

Greatness in the Sight of God

“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.”

Luke 1:15

“For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

Luke 7:28

Preliminary Reading: Psalm 101; Hebrews 11:1 – 12:4.

Introduction:

1. Last Lord’s Day we considered Abraham, mentioned extensively in the N.T. and in Hebrews 11.
2. God appeared to Abram and confirmed a relationship on walking perfectly before Him (Gen 17:1).
3. Abraham is one of the witnesses before whom we run our endurance race to heaven (Heb 12:1-4).
4. The Hall of Faith (Heb 11) and the verses that follow (Heb 12:1-4) exhort saints to run a great race.
5. In light of that example, we reviewed Paul’s exhortation to identify and follow such men (Phil 3:17).
6. Our apostle, the pattern for Gentiles, viewed life as athletic competition (Phil 3:12-14; I Cor 9:24-27).
7. David also taught such men should be identified and marked, for they have blessed lives (Ps 37:37).
8. We have three goals: the character of great men, how we can be great before God, and its reward.
9. Remember, with the God of heaven measuring by character and conduct, any Christian can be great!
10. The world may deny you greatness on the grounds of looks, intelligence, wealth, athletic ability, etc.
11. The Lord does not care about body type, personality, socio-economic group, or any other distinction.
12. God recognizes the difference between two and five pounds, but He rewards fairly (Luke 19:11-27).
13. Remember, our Father knows our frame, and He understands our passions like Elijah’s (James 5:16).
14. Remember, our Father loves zeal, as shown by Elisha’s request of a double portion (II Kings 2:9-12).
15. The highest ambition for life should be to grow in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52; Prov 3:3-4).
16. Peter was committed to this growth for his readers, as we should also be (I Peter 2:1-3; II Peter 3:18).
17. Why would we settle to be average Christians or to have an average church? Embrace excellence!
18. When we face difficulties, as we will often, we must recall the race and the prize before each of us.
19. Each day offers an opportunity to remember the goal of excellence and practice temperance toward it.
20. Ungodly emulation is not our objective, for competing with others for vainglory is false religion.
21. Paul was not arrogant to labor the most and to state his high rank (I Cor 15:10; II Cor 11:5; 12:11).
22. Where Paul could, he would declare the superlative accomplishments of churches as well (I Cor 1:7).
23. You must ask, What am I best at? What do I seek most? What do I love the most? What motivates me the most? What do I set time priorities for? For what am I most eager to spend money or time?
24. We will explore the spiritual superlatives of the Bible to identify what God values as most important.

John the Baptist

- A. The angel prophesied to Zacharias that the son of his old age would be great (Luke 1:15-17).
- B. This is the messenger God sent before Jesus and the destruction of Israel (Mal 3:1; 4:5-6), no matter what Futurists may do with this prophecy (Matt 11:7-15; 17:9-13; John 1:19-28).
- C. Jesus said John the Baptist was the greatest man ever born of a woman (Matt 11:11).
- D. But He said in the immediate context that the least in His kingdom was greater (Matt 11:11).
 1. We do not neglect to see the word *prophet* used in this description of John (Luke 7:28).
 2. Even the least preacher of the gospel, or least apostle or prophet of the N.T., would have greater understanding of Jesus Christ and His redemptive work than did John.
- E. Do you know Christ’s gospel? We are bound to give thanks for knowing it (II Thess 2:13).
- F. With only an elementary knowledge of the gospel, you likely know more than John Baptist.

God's Five Great Men

- A. We often refer to God's five great men; why did God single them out (Jer 15:1; Ezek 14:14)?
- B. They are five men that could not save wicked Judah: Moses, Samuel, Noah, Daniel, and Job.
- C. Their reputations include two main factors: (a) personal righteousness and/or (b) intercession.
- D. *Noah* was just, perfect, and walked with God (Gen 6:9); he saved the other seven members of his family by his personal righteousness (Heb 11:7). Nothing good is said of the other seven.
- E. *Job* was a perfect and upright man that feared God and eschewed evil (Job 1:1); he saved his three cruel friends by his righteousness and acceptance with God (Job 42:7-9).
- F. *Moses* was faithful in the church of the Old Testament (Heb 3:2,4; 11:24-28), and he often interceded for Israel and saved them from God's judgment (Ex 32:30-32; Num 14:11-19).
- G. *Samuel* was a relief after Eli and his sons (I Sam 2:26; 3:20-21), and he saved Israel from the Philistines by his intercession (I Sam 7:3-12), but he could not save Saul (I Sam 15:35; 16:1).
- H. *Daniel* was a faithful and righteous prophet of God (Dan 6:10; 11:33), and his intercessory prayer for Israel at the end of their captivity in Babylon is precious (Daniel 7:1-23).
- I. Are you such a man for your family? this church? You can preserve others by your righteous life and by your intercessory prayer for them, as you should (Ps 112:1-2; I Pet 3:12).

Three Great Kings

- A. Most Bible readers know that David was a favorite of God's and a man after His heart (Acts 13:22), and he is often set forth as the highest standard of Judah's kings (I Kgs 11:4; 15:3-5).
- B. Josiah was a king of Judah that turned to the LORD with the greatest revival (II Kgs 23:25).
- C. Hezekiah was a king of Judah that trusted in the LORD to the greatest degree (II Kings 18:5).
- D. If you know yourself to be a great sinner, then turn to the LORD like Josiah to be great.
- E. If you increase your faith, you can trust Him in dangerous times like Hezekiah to be great.

How Much Does God Require?

- A. The first and great commandment is our duty (and privilege) to love the LORD our God.
- B. How much love does He expect and require? All our heart, mind, soul, might, and strength!
- C. Nothing can compete – no, not the dearest relationships – which He clearly listed (Lu 14:26).
- D. Friendship with the world – flirting with His enemy – makes you an enemy of God (Jas 4:4).
- E. Both testaments, but especially the Old, compare earthly or religious compromise to adultery.

What Should You Sell for the Kingdom?

- A. Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven, Jesus Christ and His truth and righteousness, to a treasure in a field and a very rare pearl (Matt 13:44-46). You must sell all to get it!
- B. What gets in the way, distracts you, or keeps you from greatness in the sight of God? Sell it!
- C. We seek the kingdom of God first ... a priority over other pursuits (Matt 6:33; Lu 12:31-32).

What Should You Desire?

- A. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to not settle for inferior or mediocre gifts, like the Charismatics and Pentecostals do, but to earnestly covet the best gifts (I Cor 12:28-31).
- B. Observe the apostle's inspired encouragement ... to intensely desire the superlative gifts, for Paul by the Holy Spirit did not accept or understand the mentality of mediocrity.
- C. While our lesson is not about gifts, look at the apostle's expectation and exhortation.
- D. But in this context of the greatest gifts in the church, such as apostle and prophet, Paul admitted there was a more excellent way of serving Jesus Christ than even these – charity!

Love Is the Greatest

- A. The Bible teaches that love is the more excellent way of service than apostle (I Cor 12:31).
- B. The Bible teaches that faith and hope are abiding graces, but love is greater (I Cor 13:13).
- C. From all that is said about love in the love chapter of the Bible, the definition is significant.
 - 1. The first three verses show the uselessness of spiritual gifts without love (I Cor 13:1-3).
 - 2. The last six verses show the duration of love passing the spiritual gifts (I Cor 13:8-13).
 - 3. The fifteen phrases of I Cor 13:4-7 describe the greatest saints by the greatest grace.
- D. See other aspects of the greatest grace ... <http://www.letgodbettrue.com/sermons/pdf/love-is-the-greatest.pdf>

Servants Are Greatest

- A. Natural men desire to be great, and the apostles were no exception (Matt 18:1; 20:20-25).
- B. Jesus taught that greatness in His kingdom is by service (Matt 18:2-4; 20:26-28; 23:11-12).
- C. This is something to remember when you are doing some thankless task to serve others.
- D. This is something to remember when you feel self-pity coming on and a desire for attention.

Weightier Matters of the Law

- A. Jesus identified an error of the Pharisees in confusing the priorities of God's law (Mat 23:23).
- B. Jesus taught plainly and repeatedly that the Jewish leaders erred by not knowing the importance of mercy (Matt 12:7; Hos 6:6) and intent (Mark 2:27).
- C. Righteous judgment does not judge by appearance but looks for hidden wisdom (John 7:24).
- D. An extreme Christian is one that recognizes and applies these priorities to maximize wisdom.

Detailed in God's Word

- A. Jesus condemned the Pharisees and other teachers of His day for their selective application of scripture, both by ignoring principles or rules of the law or by modifying their intent.
- B. The least in the kingdom of heaven are those who break and teach neglect of God's details.
- C. Greatness in the kingdom of heaven includes doing and teaching the least things (Mat 5:19).
- D. The evidence of salvation is righteousness exceeding the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 5:20).
- E. The rest of the Sermon on the Mount identifies the modifications and neglect of details that characterized the carnal, compromising, and effeminate religion of the Jews.
- F. We are often accused of detail obsession ... <http://www.letgodbettrue.com/introduction/faq/small-stuff.htm>

Athletes Create a Good Metaphor

- A. Paul compared the temperance of a successful athlete to that of a Christian (I Cor 9:24-27).
- B. Can you find the superlative? Only one receives the prize! Therefore, he is the greatest!
- C. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to run with the same intensity and ambition as the runner.
- D. Can you find another superlative? Striving for the mastery is striving to be the very best.
- E. What temperance, or self-discipline, do you apply in positive exercises and ruling lusts?

Humility Is Crucial

- A. Lacking superlatives, God seeks the man with a poor, contrite, trembling spirit (Is 66:1-2).
- B. Moses had one of the closest relationships with God, and it is not unrelated that he was described by the Spirit as the meekest man on the face of the earth, even though he had reason to be less than meek for the blessings of a close relationship with God (Num 12:1-9).
- C. When Paul boasted of laboring the most, he also admitted that he was least (I Cor 15:9-10).

The Greatest Axiom

- A. Do you love simplicity? Then grasp this simple recipe for great gain: I Timothy 6:6.
- B. Godliness requires humility and zeal to flush your thoughts and submit to God's in all areas.
- C. Contentment requires humility and faith to admit you do not deserve more and have enough.
- D. It is learned behavior by faith in Christ's presence, and it is something you can change now.

Conclusion:

1. Your life is a series of decisions to prioritize activities within limitations of time, energy, money, etc.
2. In order to walk before God perfectly like Abraham or Moses or other great saint, you must choose it.
3. But there is another element, and it is the element of commitment, temperance, and zeal to excel at it.
4. God has bestowed grace on us, and it is a shame if our use of grace was vastly different from Paul's.

For Further Study:

- A. The Bible study, "Traits of Great Men," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/traits-of-great-men.pdf>.
- B. The Bible study, "Two Great Women," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/two-great-women.pdf>.
- C. The sermon outline, "Love Is the Greatest," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/love-is-the-greatest.pdf>.
- D. The sermon outline, "Elihu son of Barachel," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/elihu.pdf>.
- E. The sermon outline, "Great Women in 2005," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/great-women-in-2005.pdf>.
- F. The sermon outline, "Fathers for 2005," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/fathers-for-2005.pdf>.
- G. The sermon, "Great Women and Men," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/great-women-and-men.pdf>.
- H. The Bible study, "Christ-Like Men," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/christ-like-men.pdf>.
- I. The sermon outline, "The Two Great Commandments," ... not presently in e-format for linking here.
- J. The sermon outline, "Occupy Till I Come," ... not presently in e-format for linking here.
- K. The Bible study, "A Mighty Man's Life," ... not presently in e-format for linking here.
- L. The Bible study, "The Blessed Man," ... not presently in e-format for linking here.
- M. The Bible study, "Fast Track Men," ... not presently in e-format for linking here.
- N. The Bible study, "Fruitful Men," ... not presently in e-format for linking here.
- O. The Bible study, "Godly Ambition," ... not presently in e-format for linking here.
- P. The Bible study, "Kingdom Reputation," ... not presently in e-format for linking here.