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Sermon: October 18, 2009  
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“KINGDOM GREATNESS” ~ Mark 10:35-45**

■<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry {Lk 4:5-7, NCV} **“The devil [takes him] and [shows] him all the kingdoms of the world in an instant .... ‘I will give you all these kingdoms and all their power and glory....It will all be yours,’”** he says, **“If you worship me.”**

The offer is more enticing than it sounds.

Much of the Mediterranean world is an open sewer of sexual depravity. Suffice it to say that first century Gentiles are much more tolerant of immorality than their 21<sup>st</sup> century counterparts.

Infant exposure (in which unwanted babies are put out to die) is commonplace. In fact, Roman law stipulates that every child born with a deformity must be discarded.

Marriage is on its last legs. Gentiles are so blasé about divorce the government no longer requires them to file legal papers, or even to notify their spouses. Jewish husbands dismiss their wives for the flimsiest reasons.

The emperor panders to public greed and laziness and, at the same time, crushes all dissent. His appointees are concerned only with gaining and maintaining power.

Spiritually, the Mediterranean is a free-for-all of old paganism, new emperor worship, mystery religions from the East, and philosophical atheism. Judaism has fractured into splinter groups that agree on almost nothing.

Imagine how great it would be if Christ held **“all [the] power and glory”** of **“all the kingdoms of the world”!**

Sexual immorality would be outlawed. Newborns would not be thrown out. Marriage would be honored. Laws would uphold biblical principles. Judges would enforce them equally upon all. The economic system would offer meaningful work and equal opportunity for everyone.

How glorious it would be if Christians were in charge instead of secularists and pagans! What good we could do if believers held all the resources!

■<sup>2</sup> But Jesus does not take the bait. He answers, {Lk 4:8} **“It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”**

What if worship were not demanded? What if Christ He had to do to receive **“all [this] power and glory”** was to work within the existing structures of the kingdom of the world to improve it?

□ Please turn to Mark 10:35-45.

□ We’ll take verses 35-39 first.

James and John come to Jesus and say, **“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”**

Spoken by a five year old, that might be kind of cute. Coming from a couple of adult men, it’s ridiculous. But the Lord keeps his cool. **“What do you want me to do for you?”** He asks.

They reply, **“Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”**

■<sup>3</sup> Immediately before this, in Mark 10:32-34, Jesus forewarned that He will be arrested, condemned to death by the religious authorities, and handed over to the Gentiles, **“who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”**

The Lord prophesies his passion – and James and John take it as a cue to jockey for positions of power and honor in the kingdom of God?!

? Why is there such a huge discrepancy between Christ’s announcement and their request?

When the disciples hear **“the kingdom of God,”** they envision a renewed Israel liberated from foreign enemies and revived by a spiritual awakening.

They also see a political structure like the one they already have (but with better leaders). They see an army that does what all armies do (except that it does it for them). They see their humiliated enemies groveling at the feet of their king. They see good people exercising power over bad people.

🕒 In short, what they envision is merely a better version of the kingdom of the world. It follows that James and John expect the Lord to seize glorious wealth and power in Jerusalem – and they want a share in it. That explains the discrepancy.

What does Jesus say in response? {10:38-39} **“Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”** They claim they can – not realizing that his is a baptism of service and suffering.

☐ Let’s move on to verses 41-45.

**“When the ten [hear] about this, they [are] indignant with James and John.”**

? Why are the other disciples upset?

☹ They aren’t upset that these knucklehead brothers aren’t so slow to understand Jesus. They are afraid that Jesus will give James and John special treatment, and they will be short-changed. All of them have the same, skewed vision of the kingdom – except that each one sees himself beside the King.

The Twelve heard Jesus prophesy his death and resurrection three times. Yet they have weakened his words to mean something like, {N.T. Wright} **“It’s going to be tough, but when the battle is over, we’ll come out on top.”**

But the cross is not an anomaly. It is not a one-time bump in the road. It is not a single episode to be endured and then put behind them.

■<sup>4</sup> Please, do not get me wrong. Jesus won’t die a second time. Romans 6:9 clearly states that **“Since Christ**

**was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.”**

🕒 What I am saying is that though Jesus’ death was a unique event, never to be repeated, the kingdom of God continues to be built by acts of humble, sacrificial service. The way of the cross is the way of the kingdom, then and now.

Look at what Christ Jesus says in verses 42-44 ~ **“Those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”**

🕒 When Christ proclaimed, {Mk 1:15} **“The kingdom of God has come near”** He was not talking about a better version of the kingdom of the world; He was talking about something entirely different.

❖ Jesus reveals the kind of kingdom He is building when:

■<sup>1</sup> He refuses ownership of {Lk 4:6} **“all these kingdoms and all their power and glory”**;

■<sup>5</sup> He preaches, {Mt 6:39} **“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also”**;

■<sup>6</sup> He says, {Mt 16:24} **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”**;

■<sup>7</sup> the disciples ask, {Lk 9:54} **“Do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy”** those who reject you, and He rebukes them;

■<sup>8</sup> {Jn 13:4-5} He washes the feet of the Twelve;

■<sup>9</sup> {Mt 26:51-53} He prevents his disciples from defending him with the sword and chooses not to call battalions of angels to rescue him.

❖ In each instance Jesus rejects self-glorification in favor of humility, and coercive force in favor of service.

☑ Gregory Boyd {Myth of a Christian Religion, pp 22-23} puts it like this:

**The Kingdom of God... [relies] exclusively on whatever power it can exercise *under* people. This is the transforming power of humble, self-sacrificial, Christ-like love. Exercising power under others is about impacting people's lives by serving them, sacrificing for them, and even being sacrificed by them while refusing to retaliate, as Jesus did. We can think of this kind of power as the power of the cross...**

**While cross-power may look weak... it is... the greatest power in the universe. The power of the cross is the only power that can overcome evil rather than merely suppress it for the while. It's the only power that can transform an enemy into a friend. It's the power that God promises will ultimately transform the world. It's the kind of power the omnipotent God himself relied on when he came in the person of Jesus...to overcome evil and redeem...creation from its grip.**

☉ And so, in God's kingdom greatness is achieved and expressed by exercising  $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\epsilon$  love in an attitude of humility and acts of sacrificial service.

This message was hard to prepare.

I love the kingdom of God, yet I am wrestling with the application of this teaching.

The false me rebels against servanthood even as the true me embraces it. My struggle revolves around control: humble deeds of service generally come easily to

me when they are my idea – but I tend to bristle when someone imposes them on me.

I am reminded of quote from some Christian thinker: **“You can tell whether you are becoming a servant by how you act when people treat you like one.”**

Thank God, it is a process! I am further along the way of the cross than I used to be, but I still have far to go. I believe that describes Beverly Covenant Church as well.

Mark 10:42-45~ **“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 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.”**

This is the Word of the Lord.