



True Greatness

In Matthew 20:25-27, Jesus states, “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.” Jesus makes these statements in response to a debate among His disciples over what position they could have in His kingdom. Jesus makes plain that greatness in His economy is measured far differently than the way the world measures it. The world considers as great the man who is in charge. Jesus calls it “exercising dominion” over others. In stark contrast, Jesus says, “But it shall not be so among you.” Genuine greatness from heaven’s perspective is found in serving. For one to be in the running for greatness, according to Jesus, he must be willing to be a “minister.” The word “minister” in verse 26 is the word “diakonia.” That is the word used in the New Testament for any general servant. It is from this word that we get the word “deacon.” From there, Jesus says (vs. 27), “and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.” The word translated “servant” is the word “doulos.” That is the word for a bond-slave. Note exactly what Jesus is communicating. If you want to be considered great by God, you must serve. But, if you would be “chief” of the ones who are considered great by God, (i.e. the greatest of the great), you must take a step down and be willing to be, not just any servant, but the lowest of the low, a bond-slave. A bond-slave was often an imprisoned individual who was forced to row on a ship, chained to his own individual oar. Each time the master of the vessel clapped his hands or struck two pieces of wood together in rhythm, the bond-slave would plunge his oar into the water in obedience to the shipmaster’s command. A bond-slave had no rights, no recourse, and no ability to resist what he was told to do. Paul calls himself this repeatedly at the beginning of his epistles when he refers to himself as “Paul the servant (bond-slave) of Jesus Christ.”

In Joseph Petro’s fascinating book, *STANDING NEXT TO HISTORY*, he repeatedly reminisces of the greatness of former president Ronald Reagan. As the Secret Service agent in charge of Reagan’s protective detail, Petro mentions numerous incidents where the former President took time to speak to children, was gracious to a fault and genuinely loved and desired to serve people who were his inferiors. While a student in college, Reagan, then Governor of California, came for a visit to the college I was attending. Prior to delivering one of the most stirring speeches I have ever heard, Reagan was escorted onto the college campus via a back entrance. Just as he and his large entourage entered the campus, an elementary school class, returning from recess, stood at attention as the Governor, soon to become President, passed. With no cameras to see it,

and no press to record it, the President stopped his limousine, stepped to the curb, tussled the hair and shook the hands of each of those elementary school children. I was impressed then, that I was standing in the presence of true greatness. Here was a man, who by his gracious act, was gaining no benefit of a staged photo op. He was simply responding out of the kindness of his heart to a group of “inferior” children. That is how true greatness always responds.

In a world gone mad with corporate climbing and corporate corruption, truly great leaders are needed. I trust that you will not fall prey to the world’s distorted view of greatness. Look to the Scriptures and consider what Jesus said was truly great. May you not only observe what he called “great”, but may you live in such a way that you will be considered great, by Him.

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