

## **THE ULTIMATE MAN AND GREATNESS (Jesus' greatness! – and ours?)**

### **1. JESUS' GREATNESS! – Luke 9/28-36: The Transfiguration**

'Jesus went up onto a high mountain': figuratively and literally, this was the high point of Jesus' ministry! In no other event in his life was his greatness (his true identity – his divinity and glory) so clearly displayed.

It happens just as he is about to move from his Galilean ministry (4/14 – 9/50) to his Judean & Perea ministry (9/51 – 19/27), from the climax to the growth in his popularity to the beginning of the growth of opposition.

From the commentary on this passage that follows, pick up on any points that you think serve the theme...

#### **v28**

About eight days after Jesus said this - Said what? Claimed that he was who Peter confessed him to be (v18-27).

The transfiguration was the Father's attestation that both Peter and Jesus were speaking the truth: Jesus was indeed "The Christ of God" (v20), who would "come in his glory and in the glory of the Father..." (v.26). He took Peter, James and John with him cf. v18. The special discipling of Peter, James and John (v equality) (cf. Jairus' daughter 8/51, Gethsemane Mk 14/33) and went up onto a high mountain to pray Jesus' lifestyle of prayer, of going to remote/quiet places to pray.

How many of God's special events take place on mountains! Noah/Ararat, Moses/Sinai&Nebo, David& Solomon/Zion, Elijah/Carmel&Sinai, Jesus/SoM,Olives&Calvary, et al.

#### **v29**

"As he was praying" - The Father's doing, not Jesus' (may or may not have known was going to happen) The appearance of his face changed Not as in looked like another person, but became glorious/radiant (cf. v32)

Brief manifestation of who he really was! (cf. Re 1/10-16, esp v16b...)

There he was transfigured...His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. (Mw 17/2) and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Unbearably bright – but his face even more so!

His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. (Mk 9/3)

#### **v30**

"Two men, Moses and Elijah" - The two greatest OT figures, representative of the Law and the Prophets respectively, and thus of God's entire OC revelation and redemption.

Father attesting that Jesus stands in this (v introduces a new/opposing) tradition; indeed, fulfils it.

Both these men met God on a mountain (Sinai): this further endorses Jesus as the bringer of God's next rev.

In heaven Jesus appears between the two greatest saints, on earth between two common criminals!

#### **v31**

"appeared in glorious splendour" - Had a measure of glory themselves and/or reflected Jesus glory.

But as nothing compared to Jesus' glory: "they saw his glory and the two men standing with him" (v32) talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem

cf. v22. Emphasizes again that Jesus was born to die (his cross was the central reason for his coming) and

that everything which was shortly to happen to him was a "fulfilment" of God's good and sovereign plan. It possibly also reflects what was already uppermost on Jesus' heart (cf. 12/50, Jn 12/27).

#### **v32**

very sleepy...fully awake Not surprising! Understatement! Both parts sadly so like Gethsemane (prayer/arrest).

they saw his glory and the two men standing with him Possibly what John referred to later: Jn 1/14

### **v33**

Peter speaking part in fright/confusion and part in misguided zeal: truly, he did not know what he was saying!

He did not know what to say, they were so frightened. (Mk 9/6)

Yet sensed instinctively and correctly that it is good for us to be here – with God, in glory, on the mountain top

– and didn't want the men to leave; but we cannot stay/live there – yet!

### **v34**

While he was speaking, a bright cloud appeared - A supernatural cloud!

God often appeared in (/veiled by) clouds (e.g. pillar, ark, descriptions of God in Psalms/etc, ascension, return).

Glory brought bedazzlement; Presence brings fear! – disciples knew this was beyond even what had seen already.

### **v35**

The Father wanted to endorse the Son even beyond his transfiguration (manifested glory), so he speaks audibly,

Confirming that Peter's confession and Jesus' claim are true: "This is my Son".

"whom I have chosen" - God's sovereign election and decision: if God has chosen him, we have no choice in the matter (man cannot un-choose him or choose another); if we resist (do not listen to) him, we resist God!

"listen to him" - This follows from Jesus' identity as Son and God's choice of him: it is the natural/right response.

Matthew has the same words as spoken at Jesus' baptism, plus the additional and consequential "Listen to him!" (Mark has the first 2 of the 3 baptismal phrases, plus "Listen to him!")

When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. (Mw 17/6)

The audible voice of God, speaking to/about Jesus, was heard by others 3 times during Jesus' life: at his baptism (3/22), to affirm Jesus was his Son; at his transfiguration (here), to instruct men (in consequence) to

listen to him; and shortly before the cross (Jn 12/28), to comfort him in the anticipation of his suffering and

assure him that its purpose would be fulfilled (see v27-33).

### **v36**

"When the voice had spoken [they looked up], they found that Jesus was alone." The cloud, glory, and Moses & Elijah, were all gone – we cannot extend supernatural experiences beyond what God sovereignly grants.

The disciples kept this to themselves and told no-one at that time what they had seen. Disciples awed: genuine visions of heaven silence us vs. make us babblers + Don't cast your pearls before pigs + This experience was

beyond their understanding; only in the light of subsequent events, when they understood it, did they tell other

Matthew locates their silence in Jesus' instruction: Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead (17/9). Both true: their awe/incomprehension and Jesus' instruction silenced them.

### **After [v37-43]**

When come down from mountain (v37), find crowds, demons, suffering, struggle, unbelief, and ministry. Can't stay up mountain (in heaven): have to come down to valleys (earth) – where there is work to be

done (v42), we are grown (Mw 17/19f, Mk 9/28f) and God is revealed to and glorified among those who don't know him (v43)

## **Conclusion**

Lest we doubt his identity because of his humble start or inglorious end, Jesus, in the middle of his ministry, is revealed to the key disciples (and, through them, to us and all mankind) for who he really is: the glorious and awful Son of God, whom we cannot look at safely (v29, Re 1/16 cf. 1 Ti 6/16). Whatever our circumstances, or that of believers (the church) anywhere, or the state of the world, *this* is who Jesus is: the Glorious One who rules even now and will return to judge all men, right all wrongs, renew the cosmos and reward his followers.

## **2. OUR GREATNESS? – Luke 9/46-48 & 22/24-30: Two Arguments**

### **a) The First Argument (9/46-48)**

#### **v46**

There is never a good time for such a motivation/argument, but this was surely the worst: totally insensitive to what Jesus had just said (v44) and how he must have been feeling.

When we are consumed with our own cause, we inevitably grow hard hearted/uncaring about God's cause.

After the awesome revelation and demonstration of Jesus' true greatness, to be concerned about our greatness, even to think we can be 'great' in any way, seems tatty and tawdry. Instead of the transfiguration, we have a travesty – ridiculous, ludicrous, grotesque.

Jesus is not rebuking a godly ambition, a desire for significance ("To aspire to leadership is an honourable ambition" 1 Tim 3/1 NEB), but a desire to be great ("Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not." Jer 45/5) – and certainly the desire to be *greatest* is comparative/competitive and hence born of pride.

#### **v47**

Jesus' gracious correction involved making a little child stand beside him: children denote humility (because of their lowly, humble status) and so even the child's presence and Jesus' 'use' of him would have been a rebuke to the disciples' pride.

#### **v48a**

To even acknowledge a child in that culture, let alone welcome him, required humility. By requiring his disciples to welcome children in his name if they wanted to welcome him, and in turn his Father, Jesus is expecting great humility. What the world around us would consider strange, even demeaning, behaviour, Jesus expects from us as something beautiful.

#### **v48b**

For the culture/values of the kingdom are the complete inversion of the world's: he who is least (in the eyes of the world) is the greatest (in the eyes of the king). If we want true greatness, we must have true humility; if we want to be the greatest, we must become the least – in attitude, expressed in being the servant of everyone else.

For *the* greatest, Jesus, became the 'leastest', the servant of all – and because he is the least, he is the greatest! He is 'the humble king', gentle and humble in heart (Mw 11/29:); whoever is most humble is most God-like!

*Jesus' greatness* lies in his divinity and glory. But the Greatest was also the most humble, the servant of all.

*Our greatness* comes from imitating his humility and servant-heart; to be the greatest we must be the least.

Cf. v49-50 & 51-55: Two other incidents (one shortly before this argument, the other shortly after) showed up the same pride in the disciples (3 episodes, 1 story) – manifested as ambition, insecurity/control and anger.

In another incident involving children (18/15-17), Jesus tells us not only to have the humility to welcome children but to have the humility *of* a child – because only with such a humility can we enter the kingdom.

## **b) The Second Argument (22/24-30)**

### **v24**

Incredibly, the disciples did not learn the lesson – and they have the same ambition and argument later. Again, the timing is awful: at the Last Supper – as Jesus is overwhelmed with what lies before him.

### **v25-26**

Again, Jesus patiently corrects them: this is how greatness in the world looks and behaves; *“but you are not to be like that”*; to be the greatest in the kingdom, be like the youngest (the lowest status) and serve everyone else. And if there is a leader (a ‘greatest’) among you, they should be – they will be – like this. [Note diff. to 9/48b]

### **v27ab**

This is a complete inversion of the world’s culture, where the one at the table is greater, not the one who serves.

### **v27c**

But even though this is true in the world, I have demonstrated the kingdom inversion among you: I have served.

### **v28-30**

Here Jesus adds something which we did not see in his response to the first argument. There *is* another kind of greatness for those who belong to him, who faithfully stand by him in trials: Jesus shares his kingdom (which he received from the Father), his dominion and rulership, which includes both privilege (feasting) and power (judging), with his disciples. Like the kingdom itself, this greatness is already but not yet: the status and privilege is already given but we only realize it later. We will share in the greatness of Jesus’ authority and ruling one day – but for now we must share in the greatness of his humility and serving. Then we will have the greatness of being the one at the (heavenly) table; now we must have the greatness of the one who serves (at the earthly table). For us, as for Jesus, there is a cross before a crown, a suffering before a glory, a death before a resurrection (cf. Pp 3/10). David tasted and saw all this 1000 years before – “You stoop down to make me great”! (2 Sa 22/36 || Ps 18/35) – but there’s something else that comes first, something that qualifies us to be made great (for greatness).