

THE DISPUTE OVER GREATNESS

LUKE 22:24–30

Introduction

Men desire recognition, prestige, position, honour, power and authority. The disciples had such desires. Jesus used their power struggle to teach the world a much needed lesson, a lesson that speaks directly and forcibly to every person.

- I. The disciples argued over position and power (v. 24).
- II. The world's attitude about greatness (v. 25).
- III. The Lord's attitude about greatness (vv. 26-27).
- IV. The Lord's encouragement to serve faithfully (vv. 28-30).

I. *Luke 22:24 Division, Strife, Position*

The disciples argued. Note three facts.

1. The word *dispute* (philoneikia) means being eager and ready to argue and contend; being alert to strive for one's position. It conveys the idea of giving no ground, of standing up no matter what, of being stubborn, of resisting regardless of circumstances.
2. The disciples were still thinking about an earthly kingdom. They thought Jesus was about to lead an uprising against the Romans and free Palestine, establishing the Messiah's kingdom in Israel. From Israel the Messiah was to rule and reign over the whole earth on behalf of God.

Look at the reply that Jesus gave to the two disciples sent by John (Lk. 7:21-23). After ministering to the people, Jesus turned to the two disciples and told them to go tell John what they had *seen* and *heard*. Note two things.

- a. John was questioning Jesus' Messiahship. The reports he had heard said nothing about Jesus' mobilizing the people into a great army. Jesus was not plotting the strategy to free Israel from Roman domination and to set up the Kingdom of God. John had heard nothing about the Day of the Lord, about the Messianic fire of judgment, about cities falling and sinners being judged. And his time was running out. He would be tried and executed soon. The answer Jesus sent back to John was a totally new concept of Messiahship. It is God's idea of Messiahship, radically different from man's idea. It was a demonstration and proclamation of salvation, of God's care and love for persons.
 - b. Jesus was saying that His power and concern (love) were the power and concern *predicted* for the Messiah, and both were unlimited. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Messiah.
3. The disciples were in the upper room *jockeying* for position. As in most societies, the highest in position sat on the right of the host and the next highest on the left. The highest in position continued to alternate between the right and left until everyone was seated.
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Since Jesus was about to set up His kingdom, now was the time to seize the positions of rule and power in His kingdom. Now was the time to assume the seats of honour and authority in His presence. The disciples were trying to assure themselves of key seats and positions in His government.

II. *Luke 22:25 Worldly Greatness*

The world's attitude about greatness involves two key concepts.

1. There is the concept that greatness is holding authority over people or *lording it over* people: holding position and authority, influence and power, rank and dominion, money and property. Men seek position and wealth for the sake of power. They want to rule or manage people, exercise authority over them, and control their lives.
2. There is the concept of being known and called a *benefactor* (euergetai), a man who gives and helps others.

Note the word *call*. The worldly benefactor wants to be known and called a benefactor, recognized and honoured for his help and contribution. He desires to be known as a great man, a man who is generous, thoughtful, concerned and honourable.

Mat 23:12 “*For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*”

John 5:44 “*How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?*”

Psa 10:3 *He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD.*

Prov 25:14 *Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give.*

Isa 47:10 *You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, ‘No one sees me.’ Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, ‘I am, and there is none besides me.’*

Oba 1:4 “*Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,*” declares the LORD.

III. *Luke 22:26–27 True Greatness*

The Lord's attitude about greatness. The Lord rejected the world's attitude of greatness. True greatness does not seek to hold authority nor to lord it over people; it does not seek position for the sake of authority and power, nor to give and help for the sake of being known and called a benefactor. True greatness is not self-centred and selfish, not worldly-minded.

Note a crucial point: Jesus did not forbid a man from holding a position of greatness or authority. What He was doing was giving instructions to the person who is “greatest among you” (v. 26). The Lord's attitude of greatness involves two key concepts.

1. There is the concept of acting as the *youngest*, that is, of taking the last seat, of assuming the lowliest position. In the ancient world, the younger always honoured and gave way to the older. Age was looked up to and honoured. Jesus was saying that the person who was truly great was the person who took the lowest seat and last place, the person who did not seek the recognition and honour, the credit and esteem, because he held some position or had done some special work or made some unusual gift or given extraordinary help.

Luke 14:10 *“But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honoured in the presence of all your fellow guests.”*

Rom 12:3 *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

James 4:10 *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

1 Pet 5:5-6 *Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

2. There is the concept of acting as a servant. The chief person is to serve. The picture Jesus painted is descriptive. The truly great man will serve others just as a table waiter serves the guests at a banquet. The table waiter in Jesus’ day was a *bond-slave* (doulos). The bond-slave was bound every moment of his life, always serving, no matter the hour or call or difficulty (see *Slave*, Rom. 1:1).

The truly great person looks for people to help and for ways to help them, whether at work, home, play, or church. He is always seeking those who need a visit, care, attention, company, food, clothing, shelter, money. He seeks for the sake of ministering (see Mt. 25:34-40).

Mat 10:42 *“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”*

Phil 2:3-4 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

3. There is the concept of following the example of the Lord. The follower is to be like his Lord, yet he is to humble himself and serve and minister to men. Of course, the man who sits at the table is greater than the man who serves. He holds a higher position, but he is not to *act* like it, lording it over the servant. He is to behave like the

Lord, serving and ministering to men, even to the servants who are waiting upon him. (See *Mission of Jesus Christ*, Mk. 10:45 for three supreme ways Christ served.)

John 13:5 *After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

Eph 6:7 *Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men.*

Phil 2:5-8 *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!*

MARK 10: 45 AMBITION AND PURPOSE OF JESUS CHRIST

“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.” Mark 10:45

The supreme act of ambition is seen in Jesus Christ. He set His face like a flint to accomplish His purpose. This is seen in three supreme acts.

1. The supreme humiliation. This is the act of coming to earth: “The Son of Man came.” The incarnation is the Son of God becoming man. To most men, mankind is the summit of creation on this earth. But within the span and scope of the universe and before God, man is nothing – not to an honest and thinking man. He is as a microbe on a speck of sand floating through what seems to be infinite space and lasting only about seventy years if he can.

In all reality, for God to become a member of so low a race of beings is unimaginable. It is the most humiliating act possible.

2. The supreme mission. There is the act of serving: “[He] did not come to be served, but to serve.” He was treated as the lowest by the men to whom He came. Impossible, yet true! They gave Him no place to lay His head (Mt. 8:20; Lk. 9:58), and only three years after publicly announcing that He had come to save them, they killed Him. Now note: Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords, yet He secured his kingdom by becoming a servant and a slave to all. He did not “lord it” over men. He ministered to and served men. Because He became the servant to all, God has now highly exalted Him to the highest place (Phil. 2:9).
3. The supreme price. This is the act of giving His life “a ransom for many”. □

IV. *Luke 22:28–30 Faithfulness in Service*

The Lord's encouragement to serve faithfully.

Jesus gave assurance to the disciples who proved themselves. The disciples who *continued* with Jesus, who were faithful, standing by Him and sticking to Him. were given a great promise. The promise was a covenant. Note the word "conferred." The promise was set and fixed in eternity. It could not be revoked nor changed in any form or fashion. The covenant was twofold.

1. The faithful disciple is to be a citizen of the Lord's kingdom (See *Kingdom of God*, Mt. 19:23-24). The picture is that of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. The Lord's Supper pictures a great supper, a glorious promise (v. 16-18). Note carefully the promise of Jesus. He said He was going to eat and drink again when all things were fulfilled "in the kingdom of God." Jesus was *promising* to celebrate the Supper with His followers in the future. Believers shall sit down with Christ at the great *Marriage Feast of the Lamb* (see Mt. 20:1-16; 20:2). It is the promise of sitting with Christ in His glorious kingdom, of being a part of the new heavens and earth, of being perfected and living forever.
2. The faithful disciple is to rule (see *Reward*, Lk. 22:30). ■

LUKE 22: 30 REWARD

"So that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." **Luke 22:30**

Jesus said that the disciples would be rewarded with twelve thrones, each one governing one of the twelve tribes of Israel. When are they to govern? "At the renewal of all things" (Mt. 19:28). When the new order of things shall be set up under the rule and reign of Christ. But when is the new order of things to be? There are two possible answers: either the millennial reign of Christ (See *Kingdom of God*, Mt. 19:23-24; see Rev. 20:4-6), or the new heavens and earth (Rev. 21:1f; see 1 Cor. 15:23-28).

There are three passages where Christ dealt with the renewal as predicted here.

Mat 19:28 *Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

Mat 20:21, 23 *"What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."... Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."*

Luke 22:28-30 “*You are those who have stood by me in my trials. 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 fulfilment of this promise seems to be the Messianic kingdom or millennial reign of Christ on earth. This seems to be the way Christ’s promise to Israel will be fulfilled.

Isa 1:26 “*I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.*”

Note three things.

1. Some commentators find great difficulty in saying there is ever again to be a distinction between Jew and Gentile, for Christ came to bring peace between all men, breaking down the wall of partition between all. They say that the great weight of Scripture is opposed to there being a distinction between Jew and Gentile again. This interpretation simply says that when Christ returns, that is it: He sets up His *eternal reign and rule forever*. Therefore, the apostles are to rule and reign over the church, spiritual Israel, the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:15-16; see Rom. 2:28-29).

2. Jesus said He will reward the disciples with *a particular honour*. Why? The disciples believed and followed Christ in the embryo stage of Christianity. They adhered to their belief and endured in the face of unbelievable odds.

=> Imagine standing before a man who looked like all other men, merely a man, and believing that man to really be the *Son of God*.

=> Imagine clinging to and continuing to follow Christ when everyone else turned away from Him (see Jn. 6:67).

=> Imagine following immediately upon the heels of the risen Lord and being instantly responsible for reaching the world. (No wonder God had to plan for His Spirit to infill the disciples and to live within our bodies as He does. See 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19-20.)

=> Imagine continuing on and on, trying to be obedient and to reach the world for Christ, despite unbelievable odds.

=> Imagine confronting and enduring through unbelievable persecution launched from both an immoral government and a fierce religion.

The disciples were not only responsible for more and faced more than most of us will ever know; they were responsible for and faced more than we can ever imagine (see 1 Cor. 4:9-13; 2 Cor. 11:24-28).

3. The disciples were not the only ones to be rewarded. Every true follower of Christ will be greatly rewarded (Mt. 19:29; Lk. 16: 1-13). □

MATHEW 19:23–24 THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter enter the kingdom of God.” Mathew 19:23-24

The Kingdom of Heaven evidently means the same thing as the Kingdom of God, eternal life and salvation. The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God are interchanged when Jesus says, “it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 19:23) or “Kingdom of God” (Mt. 19:24). Eternal life (Mt. 19:26) and salvation (Mt. 19:25) belong to the very same concept. Eternity and salvation, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, is the very subject being discussed in Mt. 19:16-30. Having eternal life, being saved or entering into the Kingdom of God or of Heaven is more difficult for a rich man than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

The Kingdom of Heaven and of God is revealed in four different stages throughout history.

1. There is the spiritual kingdom that is at hand; it is present right now (Mt. 4:17; 12:28).
 - a. The present kingdom refers to God’s rule and reign and authority in the lives of believers.

Eph 1:18-23 *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

Phil 2:5-11 *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the*

name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Col 1:13 *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.*

- b. The present kingdom is offered to the world and to men in the person of Jesus Christ.
- c. The present kingdom must be received as a little child.

Mark 10:14,15 *When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."*

- d. The present kingdom is experienced only by the new birth.

John 3:3 *In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*

- e. The present kingdom is entered now and must be received now.

Mat 21:31 *"Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you."*

Mark 10:15 *"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."*

- f. The present kingdom is a spiritual, life-changing blessing.

Rom 14:17 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

- g. The present kingdom is to be the first thing sought by believers.

Mat 6:33 *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

- 2. There is the professing kingdom that is also in this present age. It refers to the people who profess Christianity in every generation. It pictures the imperfect state of the Kingdom of Heaven or professing Christianity, what professing Christianity is like between Christ's first coming and His return. This imperfect state is what is called "the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 13:1-52, esp. 11)

Mat 13:24-25 *Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away."*

3. There is the millennial kingdom that is future. It is the actual rule of Christ or the government of Christ that is to come to this earth for a thousand years.

a. The millennial kingdom is the kingdom predicted by Daniel.

Dan 2:44 *“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.”*

Dan 7:18, 22, 27 *But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever — yes, for ever and ever, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favour of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.*

b. The millennial kingdom is the kingdom promised to David.

2 Sam 7:12, 16 *“When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”*

Psa 89:3-4 *You said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, ‘I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.’”*

Zec 12:8 *On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them.*

c. The millennial kingdom is the kingdom pictured by John.

Rev 20: 4-6 *I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.*

4. There is the perfect kingdom of the new heaven and earth that is future.

- a. The eternal kingdom is the rule and reign of God in a perfect universe for all eternity.

John 14:1-3 *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

1 Cor 15:24 *Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.*

2 Pet 3:10-13 *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

Rev 21:1 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.*

- b. The eternal kingdom is the perfect state of being for the believer in the future.

1 Cor 15:50 *I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*

Rev 21:4-5 *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*

- c. The eternal kingdom is an actual place into which believers are to enter sometime in the future.

Mat 8:11 *I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.*

- d. The eternal kingdom is a gift of God that will be given in the future.

Luke 12:32 *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.” ■*