

• *Increasing warnings*

1. Jesus' greatness focuses upon the cross

• *Whether they understand or not Jesus goes on telling them about His cross.*

• *They will understand one day*

2. Greatness is seen in freedom from snobbery

• *They still have an incorrect understanding of the Kingdom*

• *Greatness is revealed in the people you are willing to receive*

• *Freedom from self-assertiveness is the mark of greatness*

Jesus is increasingly warning His disciples that His work in this world involves His going to the cross to die.

1. **Jesus' greatness focuses upon the cross.** There is emphasis on the cross in all of the four gospels. In the Gospel of Luke, the first hint of the cross was in Luke 6:11. There we had our first warning that the Jewish leaders were planning to do Jesus harm. After the confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus begins to be more explicit in predicting His death. '*The Son of Man must suffer many things... and be put to death, and... be raised*'¹. Now Jesus gives a second prediction. '*The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men...*'². We are less than half way through the gospel and yet the death of Jesus is already being heavily emphasised. Imagine you were writing a biography of someone who lived until he was about thirty-three years old. Would you be dealing with how he came to die when you were less than half way through the biography? Probably not. This shows us how much emphasis there is on the death of Jesus. They did not yet understand what He was saying³. Not until the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them would they come to a clearer understanding. Then on the Day of Pentecost the death of Jesus would come clearer to them in a matter of seconds. But whether they understand or not Jesus goes on telling them about His cross. They will understand one day. After the day of Pentecost these predictions will come back to their memories and they will realise that all along the way Jesus was talking to them about His cross.

2. **Greatness is seen in freedom from snobbery.** 'Snobbery' is social pride, a feeling of superiority that comes from our being in a wealthier or more eminent position in society. The disciples are very interested in being eminent in society. They have heard Jesus speaking of the kingdom of God. They still think very much in terms of the Romans being expelled and Jewish leaders ruling the nation. They are eager that they should have important parts to play in this new kingdom. Little do they know what the future holds for them! They are already discussing which disciples will have the greatest authority¹.

Jesus calls a child to be near at His side¹. His reply to the disciples has two parts to it. Firstly, greatness is revealed in the people you are willing to **receive**. Most people would not pay special attention to children because they are powerless and they are not wealthy! The disciples are already thinking of how great they will be. They are interested in the important people they will have in their kingdom. Jesus says the mark of greatness is to have an interest in the poor and powerless. The child is a sample of social powerlessness. Jesus has come for such people.

The second part of the reply deals with their own willingness to take a lowly position. **He who is least among you is the one who is great.** Like all of Jesus' teaching it deals with attitude; it does not make absolute rules. Freedom from self-assertiveness is the mark of greatness. A child is dependent on adults. He or she has no great

¹ 9:22

² 9:43b-44

³ 9:45

¹ 9:46nn

¹ 9:47

status, but is under the authority of parents or guardians. The person who is childlike does not strive for power. The one who has child-like dependence on God, child-like readiness to let God's will take place, such a person is great in the kingdom of God. Any disciple who wants to be 'great' has lost greatness already! The one who will be great in God's sight is the one who, like a child, is not bothering about greatness at all.

3. Greatness is seen in freedom from rivalry.

Human beings are generally somewhat hostile to other cultures, nationalities, tribes and denominations

3. **Greatness is seen in freedom from rivalry.** The disciples hear of a person who casts out demons in the name of Jesus. He does not belong to the twelve apostles or any of those who travel with Jesus. It is rather like the story in Numbers 11:24–30. The disciples react with indignation. It is typical of all of us that we want people to be in our group. Human beings are generally somewhat hostile to other cultures, other nationalities, other tribe, other denominations. This exorcist evidently had a high regard for Jesus and used His name in his work. The disciples were indignant that he was not fully submissive to their little group of disciples led by the twelve apostles. Denominationalism is starting already.

There is a link between what Jesus says here and the previous section. Their desire to be the only people who represent Jesus is part of their desire for worldly greatness. They would love to forbid anyone serving Jesus unless He does so under their banner. Then they will feel more important!

• *People who are more on our side than against us are to be welcomed!*

But Jesus feels quite differently. He does not mind if someone has learned a little about Him and is seeking to minister to people in His name – even if that person is being rather independent-minded. 'He that is not against you is for you'. There will be plenty of people crying out 'Crucify Him! Crucify Him' in a few months after this time. People who are more on our side than against us are to be welcomed!

• *To become great like this is a 'crucifying' experience – daily*

This is what true greatness is: recognition of the cross of Jesus, a willingness to let vindication and social eminence come from Jesus alone, and a loving, gracious, large-hearted approach to everyone everywhere. To become like this is itself a 'crucifying' experience. This is what Jesus meant: 'if anyone wishes to come after Me let him... take up his cross – daily.'

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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