

Easter! So What?
Who is The Greatest?
Luke 22:24-30

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Text Introduction: Who is the greatest? Through the years you have grown accustomed to my question, “So What?” at the conclusion of my messages. I fell into this practice a few years ago as the result of making sure that every message ends on a note of action. As I routinely say, “We gather not so much for information, but for inspiration and transformation.”

As we journey toward Easter this year, we are going to pursue what I would call the ultimate “So What” preaching series. My preaching series through the week after Easter will be “Easter! So What?” We will be considering several questions surrounding the Easter accounts in the Bible. Some of the questions come from Jesus. Others questions come from the disciples. A few of the questions come from adversaries of Jesus like Pilate. Many of the questions are our questions. I think you will discover that every question impacts us. That is, all of the questions cause us to ask “So What?”

By the way, who will you invite to be with you this coming Easter Sunday? We need to be actively sharing the “So What” of Easter. Everything that we believe and all of our hope rests in the truth of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Our text today comes from Luke 22. You could also read the same story in Matthew 20 and Mark 10. I will explain why in just a moment, but let’s put the text in front of us now as we explore this Easter question: “Who is the greatest?”

Text: Then a dispute also arose among them about who should be considered the greatest. ²⁵ But he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who have authority over them have themselves called ‘Benefactors.’ ²⁶ It is not to be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever is greatest among you should become like the youngest, and whoever leads, like the one serving. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one at the table or the one serving? Isn’t it the one at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves. ²⁸ You are those who stood by me in my trials. ²⁹ I bestow on you a kingdom, just as my Father bestowed one on me, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom. And you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Introduction: Unless you are completely out of touch with our world you know that we have lost arguably the “greatest preacher” of our lifetime this week. Billy Graham died last Wednesday. Some have estimated that Graham preached to over 80 million people combined in his ministry. Three million people responded in making a decision at one of his crusades. I have seen it reported that 1200 people called the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association number on Wednesday alone to indicate their decision to trust Christ as Savior and request follow-up materials (or literature, as Graham often referred to such). What a legacy! What an inspiration! We could say indeed, “Greatness.” Interestingly though, the quality of his ministry admired by so many is that Graham himself would have never referred to himself as great.

Not so with the disciples in our text today. Their story is here in Luke. I easily could have shared this story from Matthew and Mark. Matthew, Mark, and Luke collectively are called the “Synoptic Gospels.”

If you have never heard this term before, literally this term means, “seeing together.” The term is used because Matthew, Mark, and Luke reported the same stories.

Synopsis of the Synoptics:

Sometimes these stories in the Gospels are absolutely verbatim. Sometimes these stories are told in just a bit different way. Don’t be alarmed by that. Our understanding of the events are enhanced by that.

In this particular story, we get a little different nugget from each of the Gospels.

In Matthew’s version, we get the nugget that James and John’s mother was involved in asking Jesus.

In Mark’s version, we get the nugget that the question came with the introductory comment, “Teacher, we want you to do whatever we ask you.” Can we just understand that we are always on pretty shaky ground when say to Jesus, “We want you to do whatever we ask you?”

In Luke’s version, we get the nugget that this happened after the sharing of the Passover meal. In other words, we are in fast forward motion to the cross. This timing element coming from Luke is of particular importance because in Luke 1:3, we understand that Luke had a more particular purpose than did Matthew and Mark to put down the events of Jesus’ life in chronological order.

So, let’s draw a couple of conclusions from this background that will help us for today.

1. The differences in the synoptic accounts are not contradictory, but rather complementary.
2. The disciples debated this matter of greatness on more than one occasion.

This attributes to some of the details perhaps being run together a bit. We have at least two accounts in each Gospel, but perhaps there were other times as well.

So, to just keep us in spot, let’s focus on the Luke passage, but know that we might draw from the accounts in other Gospels.

Four Big Ideas in this Text:

Before making application, I think it will be helpful to move this scene along noting four primary movements of the story.

Unbelievable Dispute about Greatness

That the disciples are having this discussion troubles us. That they had this conversation more than once troubles us further. To realize that at least two of the disciples involved their mother in the dispute troubles us even further. These are not kids. These are young adults to whom Jesus is entrusting the inauguration of His Kingdom and though they don’t know it, the implementation of the Church after His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. They should by now have a more Christlikeness about themselves. And, Jesus has just revealed to them His impending death.

Here are the wrong people having the wrong priorities at the wrong place in time.

It's like people in the Church having a dispute about who is the most important person, what is the more important ministry, or what are the best songs to sing while people all around us are dying and going to Hell. Oh...this passage does have something to say to us, doesn't it?

Unpopular Definition for Greatness

Notice that Jesus didn't answer their question, because their question had no merit. Jesus, instead, offered a completely different view of greatness.

Jesus defined greatness in wholly different terms than to what they were thinking. Jesus revealed that greatness in the eyes of God is the opposite of greatness in the eyes of the world.

Jesus defined greatness in terms of service or better yet, slavery.

The ancient world would have known the meaning of slavery. A slave was one who was owned by another and possessed no right except those given by the master. This kind of service to others is contradictory to our culture and to our nature. Our world is like that of the first century world described in verse 25. Our cultural and natural inclination is to lord over people. However, Jesus calls us to a raised standard of living in regards to our relationships with other people and with Him. Theologian J. I. Packer reflects upon modern Christianity using the symbol of a luxury of our day in his book, *Hot Tub Religion*. Packer writes:

The other day . . . as I sat there savoring hot tubness, cracking small jokes, adjusting to the feel of being bubbled over from all angles, it struck me that the hot tub is the perfect symbol of the modern route in religion. The hot tub experience is sensuous, relaxing, floppy, laid-back; not in any way demanding. . . but very, very nice, even to the point of being great fun.

Many today want Christianity to be like that and labor to make it so. The ultimate step, of course, would be to clear church auditoriums of seats and install hot tubs in their place. But if there were no more to our Christianity than hot tub factors, a self absorbed hedonism of relaxation and happy feelings, while dodging tough tasks, unpopular stances, and exhausting relationships—we would fall short of Biblical God-centeredness and cross-bearing life to which Jesus calls us, and advertise to the world nothing more than our own decadence.

Unprecedented Demonstration of Greatness

You will see this in Luke 22:27, but see it better in Mark's version. (Mark 10)

True servanthood is displayed by Jesus Himself. Jesus modeled for the disciples and for us the exact nature of service that He calls us. "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." (10:45) Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice—an unprecedented demonstration of greatness. He exhibited the ultimate nature of service. Jesus' act of service stands in great contrast to James and John who sought a special place of honor.

Unique Destiny for True Greatness

Then, this text takes a very surprising twist. After rebuking the disciples for their dispute, He revealed to them that they would be getting what they were asking for, but in a completely different way. We will reign with Jesus—all of us!

So What?

Seek Godly Greatness by

- **Seeking the Savior**

And

- **Seeking Servanthood**

Dr. Graham often said that the first thing he would do when he got to heaven was to ask, "Why me, Lord? Why did You choose a farm boy from North Carolina to preach to so many people, to have such a wonderful team of associates, and to have a part in what You were doing in the latter half of the twentieth century?" He would say that "only God knows the answer."

Now he knows the answer as well.

The only way to come to Jesus is the way that Billy Graham invited so many to come to Jesus. "Just as I am without one plea. . . I come." Are you willing to say that today? Putting aside whatever you might offer up as your greatness, you come to Jesus alone.