

## Adult Bible Class: August 11, 2024 – “Who is the Greatest?”

What does the GOAT mean? What prize fighter was famous for proclaiming, “I am the greatest”? In our culture today, what makes a person “great”?

What did Jesus say about greatness? Matt. 23:11-12. 11) *The greatest among you will be your servant. 12) For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*

The apostles struggled with which of them would be the greatest in Jesus’ kingdom.

Mark 9:33-34. 33) *They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” 34) But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.”*

Jesus had even told them in Matt. 19:28 that they would have places of prominence in heaven – *“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.”* What more did they want?

Table Time: James and Johns’ request of Jesus

Matt 20: 20-28. 20) *Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons (James and John) came to Jesus with her sons and kneeling down, asked a favor of him. 21) “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.” 22) “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” “We can,” they answered. 24) When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. 25) Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26) Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27) and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – 28) just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

The above (also found in Mark 10: 35-45) happened after Jesus’ teachings on how God looks at greatness:

Matt 18: 1-4. 1) *At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” 2) He called a little child and had him stand among them. 3) And he said, “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4) Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*

What had just occurred the previous day that probably prompted the disciples to argue and ask about being the greatest in His kingdom? (Luke 9:28 & 37) Who was with Jesus on that occasion? Many scholars have stated that these three were in Jesus’ “inner circle”.

What do you think the disciples were thinking? Had they not been listening to what Jesus said about greatness? How did the other ten react when they heard James’ and Johns’ request of Jesus?

So, why did Jesus choose these 12 ordinary men? Had they shown any signs of greatness? Paul gives us an insight in his first letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 1: 26-29): 26) *“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27) But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28) He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, 29) so that no one may boast before him.”*

Why does God choose “ordinary” people for His mission?

Let's look closer at James and John:

- They were fishermen as was Andrew and Peter and possibly some of the others
- They were with Jesus on four of his most notable occasions. What were they?
  - 1) Mark 5:37
  - 2) Matt. 17:1
  - 3) Mark 13:3
  - 4) Mark 14:33
- Mark 3:17 and Luke 9:51-56 gives us an insight into their personalities. How would you describe them based on these scriptures?
- In the OT, what prophet witnessed fire coming down from heaven? (2 Kings 1:10-12). What was the major difference between the OT "fire from heaven" and what James and John asked of Jesus?
- How did Jesus respond to their request? Did he kick them out of the group?
- James was the first to be \_\_\_\_\_. Acts 12:2
- John became known as the Apostle of \_\_\_\_\_. His epistles show that Jesus had transformed him into a man of love and tenderness. In I John 4:7-12, 19-21 he used the word love 20 times.

Based on Luke 22:24-30, had the disciples finally understood by the time of the Last Supper what greatness meant in God's kingdom? Why not? A possible reason may be found in Luke 24:45

### Group Time:

Think about the failings and weaknesses of the 12:

- Peter disowned knowing Jesus (Matt 26:69-75)
- James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan town that wouldn't welcome them in (Luke 9: 51-56) and they wanted to sit at Jesus' right and left hands in His kingdom.
- John was against a man who was ministering in Jesus' name because he was not one of their group (Mark 9:38).
- Matthew was a despised tax collector
- Simon the Zealot was most likely a terrorist, a group that believed in violence against the Roman government. Typically, would Matthew and Simon the Zealot have gotten along?
- Thomas, despite Jesus telling them he would rise again, doubted that He had when told so by his fellow brothers in the faith.
- Judas Iscariot stole money from the group's treasury (John 12:6) and betrayed Jesus, when Jesus knew that he would when he chose him to be a part of the group.

Except for Judas Iscariot, think about what these men did after Jesus' death and resurrection. Traditions say all but John died as martyrs for their faith. And John, despite being someone who showed intolerance, elitism and a lack of love became known as the "Apostle of Love".

John MacArthur says this in his book, Twelve Ordinary Men: "When they (the 12) do come to the foreground, it is often to manifest doubt, disbelief, or confusion. Sometimes we see them thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think. Sometimes they speak when they ought to remain silent and seem clueless about things they ought to have understood. Sometimes they exhibit more confidence in their own abilities and their own strengths than they should. So, their shortcomings and weakness show up more often than their strengths."

Who does that remind you of? Does this give you any comfort and if so, why?