

Theme: Success
"The Truly Great"

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – based on a sermon series by Adam Hamilton
November 2-3, 2013 at First United Methodist Church, Durango

Scripture: Matthew 20:20-21, 24-28

20 Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectfully to ask a favor. 21 "What is your request?" he asked. She replied, "In your Kingdom, please let my two sons sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left."

24 When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. 25 But Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. 26 But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. 28 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

VIDEO The Truly Great Sermon Starter

SLIDE The Truly Great

Today we continue in a sermon series on the meaning of success and we do so by looking at what makes one truly great. I thought it was very appropriate that we would have this sermon around Veterans Day as we remember those who have made a commitment to serve because Jesus makes it clear throughout the Scriptures that in order to be truly great we must be willing to serve others. Today we will look at what the Scriptures had to say to us about true greatness. We will discover that the secret to success, whether you're talking about what you find in Scripture or what is being taught in the business world today, are not really secrets. Most of us know these things already but we sometimes fail to practice them and we often forget how it is we can find success and greatness.

As we remind ourselves of these truths today I want to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. At the very top you will find listed the Scripture passages that we are going to look at

today and then there is a space for you to write something down that you would like to remember from today's message. I hope there are a few things that you hear today that you want to write down and remember and reflect upon later. Continued on that side and on the backside you will find daily Scripture readings which tie back into today's message. I believe if you'll take the time to read the Bible on your own this week that it will speak to you and encourage your heart as you grow in your understanding of what true greatness and success looks like in life.

There was a pastor who received a card during pastor appreciation month. This was a particularly powerful note and the pastor treasured it because it read, "I think you are the best preacher I have ever heard in my entire life. I heard Billy Graham once and you are a better preacher than Billy Graham. I feel like when you preach God is speaking directly to me."

The pastor felt good about that note any carried that card with him all day until he came home from the office. When he saw his wife he said, "You won't believe what somebody wrote to me today. A person in the congregation sent me a note and wrote that my preaching was better than Billy Graham's and any other preacher he they had ever heard. This person feels like I am speaking to them every time I preach and I am the best preacher they have ever heard in their entire life."

His wife said to him, "Who was it that you sent you this note?"

The pastor said, "It's a woman in our church with impeccable taste when it comes to preaching. She is very bright and intelligent and clearly appreciates great preaching."

He then went on and said to his wife, "How many great preachers do you think are really out there? I don't think there are very many. How many do you think could be compared to Billy Graham?"

His wife turned and said, "One less than you think!"

Hank Ketcham, the creator of Dennis the Menace, gave this sound advice.

SLIDE *"Flattery is like chewing gum: enjoy it but don't swallow it!"*

Our Scripture reading today is one of these great stories that is a very human one and takes place just before the crucifixion of Christ. According to Mark's gospel it is Palm Sunday and Jesus is with his disciples and a large crowd of people in the city of Jericho. Later that afternoon Jesus will ride into Jerusalem on

a donkey. He will be hailed as the coming King of the Jews and the long-awaited Messiah. People wave palm branches and children will shout, "Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna to the son of David!"

By Thursday of that week he will be arrested and on Friday he will be crucified as a common criminal. This story happens at the climax of Jesus' public ministry. The crowds are gathered around Jesus, as are the disciples and the mother of two of his disciples, James and John. Their mother is with the disciples and the crowds following Jesus in the town of Jericho. Jesus had called these two boys three years earlier to be his disciples. They have been part of a successful family fishing business on the Sea of Galilee. The Scriptures tell us that their father Zebedee owned several boats and he was probably the most successful and well-known of all of the disciples because of their status as owners of a large business. Most likely a few of the other disciples who were fishermen worked for James and John's father Zebedee. They left the successful fishing business to follow Jesus for three years.

The disciples believe that Jesus is entering Jerusalem to finally announce himself as the King, the long-awaited Messiah who will lead a revolt against the Romans. They believe God has commissioned Jesus to do this and they believe that things are about to change radically in the world because Jesus is going to raise up an army that will defeat the occupying force of Rome. Here's what happens next according to Matthew chapter 20:21 and following.

SLIDE 20 Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectfully to ask a favor. 21 "What is your request?" he asked. She replied, "In your Kingdom, please let my two sons sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left."

In ancient times, when the King was meeting with other generals or dignitaries or leaders of other countries, he would place on his right his oldest son and on his left he would place his lead general. Jesus didn't have a son and he didn't have a general and so the mother of James and John asks Jesus to declare to her and others that her sons will be on his right and on his left. You can picture a mother doing this, can't you? It looks an awful lot like a La Plata County soccer mom who wants to make sure her children are in the starting lineup for the soccer team. Sorry, did that hit too close to home?

It also seems like a move to cut Peter out of the picture a bit. There is only

one right hand and one left hand and always in the Gospels when you read about the three disciples that are closest to Jesus it's Peter, James and John. James and John's mother is asking Jesus to put her boys on his right and left and that would put Peter in the backseat.

In many ways this scene makes perfect sense to me. The mother goes up and is trying to get a good position for her children in life, trying to help them be successful. In Mark's Gospel it doesn't say that the mother did it but it says that James and John themselves asked Jesus for the preferential treatment. If we look at life in general, what do we call someone who wants to be the top dog or rise up to the best seat in the house? What do we call that motivation of someone who wants to be successful? Typically we call that ambition and in a real sense these boys are ambitious, and their mother is ambitious for them.

I suspect that many of us in this congregation can relate to this because we have a lot of very ambitious people who are a part of this church. Many of you are type A personalities and you are driven and you like to succeed. You like to win and you are competitive and you work for that top spot, whether it is in sales or the corporate office or whatever it may be. That's a normal part of life for many of us who live in today's world. In many ways our economy and our country is driven by people who want to be successful and who have ambition and a desire for greatness. This leads to an important question for us to wrestle with as people of faith.

SLIDE What role does ambition play in the Christian life?

In the New Testament we find that there are two different Greek words for the word, "ambition." One of those words has a positive meaning and the other one not so much. The apostle Paul writes a letter to the people in Philippi and he writes this in Philippians 2:3-4 (NRSV).

SLIDE 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Paul talks about this idea of selfish ambition and tells us to stay away from that. James says the same thing in his letter in James 3:16 (NLT).

SLIDE 16 For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

The Greek word for selfish ambition is "eritheía." This word was also used

in the democracies of ancient Greece to describe some people who were running for office were primarily concerned for themselves. I thought it was interesting given the fact that we just went through a government shutdown and saw politicians bickering back and forth about many things and that many people in our culture are disgusted right now with politicians in both parties.

I suspect that what happens in politics in our own country, for both Democrats and Republicans, is that most of the candidates I think really want to make a difference. I think they initially want to help people and do the right thing but somewhere in the midst of running for office and playing the political games, something happens. Especially when there is an election year coming up and you are not sure if you're going to win and that becomes the most important thing. Then you start promising things or making decisions that are not necessarily in the best interest of the people. You might even say things you don't mean in order to get elected because what becomes most important is getting elected. I suspect that in both political parties this kind of ambition takes over and leads us to say and do things that we would never have said or done otherwise because we want to win.

I'm not sure that we can point fingers very easily because I suspect that if any one of us in this room were in the same place we might be doing the same thing as we lock horns with other people and think that our way is the best way or the only way. This is the idea of "**eritheía**" that we find in the Scriptures and in culture.

Paul uses another word for ambition however and that word is "**philotimoumenon**" which is where we get the word philanthropist. Paul uses it in Romans 15:20 (NLT).

SLIDE 20 My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard...

Paul has this ambition or drive to preach and share the good news. He also uses this word in 2 Corinthians 5:9 (WNT).

SLIDE 9 And for this reason also we make it our ambition, whether at home or in exile, to please Him perfectly.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:11 (NIV) Paul says this.

SLIDE 11 Make your ambition to lead quiet lives, minding your own business and working hard so that your daily life will win the

respect of outsiders.

There is a good ambition in the Scripture and a not so good ambition we find. The not so good ambition can be normal for us because we want to win and we are often wired to try and get to the top and to be better than others, especially our culture. But there is this other kind of ambition which is noble and it literally means...

SLIDE “to have a deep love for the honorable”

The difference between these two types of ambition is the object of the ambition. If the object of the ambition is my own glorification and my own advancement or is the object that which is good and noble and honorable, that builds up and blesses others or God. Philotimoumenon means to be ambitious or to strive earnestly and make it one's aim.

In my own life I have struggled with the negative kind of ambition because I like to win. You don't want to play cards with me and you may not want to play basketball with me either. The reason is because I'm going to beat you, and you may not like how I act when I want to win. I like to win. From my life I have always wanted to be the fastest or the smartest or the best or whatever even though I often couldn't be that. I wanted to win even if I couldn't

As I have become a follower of Christ I have discovered that the deep desire to be that top dog and to be the best often comes into direct conflict with what Jesus was teaching it means to be great. There is this other definition of greatness and the real question for us is: Which kind of ambition are we going to practice?

Are we going to practice eritheía or is it philotimoumenon? Are we going to pursue what we want or are we going to pursue what is noble and good, with a concern for others first?

R.T. France wrote a great commentary on Matthew's gospel and about this passage he says this:

SLIDE *The natural human concern with status and importance is clearly one of the most fundamental instincts which must be unlearned by those who belong to God's kingdom.*

We have this natural human instinct and the question is: are we willing to unlearn it or channel it in a new direction? I used to pray when I was younger that God might take away some of my ambition so that I wouldn't be so annoying, but the prayer didn't work and so instead I now pray that God might help me

remember what really matters and help channel my ambition in ways that are healthy and helpful and seek to honor God and others.

I'm guessing you might struggle with this in some way. It might be for your career advancement but it might be in other ways, like the woman who came to her pastor and said, "Pastor, I really struggle with something that I am embarrassed to tell you about. I know it's a sin but I struggle because I compare myself to other women in the church. I looked to see how many wrinkles they have and I look at their figures. I look at what their hair looks like and how many gray hairs they have. I look at the clothes and I compare them to my clothes. I hate to even say it but inside I think I'm the prettiest woman in the church. I need your help with this pastor. Can you please help me?"

The pastor said, "O Mary, I really don't think that this is the sin that you are struggling with. I just think you're horribly mistaken."

Be careful what you ask your pastor for help with because you never know what he might say. The truth is that I have learned a lot about my own selfish ambition and I have felt God trying to redirect that in my own life.

I served as a youth pastor for 10 years before I began preaching on a regular basis and when I first started out I was in seminary. I wanted to have a great youth group and I wanted to do great things. I still have my file folder filled with different things that we did in that very first youth group that I was in charge of. We developed a leadership team and I even worked real hard to put together this diagram about how the leadership team worked. I also did a newsletter each month which I listed our calendar and all of the things we had planned for the month. We developed policies for driving and for people who worked with youth group and I was really proud of all these things that we put together. This was in the olden days when you had cut and paste things physically and put them together to look really nice and neat pretty, you know before we had word processing or publishing software.

Not only did we send our youth newsletter to all of our families but they also were sent to a lot of the other churches in our area who were on our mailing list. I received newsletters from the other churches as well and one day I was looking through a newsletter from a neighboring church and I found all this new cool stuff they were doing in their youth ministry. The only problem was it was all stuff we had developed at our church already and they just took it and they used it. I'm really embarrassed to tell you this but I was really angry when I read it and

realized they didn't give us any credit! They just changed the names on it and put their own church name over our diagrams. They actually cut out their church name and used scotch tape and taped it over our church's name.

I even went to our senior pastor and I complained to him and showed him what this other church had done and instead of commiserating with me or feeling sorry for me he just laughed. He said two things I'll never forget. First he said, "Jeff, I would think you would be honored that someone like this stuff that you developed enough to want to use it rather than be jealous."

That one was deep enough, but then he added insult to injury when he said, "Jeff, you do realize that we're all on the same team."

Ouch, did that hurt. I learned something really important that day. First, I learned that I need to stop listening to my ego so much and being so competitive because it doesn't really matter who gets the credit. Second, I realized that we are all on the same team and there is no sense in reinventing the wheel and I can steal other people's stuff just as well as they can steal mine!

Marti Zimmerman was that senior pastor and she taught me that greatness looks like giving things away and not needing to take credit. Marti passed away from cancer two years ago and I actually shared with you her story a bit after her death because she made a deep impression on me. She is one of the people I remember whenever we do All Saints day. Marti taught me something else a few months later.

I was going to graduate from seminary and I needed a full-time position and it was time for me to move on from that church. We had done some great things and the youth group had grown from about five kids to over 150 kids in the three years that I was there and when I left they needed to find somebody to replace me. Once again, I'm embarrassed to say this story but I saw myself wondering who was going to take my place. Part of what I was feeling inside is that I wanted somebody who would continue on with this great ministry and nobly I wanted somebody who would do a great job. But I also had a lot of insecurity which hoped they wouldn't do a better job than I did!

They were struggling with finding the right person during the search process and so I met with Marti and I said one of the dumbest things I've ever said to anyone in my entire life. I said, "It looks the church is going to have a hard time finding somebody to take my place."

Marti just smiled at me and said, "Jeff, none of us are irreplaceable."

Ouch, did that one hurt! But the truth is that he was right. None of us are irreplaceable. If we have gifts and we've done an amazing job at whatever it is that we do, we have to be honest about where those gifts came from. Where do those gifts come from? They came from your genetics and your parents and the people who have poured into your life and your life experiences and somewhere the Holy Spirit was a part of that process. But most importantly, they came from God, so what business do we have taken credit for those and thinking were all that. Those are gifts which are given to us and we use them wisely hopefully to benefit others and to serve God. And none of us is irreplaceable. We're just not that big of a deal when it all comes down to it.

Have you figured this out yet? According to Jesus, the path to greatness is figuring this out. It takes a long time for many of us to figure this out and some of us never get there. Our whole lives are spent on trying to claw our way to the top. We want to be the King of the Hill and in the process of doing that, when we forget the lessons that Jesus teaches us about greatness and we only focus on ourselves, we find ourselves very lost.

When our ambition to be great overcome our ambition to be good it becomes toxic. So let me ask you:

SLIDE Is your ambition to be good stronger than your ambition to be great?

This brings us back to the conversation that the mother of James and John is having with Jesus. Remember again that this is Sunday morning and Thursday night Jesus will be arrested on Friday will be crucified. They think that Jesus is going to reveal himself to be the messianic King and it's gonna be an awesome explosion that takes over the whole region of Israel. God can do this great thing and that greatness will be about stature and power.

What she doesn't know is that the Crown that Jesus will wear on Friday is a crown of thorns. Jesus looks at her and says, "You just don't know what you're asking for."

Then Jesus turned to James and John and says, "Are you able to drink from the cup that I'm going to drink from?"

By that he means his suffering but they think it's a chalice of gold. They say, "Yes, of course we can drink from the cup with you Jesus."

He looks at them and sadness and says, "One day you will drink from the

cup." Jesus knows that 10 years later James will be beheaded in the city of Jerusalem and several decades later John will have boiling oil poured all over his body before he is exiled to the penal colony of Patmos where he will end out his days in solitary prison on an island.

Jesus then says to them, "It is not for me to decide who sits on my right hand and on my left."

The other disciples get wind of this conversation and they are upset. Why do you think the other disciples are upset with James and John and their mom who has come to ask if they can sit on the right and the left of Jesus? They are upset because they all want those positions. They want to sit on the right and the left. Every one of them has the same ambition and they are irritated and frustrated and jealous.

You can understand this to because you probably work somewhere where somebody got the promotion that you should have gotten because they weaseled their way into the heart of the manager or the boss. When I was in sixth grade I had a paper route and we would get a little bonus every time we signed someone else up for a subscription who didn't currently have one. Each new subscription was worth \$.10 or something like that. But there also was this contest and whoever got the most new subscription would get a new bicycle and I really wanted that new bicycle because my bicycle was old and not near as cool as the new one would be. So I went around to everyone on my route who didn't get the paper and tried to sell them a newspaper. I got several people to sign up and got several new subscriptions but several people said they wanted to think about it and they would get back to me.

A few days later some other kid went around my route trying to sell subscriptions and those people who said they want to think about it a few days, guess who they signed up with? Guess who got the credit and guess who won the bicycle? Danny Stinkenmeyer that's who and I was ticked! I even went to my supervisor and complained but they had already given away the bicycle. Don't you feel sorry for me?

So I can understand why those other disciples were frustrated with James and John and to top it off they brought their mother into it! You brought your mom in to ask for this favor? Seriously, what had a disciple are you anyway?

This is what happens next.

SLIDE 24 When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had

asked, they were indignant. 25 But Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. 26 But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. 28 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus is teaching us that success is found in serving other people and it is a byproduct of giving yourself away. Greatness is defined by your capacity and your willingness to humble yourself and bless others. When we encourage others and build them up we find greatness.

Jesus teaches us something fundamentally true about being human and what's interesting is that modern-day business folks have discovered that it is true in every endeavor in life. The father of the theory of servant leadership in the business world is Robert K. Greenleaf and the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership teaches this concept. But the truth is that he is not the father of servant leadership. Jesus was the father of servant leadership. Jesus was the first one who said, "This is what it looks like to be great and when you do this you will find success and everything else seems to work better. When you think not first of yourself but of others it changes everything."

SLIDE The Go Giver (Graphic)

Several years ago Bob Burg and John David Mann wrote a book titled, The Go Giver: A Little Story About a Powerful Business Idea. This is not a theology book but it's a business book and was written up in most business magazines and was on the New York Times bestseller list for a while. It's a story that similar to the book Who Moved My Cheese if you remember that from a few years ago. It's a fictional story that is meant to teach you about the most important laws for success in life and in business. If you read the book then you recognize that you already knew these things but it reminded you of the things that lead us to success.

In this story Jim is a businessman in sales and he is struggling because his sales are not going very well. He is frustrated and can't figure out how to get his career on the right track. Pindar is an older man who is wildly successful and chairman of the board of this company. Somebody tells him that he should talk to

Pindar. Jim asks, "Will he talk to somebody like me?"

Jim is told that Pindar will see him and so he makes an appointment with him and says, "I know you're wildly successful and I would like to know the secret to your success."

Pindar says, "Are you wanting me to reveal my trade secrets to you?"

Jim said, "It would be great if you would share that with me."

Pindar replies, "I will share with you the secret of my success. It's just one word." He leans over and whispers into Jim's ear, "Giving."

"If you see your role as giving your self to other people, your clients, the people that you work with, you will find that things work for you. The secret of my success is being willing to give and invest in others."

The rest of the book goes on to reveal Pindar's five laws of success. I'm going to tell you the first three and you might want to write them down but once again you probably are you know them.

SLIDE The Law of Value (Graphic of book to the left of each slide of the next three slides)

The first one is the law of value. Pindar says, "Your true worth is determined by how much more you give in value than you take in payment." Once again, this isn't rocket science and you probably already know this. Your true worth is determined by how much more you give in value than how much more you take in payment. If you are an employee and you are constantly giving more value to your employer than what you are getting paid for then you will have some pretty good job security. There is a high likelihood they will find ways to use you more and more.

But if the company is not sure if they are getting their money's worth out of you and if you are not returning more value than you are being paid for, there is a high likelihood you won't have a future and a company.

SLIDE The Law of Compensation

Another law that he talks about is the law of compensation. Pindar says, "Your income is determined by how many people you serve and how well you serve them." That's not really rocket science either. Pindar says to Jim, "You are focusing on sales and you want to make more and more sales, but what you need to focus on is serving. If you will focus on serving others then you will find that the

sales will eventually come."

SLIDE The Law of Influence

The law of influence says that your influence is determined by how abundantly you place others and their interests before your own.

How interesting is it that these guys are writing a business book with the laws to success in business with the subtitle, "A little story about a powerful business idea," and the major premises come straight from the Gospels where Jesus has said that if you are going to be great you must be a servant of others. Paul says to put the needs of others before your own needs. St. Francis of Assisi summarized this when he said these words.

SLIDE "It is in giving that we receive." (Graphic of St. Francis on right)

This is in many ways counterintuitive because we often think that we need to do is take and yet we find that it is in giving that we are blessed. This ties into how we look at the work that we do in our daily lives. You will either look at each day as what you can get out of it, or if you're working about getting a paycheck or climb the ladder or be successful, or you look at your day and recognize that you have a chance to serve people. Almost any job which has the potential to help people is a job they can be looked at this way. If you are in a job that actually hurts people you might want to consider finding a new job.

But the truth is that most of the work that we do have some capacity to be able to help people and that's what you can focus on and the rest begins to take care of itself. When I think about this I think about Shirley. In the church that I served in the Denver area before he moved to Durango there was a McDonald's across the street and my brother-in-law was the manager of that McDonald's for a while. One of the women who worked there was in her 80s and her name was Shirley. She took on the job as a part-time gig to supplement her income because her retirement and Social Security were very small.

You could always count on Shirley to give you a smile when she served you. I actually met customers who would past three different McDonald's to come to this McDonald's in order to see Shirley because she was so friendly. One day I was sitting in the lobby of the restaurant with one of our church members and Shirley was cleaning up the tables around us. I told her how thankful and appreciative I was because she made coming to McDonald's a real blessing because of gratitude. She looked at me and she smiled and she said, "Well that's my job. My job isn't to serve you food or clean your tables. My job is to make you smile and

I'll do whatever it takes to help you feel better when you leave than when you came in the store."

Just before I moved to Durango they threw a big party for Shirley as she was given the McDonald's National Employee of the Year. The head of McDonald's Corporation came to the store along with literally hundreds of other people who loved Shirley. When asked her to give a speech and tell everyone how it is she was so successful she simply said, "I was just glad I could help you smile."

By the way, the all-knowing the McDonald's ad campaign was beginning in 2000? That didn't come from some big wig in advertising.

We try to remind our entire staff every day that our purposes the team is to be the presence of Jesus Christ the world. Each one of us is called to do that and we are changing the world when we take on this mantle of servant leadership and my hope is that is how you will find success.

I hope that many of you find it rewarding, what you do for a living. But I also know that when you leave work or if you are in the midst of retirement my hope is that you will find something here the church that you will find meaningful as you give and as you serve. There are opportunities every single day of the week for you to serve in some capacity here at the church or through one of our ministries. When you are ready and you are wanting to take that step we have a staff person here, Jake Forsythe, and a ministry team called the Equipping Team whose only job is to help you get connected and find a meaningful place to give. To get started you can go on our website and click on the spiritual gifts survey.

SLIDE Website Snapshot (Graphic)

You can go online and take that spiritual gifts assessment that you see on the bottom of this picture of the website. You also can take the next steps class which happens this coming Wednesday night here at the church to help you take that next step in becoming the presence of Jesus Christ the world. I hear every week from people in the church what it would be like to live out fully and completely in the name of Jesus the things that he is taught us about being a servant and blessing others.

JoAna Dwyer is the Executive Director of ODIM - Organization for the Development of the Indigenous Maya in Guatemala. We have partnered with this ministry over the past few years to help build the medical and dental clinic in San Felipe. We have sent several teams they're both medical teams and construction teams and JoAna is here this week in the United States and is with us in worship

today and so I asked her if she would share a bit about that ministry that you have been a part of the past few years through your offerings and through serving.

VIDEO ODIM Movie (JoAna will narrate)

SLIDE The Truly Great

Every year we asked you to take some time to think and to pray about what it means to give. We do this every year to encourage you to grow in this area because what we know is that unless we learn to give we will never grow and we will never be truly great in terms of becoming the presence of Jesus Christ the world. Our family makes a commitment to give each year and we do that because we know that if we keep everything to ourselves it would not be good for us or for our souls.

Last week we were visiting our son Thomas at his school in Utah and one of the other students announced that there would be boxes around their campus where we could place items for Operation Christmas Child. You heard about this ministry last week here in this church because we do this every year where we ask you if your family will put together a box for a child living in another part of the world. Our family bought a few items at the store and brought them back to place in the boxes around the school and there is just something exciting about buying an animal or a toy or whatever it is and praying over that item and knowing that one day will reach a child somewhere halfway across the world. Isn't that a cool thought? It makes it exciting to give.

I want to suggest to you that what you put in the offering plate each week or what you give online or through your bank account if you do it electronically, is meant to feel the same way. You are meant to give and know that you're making a difference in places like Guatemala and on Tuesday night when we have youth group here and many of the kids don't go to church here or anywhere. You are meant to know that you're making a difference in the lives of those families and children that come to the Christian school and who came by my office this week and did a reverse trick-or-treat where they brought gifts to me instead of asking for gifts and each one of those children was smiling because there is something about giving that changes our hearts in the shape of our mouths.

The money that you give to God each week makes a difference in the lives of those kids. We had more than 80 people join the church this year and one of those persons came to me before they joined and told me they had been in a cult for more than 20 years and told me what a joy it was to be a part of the church

now. People's lives are being changed here. You make that possible when you give your time and your resources. Hundreds of children at Spring Valley and the Hope for Orphans Rescue and Education Center in Kenya are touched by the giving of your time and your resources. 40 people were married by pastor Roger and myself this year and you touch their lives through the pre-marriage work that we do and the wedding ceremony itself as we help them to start their life together. Every year we do more than 20 funerals and you provide a place for families to walk through their grief together. Celebrate Recovery and Divorce Care offer support for those going to the toughest of life situations and you make all of those groups possible. More than 100 children and more than 100 youth are touched and shaped into the heart of Christ through our children and youth ministries. We have more than 50 people on the youth retreat this weekend and they are being changed. We have seven weekly worship services that include Celebrate Recovery and JOLT Worship and college students on Thursday nights up at Fort Lewis College and Saturday night services and three services on Sunday mornings and just about every week I get an e-mail from someone who is touched by worship. You make that possible through your giving your time and your resources.

I'm not going to apologize ever for asking you to share your gifts and your resources and your time. I'm not going to apologize because you change the world and you become the presence of Jesus Christ in the world through your giving. You not only change the world for others but in the process of figuring out that is not about you and putting God first when it comes to your finances and your time and your talents, you find yourself blessed and filled up. This is how you find success in life and this is how you become truly great.

In the end, nobody is going to care about how much money you made. What they will care about is what you did with what you had. If you're in financial distress right now then you give what you can in terms of your time, but for most of us I want to challenge you to stretch yourself and pray about what God might be calling you to give so you can put him first. If you're not tithing yet, giving 10% of your resources, then take a step and move towards that and make a conscious decision that you're going to grow in this area of your life.

Let me end with this. John Wesley who is the founder of Methodism gave three rules that he said if we will live by we will find life and success. The first was to do no harm or avoid all of the evil that you can. The last one was to do the things that help you grow in your love of God like studying the Scriptures and

prayer and worship. But the middle one is the one I want you to remember today as you leave.

SLIDE "Do all the good you can, everywhere that you can, as often as you can to everyone that you can."

Do this and you will find life and success and greatness.

SLIDE Communion

“The Truly Great”

Theme: Success

Scripture: *Matthew 20:20-21, 24-28*

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

Meditation Moments for Monday, November 4 – Read Genesis 12:1-4 – God promised Abraham, “I will bless you.” A common human reaction to a promise like that would be, “I’m special—more for me!” But God had something else in mind. God blessed Abraham so that he and his offspring could pass the blessing on, as verse 3 said: “All families of earth will be blessed because of you.”

- Just before Abraham’s story, Genesis 11:1-9 told the story of the Tower of Babel, where humans tried to “declare independence” from God. Pastor Stuart Briscoe wrote: “In marked contrast to a world that came to ruin because it insisted on making a name for itself independently of God, this obscure man’s name was to become ‘great’ because God was promising to bring it to pass.” In what ways can you trust God’s principles to guide your life well, rather than having to fight for distinction and worth on your own?
- In a famous Civil War episode, General George McClellan snubbed President Abraham Lincoln. Urged to assert his rank, Lincoln said he’d gladly hold General McClellan’s horse if that would bring a much-needed Union victory. Which man do we remember as the greater man? How willing are you to take the humbler, “blessed to be a blessing” stance in order to serve the greater good?

Prayer: Lord God, sometimes I’m tempted to only count how many blessings I’ve received. Please grow in me a heart that’s just as interested in how many ways I’ve been able to bless others. Amen.

Tuesday, November 5 – Read Matthew 23:8-11 – In Jesus’ day (as in ours), many leaders (even religious ones) sought exalted, lofty titles. Scholar William Barclay wrote, “The Pharisees liked to be addressed as Rabbi and to be treated with the greatest respect. They even claimed ... greater respect than that given to parents, for, they said, a man’s parents give him ordinary, physical life, but a man’s teacher gives him eternal life.” Jesus said his Kingdom was not about high-status titles, but about greatness in serving others.

- Does verse 9 mean it's wrong to send a Father's Day card, or honor your earthly father in other ways? No—Jesus often used a teaching style called “prophetic hyperbole,” overstating to make a point. Here he probably referred to men who insisted on the title of Elijah the great prophet (see 2 Kings 2:12) and other “fathers” of the faith. When have you sensed an inner need to make yourself feel more important because of your role, status or title?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, keep purifying my motivations as I serve you and others. May my meaning and sense of worth come more and more from you—until my service is about you, not me. Amen.*

Wednesday, November 6 – Read Matthew 20:20-28 – Jesus' disciples James and John wanted the highest rank in his Kingdom. (In Matthew their mother made the actual request; in Mark 10:35-45, they made it directly. The effect was the same.) Jesus said neither they, nor the other disciples who resented them, understood what drove his way of life. He wasn't out for “perks” or prestige. He came to serve, to give his life to liberate many people.

- Jesus said: “Those who rule the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around.” Power can be a “high”—but Jesus went on, “That's not the way it will be with you. Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant.” In which parts of life do you have power (parent, boss, teacher, pastor, public servant, etc.)? Are you most effective when you use your power on your own behalf, or when you employ it for the good of others? How can you become more of a “servant leader” in your sphere?
- Ambition seems to be a natural part of almost all human hearts. But the motives that stir our ambition can be very mixed, and they can lead to good or bad consequences. How is God growing you into a secure, content “servant” who is primarily motivated to glorify God and serve others?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you for calling me into your Kingdom, where your love's transforming power can motivate me to live a servant life. Teach me how to treat others as you treat me. Amen.*

Thursday, November 7 – Read 2 Matthew 12:15-23 – The book of Isaiah included four poems in whose imagery God called an unnamed figure “my servant” (Isaiah 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12). When Matthew quoted Isaiah 42:1-4 to describe Jesus' ministry, he echoed Jesus' belief that he fulfilled the deepest meaning of the poems in Isaiah. As people saw Jesus serving them, they did not think less of him, but rather asked if he might not be the “Son of David,” God's anointed redeemer.

- Just before today's reading, Matthew showed the Pharisees criticizing Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, which they saw as work. In verse 14, they met to find a way to destroy Jesus. But Jesus simply withdrew to preach and heal. How did Jesus' way of dealing with his foes live out the attitude Isaiah said the “servant” would have? Have you ever faced a situation where it was wiser to withdraw or speak gently rather than trying to prove a contentious point?
- Probably writing mainly to Hebrew Christians, Matthew quoted parts of Isaiah's poem that said God wanted to save Gentiles as well as Jews. As Matthew wrote his gospel, early Christians were actively preaching to Gentiles. What are some ways you can live out Christ's life, making “justice win” so that “Gentiles [whoever they are in your world] will put their hope in his name”?

Prayer: *O Jesus, you walked this earth, not as an arrogant, demanding ruler, but as a gentle, healing servant. Guide me as I seek to live into your brand of greatness. Amen.*

Friday, November 8 – Read John 13:3-17 – On the night before he was crucified, Jesus gathered with his disciples, and washed their feet. It was a shocking act—washing feet was slaves' work. Then Jesus told the disciples they were right to call him “Teacher” or “Lord.” His lesson for them (and us) was that when he acted as a servant, he wasn't abdicating leadership, but redefining it.

- John, a very meticulous writer, quoted Jesus saying, “I give up my life so that I can take it up again” (John 10:17). He used the same Greek words to describe Jesus “taking off” and “putting on” his robes before and after he washed the disciples' feet. In what ways was what Jesus did not just a needed action, but an acted-out parable of the way he would give himself up on the cross? Have you ever had an experience in which acting humbly toward someone else felt almost like dying?
- John stressed that Jesus knew what Judas would do later, but Jesus even washed Judas' feet. Can you imagine the yearning in Jesus' heart as he washed the betrayer's feet? “Washing feet” was a practical act in a dusty land where people wore sandals. What are some practical ways you can serve another person that will tangibly make their life better? Who is God leading you to bless with a concrete act of service?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, what an example of humility you gave us! Soften my heart, and make me willing to take up the towel as you did, to set my power aside for the good of others. Amen.*

Saturday, November 9 –Read Galatians 5:13-1 Macmillandictionary.com defines “freedom” as “the right to do what you want, make your own decisions, and express your own opinions.” The apostle Paul, shaped by Jesus' definition and model of greatness, called us to move beyond selfish impulses that actually enslave us. “God has called you to a free life,” he wrote. “But use your freedom to serve one another in love. That’s how freedom grows” (The Message).

- Scholar James Montgomery Boice wrote, “It is ironical that, having urged the Galatians not to be slaves to law, Paul should now encourage them to become slaves of one another, for that is what “serve” means ... The Galatians are to be slaves of one another, though this slavery is not like the first. In fact—this is the paradox—it is the Christian form of being free.” How free are you to open your heart and mind to God’s definition of greatness, to be more and more Christ’s physical presence for those you live with? What steps will you take to grow in living out the Christian form of freedom?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, I long to stop feeling the need to elbow my way to the front of the line, to quit frantically trying to “climb the ladder.” Free me to live a life that is great by your standards. Amen.*

Family Activity: As a family, choose something that you will all give up for a period of time (e.g., dessert, screen time, shopping or cell phones). Decide how long you will commit to living without this thing. Now, choose to substitute something that is more spiritually helpful for whatever you have given up. For example, if you give up screen time, practice hospitality by inviting friends over for a family game night. If you give up dessert, save the money you would have used and give it to an offering at church. Add more prayer time in place of shopping or visit neighbors instead of texting. How might these new practices influence your sense of giving to others? Pray for God’s guidance and grace.