

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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Jesus Came to Serve

Mark 10:35-45

Key verse: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

“Caution: Value System Being Overturned!”

Such might be the heading to this episode in the life of Jesus and his disciples. In response to a question from two of his disciples, Jesus set the *standard for greatness in God’s kingdom*—a standard that is in stark contrast to the world’s value system.

When James and John tried a power grab, seeking positions of prestige and power for themselves (vv. 35-37), Jesus told them: “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (v. 38). The “cup” and the “baptism” referred to the suffering and death that Jesus would willingly accept on his way to the cross.

Cavalierly, even arrogantly, James and John responded, “We are able” (v. 39).

Jesus then said, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared” (vv. 39-40). With this reply, Jesus acknowledged that his disciples would indeed have a part in his sufferings. He also told James and John that power positions in the coming kingdom of God were not his to give out. That job belongs to God the Father.

Verse 41 is intriguing because it indicates that James and John were not the only disciples with a power problem. “When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.” This verse suggests that the other ten disciples were likely jealous of James and John and probably wanted those “glory” positions for themselves!

Jesus realized that all twelve of his disciples needed a lesson in kingdom ways. So, he called together the entire group and said to them: “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (vv. 42-45).

With this statement, Jesus set the standard for greatness in God's kingdom—not the egocentric pursuit of prestige and power but *humble and loving service*. In this counter-cultural approach to life, Jesus himself is our model: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

The twelve disciples, like us, didn't “get it” right away. They would receive another great lesson one night shortly before Jesus' crucifixion. As they gathered there with Jesus to celebrate the Passover Feast, Jesus got up from the supper table, wrapped a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin, and then washed the disciples' feet. It was a task for a servant to do, and it is significant that none of the twelve had offered to do it.

When Jesus had washed the feet of each of his disciples, he said to them: “You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:13-15).

The twelve disciples didn't get it at first. They were too immersed in the world's standard of “me, me, me.” Slowly but surely, Jesus kept teaching and modeling God's standard for greatness, not the egocentric pursuit of prestige and power but *humble and loving service*.

I wonder if you and I “get it.” Are we easily offended when people fail to recognize and praise us? Are we jealous when others get more attention and recognition than us? Are we willing to serve when nobody else knows about it or gives us credit? To be a true servant, like Jesus, will mean letting God “crucify” our self-centered approach to life and to service.

Helen Rosevere, a medical missionary in Africa, was the only doctor in a large, busy hospital. The demands and pressures had made Helen impatient and irritable with her fellow workers. Finally, one of the African pastors said, “Helen, please come with me.” He drove Helen to his house and told her that she was going to have a spiritual retreat, two days of solitude and prayer. She was to pray until God gave her an “attitude adjustment.”

Helen prayed all night and the next day, but her prayers seemed to be going nowhere. Finally, she confessed her lack of progress to her pastor friend. The pastor drew a long straight line in the dirt. “That is your problem, Helen,” he said. “There is too much ‘I’ in your service.” Then the pastor added, “I have noticed that often you take a coffee break and hold the hot coffee in your hands waiting for it to cool.” Then he drew another line across the first one. “Helen, from now on, as the coffee cools, ask God, ‘Lord, cross out the “I” and make me more like you.’”

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Outside the home of an African pastor, Helen Rosevere “got it”! Greatness in God’s kingdom comes through humble service, and joyful service comes when we let the Lord cross “I” out!

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