Following Jesus: Marks of a Disciple – Lesson 4

"Serving Like Jesus: Greatness Through Humble Service"

Summary

In Mark 10:35-45, Jesus confronts a common misunderstanding among His disciples about greatness, leadership, and power. While James and John sought positions of honor and authority, Jesus taught that God's Kingdom operates according to a different standard. True greatness is not found in being served but in serving others. Jesus Himself became the ultimate example of servant leadership by giving His life as a ransom for many. As disciples, we are called to imitate Christ's humility and sacrificial service in our homes, churches, workplaces, and communities.

Scripture

Mark 10:35-45

1. Introduction

Opening Thought

Most people naturally desire recognition, influence, and success. The world often measures greatness by:

- Position
- Wealth
- Power
- Popularity
- Achievement

Many leaders seek to climb higher, gain more authority, and increase their influence. However, Jesus completely reverses these expectations. In God's Kingdom, greatness is not measured by how many people serve you, but by how many people you serve. As His followers, Jesus calls us to embrace a lifestyle of humility and selfless service.

Today's lesson will examine how Jesus redefines greatness and how disciples can reflect His servant-hearted example.

2. The Context: A Request for Greatness (Mark 10:35-37)

James and John approached Jesus with a bold request: "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

Their request revealed that they were thinking about position rather than service. Like many people, they envisioned the Kingdom of God through the lens of earthly power. They wanted prominence without fully understanding the cost of discipleship.

The desire for significance is not sinful in itself. God created us with purpose and value. The problem arises when we seek greatness for personal glory instead of God's glory. Pride motivates people to elevate themselves. Humility motivates people to lift up others. The disciples often struggled with pride because they still viewed leadership from a worldly perspective. Jesus intended to transform their understanding.

Practical Application
Christians today face the same temptation. We may seek:

- Recognition for our efforts
- Praise for our accomplishments
- Influence for personal benefit
- Status within ministry or church life

Jesus calls us to examine our motives and ask: "Am I serving to be noticed, or am I serving to honor Christ?"

3. The Cost of Following Christ (Mark 10:38-40)

Jesus responded: "You don't know what you are asking." He then asked whether they were willing to drink His cup and experience His baptism. These symbols referred to His coming suffering and sacrifice.

True discipleship always involves sacrifice. The path Jesus walked was not one of earthly privilege but one of humble obedience. Before there is a crown, there is often a cross. Following Jesus means embracing His values rather than pursuing worldly success. The New Testament repeatedly teaches that suffering, sacrifice, and service are often part of the disciple's journey. Christ calls His followers not merely to admire His sacrifice but to participate in a life of self-giving love.

Biblical Illustration
Paul described Christ's example: "He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant." (Philippians 2:7) Though equal with God, Jesus willingly humbled Himself to serve humanity.

Practical Application

The disciple's willingness to sacrifice reveals the depth of their commitment to Christ. Service often requires sacrifice:

- Giving time when we feel busy
- Helping others when it is inconvenient
- Serving without recognition
- Meeting needs before pursuing our own preferences

4. Jesus Redefines Greatness (Mark 10:42-44)

Jesus pointed to worldly rulers who "lord it over" others through power and authority. Then He declared: "Not so with you." This is one of the most radical statements about leadership in Scripture.

Jesus established a completely different model: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant." Kingdom greatness is measured by humility, service, and love. Leadership in God's Kingdom is not about controlling people. It is about serving people. The highest calling is not to be first in status but first in serving.

Biblical Illustration
God often uses those who are willing to take the lowest place. Throughout Scripture, God consistently honors humble servants:

- Joseph served faithfully in difficult circumstances.
- Ruth served her family with devotion.
- Nehemiah served his people through sacrificial leadership.
- Timothy served the early church with humility.

Practical Application
True spiritual maturity reveals itself through humble service. Servant leadership can be practiced by:

- Listening before speaking
- Encouraging others
- Meeting practical needs
- Giving credit to others
- Performing unnoticed acts of kindness
- Serving without expectation of reward

5. Jesus: The Ultimate Servant (Mark 10:45)

Verse 45 serves as the climax of the passage: "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 verse summarizes both Jesus' mission and the heart of discipleship. Jesus possessed all authority, yet He chose the role of a servant. The word ransom refers to the price paid to redeem or liberate someone.

Through His death on the cross, Christ paid the price for our salvation. His service was not merely an example. It was a redemptive sacrifice. The gospel itself is rooted in God's servant-hearted love.

Biblical Illustration: Jesus washed His disciples' feet (John 13:1-17)

Marks of a Servant Heart

Characteristic	Description
Humility	Putting others before yourself
Compassion	Seeing and responding to needs
Sacrifice	Giving your time, resources, and energy
Faithfulness	Serving consistently, even when unnoticed
Love	Motivated by Christ's love for others
Selflessness	Seeking God's glory instead of personal recognition

6. Discussion Questions

1) How does Jesus redefine greatness?
2) Why were James and John seeking positions of honor?
3) What is the difference between worldly leadership and servant leadership?
4) Why is servant leadership difficult?
5) How does Jesus model true service in this passage?
6) What does it mean that Jesus gave His life as a ransom for many?
7) What attitudes or desires can prevent us from serving others?
8) Where can you serve others this week?

7. Closing Thoughts

Jesus completely transformed the meaning of greatness. In a world that prizes power, status, and recognition, Jesus calls His followers to pursue humility, sacrifice, and service. The greatest person in God's Kingdom is not the one who receives the most attention but the one who most faithfully reflects the heart of Christ.

The ultimate example of greatness is Jesus Himself. Though He possessed all authority, He chose to serve and ultimately gave His life for the salvation of humanity. As disciples, we are called to follow His example by serving others with humility, joy, and love.

Challenge for the Week
Ask God each morning: "Lord, show me one person I can intentionally serve today."

Look for opportunities to perform acts of service that may go unnoticed or unrecognized.

At the end of the week, reflect on how serving others affected your relationship with Christ and your perspective on greatness.