

## Going Backwards

Summary: Jesus taught that personal goodness is more valuable than personal greatness.

**Hymns: 1<sup>st</sup> Service**

**How Great Thou Art #77**

**Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service #581**

**Jesus Loves Me #191**

**Praise Songs: 2<sup>nd</sup> Service**

**How Great Is Our God**

**We Fall Down**

**Jesus Loves Me #191**

Call to Worship

L: Who among you is seeking the wisdom of God?

**P: We long to hear God's Word spoken to our hearts.**

L: Who among you is seeking God's bright and holy truth?

**P: We long to learn the ways of wisdom and righteousness.**

L: Who among you is seeking a Spirit-filled life?

**P: We long to live lives of holiness and light.**

L: God grants God's wisdom generously to all who ask.

Come near, people of God!

Let us worship in wisdom and truth.

**P: AMEN!**

Prayer

**Our Creator and sustainer, we confess that we are not always strong like the trees planted by the water's edge. Sometimes we are weak and indecisive. When the first big wind comes, we lean and break. We plot revenge instead of letting you fight our battles. By our silence and busyness, we let wickedness and ugliness fester and flourish. Today Lord, forgive us when we covet and lie and when we get caught up in things that displease you. Heal us, direct our paths, and be for us the peace we so desperately crave.**

**Amen.**

Scripture:

**James 3:13-4:3**

<sup>13</sup> Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. <sup>15</sup> Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

<sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup> Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

**4** What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? <sup>2</sup> You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. <sup>3</sup> When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

**Mark 9:30-37**

**<sup>30</sup> They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, <sup>31</sup> because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” <sup>32</sup> But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.**

**<sup>33</sup> They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” <sup>34</sup> But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.**

**<sup>35</sup> Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”**

**<sup>36</sup> He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.**

### Message

### Going Backwards

The word “great” is probably the most overused word in the English language. When you Google the word great there are around 5.5 billion links. Not only does the word great mean above normal or above average, the word “great” can also mean just the opposite. If you get in your car to crank it up and the battery’s dead you might say, “Well, that’s just great!” No wonder it’s hard to learn English!

I’m going to talk about greatness today, and I want to illustrate greatness the same way Jesus did.

When it comes to personal greatness, Jesus turned the pyramid upside down. I’ve entitled this message “Going Backwards.” I don’t think a business book with that title would sell many copies. But when it comes to our personal relationship with God and with others, Jesus taught that personal greatness is less valuable than personal goodness. There are 3 principles we can gather from this.

#### 1. The first is to RESIST THE TEMPTATION OF SELFISH PRIDE

We read that, “On the way they had argued about who was the greatest.” Just hours earlier Jesus had revealed Himself in all of His glory to Peter, James, and John. Then He had performed the miracle of delivering the young man who was tortured by a demon. Now picture this, as they were walking back, Jesus tells of how He would be delivered, betrayed, tortured, and killed in Jerusalem, then He would rise from the dead. Those are deep, important topics. But instead of discussing these great events, the disciples were arguing about which one of them was the greatest. When Jesus asked them what they were talking about, I don’t blame them for keeping quiet. They had to be embarrassed.

But Jesus is omniscient—He knows all things—so He knew exactly what they were arguing about: Who was the greatest. We all have to deal with the temptation of our flesh to think we are great. We have an “I” problem, and it has nothing to do with sight. I’m talking about the big “I” that represents your ego. I can remember boxer Muhammad Ali brashly declaring, “I am the greatest!!” and it’s hard to be humble when you’re as great as I am.

We say so many things are “great” that the word has lost its power. We talk about the Great Lakes, Great Britain, the Great Plains, the Great Wall in China; and the Great White Shark swimming in the Great Barrier Reef. And history has dubbed certain leaders with the title “great” like Alexander the Great, Herod the Great, and even Catherine the Great. Wikipedia reports there has been at least 114 world leaders who had the word “great” used with their names, all the way from Albert the Great to Xerxes the Great.

The essence of sin is self-centeredness. And a person who suffers from selfish pride places their ego at the center of their own personal universe and everything and everyone revolves around them. They don't know much about theology, but their favorite topic is Me-ology. They love to talk about "me" and what "me" likes or "me" doesn't like. And drumroll please; now we have the ability to take pictures of our favorite subject—me!! According to a CBS report, we are taking 93 million selfies a day.

The Bible teaches that we must resist this temptation for self-promotion. The Bible says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3)

There's nothing wrong with having ambition—ambition for your family, your church, or your business can be a good thing. The Bible warns about the kind of SELFISH ambition that causes you to consider yourself better than everyone else.

Dr. Jim Henry served as Pastor of FBC Orlando for almost thirty years before he retired in 2009. He is a genuinely a humble servant of God. He tells the story on himself about the time when he was attending a graduation ceremony in the football stadium at his alma mater, Georgetown College in Georgetown, Kentucky. He was receiving the outstanding alumnus award. He was sitting up on the platform with the president and the faculty in his dark robe. And for a few minutes he was feeling pretty good about himself. Just before he got up to get the award he was thinking, "When I was a student here, I was a nobody. Nobody expected me to succeed. Nobody knew that I would be the pastor of one of the largest churches in the Southern Baptist Convention. But here I am. Getting the outstanding alumnus award. Not bad, Jim, old boy." Then Jim said, just as he walked to the podium to get the award, he said a large bird flew over him and bombed him from his head down the shoulder of his black robe. He started laughing and everyone else started laughing. And Jim was thinking, "God sure has a sense of humor. And He has a way of humbling us when we start thinking too highly of ourselves!"

## II. IN GOD'S KINGDOM SERVICE IS BETTER THAN STATUS

Jesus said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

In this world, everyone is trying to make it to the top. They want to get to the top of the corporate ladder, or the top of the heap, or the top of the list of richest people.

The Bible says in James 4:6, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Then a few verses later in James 4:10, "Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up."

In Isaiah 14 we read about the selfish ambition of an angel named Lucifer. He said, "I will ascend to heaven; I will place my throne above the stars of heaven...I will make myself like the most high!" (Isaiah 14:13-14) Satan said, "I'm going up, up, up. The sky's not even the limit for me!" But God said, "No way. You're going down, down, down." And one day Satan will go all the way down to the bottomless pit.

Jesus demonstrated a servant's heart when He washed the disciples' feet the night before He was crucified. They all thought they were too important to wash feet, but Jesus showed them what servanthood is all about. He was the Son of God, but He didn't lead with a fancy title, He led with a foot towel.

## III. A CHILD IS JESUS' PATTERN FOR HUMILITY

When Jesus was looking for an object lesson about true greatness, "He took a little child and had him stand among them."

As Jesus got ready to talk about greatness, I suspect Simon Peter was getting ready to stand up to be the perfect example of the greatest disciple. But instead, Jesus took a little child and held him in His arms. We know Jesus loves children and He welcomes them into His arms.

In the parallel passage in Matthew we read, “He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: ‘I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’” (Matthew 18:2-4)

Jesus didn’t just use a child as an example of humility; He told the disciples they had to change and become like little children if they ever wanted to enter the Kingdom. That is a revolutionary statement. If we’re going to become like children again, we’ve got to understand how a child thinks.

Now, Jesus didn’t say we must become childish; there are some negative qualities of kids we should avoid. He said we must become childlike. I’d like to remind you of three positive childlike qualities we should keep on expressing.

#### A. Kids have UNRESTRAINED JOY

Don’t you love to hear children laugh? There is nothing like when your child for some reason begins to giggle. The Bible says we should have joy unspeakable full of glory. Proverbs 17:22 says a cheerful heart is good medicine. Reader’s Digest paraphrased that to be “Laughter is the best medicine.” Go ahead, don’t be afraid to laugh. I read somewhere that if you suppress laughter, it goes down and just spreads out your hips. I don’t know if that’s true or not—but go ahead and don’t be afraid to express the unrestrained joy of kids.

#### B. Kids show UNRESERVED LOVE

It’s easy for kids to show their love. It’s sad, but it seems the older we get, the more reserved we become in expressing our love. Men are the worst. It’s hard for tough men to express love for their spouses, much less other men. We live in a time when we don’t want to be heard telling another man, “I love you.” But you have to have the lingo down. We never say, “I love you.” You have to tell them like this, “I love you, man.” And they may say, “I love you, too, dog.”

#### C. Kids have UNCOMPLICATED TRUST

I can remember when my daughter Stephanie would stand at the top of the stairs and seeing me at the bottom, without any warning, she would leap into my arms knowing I would catch her. Wouldn’t it be amazing if we could trust God the same way when He calls us to do something.

Jesus said that we must change and become as little children if we want to enter the kingdom of Heaven. That’s the attitude of some people—it’s them—and everyone else is insignificant. But Jesus taught us that there are no little people, just people loved by God.

When you die, will anyone say, “He was a great man” or “She was a great woman”? Instead, Jesus teaches us that goodness is more valuable than greatness. Can we go against the flow and go backwards from greatness to goodness? The best reward we will ever receive will be when we hear the Master say, “Well done, GOOD and faithful servant.”