

Ambition Not Always for Success

- As children, we learned that those with greater abilities often received preferential treatment.
 - Best players = 1st chosen + never cut
 - Pleasing personality = popular.
 - Beautiful and handsome = more opportunity
 - Smartest students = recognition/awards.
- Those of us without any of these things were often on the outside wistfully looking in.
- Some become scarred over these exclusions.
- Others long for and seek for something to bring it.
- It is an inverse “*pride of life*” of low self-esteem an ambition for power and dominance.
- Colors our thinking and affects our relationships.
- Sadly, some will bring this into the church.

Inverse “Pride of Life”

- *For three things the earth is perturbed, Yes, for four it cannot bear up: 22 For **a servant when he reigns**, A fool when he is filled with food, 23 A hateful woman when she is married, And **a maidservant who succeeds her mistress**. Pr. 30:21-23*
- *Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. 4 So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, **her mistress became despised in her eyes**. Gen 16:1, 4*
- Even the smallest amount of power can corrupt.

The Apostles

- *Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were **unlearned (uneducated) and ignorant (common / ordinary men)** Acts 4:13*
- What happened to Hagar could have happened to them. What they saw in their leaders.
- *They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'* Mt. 23:6-7
- Is this what they were seeking?

They Sought This Greatness

- *when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. 35 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."*

Mk. 9:33-36

- They sought the same dominance in the kingdom of heaven they saw in Israel.
- *He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, Lk 14:7*

What was it You Disputed

- Silence revealed either embarrassment or a fear Jesus would not approve: *“they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest.”*
- A good emotion channeled wrongly.
- Greek has for zeal and jealousy (*zelos*). Zeal – pull ourselves up; jealousy bring them down.
- Jesus completely reframes the emotion and goal.
- Greatness is attainable, *“If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”* This was contrary to all experience and desires

First = Last of All and Servant of All

- *“If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”*
- In Jesus’ kingdom, the greatest would place himself at the very bottom.
- Instead of seeking the benefits of being first, they must give those benefits to the least.
- The road to greatness leads to the bottom.
- All that we learned in our youth must be set aside
- **All that we think we know is wrong if it makes Jesus conclusion here seem strange.**
- Greatness comes through service to others

Jesus Created a Paradox

- Turned everything upside down and inside out.
- Purpose of greatness is to gain what greatness brings!
- In the kingdom of heaven, greatness gives the benefits of greatness to those who are least.
- All leaders must serve those they lead.
- Husbands / Fathers lead as servants giving what is best to those under them.
- Elders do not lord it over, but serve.

When the Greatest Serve Themselves

● *"Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? 3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. Ezek 34:2-5*

● *Fathers do not provoke your children to wrath*

● *Husbands love you wives and be not bitter.*

The Final Journey to Jerusalem

- James and John seek #1 and #2 position
- *Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.*
- *when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. Mk. 10:34-45*
- Just like kids on playground, in high school, on the job or in politics.
- They wanted to reach the top, but not to serve!
- Jesus identifies this as a trait of the Gentiles.

Mirroring the Gentiles

- *Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.*
- In every realm of rule among Gentiles, the goal is to “*lord it over*” and “*exercise authority.*”
- When we see this in our own government, work places, homes, schools and even in the church:
- It is a mark of Gentile / worldly thinking.
- This Gentile concept is what the apostles sought
- This is what happened in Corinth. Paul said it was carnal and condemned it.

Carnality of Worldly Greatness

- *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 1 Cor 3:1-4*

Cure of Worldly Greatness in All Forms

- All the hurts, sorrows and loss of our youth must come to an end. They hurt then, but now we understand.
- That's how Gentiles act. They were being petty and small. We can't respond like that or we are still among them:" petty & small. A better way:
- *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Phil 2:3-4*
- This is exactly what Jesus was trying to teach His apostles.

Greatness will Not be so Among You

- *Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

Mk. 10:42-45

- It is **NOT** wrong to desire to be great **to serve**
- It **IS** wrong to desire to be great **to BE served**
- The paradox (upside down) must become reality (rightside up).

Desire to Be First

- *And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.*
- For Jesus to see us as first, we must use our power, strength and abilities to lift the weaker
- We must give to all what Gentile rulers only wanted and kept only for themselves.
- The very things the apostles sought were the things that must be sacrificed and given to others in order to become truly great.

What does this look like

Spiritual Greatness

- Barnabas Sells Property
- The Apostle Paul
- Jesus emptied himself
- Moses the meekest in all the earth
- Samuel
- Jesus

Worldly Greatness

- Ananias & Sapphira
- Saul of Tarsus
- Corinth full of self
- Korah – you take too much on yourself
- Hophni & Phinehas
- Pharisees & Sadducees

An Ambition for Spiritual Greatness

- When greatness means giving up all that we once held dear, where do we stand?
- If true greatness is serving, sacrificing and giving to others, do we still want it?
- Until we can answer this clearly and fully understand it, the door to true spiritual greatness will remain closed to us.

Jesus gave His own Example

- *the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.*
- Every true Christian understands this.
- Every 1st day we remember He gave “*His life a ransom for many.*”
- He lived a life of service and sacrifice from the moment He gave up his glory and divine form. Jesus never used greatness to force others to serve. N never sought what Gentiles sought.
- He used His greatness to serve, bless and uplift those who were weak.

Assessment

- If greatness means service do we have the faith to want it?
- Assessing our attitude toward service are we great?
- Do we still carry the hurts and desires of our youth?
- Do we still feel the sting of being viewed as less
- Can we set that aside to become all things to all man and see ourselves as servants?