
Seeing True Greatness

Mark 10:32-11:11

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Introduction Seeing true greatness is what we were made for. To look upon the magnificence of God not cringingly but confidently is the ultimate hope and joy in life. To be taken aback by His beauty – to relish His righteousness – to be glad about His glory is what we were created to enjoy. But there is a serious problem.

We settle for substitutes (cf. Rom.1:23-25). Instead of His grandeur we excite our hearts in gadgets. Instead of His holiness we are content in human happiness. Instead of being dazzled by divine attributes we are wowed with what we have (cf. Mk.10:17-22). Perhaps this could not be illustrated more dramatically than recently on St. Patrick's Day. (story of Cleveland Cavs.)

Transition:

There it was – greatness paraded before 21,000 sets of eyes. We saw it. We sensed the presence of power. We concluded that this must be true greatness. We thrilled. We lauded. We applauded. The much-admired, highly praised 21 yr. old (Labron James) was on center stage and most concluded that we were seeing true greatness.

As the boys and I sat in row 5 looking up to 7'3" human beings and looking around at richly dressed human beings and listening to ear-ringing celebration of human beings it occurred to me. We people of this planet have two objects on which to set our gaze; 1) omnipotent opulence 2) Impotent opulence. We either look upon well-dressed incapable, insufficient and inept objects and conclude that we are seeing true greatness. Or we look upon the suffering Servant (Jesus Christ) and worship Him. This makes clear the battlefield in life. What type of greatness will grip you? Human greatness or Jesus Christ?

To be able to answer the question "Are you seeing true greatness" let's think briefly together over Palm Sunday and Mark 10:32-11:11.

Seeing True Greatness

The context for our passage this morning is shaped by the prophecy of the passion of Jesus Christ. In v.32-34, we come across Jesus telling his disciples what must come to be. According to Mark's gospel, this is the third and final time he will foretell of his death, burial and resurrection.

One command is found in these verses. Applied to his disciples and applied to us this morning the imperative is found in v.33 – "See". That is the command. Jesus Christ frames the next three episodes with this one command. He tells those who follow him *to see* (that is; to behold, perceive, carefully consider; interpret well what you are about to witness).

Now for our purposes this morning, I'm merely going to outline this passage for us in order to prepare us for the Lord's Table in order for us to see true greatness.

What follows Christ's prophecy of His passion are three episodes to narrate three types of people. Each group we come across will have true greatness pass before their eyes. The question is: Do they see true greatness?

Happens not when it is measured by human standards (10:35-45)

The first group is the twelve disciples. These are his hand-picked disciples that have been with him now for over three years. As true greatness goes before them (32) and talks with them (33) what do we notice as readers (read v. 35-45)?

What we notice in these verses is that *seeing true greatness happens not when it is measured by human standards*.

Evidenced in

This is evidenced by:

Selfish ambition and rivalry with little thought of sacrificial service for others

James & John (35-40)

James and John wanted to be made much of. In their self-adoring and Christ-ignoring disposition they asked Jesus to allow them to sit in the most prominent places at the Great Marriage Banquet at the end of the ages (see Rev.19:6-10). They did see Christ as the long awaited Lord who would go to Jerusalem to restore the glory of the fallen throne of David. But their question betrays the notion that he would go into Jerusalem and fulfill messianic prophecy without suffering. Though the sufferings are profoundly different from each other, both Christ and His followers must undergo suffering before they enjoy glory. This is made clear in the two symbols of the cup (representing judgment [14:24] and baptism (meaning to be immersed in suffering [Lk.12:50]).

Their question of rank involved selfish ambition and an inflated understanding of their own position.

The Ten (41-45)

When The Ten overheard what James and John were vying for, they became indignant. Rivalry and jealousy break onto the scene. Out of their hearts came all sorts of contentions for greatness; a greatness measured not by the gospel standards but by human standards (seen plainly in how Jesus views them; v.42-44). Jesus contrasts them and their views by summarizing His identity and mission. This is found in v.45 (a key verse in the entire book of Mark).

Both James and John and the Ten demonstrate that *seeing true greatness happens not when it is measured by human standards*.

Happens when it is seen through the eyes of faith (10: 46-52)

The second group we come in contact with is represented by one person. The setting is eighteen miles northeast of Jerusalem. Just south of the old city of Jericho (the great city that came crashing down) we find the first century Jericho. This city was built by Herod

as the site for his magnificent winter palace. Its greatness was known throughout the region for its beauty and amazing structural design.

With that as a backdrop we find a person named Bartimaeus. He is a nobody. He has no money. He is not prominent. He is not a go-to man. He is a blind beggar. What does the writer of Mark want his readers to conclude as they read v.46-52? (let's read the vv.)

Evidenced in

I love this paragraph in the Bible! This scene embodies the truth that *seeing true greatness happens when it is seen through the eyes of faith*. This is made evident by noticing Bartimaeus.

Crying out to Christ for mercy and sight

First we notice him crying out to Christ for mercy. The Bible says that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. Bartimaeus undoubtedly heard about Jesus of Nazareth. His relentless crying of "Son of David" reflects his conviction that he believed that Jesus was the Messiah (cf. Isa.11:1ff; Jerr.23:5f; Eze.34:23f).

His request to see also reflects his conviction that Jesus is the Christ who fulfills Isa.35:4-5; 61:1. The crowd cannot see true greatness for they are rebuking him to silence him. But undeterred, Bartimaeus must hear Jesus call for him. And for him Christ did call.

Coming to Christ expectantly for mercy and sight

Notice how Bartimaeus came when he heard Jesus calling for him. "throwing off his cloak" and "sprang up" are descriptions of a man who has confident and joyous trust in Christ. It's as though he recalls the words of Isaiah 29:18-19 "In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel"

Carrying on with Christ by following Him on the way

The last bit of evidence for the reader to conclude that Bartimaeus truly sees true greatness is in his actions that follow his sight. He is found in v.46 as one who was "sitting by the way". After given his sight Bartimaeus now is seen as following Christ on the way. Eyes opened to glory will motivate the legs to walk the way; a way leading to glory that passes through suffering and sacrifice.

The healing of Bartimaeus displays the identity of Christ as the long awaited Messiah. It also displays how one truly sees true greatness. It is a gift of faith by God through His Son Jesus Christ. *Seeing true greatness happens when it is seen through the eyes of faith*.

The unveiling of Jesus' majesty continues in the passage known as The Triumphal Entry (11:1-11). The clues of His greatness are everywhere. V.1 talks about the Mount of Olives (an allusion to Zech.14 and the great coming of the Messiah). V.1-6 have almost redundant descriptions that point the reader to Gen.49:8-12; Zech.9:9; all of which reveal the true significance of Jesus' greatness. V.8 describes the way a king would be welcomed as noted in 2Kings 9:11ff. V.10 quotes Ps.118:26 as a celebration of the coming King. Here it is! Nine verses are thickened with allusions from the O.T. to make clear that the Messiah is near.

The clear point should be clear by now. True greatness is on center stage. Does the nation of Israel see it? V.10 is a commentary on v.9. Their understanding of Ps.118 is that it's accurate but it's not current. The prophecies of Ps.118 according to the crowd are not fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Otherwise why would they conclude by saying "Hosanna IN THE HIGHEST. In other words, "Save us, oh you who dwell in the highest". Jesus, who is right under their nose, is unnoticed. Do they see his greatness? Look at his fan fare in v.11.

The passage shifts from being loud and many to lonely and few. The point made is clear. True greatness was not seen by the nation of Israel. Sight comes from Christ.

The Lord's Table and Mark 10:45

Conclusion

As we prepare to serve the Lord's Table we are reminded from this text that the reversal of all human greatness was achieved when Jesus came, not to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many. (call for men who will assist serving the Lord's Table).

In Mark 10:45 the death of Jesus is presented as his service to God and as a vicarious death for many. Each of the components seen in this verse will function as a guide for our time around the Lord's Table.

- The Son of Man came... (a messianic mission; see 2:17)
 - The whole need of a substitute to die of our behalf is made plain by noticing the disciples. Filled with selfishness and demonstrating rivalry are his disciples. V.35-45 is the material from which he fashioned the church.
 - Mark in his gospel introduced the messianic mission in 2:17 by saying "*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners*".
- To serve...
 - A talk over how his life was focused on serving people. A talk on how this life was ultimately a sacrificial service to his Father.
- To give His life a ransom...
 - Due to this ransom we are freed from the cruelty of sin, Satan and the awful and ultimate consequence of rebellion. The ultimate captivity however from which we need release is the final judgment of God (Rom.2:2; Rev. 14:7).
 - This ransom was not just how he lived his life. This ransom was the free giving of his life in death. He freely offered his life as an offering to his Father on behalf of the sins of many.
- For many... (particular atonement)