

## “MIND BLOWING” GREATNESS



You're in the shower and your mind is racing with thoughts from the workday ahead to "what's for breakfast?" to "where did that mole come from?" to "why can't you wear white after Labor Day?" And suddenly you come across a thought that never crossed your mind before giving you that "Booom! Whoa!" moment.

**We call those thoughts, "Mind blowing" or "mind boggling" or "overcome with amazement" moments.** Have you ever thought any of these: You can't stand backward on stairs. Every mirror you buy is in used

condition. If you can't see the air (you breathe), can fish not see the water? A dog understands a few words of our language but we can't understand any of theirs - so are dogs smarter than humans? I could go all day - but you get the picture. These "mind blowing" thoughts are counter to everything you ever perceived or considered.

Jesus had one of those mind-blowing truths to share with His disciples: *"If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all"* (Mark 9:35). Jesus is the Son of God who made Himself the least of all and the servant of all. Coming and serving the least, the lowest, the outcast, the sinner but at the very same time that the Lord reveals this truth to His disciples, the twelve are arguing about who is the greatest. Mind blowing! A servant being the greatest stood in direct opposition to their world view where the greatest is number 1. What about you? Are you still buying into the world view that motivates most everyone - get to the top of the mountain while not worrying who you step on to get there? That world view has no room for serving others before yourself and, consequently, has no time or effort for sharing a Gospel that heals and blesses others. You are encouraged to **continue reading** this article. You just may have your mind blown by God's definition of greatness and your life changed by Christ's service for you.

**Humility is not thinking less of yourself but rather thinking of yourself less.**

A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, 5, and Ryan, 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity to teach the lesson found in the Gospel of Mark (9:30-37): "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake; I can wait.'" Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus."

It's not easy imitating Christ who came, not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). The Christian world view taught by Jesus and His Word proclaims: you are great because you've been chosen; you're not chosen because you're great (John 15:16). These truths were mind blowing to the disciples, and they're still mind blowing to

us today. The world's me-first doctrine runs counter to putting others first. The Bible clearly says, *"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you"* (James 4:10). Humility is not thinking less of yourself but rather thinking of yourself less. This is difficult in our culture today.

When we think of someone or something that is the greatest, we think in terms of the VERY best. Who is at the top of their game, what is the best product, who is the most well-known? Greatness means a tremendous amount to people today - it always has. Greatness has meaning from the youngest child to the most mature adult. The disciples were no different. Our world is obsessed with greatness and who's number one: the "Top 25" college football teams; the Fortune 500 companies; the "10 Best Dressed" and "10 Worst Dressed" lists; the top colleges and universities in America; and heaven forbid if we didn't watch "Dancing with the Stars" to see who will come out on top.

But Jesus takes this concept of who is the greatest and, as He often does, turns it on its head. Jesus puts new meaning to what it means to be the very best and the greatest. It's not the one with the greatest skills or talents, nor the one who is the most famous or who draws the most attention, or the one who has the most people serving him or her, but the greatest is the one who serves the lowliest, the least, the needy. The greatest is the one who is moved by the Holy Spirit from having a selfish heart to having a servant's heart. And our greatest service to the entire world in need is to share the Gospel truth that turns the world upside down.

### **The idea of a suffering, servant Savior just doesn't compute.**

As they journey together privately, Jesus tells His disciples again, and not for the first time, *"The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise on the third day."* This is the work of the Savior in a nutshell: Jesus is going to save the world by suffering the world's judgement, dying in the world's place, and rising again to give life to all who will believe. To you and me, this is dangerously close to old news; but to the disciples, it doesn't make sense at all. They don't understand, and they're afraid that what they're hearing is correct. Instead, the conversation shifts to what they do understand, and it occupies them until they arrive home. What's the topic? Who will be the greatest among the disciples? Jesus had just completed telling His disciples of the greatest act of love and sacrifice known to this world, and their response - worship, praise, reverence, awe? NO! Instead, the discussion shifts to the value system they knew all too well and the one we live in today - a system based on power, status, money, recognition, and who is the greatest.

There is a story about a woman who had been trying for years to persuade her egotistical husband to change his ways. He was obsessed with being number one. He never stopped talking about being first in sales at the office. He proclaimed that he was first on the list for the next promotion. He had to be first in line to buy tickets for a game and also the first to hit the parking lot after the game. One day this man's long-suffering wife watched with interest as he stepped on one of those fortune-telling scales. He dropped a coin in the slot and out came a

little fortune-telling card that read: "You are a born leader, with superior intelligence, quick wit, and a charming manner. You have a magnetic personality and are attractive to the opposite sex." "Read that and weep!" he said to his wife with more than just a hint of gloating. She did, and then turned the card over and said: "It has your weight wrong, too."

### **When God measures greatness, He measures it in terms of serving.**

By nature, the Almighty God of heaven and earth is...a servant. He created Adam and Eve so that He might care for them. He created them in His own image to be servants of one another in relationship to Him, their serving God. When man fell into sin, it was God who responded with a loving, servant's heart to send His Son to accomplish everything needed to restore mankind in grace and love. He is still serving us through Word and Sacrament. That's why we call worship the "Divine Service", not that we come and serve the Divine, but that the Divine comes and serves us! God is, by nature, a servant.

When man measures greatness, it is measured and achieved when one has enough influence to be served by others. The more people you have under you, the greater you are. The less accountable to others you are, the more greatness you have. When man thinks of greatness, he thinks of being worshiped, served, and glorified by others. That is why our world idolizes those who are on top - American Idol, America's Got Talent, Dancing with the Stars, Survivor, the World Series, the Super Bowl, the Ryders Cup and Olympic champions. The old Adam looks at them and proclaims: "Now that's greatness."

This measure of greatness is diametrically opposed to God's measure. Jesus says, "In service to the world, I'm going to suffer and die to redeem the world." This is the greatest service of all. By their discussion, the disciples responded, "Suffering and dying isn't great. Rising up to be powerful is great. SO.... which one of us will be the greatest of Your disciples?" The Lord remains the servant. He went to the cross and died for the sins of the world in service to all, and He still comes here to serve us by His means of grace. This is a very good thing, because we sinners remain as confused about greatness and service as ever! Therefore, all mankind has trouble with the Gospel.

### **As sinful, broken people, we tend to make Jesus either Lord or Savior, not both/and.**

Before Jesus would cast out demons, He was the child who perfectly obeyed His parents. Before He would reveal Himself as the Incarnate God who healed the sick and raised the dead, He was God in diapers, an utterly helpless and defenseless infant. WE would have done it all differently - with thunderbolts and tremendous displays of power - but Jesus loved you too much to do that. He wants to be your Lord AND your Savior. So He was first of all your servant.

We thank God in worship that His idea of true greatness is not ours. God comes along and says, "Look, I'm a servant by nature and I've offered My Son on the cross for your salvation.

He has done all the work to forgive you and save you. By His sacrificial service, you have eternal life.” Man responds, “That can’t be! Nothing worthwhile is free. The good we do must account for something.” God responds, “Don’t try to be saved by serving Me. Instead, trust that I’ve saved you by My service to you.” Rejoice as you worship. God’s idea of greatness involved the humiliation of His Son, the death of His Son, even on a criminal’s cross, so that we might be exalted as a redeemed child of God. And because our Lord and Savior has completed this service for us, we are free to serve others including sharing the Gospel truth with them. We are free to serve the world around us so that they can confess belief in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

**Because of Jesus’ service, we are set free to serve wherever the Lord has placed us.**

The Lord is a servant who sets you free from sin for a life of servanthood. The Lord has placed you in that place where you are to be a servant. Parents are given to serve their children, children their parents. Husbands are to serve wives, and wives are to serve husbands. Employees serve companies and customers, employers serve employees. Church members serve on committees and boards. Whatever vocations you have, the Lord has placed you there to serve.

Therefore, if you have no position of authority recognized by the world, you can still be content. The Lord has placed you where you are to serve, and you do not need the world’s approval to serve others. On the other hand, you may achieve some sort of position to which the world gives status; in that case you are placed there by God to be a servant, whether your position is manager, captain of the basketball team, or president of a company. The Lord may give you skills, assets and wealth; should He do so, then rejoice that the Lord has entrusted these things to you so that you can serve others. On the other hand, if you have little in the way of material things, rejoice that the Lord has put you where you are to serve with exactly what you have.

**In such times of uncertainty and trial, pandemic and tragedy, the Christian must look to what God has promised and not dwell upon that which He has not.**

God has already promised the believer as His baptized child that He works all things for their benefit and for their eternal good. He promises that He will always be there to give comfort in distress and be an oasis in the wilderness of this fallen, broken and mixed-up world we live in. He does not promise a spontaneous pick-me-up when you’re feeling blue, but He says in His Word that He is the Rock and Fortress in all times and trials. He doesn’t promise that you will never feel alone or forsaken, but He reveals to you that He indeed will never leave you or forsake you. God does not promise you a robust checking account, immunity from COVID or any other sickness, or worldly greatness without sorrow - but He does promise to provide for all your needs, He promises you strength in the midst of weakness, and joy above all tribulations. And He does this through His Word and Sacraments - where He promises the

forgiveness of all sin and to cleanse the believer of all unrighteousness - not by any great thing you have ever done or will do, but through the greatness of your Lord and Savior.

True greatness in Christ is the joy of confessing that one can gain nothing greater for oneself than what Jesus has already given as your servant Savior. The Lord and Savior has made you great by making Himself last. What more in this life can be gained than knowing that God has exalted you. To what higher place can you be placed? Every soul is of first importance to God. That's why God serves, therefore, that's why we serve. God has transformed our selfish hearts by His grace through the Spirit into servant hearts. Wherever we have been placed in life, may the blessings we have freely received from our suffering, servant Savior lead us to respond in any and every circumstance, "Let me serve as Jesus first served me." Now, that's true greatness in God's Kingdom. And that's true greatness right where we live. Talk about mind blowing greatness!!

This message of true greatness will blow people away when they hear it. The Gospel message is counter to all that the world builds upon as its foundation. But as you share the Gospel and by God's grace, live out this truth through faithful service to others, the world's view of greatness crumbles and the truth of God is exalted. Your Evangelization Team is praying that every member of every English District congregation along with every believer in Christ would be better equipped to serve the Lord by serving others. Even as mind blowing as this task may be, it is our Servant Savior serving the world He loves through each one of us. This serving and Gospel-sharing task gives the greatest significance to every moment of life - from the child to the most mature. We are all children of God sitting at the feet of Jesus learning a life of service. May the Holy Spirit continue to equip and empower you to serve as the Lord has served you.

The Evangelization Team, as it meets in the coming month in regions across the English District, will be equipping pastors and leaders for service in sharing the Gospel through the book, *Connected to Christ - Witnessing in Everyday Life*. Our prayer is that your pastor and church workers will then share this book with every member of the district and teach it in Bible study, small groups and various formats. Together, we will be inspired to take the healing Gospel to a broken world - just like ourselves. Yes, it is mind blowing that God chooses to use each one of us in our service to make Him and His salvation known, but that's how God reveals true greatness. Look forward to hearing about *Connected to Christ*. Thanks be to God, you are already great in the Kingdom of God and in the eyes of your Heavenly Father. In the end, that's the only truth that matters. This year's Dancing with the Stars couple will be replaced by another couple. Top teams come and go. But God's truth of greatness stands firm. Can there be any greater prayer than to ask God for the opportunity to serve as you have been served by Him? Mind blowing and life changing.

If you have any prayer requests, need encouragement for serving and sharing the Gospel, desire resources to equip your discipleship, please reach out to your Evangelization Team.

We're here to serve you! Contact us at the email [evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org](mailto:evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org) We are so blessed to serve together in a hurting, broken world with God's Word and saving grace.

In Christ Alone,  
Pastor John Diener  
Galatians 2:20