

Joshua Bell is a **world-renown** violinist. In this video... you see and hear him playing a rare **Stradivarius**... that is worth over \$3 million dollars. This is all part of an elaborate experiment... set up by the Washington Post Newspaper... to measure context... perception... and priorities. ... The experimenters wanted to see if beauty would **transcend** the banal setting of this DC Metro train station. Would the **same** beauty... be recognized that had just **three days earlier** sold out the Boston Symphony Hall – with the cheapest seats selling for \$100.00 a piece...? In a busy train station... would this highly valued art be assessed the **same**... as it was in the context of a Symphony hall... where people gladly paid such steep ticket prices...? Dressed in jeans... a T shirt... and a Washington National's baseball cap... Bell played Mozart and Schubert for 45 minutes as over 1,000 people streamed by... most hardly taking notice.

As you can see... recognition of greatness is largely dependent on the **context** in which it is found. It is the **same** art... but many could not recognize it... when it was in an **unexpected** setting. Joshua Bell's music... that sold out the Symphony Hall... **HERE** – only garnered about \$32 from the few people who stopped long enough to give a donation.

If you are like me... you probably think that you would have no problem recognizing greatness... whenever... or wherever you come across it. But the truth is we probably **do** have a hard time recognizing it... much less... striving after it for our own lives... in a Biblical sense of greatness.

In our passage this morning in Luke... the discussion is about greatness. Jesus hears His disciples arguing among themselves about who is the greatest. ... This isn't the first time they have been so knuckle-headed to

argue this with each other. It seems to be a **re-occurring** discussion among them to determine which of them God puts on **top** of the greatest disciple list. And Jesus... on each of these occasions... just like this one... has to stop and correct them.

In Mark 9:35 we read that Jesus told them: "*If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.*" ... Previously in Luke... Luke 9:47-48... we saw how Jesus intervened in a similar debate by placed a child in front of them as an object lesson...

Luke 9:47-48 (ESV)

But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great."

And in Mark 10:35-45 James and John came to Jesus just a few weeks before the cross... and asked Him if they could sit at His right and His left when He set up His kingdom. ... Then Jesus told His disciples, "*...even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*"

So... here we are again... moments away from His betrayal and crucifixion... and the subject of this vain discussion comes up once more. So... in these last... precious... moments... during His last Supper with them... Jesus takes the opportunity to discuss greatness. ... Let's see how well **we** recognize greatness... and strive after it with our own lives.

Let's begin by reading about how the debate among the disciples – probably – got started.

Luke 22:21-23

When Jesus mentioned that one of THEM... this inner circle... would betray Him... they all started justifying themselves... saying “Not me!” ... “I would never do such a thing!” “I couldn’t... but YOU... **You might...!**” “What!?... Me? ... I’ve shown a whole lot more commitment than you...” “No way! Everyone looks up to me – more than you... when Christ isn’t around... who does the crowd usually come up to and ask their questions...? Me... that’s who! That should tell you how high my position will be in the coming Kingdom... I will be much higher than you!...” ... Will not!” ... “Will too...” ... “Oh... Wait a minute... Do You know what...? Maybe it will be Thaddeus, over there... who betrays Jesus... He never sits as close to Jesus during these meals... and he hasn’t hardly said a word all day.” “Hmmm... Maybe! But I was thinking... it could be Bartholomew... His heart has never seemed to be as committed. ... “Well... Perhaps... but I am still greater than you – any day!” ... “Are not!” ... Am too...” Hey Levi... who is the greatest among us...?” ... ***I* am!**

Luke 22:24

Then Jesus speaks out... He takes over the conversation and addresses the subject from several angles. Overall... He will declare WHAT MAKES FOR GREATNESS!

The first thing He does... is to contrast worldly leadership... with greatness in the Kingdom of God. ... Positions of authority... even when recognized by their underlings who look up to them... and even though they might ascribe fancy titles (names of great respect) to them ... does NOT

constitute what **God** regards as greatness. He measures it in a different way. Worldly leadership... (NOT God!)... recognizes greatness by three things: **position**... **titles**... and the pompous **attitude** of the leader.

Luke 22:25-26a

The attitude of a worldly leader is to lord their position over those they rule. And in turn... people would submit and show that they recognized the ruler's authority by calling them "benefactors" – a title of honor and greatness. A position of leadership... a lording attitude... and a title of honor and greatness... were the disciples' **assumed** measurements of greatness.

People in the church today... still try to use these WRONGFUL measurements. But any person who pursues a sense of greatness from a ministry position... displaying a superior attitude (I am better or more deserving than you) ... or accumulating titles of honor and respect... might as well believe in lepricons and a pot of gold at the end of every rainbow. "You are as likely to accumulate great wealth from this myth... as you are achieving greatness in the Kingdom of God through the pursuit of position, haughty attitude, and titles." It will not work!

So... what makes for greatness...?

1. The greatest among the disciples will be the one who is like the youngest and is the one who serves.

Luke 22:26-27

Greatness is not defined by superior attitudes – it is the opposite!
Greatness is defined by attitudes of humble service.

Now I just HAVE to say something that I mean as sincerely as I can possibly be! I don't think that I have ever been involved with a church as **great** as this church! Living Water – you are such an encouragement to me. God measures greatness by humble service... and everywhere I look... I see humble servant after humble servant. This is a GREAT church. Hundreds of teddy bears are being made and given to Children's hospitals... Orphans are being loved through our church's effort to build and maintain an orphanage in Colombia... Humble servants here have started Colombia Grace Foundation... Recently we had a member with special needs and so many of you quietly helped her get moved into a memory care facility – which required a lot of loving service... There is so much serving going on behind the scenes – which very few know about... food sharing ministries... financial aid... and my goodness! – My family and I are absolutely blown out of the water by all the love that is being shown to us through all the help and support this church is being for my daughter's wedding!

We do not have all the bells and the whistles for which the **world** might try to determine what a great church is... but looking at what Christ declares to be **His** standard –There is GREATNESS in this church!

Jesus closed this lesson on servanthood being a measure of greatness... by reminding them of their future reward in the kingdom. ... In spite of their weaknesses and failures... the disciples had stood by Jesus during His earthly ministry... and God would **honor** them for their **faithfulness**.

None of us should ever mind being servants today... for we shall sit on thrones in the future kingdom! Greatness has eternity in mind – not just the here and now.

Luke 22:28-30

1. The greatest among the disciples will be the one who is like the youngest and is the one who serves.

2. The greatest among the disciples will be the one who has eternity on their mind.

Jesus set the example for every follower He has. We must face a cross... before we receive a crown.

Luke 22:31-34

Before the tone turned so somber... Jesus had just been encouraging them with the thought of their crowns... *You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

That had to have produced quite a stir of excitement. ... What a prospect: the great messianic kingdom established... and the apostles ruling with Jesus! ...Talk about a spiritual high!

But then came the pain-filled words of realism in verses 31–34. ... The kingdom is not yet fully come. ... There is a cross to bear for all of you...

before you get the crowns. ... Jesus portrays the Christian life as threatened and fraught with spiritual difficulties.

"*Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you.*" The first thing to notice here is that the word "you" is **plural**. ... It is Ya'll ... just like they say in Tennessee and Alabama. (Being plural is obvious in Greek, not English.) Jesus is telling Simon Peter that Satan has demanded to have **all** the disciples.

To whom has Satan made this demand? ... Probably to God the Father... just like in the book of Job... where Satan is pictured as having access to God... and making demands of Him. God asked Satan, "*Have you noticed my servant Job?*" ... to which Satan replies, "*He is nothing special... You put such a hedge of protection around him. He would not be a servant of Yours if he wasn't so spoiled... let me take away from him... and we will see if he will still worship You...*" God gave Satan permission to afflict Job... but with certain limitations.

Then when Job's faith does not fail at the loss of his family and possessions, Satan returns to God and says, "*...This really isn't fair! You limited me and would allow me to touch him. Remove this limitation and Job will curse You to Your face...*" God said "OK" but limited Satan once again from killing Job. "*Behold he is in your power, only spare his life.*"

So both in **Job** and with these words of Jesus... here in Luke 22... Satan must go to God for permission... **before** he can trouble the lives of God's children.

Two implications from this are important for our lives. ... One is that Satan has a lot of power in this world. Jesus calls him the "prince" or "ruler of this world" (John 16:11), and Paul calls him the "god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4) and the "ruler of the authority of the air" (Ephesians 2:2).

The fact that Satan has such power in the world should give a kind of seriousness to our lives which unbelievers don't have. It shouldn't make us paranoid or fearful... but sober and earnest in our prayers... and persistently conscious of needing God's power. ... When the enemy is supernatural... so must the weapons be.

That's one implication of Jesus' words: Satan is real... has great power... and must be reckoned with seriously and soberly in this age. ... But a second implication is that Satan's power is by **permission** from God.

There are **not** two ultimate powers in the universe. ... There is only one: God. ... When Satan wants to have any of the Lord's followers... he must go to God first. ... That's an important word for our day... because the demonic forces of unreason... and insubordination... and hate... and violence... are becoming so strong... and ever nearer to home... that our faith in God's supremacy may be tested to the limit. We will need to remember words like these: *Satan cannot hurt us any more than God permits.*

But in addition to being very comforting... it is also puzzling. ... It raises a very important and hard theological question: "Why would God grant to His archenemy any of his demands?" ... AND – "Why does God tolerate the activity of Satan at all?"

Through suffering and trial... our faith is refined. ... We are drawn to rely ever more heavily on God... and we are moved to cherish His **grace** more strongly. ... Satan has his role to play in fanning the flames of our refining furnace... and God waits for us to draw closer to Him... knowing that there will be an appointed day of judgment for this trouble-maker.

In verse 31... we see that Satan wants to sift *you*... (plural – ya'll)... like wheat. ... What *does* Satan aim to do? ... What does "*sifting like wheat*" refer to in real life? ... The best clue comes in the next sentence where Jesus says, "*But I prayed for you that your faith may not fail.*" ... Satan aims to sift Simon and the others like wheat. Jesus aims to keep Simon's faith from failing. ... So probably "*sifting like wheat*" means doing something to make the disciples' faith fail. ... And this remains Satan's main goal today.

It is a great encouragement to know that God is always stronger than Satan... and that by faith in Him... we can avoid Satan's destruction... and gain a crown of life. ... But God's word of consolation and hope goes even farther.

We need for our daily struggles some encouragement that in a time of suffering and weakness... we will not abandon the faith and curse God. ... We need some reassurance that the ups and downs of our faith... will not end someday in a permanent **down** and fail utterly. ... And Jesus gives us that encouragement and reassurance in verse 32.

Luke 22:32

It is encouraging to know that God is **infinitely** stronger than Satan... and that if we simply trust God to the end... He will give us eternal life.

But it is **doubly** encouraging... doubly **hopeful**... that Jesus Christ and God the Father do not stand back and watch to see if we will have the strength to endure in faith. ... Notice Jesus **prays** to His Father for Simon. (Now... in this case... the word "you" is singular... it isn't "ya'll" this time. ... "I prayed for you... that is... Simon. ... Jesus prays for us on an individual basis... not just generically for us all... We see here Jesus asking God to do what needs to be done in order to preserve **Simon** from destruction.

And Jesus is completely confident that his Father will answer his prayer, because He says, "*And when you have turned, strengthen your brothers.*"

Jesus knows that Simon will deny Him three times. He says so in verse 34. But evidently Jesus does not consider this brief denial to be the utter failure that Satan is after. ... It is a temporary weakness... a brief faltering of confidence... but it is followed quickly by bitter tears of repentance and turning. ... Jesus knew Simon Peter would turn from his sin... because He had prayed for him... that his faith **not** fail utterly.

Here is the double weapon of hope and encouragement that these verses ought to give us... Not only is God willing and supremely able to save forever all of us who trust Him... You see God the Father and God the Son **will** keep us trusting to the **end**. ... We are not left without a shield against the enemy... nor are we left to hold this shield of faith merely by our own strength. ... God will always see to it that faith has the victory and that His children have faith.

1. The greatest among the disciples will be the one who is like the youngest and is the one who serves.

2. The greatest among the disciples will be the one who has eternity on their mind.

3. The greatest among the disciples will be the one who overcomes failure and then strengthens their fellow believers.

A great disciple may have failure of nerves... but it won't be **permanent**.

You may have blown it **big** in your Christian walk... just like Peter. ...

Perhaps you have denied Christ... maybe you pretended that you were not a Christian when your friends spoke poorly about Christianity... Maybe you have ignored the clear teaching of the Bible... you knew what God wanted you to do... but you chose the wrong way instead. ...But - God will always see to it... in a believer's life... that faith has the victory. Overcome your temporary failure... **AND**... help strengthen other believers.

Though failure is **regrettable**... sometimes our best lessons come from our reflections about it. ... Peter had lessons to teach about thinking too high of our own ability. Peter thought that in his own strength... he could never deny the Lord. But after he was restored... Peter had a powerful lesson about how **deceptive** self-confidence is...

1. The greatest among the disciples will be the one who is like the youngest and is the one who serves.

2. The greatest among the disciples will be the one who has eternity on their mind.

3. The greatest among the disciples will be the one who overcomes failure and then strengthens their fellow believers.

And now it is time for us to turn our attention to number four...

4. The greatest among the disciples will be the one who adapts as he prepares for future ministry.

Luke 22:35-38

Jesus reveals that times are changing... and the way they will do ministry will not be the same. *“Before... I told you to pack lightly... no money... knapsack... or sandals. Now that method worked... didn't it? But as the circumstances change... you will **not** be able to do ministry the same way. You are going to be sent out again... and I want you to prepare differently...”*

Previously... the disciples had been sent out with special authority... and they were treated with respect and appreciation. ... At that time... Jesus was still a very popular rabbi... and the authorities were not able to attack His disciples. ... But now "His hour had come"... and the situation would change radically.

Today... You and I... as Christ's followers... are aliens in enemy territory... Our times have changed on us... hostility has grown in the last 20 years toward Christians in our culture... and we must **adapt** accordingly and **prepare** ourselves as best we can to serve the Lord. ... This is a good warning to zealous people... who foolishly get themselves into tight spots... because they don't **prepare** or adapt for ministry... they don't bother to

pray... and study... and memorize God's Word... learn basic theology... and then when they get into a hostile confrontation for their faith... they expect God to perform miracles for them. ... Some ignore how the times change and they want to hold onto the older methods of ministry... before the church has become so marginalized in our society... when Christianity found greater respect... and they expect God to keep blessing their never-changing efforts.

Take advantage of the wonderful tools we have available today... use the internet to learn more about God's Word... practical ministry... and theology. Prepare yourself... position yourself as best as you can... for God to use you. ... Also... look at how the times will change... and adopt to them. Be ready to abandon the old tried and true methods of ministry that have worked well in the past... but may not be as effective today. Jesus told His disciples to change their **method** because the time was different.

As the disciples immediately prepared... they came up with **two swords**... hardly enough to defend them all. ...But Jesus said, "**That's enough.**" Theologians are divided on what Jesus was telling them – first in acquiring swords... and second in limiting it to only two.

It seems clear to me that Jesus was telling them to prepare for conflict... whether Jesus wanted them to obtain **literal** swords... or **symbolic** swords... Jesus wanted them to get ready for definite struggle. The fact that He said **two** was enough... and two swords is not an amount to take on all their enemies... ... plus the fact that... later that evening... when Peter used one of them to lop off the ear of one of the men who came to

arrest Jesus... and was rebuked by Jesus for doing so... All of this suggests to me that the disciples were not to **depend** on them. Their primary trust is in the Lord – **not** in these provisions. ... So prepare! – (We need to ready ourselves to minister)... but do not consider those provisions as your best hope for victory.

Before this lesson from Christ on greatness... the disciples thought that they knew how to measure it. It turns out that they didn't.

Do you know the measurements that God uses...? If you do... are you aiming for greatness...?

In just a few weeks the world's attention will be focused on London England. They will be looking for greatness. But God is calling for you and I to be even greater than what people hope to witness in the Olympics. God has shown us today what His eyes are looking for in you and I - as **true** greatness.

1. Greatness will be seen by the one who is like the youngest and is the one who serves.
2. Greatness will be seen by the one who has eternity on their mind.
3. Greatness will be seen by the one who overcomes failure and then strengthens their fellow believers.
4. Greatness will be seen by the one who adapts as he prepares for future ministry.