

## “A Kingdom Secret”, #1

**A KINGDOM SECRET:** The road to greatness is \_\_\_\_\_.

**Mark 10:32-34** And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

The disciples are shocked at the predictions of Jesus regarding the upcoming trip to Jerusalem: *arrest, a death sentence, "to the Gentiles," ridicule, torture, execution ...* And then after three days, *resurrection! (???)*

**Mark 10:35-37** And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

And somehow, on the heels of this shocking prediction, James and John arrive at the mutual conviction that they are his two main men (Brothers; "sons of thunder") ... and in their minds there is only one question left to sort out: *which of us is the greater of the two: the Lord's RIGHT HAND guy?*

**Compare Mark 9:30-34** → The second time he spoke of his suffering and death and resurrection! (Maybe because the first time, he concluded with a statement about him coming "in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." Perhaps the only part they remembered, and/or understood! Cf. 9:32)

They approach Jesus and make their request: *Do for us what we ask!*

**Mark 10:38-41** Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "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." And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

This was not as strange a request back then as it seems now ...

**HISTORICAL NOTE:** "Before Christ," pride was considered a virtue and humility was a disgrace!

e.g. **Aristotle:** *megalopsuchia* [variously translated as proper pride, greatness of soul and magnanimity] "Now the man is thought to be **proud** who thinks himself worthy of great things, being worthy of them ...pride implies greatness, as beauty implies a goodsized body, and little people may be neat and well-proportioned but cannot be beautiful. Pride, then, seems to be a sort of crown of the virtues; for it makes them greater, and it is not found without them. Therefore it is hard to be truly proud; for it is impossible without nobility and goodness of character."

(from *The Nicomachean Ethics*)

So the request wouldn't have sounded so strange back then. But what WAS strange and even shocking was the response of Jesus: a strangeness we can hardly notice, let alone feel, because the life and words of Jesus have changed the world; because of the degree to which the kingdom of God has come to the earth. But in the mind of the people of those days, to be someone's servant was to be less than human.

**Mark 10:42-45** And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In its day, this was a totally new concept of human greatness: "greatness" defined as being a good slave! (Cf. 9:35 ... They HAD heard it once before!)

Pride a bad thing! Humility a good thing! Here is a secret that turned the world upside down (actually, right side up!) – that will turn your world upside-down!

**A KINGDOM SECRET:** The road to greatness is mostly downhill.

## **ACTIONS:**

- a) **Let's be careful what we ask for!** (Like Israel asking for a king!) It is sometimes a surprise what is involved in getting what you are asking for!

**Mark 10:36** And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"What do you want me to do for you?" Great question! But be careful how you answer it! We all know people who are deeply troubled because they got what they wanted: that promotion, to be married, to be single again, to have a child, to have a dog ... Lots of examples all around to illustrate that we ought to be careful what we ask for ... and the fix here? Humility! (Don't be saying: "I know what's good for me!!!")

- b) **Let's aspire to be great servants.**

**Mark 10:43-44** ... whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

In the kingdom of God, greatness requires servanthood. (Some of you have learned this being a parent!) To be great in the kingdom of God requires you to be a servant! And to be "#1" is to be everyone's "slave"! ["Who was your slave last year?" The humiliation of being asked to do something that makes you feel like a slave!!!]

Notice that the desire for greatness is not being discouraged. It is being directed towards true greatness, as defined by the secrets of the kingdom of God.

But even the Son of Man came into the world to serve. So we should choose "kingdom greatness"; choose "kingdom glory"; choose humility!

**Matthew 25:21** His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

- c) **Choose the real Jesus as your real role model.**

**Mark 10:45** For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

He came to serve people, to serve them to death!

- d) **Choose people who are like Jesus as examples.**

In history, e.g. George Whitefield!

And at West London, you will find there are people you can learn from: every Sunday and all through the week: and the reason is simple: there are actual servants of Jesus Christ in this group. This attitude is one way to recognize them.

**John 13:34-35** A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

And if they are truly in on the secret, they will be thankful for the privilege of being your slave "this year"!