

I'm so great

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[0 : 00] Everyone wants to be great or to be known as great. And in this passage you'll see that's one of the questions that they're arguing about.

They see that they've been arguing about who's the greatest, the two of the disciples. Yet greatness is not something that you can say about yourself. It is a value that is given to you by others. In fact, it doesn't matter how great, I'm not great actually, at football. But it doesn't matter how great I would think I am at football. It matters what the football world thinks about how great I am at football.

As to whether, I can't believe my own hype. But everybody wants to be great. Perhaps one area of sporting life where we see people arguing about who is the greatest.

It comes in the world of boxing, doesn't it? The build up to a big boxing match, you get fighters trash talking each other. And everyone telling the world that they're the bigger, the better fighter.

[0 : 58] There's no better place to start than hearing a few quotes from the best of all time at doing this. Muhammad Ali, some famous lines. These are genius.

He says, I'm not the greatest, I'm the double greatest. Not only do I knock them out, I pick the round. I'm the boldest, the prettiest, the most superior, most scientific, most skillfulest fighter in the ring today.

He said, It's hard to be humble when you're as great as I am. You remember this? This one is brilliant. It's not, it's just, I just think it's genius. I done something new for this fight.

I wrestled with an alligator. I tussled with a whale. I handcuffed lightning. I thrown thunder in jail. Only last week, I murdered a rock. Injured a stone. Hospitalised a brick. I'm so mean, I make medicine sick.

For those quotes to be true, you know, he had to back it up, didn't he? And what, he had to have people, after the fight, which they did rightly, ascribe greatness to him.

[1 : 59] He's great. He's the best boxer ever. He's backed it up. And in the world of boxing, there is no doubt he's a great boxer. I wonder what he'd have made of Jesus' words today that we're looking at.

Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last. And the servant of all. Now, of course, we're talking about different things. Muhammad Ali is talking about having greatness in the world of boxing.

Jesus is talking about what it means to have greatness when stood before God. What greatness is in his kingdom. And what we see is, throughout the Bible, really, especially through Jesus' ministry, is that he's showing us that the values of God's kingdom are the reverse of our worlds.

The reverse of our worlds. It is flipped upside down. Because if you look at Muhammad Ali and his life, because of his boxing success, he had money.

He had influence. His voice was listened to. A red carpet was practically rolled out everywhere he went. His achievements brought notoriety. People served him because of who he was and what he'd done.

[3 : 15] Because of his greatness, people would have done anything, actually, to meet him. Been starstruck just to have their photo with him. In many ways, I don't want to say there's nothing wrong with that.

He was a great boxer and we admire what he did. But that is generally how it works in our world. It's just how it works. Because if you have success, if you achieve, if you've got money, your voice carries more weight and people will serve you.

Because you're seen as having more importance because you've made a success of your life. Jesus' kingdom is the complete opposite, which we're going to look at this morning.

Just a reminder, in our third series in Mark's Gospel, and it's titled The Journey to Jerusalem. After the Transfiguration, the whole rest of Mark's Gospel is about his journey to the cross.

First, his way to Jerusalem, which finishes with his riding on the donkey. And then we have quite a few chapters, just the final week of his life. On this journey from the north of Israel down to Jerusalem, he's travelling with his disciples and he's teaching them all the way.

[4 : 23] He starts by teaching them what it means to be a disciple. What it means to be a follower of Jesus on this journey towards what will ultimately end in his death. And for the second time on this journey in Mark's Gospel, we see Jesus predict his death and resurrection.

You might remember the first time it happened back in chapter 8. And after hearing it, Peter takes Jesus aside and he rebukes him. To which Jesus replies, get behind me, Satan.

He sees it as a temptation. In this second prediction, perhaps the disciples have remembered the incident with Peter because Jesus' prediction is met with silence.

Verse 32. The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him. And after three days he will rise. But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

The fact that it is a prediction, a foretelling, you might say, of what was to come, it shows us, it reminds us, doesn't it? It is obvious it reminds us that Jesus' death and resurrection, the means by which he saves, was always the plan.

[5 : 33] It wasn't an accident. God's plan for us was that in his death, he would be punished for our sins.

That was always the plan. The Gospel, when you actually think about it, the Gospel is a scandal. It's completely unfair on Jesus. In a human court of law, what happens to Jesus is not allowed.

You're not allowed to go to prison or to be punished for someone else. That in itself is against the law. But in the heavenly courtroom, that's exactly how it works.

The anger of God at our sin lands on Jesus' shoulders. And we're saved from death by his death. And given new life.

We're given his life. He did it willingly. He knew what the plan was already. That is the primary reason why Jesus goes to the cross. He goes to the cross.

[6 : 34] So that we can be given his life as our substitute. That is the plan. However, what we see here is that Jesus has something else to say about the reason he goes.

Yes, he goes. He's just mentioned the primary reason. But the cross is more than that. It is also the pattern of life which his disciples, his followers are to imitate.

That their life and consequently our life should be shaped by the cross. Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last. And the servant of all.

At the cross of Jesus Christ, we see Jesus fulfilling that very command that he gave the disciples. In that verse. He becomes the last. He becomes the bottom of the pile.

He's treated like an old mattress that's taken to the tip and thrown away. Like dog excrement on the bottom of your shoe. Lower than the lowest of the low. Dying the death of a slave.

[7 : 35] Yet it's by being the last. That he serves the very people who are crucifying him. He serves them in his death. That service in death is why he's actually given first place in the kingdom.

Why every knee will bow to him. And disciples, followers of Jesus, were called to live and mirror the pattern of Jesus' life in our own.

Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last. And the servant of all. The disciples, as I mentioned before, they're arguing about who is the greatest.

Hadn't been long since they were arguing with the teachers of the law. You might have remembered from last week. Now they argue with one another. Who is the greatest? Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last.

You could re-read that as anyone who wants to be the greatest must be the very least. I'm a servant of all. Now that on its own, a statement like that does sound kind of abstract.

[8 : 40] What does it mean to be the very last, the very least? And so Jesus, for the disciples and for us, gives them concrete examples of what that might look like in their life.

And the first thing is to love the lowest in society. To love the lowly. In Roman and Jewish society, children did not have the same attention that they're given today.

They weren't viewed as something to adore and think they're lovely. They were viewed as insignificant. They were ignored. Another mouth to feed that couldn't yet contribute.

That couldn't provide for the rest of the family. Until they reached adulthood, they were a drain. Jesus sits with a child in his arms and points out that loving these ones is not only what Jesus tells us, but it is rewarded by God.

Look with me. Verse 37. Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.

[9 : 48] To welcome a child in the name of Jesus, what we see, the resultant clause at the end, is that you receive the living God. If you're welcoming them in his name.

You receive the living God by looking out for the lowliest at the time in society. It shows us that the living God, that Jesus Christ, views all people the same.

He doesn't show favouritism. Each person is made in the image of God. Young or old. Able or not. If you welcome the insignificant in society, in his name, it demonstrates that you understand that.

That you have God's perspective on every human life. That's what God does. He places the same value on every human life. They're made in his image. There is no hierarchy or pecking order.

Everyone's spiritual CV, when they're born, says made in the image of God. Now in 21st century Scotland, it isn't children.

[10 : 50] I think children probably come pretty high up as to the value that's placed in them. But what about the elderly? The ex-offender who comes out of prison?

The unborn. They are marginalised. That humanly speaking, can't actually give you anything or do anything for you.

And it's true of every group actually. Every group marginalises or looks down on a group that is different to them. What about us here? There might be groups of people that we'd be thinking, how would we respond if somebody like that came into the church?

What about somebody we've seen on the news that has far-right views that was involved in the riots? What if somebody like that walked into our church?

What about people who think differently about us with regards to sexuality and gender? What if somebody like that walked into the church? We all have groups that we think that we might be tempted to look down on.

[11 : 57] The rich, at times, not everyone who's rich, but there's a tendency for the rich to look down on people who benefit culture.

And yet you have the poor who also turn their nose up at the rich. When stood before God, there will be no pedestals.

The gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ, bridges the gap between people who are different. All welcomed in by Jesus. And we have that as part of our thing. We're a church for everyone.

Whether you're an ex-offender. Whether you've got a history of... I don't know. Whatever tainted history you have.

Whether you were involved in the riots and you've had far-right political views. They would be welcome here to hear the good news of Jesus. Whatever your background, there is nothing that can stop you from Jesus putting his hand upon you and calling you to himself.

[13 : 05] Because you're made in the image of God. Jesus doesn't want to exclude anyone to turn to him. And so he once expects us to welcome in and treat those who are different to us.

Those who, humanly speaking, couldn't give us anything. So that's the first group, the insignificant. The second group that comes to the picture are those that are doing the right thing.

But they don't belong to the disciples. This is dripping with irony. Teacher said, John, verse 38.

Teacher said, John, we saw someone driving out demons in your name.

And we told him to stop. Because he was not one of us. Now you might remember from last week. It wasn't so long ago. That the disciples couldn't drive out an evil spirit.

Because they didn't rely on Jesus. And here is a group, or one of the group, different to them, who can do what they couldn't. Presumably, what he's saying, it shows that he is relying on Jesus, whoever this bloke is.

[14 : 06] And the disciples stop him. Jesus stops his disciples from stopping him. Verse 39. For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me.

For whoever's not against us is for us. This group, whoever they are, are included because they have a commitment to Jesus' name. Now, I don't know what the disciples are thinking.

Maybe they had visions of cornering the exorcism market. I don't know. This is our turf. We're the chosen ones who do all the exorcisms that they couldn't do just a few days before.

Not that rabble over there. We're not letting them get in on our turf. Who do they think they are? They're not even one of us. There's a cliquiness about them. No, not one of us. You can't do this. It's jealousy, isn't it? It's envy at somebody who seems to have more of Jesus, in a sense. The desire to be greater than someone else they want to be greater.

[15:08] And it's attractive. It is attractive. You know, you ever get that feeling when you've had a nice pudding, nice cheesecake, and you know that there's one slice left in the fridge, and you know it's there, and you just think, oh, I just should.

It's weighing on your mind. Maybe I should go and just have that last piece of cheesecake before anyone else does. It's tempting to go and indulge that desire, isn't it? You want that last piece of cheesecake?

If you don't like cheesecake, then replace it with another pudding. You desire it, and you can't resist. That is what sin is like. That is what sin is like.

Whereas we should be thinking of sin rather as a rotting piece of old meat that's covered in blue bottles and maggots that stinks. And if you eat it, it'll make you sick.

That's what we should be thinking of it like. The desire to be great. Wouldn't it be brilliant that everybody thinks I'm great?

[16:11] It's like that Moorish. I'm wanting that piece of cheesecake. But it's a rotting carcass that if you eat will make you sick. When we hear of another church or ministry that's growing really quickly, we might think, why them and not us?

Why them? Superiority feels good. It's tempting to be consumed with what's going on with us and be inwardly focused. Jesus says whoever's not against us is for us.

Which means we can, and I'm thankful that we do, celebrate the work of other ministries and churches from other parts of Scotland and across the world.

Yeah, they'll be different. They'll be different in approach and attitude to church. They'll preach differently. They'll emphasise different things. But God is graciously working through his people and churches that are different to us.

What does it mean to be great? It means thinking of yourself last. Loving everyone like Jesus did. The marginalised and the insignificant. And loving the whole church.

[17:20] Those who are different to us. Loving the people who may be from a different group, but God is at work through them. So that's the first thing.

What does it mean to be great? Thinking of what? To aspire to living like Jesus. It's turning, actually, towards what Jesus is like. It's part of what it means to repent is becoming like him. But the process, if we think about repentance, of becoming like Jesus, it involves turning to the right way of living, away from what is wrong. But in the same moment, it means turning away from what is wrong, from sin.

And in the next thing that we're going to look at, Jesus' language is deeply shocking. Deeply shocking. That turning away from sin means being radical and serious with yourself.

It means being honest and ruthless with your own soul. When I was little, I was once reading whilst walking home from my uncle's house. And my dad kept saying, look, somewhere walking, can you put the book down?

[18:24] You're going to end up hurting yourself. And I ignored him and walked straight into a lamppost. And I had a massive bump on my head. I was crying my eyes out, had to be carried home.

And I still remember it as many years later. When you're walking, you do need to watch, don't you? Where you're going, what's in front of you. And if there is something, you either moved or change your steps so that you don't fall down.

Jesus says, get rid, get rid of the thing that causes you to stumble in your life. And the imagery is quite graphic. And it is, it's radical.

Verse 43. I'm going to read quite a few verses out here because it is, the repetition of it is really striking. Verse 43. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It's better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands and go into hell where the fire never goes out.

If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It's better for you to enter life crippled than to have two, three feet and be thrown into hell. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It's better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell.

[19 : 30] Where the worms that eat them do not die and the fire is not quenched. What's being described is repentance. It is turning away from sin.

He's not being literal and expecting them to actually maim themselves. He's expecting them to, yes, true repentance, ask for forgiveness, ask for the Holy Spirit to change them.

But then, by the power of the Spirit, cut out the thing that is actually bringing the temptation into real life. Taking action against it. It means that in the past, if you've had a significant problem with drink, it might mean cut out going to the pub.

If it's lust, it might mean putting blocks on your smartphone so that you can't look at things you're not supposed to. Or maybe even more radical, if it was such a problem, getting rid of a smartphone altogether and replacing it with an old Nokia.

If, when you look at social media, you get jealous, envious and discontent from looking at someone else's feeds and it breeds anxiety in your heart.

[20 : 37] Get rid of social media. Cut it out. Be radical. Because that's what Jesus is asking for. That is, you've turned away from sin but practically you're doing something which shows that the repentance has been true in your heart.

Be ruthless and radical for the sake of Jesus and for the state of your own soul. It's first in the heart but it's demonstrated with action. You choose how you walk and look at what path, what the future path might be if you continue walking in that way.

Cut it out. It might mean that you stick out in a crowd as you choose to live differently. People might think that's a bit OTT, isn't it? But Jesus doesn't think that.

Jesus doesn't think it's OTT. You can't actually be over the top for Jesus. Jesus knows that you're choosing him and putting him first.

Because Jesus doesn't say this so you can be the best version of you or live your best life today. He says it because he wants your life to glorify him and to glorify the living God by putting him as your first desire.

[21 : 46] It glorifies what he's doing in your life. People who knew you before you followed Jesus and then see you after. What has happened to them?

Something must have happened. Maybe there is something to this Christianity if there's such a dramatic impact on someone's life. Putting sin to death. Watching how you walk glorifies Jesus. We all stumble.

That's not the issue. It's how we get back up and turn away. And after, how will we walk once we've stumbled? Will we keep tripping over the same rock? The Holy Spirit gives the power to say no to sin and yes to Christ.

I tell you, I've never walked and read a book again. Because I don't want a bruised face. Spiritual stumbling leaves spiritual bruises.

Feel the pain. And don't trip over the same rock. If you keep stumbling in the same way and there's no desire to change, there is a warning, isn't there? It's a warning regarding your eternal future of what eternity might look like without God in your life.

[22 : 53] And it's pretty terrifying if I'm going to admit it. It's absolutely terrifying. The worms that eat them do not die and the fire is not quenched. It's a terrible image.

It's absolutely terrifying. It's like a box of maggots squirming like you see with fishing tackle. But feeding for eternity on the unrepentant soul.

That is grave. It is a grave picture. It is there to shock us. There's no two ways about it. It is there to sober us into what a future looks like for the unrepentant.

You're supposed to be thinking, my goodness. So that you turn afresh today. Turn afresh today. It might be years since the first time you turned to Jesus.

Maybe you never have. Whatever is causing you to stumble, to live a life apart from Christ, cut it out. Ask for forgiveness. Ask that Jesus' blood would pay for your sins.

[23 : 55] Ask Jesus to change your heart, to be like him, to follow him. And you can ask afresh today. It doesn't matter how many times you've asked. It doesn't mean if you've been repenting every day.

Repentance is what matters today. Ask afresh today. To turn away from sin and turn to Jesus.

Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last. And the servant of all.

That's what it means to be great. Anyone who wants to be great must be the very least. And the servant of all. And Jesus, who was great.

Who was great in heaven. Had all the greatness. Everything he desired in heaven. Who was great. Became the least. So we who actually are the least.

Might one day actually become great. Let's pray. Let's pray. Almighty God.

[24 : 57] God. The good news of Jesus is so glorious. It's so amazing. That you who. Who actually is truly great.

Became nothing. So that we who are actually nothing. One day become great. We thank you that that's the good news of the gospel. Because you take our sins away.

And you make us like yourself. You give us your righteousness. You make us like yourself. Each and every day you're making us more holy. More like your son. And so we give you thanks. That's true. So I pray that our lives would represent.

What you've actually already done. You've made us holy. In Jesus name. And we're becoming holy. We're becoming like the people you. We actually are. And so Jesus would you by the power of the spirit.

Would you. Would you. Chop off the bits of our lives. Which are just bearing no fruit. Which are actually bearing bad fruit. Would you chop them off. Would you help us to be radical and severe. Help us to take it seriously.

[25 : 58] But we're only. And I pray that. We'd repent fresh today. We'd turn away from sin. We'd turn to you. Knowing that you love us. And knowing that we love you. And that our future is secure in Jesus.

Not doing it out of place of fear. Or being scared. Or feeling guilty. Not doing it in a legalistic way.

But doing it from a place of love. But we do it knowing that we're already belonging to you.

We're already loved. And we're already. We're already changed to be like. And our future is secure.

We do it out of that place. Desiring what you desire. So that our lives are aligned. To what you want for us.

And so I pray. Bless you. I ask for your blessing. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.