

The Highest in the Lowest

Luke 1:26-38

Greatness

In the movie "Chariots of Fire": speech at the Freshman's dinner

"Let each of you determine where your true chance of greatness lies.... Seize this chance! Rejoice in it! Then let no power nor persuasion deter you in your task."

Where might our chances for greatness lie?

How do you relate to greatness?

What if our thoughts about "greatness" have blinded us to the work and presence of God in the world and in our own lives?

The Gospel of Luke: certainty of the things "from the beginning"

1:5-25 Announcement of John the Baptist's birth

1:26-38 Announcement of Jesus' birth

1:39-56 Celebration by the mothers together

1:57-80 Birth and blessing of John the Baptist

2:1-40 Birth and blessing of Jesus

2:41-52 Jesus as a boy in the temple

3:1-20 John the Baptist prepares people for Jesus

3:21-22 John the Baptist baptizes Jesus

Luke 1:26-38

26-29: Greeting of great honor for a very lowly person

Comparisons of Greatness in a First Century Jewish Perspective

Zechariah: John's dad

- Man
- Married
- Elderly
- Righteous in God's sight
- from Judea, in Jerusalem
- Priest
- Tribe of Aaron

Mary: Jesus' mom

- Woman
- Single (and soon to be pregnant)
- Not even an adult yet
- No moral approval stated
- from Galilee, in a village
- Commoner
- Unknown tribe

Mary was "pledged to be married"

Legally binding pre-marriage without sexual intercourse (perhaps up to a year)

Getting pregnant when pledged to be married would be a great scandal

Why was Mary troubled "at his words"?

"I will be with you" comes with challenging assignments

When God told **Jacob** to return to his family home, where his brother **Esau** had sworn to kill him Genesis 31:3

When God told **Moses** to return to Egypt and lead God's people free, where Moses had been rejected & Pharaoh tried to kill him Exodus 3:12

When God told **Joshua** to lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land where Moses had failed Joshua 1:5

When God called **Gideon** to lead Israel in overthrowing the Midianite army that had oppressed them Judges 6:12

When God called **Jeremiah** to be a prophet to Israel, warning him that Israel would reject him Jeremiah 1:8

When Jesus told His **disciples** to make disciples of all nations Matthew 28:20

"The Lord is with you" implies a challenging assignment from the Lord

So if God says, "I'll be with you" expect to learn why His presence will be needed!

30-33: Astounding work of God in a very lowly person

Mary is the recipient of grace (undeserved gift)

Mary is to name the baby "Jesus"

Not the cultural norm > but neither is a virgin birth

Radical claims

Son of the "Most High"!

a globally understood reference to the God over all
He'll sit on David's throne: empty for 600 years!
He'll reign forever: not just for a human lifetime

34-37: Gabriel explained the miraculous work of the Spirit

Why was Zechariah rebuked and Mary honored?

Authoritative word

Elizabeth says of Mary: "Blessed is she who believed"

Gabriel says to Zechariah: "You did not believe"

Mary: Faith seeking understanding and obedience

Zechariah: trying to avoid the need for faith

God's work happens by the Holy Spirit's work

Never by human or natural processes alone

Sometimes God works through nothing but humility

38: Mary submitted to the will of God

Mary understood and willingly accepted her place in total submission to God

Being a slave of God is a glorious thing because of the glorious nature of God

God protects and raises up those who humble themselves without reservation under Him

Comparisons of greatness

John the Baptist

Jesus

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • Amazing birth | Impossible birth |
| • Received Spirit before birth | Spirit-conceived |
| • Great in the eyes of the Lord | Great without qualification |
| • Prophet of the Most High | Son of the Most High |
| • Go before the Lord | The Lord Himself |
| • Prepare people for the Lord | The Lord Himself |
| • Serve until the Lord comes | Forever |
| • Unbelief of the parent | Faith/submission of the parent |

The Big Idea in Jesus' Birth

**God's astoundingly great rescue and restoration of all creation
was done by His design and initiative
by the greatest Son of God
becoming the least
among the least
in submission to God**

When God worked to rescue and restore the guilty and shameful,
He came personally and in perfect humility, kindness, & patience

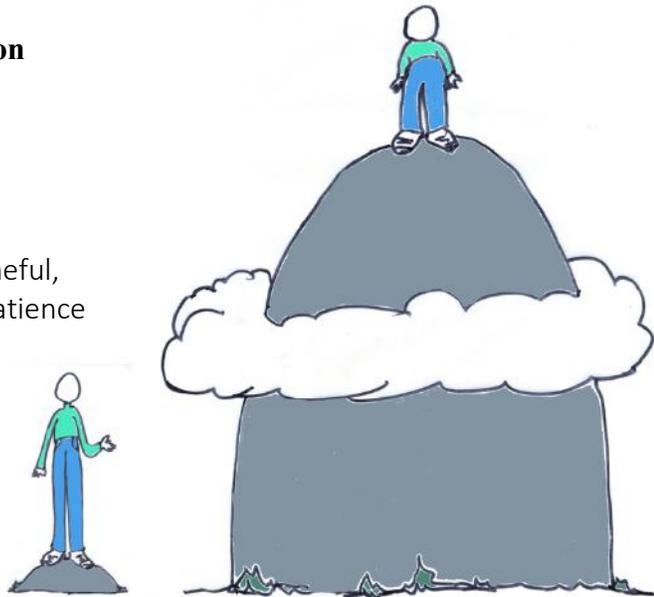
The Big Idea in Our Lives

**God's works
are done by His design and initiative
by the Holy Spirit of God working
through the least
in submission to God**

We can be so impressed (or depressed) by human greatness
We can easily believe that important things are only done by great people
We can easily believe that God shares our view of greatness
And the vast majority of us will never be great

But...

the 'greatness' of a person is dwarfed by the 'greatness' of what they stand on



The smallest person standing on a great mountain is far greater than the greatest person standing on a mound of dirt

By God's design!

"But we have this **treasure in jars of clay** to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."
2 Corinthians 4:7

"I am going to send you what my Father has promised [the Holy Spirit]; but stay in the city until you have been **clothed with power from on high.**" *Luke 24:49*

To know Christ and to be known by Him is to stand on the greatest mountain

"I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him..." *Philippians 3:7-11*

To be impressed by any other greatness is to belittle the greatness of God

God does not look for greatness! He looks for people who will stand on His greatness!

Application

Worship the Son of God who turned from greatest greatness to lowest lowliness to lift us up to eternal life

Philippians 2:6-8

This is so unexpected!

This is such a relief!

The One who would be fully justified in condemning us, instead humbly sacrifices Himself to rescue us

This is sublime...beautiful in a way that inspires worship

To be a Christian is to bow in willing, joyful worship and submission before Jesus Christ, our sublime God and Savior

Turn from believing in human greatness to seeing greatness in Christ

Turn from... Giving up because we aren't "great"

Envy others who seem to be "great"

Putting our hope in people who are "great"

Believing we are "great"

Turn to... Lowering ourselves in Christ

No longer seeing "greatness" as the world sees it

A "nobody" who stands in Christ is far greater

than the greatest human being standing on their own

Fully submit to Christ as the servants of God

In complete submission (head, heart & hands) to the Most High God

Accept the path He leads us on

Peter was comparing his path to the path of another apostle: "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." *John 21:21-22*

"I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."

Obey the commands He gives us

To be humble servants of God and of people

To give preference to others rather than ourselves

A desire for human greatness has brought such deep harm to so many churches and ministries
individual and collective

Being impressed by human greatness has brought such deep harm to so many churches and ministries

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time." *1 Peter 5:6*

God has been doing a work in my heart

"Put me right where you want me to be. No more and no less"

Make me (and us) humble like Christ

The surprise: being like the greatest

Surprisingly, we are most like the great Son of God
when we humble ourselves
and submit without limitation to God

Reflection Questions for later today or this week...

1. What forms of human greatness are most compelling to you? Why might that be?
2. Where or how have you seen God work through lowly people in wonderful ways?
3. How might our thoughts about “greatness” have blinded us to the work and presence of God in the world and in our own lives?
4. In what ways might you be tempted to think that God is not interested in working through you because you are not great in people’s eyes or in your own eyes?
5. What does it look like for you to humble yourself and submit without limitation to God?