begin by washing dishes in the kitchen." Brother Lawrence simply said, "Yes," and went into the kitchen. He began to wash the dishes everyday, for one month, two months, and then three months. The monks ignored him, despised him and treated him badly. Then one day, the bishop visited the monastery and all the monks became nervous about his sudden visit. Not finding Brother Lawrence, he asked, "Where is the new abbot?" Puzzled by the question, they said, "We don't have a new abbot." The bishop said, "What do you mean? I sent Brother Lawrence here three months ago!" Then they realized what they had done. They went to the kitchen and knelt down before the humble leader. They were deeply moved by his attitude of humble service. From then on, the monastery became known for their humble service.

Simon Peter was the top disciple of Jesus. He had big mouth. He often boasted about what he could do for Jesus. The other disciples, especially James and John, did not like him. But Jesus served him, bearing with his weaknesses and failings to the end. Finally, Peter recognized the grace of Jesus. He was changed into a shepherd who served others as Jesus did. In 1 Peter 5:2-3, he said, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." May God help each of us to serve the Lord joyfully and serve one another with humility!

## II. STAND BY JESUS TO THE END (28-30)

Jesus did not despair when his disciples displayed their immaturity at the Last Supper. Instead, he encouraged them. He said in verse 28. "*You are those who have stood by me in my trials.*" Jesus knew that they would abandon him on the very night. But he also knew that they would be changed into men of faith and courage. After his death and resurrection, they would carry his gospel to Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth. So he said, "You are those who have stood by me in my trials." Jesus recognized their faith and courage and respected them. We learn that our faithfulness to Jesus in time of trial is very precious to him.

Look at verses 29-30. *“And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”* The word “confer” means to give due honor in recognition of quality performance. SU President will confer a diploma on you at your graduation. Jesus’ disciples had received spiritual training from Jesus in many ways. Though things became difficult from time to time, they did not run away. They remained with Jesus to the end. Now before leaving them behind in the world, Jesus conferred on them a kingdom. He promised them that they would eat and drink at his table in his kingdom. Furthermore, he promised that they would sit on the thrones in heaven, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. While waiting for this kingdom to come, the apostles must do what Jesus had done. They must shepherd the lost ones by preaching the kingdom of God and healing the sick. They must advance the gospel until the kingdom of God came on earth as it is in heaven. Finally, they would enjoy the glorious and final victory and would eat and drink at Jesus’ table in his kingdom of God. This is our ultimate hope. While waiting for this hope to become reality, we must stand by Jesus to the end.

### III. DEPEND ON JESUS ONLY (31-32)

Look at verse 31. *“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat.”* Jesus called Peter, his top disciple, but he was talking to all of them. (The word “you” in verse 31 is plural in Greek.) Jesus called Peter Simon which was his pre-Christian name, which meant “sand.” It represented his unpredictable and unstable character. Jesus warned him that he would be tested. If Simon depended on his ego, Satan would find him and shake him as harvesters of grain did with their giant colander. He would be like chaff on the threshing floor that is blown away by the wind. Jesus knew that he could not stand by his own strength. And, at the moment, Peter was too proud to really pray for God’s help. He was more “Simon” (sand) and “Peter” (rock). So Jesus prayed for him. Look at verse 32a. *“But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.”* Jesus’ prayer topic was that his faith would not fail. As we know, Peter would deny knowing Jesus three times later that very night. It was a crushing failure that brought Peter to weep bitter tears. In a time of such devastating failure, there is a spiritual danger of despairing completely. However, as Jesus prayed, Peter’s faith did not fail. He remembered the words that Jesus had spoken to him. Though his self-confidence and ego were crushed, his faith became the source of strength for him to turn back to Christ. Likewise, the natural man in each of us will fail, and fail miserably. At that time, only faith in Jesus’ word can save us. The death of self-confidence should be the birth of true faith in Jesus alone. After this experience, Peter did not boast about himself any more.

When Peter was truly changed in his inner man, he became a blessing to the other disciples. Jesus charged him, *“And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers”* (32b). Jesus gave him the mission to strengthen his brothers. After the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, Peter became the most courageous witness of the gospel of Jesus. Through Peter’s fearless preaching, thousands in Jerusalem repented. We learn here that as the new covenant people, we should not depend on ourselves. Instead, we should depend on Jesus only and carry out our mission to strengthen our brothers.

#### IV. OVERCOME THE WORLD BY FAITH (33-38)

When Jesus predicted his denial, Peter was unhappy. He protested, saying, “*Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.*” Peter was still self-confident. He did not listen to Jesus’ words. Peter did not really know himself. So he was totally unprepared for what was about to happen. To help him, Jesus clearly told him, “*I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.*” Then Jesus warned that trouble and hardship awaited the disciples. This was a very painful topic to talk about. But Jesus helped them prepare their minds to confront the world without his physical presence. In the past, they could go from place to place without purse, bag or sandals. Many ordinary people had a positive attitude toward Jesus and his disciples and were ready to help them. But after his death and resurrection, Jesus would be branded as a criminal by the Jewish religious leaders. In fact, the entire Roman Empire would consider Jesus a criminal and his disciples guilty by association. Anyone who helped his disciples would do so at great risk. In brief, the world would become hostile to Jesus’ people. Look at verse 36. He said to them, “*But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.*” Jesus didn’t really mean that they should fight with swords; in fact, he stopped them from doing so later that night. Jesus meant that they should prepare their minds and hearts to confront a hostile world.

Look at verse 37. *It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.*” Jesus quoted Isaiah’s prophecy, “...because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors” (Isa 53:12). To save us from our sins, Jesus would be treated like a criminal. That very night Jesus would be betrayed, arrested, imprisoned, tried, condemned, tortured again and again. Then he would be handed over to the Roman governor and finally crucified. But Jesus calmly told his disciples these things before they happened. He told them that it was to fulfill God’s will. It was according to the Scriptures. Jesus would not face the ordeals as a victim of the political circumstance. He was ready to obey God’s will with courageous faith. Likewise, new covenant people must overcome the world with courageous faith. However, the disciples did not understand the spiritual meaning of Jesus’ teaching. They only thought about getting swords. Likewise, we often are slow to understand Jesus’ words.

Today we learned how to live as the new covenant people. Jesus says we should learn to be humble. We should also learn to serve others humbly. And we should stand by Jesus to the end, not by own human will but by faith. May God help us live as the new covenant people!