

G.O.A.T.

Luke · Luke 9:46-50; Luke 1:32-33; Luke 4:18-19; Philippians 2:5-8

AT A GLANCE

Twelve men argue over who is greatest while Jesus walks toward a cross, and he answers not with a ranking but with a child. Cormac Parker Jr. opens Luke 9:46-50 to show that kingdom greatness is measured not by resume, status, or group loyalty, but by welcoming the least and celebrating God's work wherever it appears — a definition Jesus embodies, not merely teaches, by descending rather than climbing.

- Every credential we use to rank ourselves above others is itself a gift of God's grace, not an achievement.
- In God's kingdom, greatness means welcoming those with no status or ability to offer you anything in return.
- Celebrating God's work through people outside your circle is greatness, not mere tolerance — gatekeeping only repeats the disciples' status contest.

“Everything that we could ever boast about in this life is a product of God's grace.”

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

[Luke 9:46-50](#) — Jesus' followers began to have an argument about which one of them was the greatest. Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he took a little child and stood the child beside him. Then he said to the followers, “Whoever accepts a little child like this in my name is accepting me. And anyone who accepts me is also accepting the one who sent me. The one among you who is the most humble—this is the one who is great.” John answered, “Master, we saw someone using your name to force demons out of people. We told him to stop because he does not belong to our group.” Jesus said to him, “Don't stop him. Whoever is not against you is for you.” (ERV)

[Luke 1:32-33](#) — He will be great. People will call him the Son of the Most High God, and the Lord God will make him king like his ancestor David. He will rule over the people of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end. (ERV)

Luke 4:18-19 — “The Spirit of the Lord is on me. He has chosen me to tell good news to the poor. He sent me to tell prisoners that they are free and to tell the blind that they can see again. He sent me to free those who have been treated badly and to announce that the time has come for the Lord to show his kindness.” (ERV)

Philippians 2:5-8 — In your life together, think the way Christ Jesus thought. He was like God in every way, but he did not think that his being equal with God was something to use for his own benefit. Instead, he gave up everything, even his place with God. He accepted the role of a servant, appearing in human form. During his life as a man, he humbled himself by being fully obedient to God, even when that caused his death—death on a cross. (ERV)

The argument

A right king, wrong kingdom — The disciples' Christology was correct; their political expectations of the kingdom weren't

Cormac Parker Jr. notes that Luke, unlike Matthew and Mark, strips away every setting detail to cut straight to the argument, forcing a juxtaposition: Jesus predicts the cross, and immediately the Twelve argue about status. He calls Luke's editorial choice 'leaving us breadcrumbs,' pointing to a deeper pattern: the disciples 'had the right understanding about King Jesus, but the wrong understanding about his kingdom.' Promises like Jesus reigning 'over the house of Jacob forever' and his own proclamation of freedom for captives convinced them a political takeover was coming, so naturally they began jockeying for position. Even on the road to Emmaus, disciples would still confess, 'we had hoped that he would redeem Israel' — the same misread, persisting to the Gospel's end.

Insight — *Correct beliefs about who Jesus is can still mask a wrong picture of what he came to do.*

Every credential they raised was a gift, not an achievement — Status contests collapse once you notice whose grace produced the resume

Imagining the argument's content, Cormac Parker Jr. walks through what James and John, Peter, and Judas might have claimed — the mountaintop, walking on water, holding the money. Then he turns each claim inside out: 'Jesus invited you... it was Jesus that bid you to come... Jesus was the one that allowed you to do it.' His conclusion: 'everything that we could ever boast about in this life is a product of God's grace.' He extends this to the scoreboards believers keep today — comparing careers, children, highlight reels — and names the problem beneath it: using any gift to rank ourselves over someone 'also made in the image of God' turns grace into a weapon.

Insight — *Nothing we could boast about was ever ours to begin with, so it cannot be used to outrank someone else made in God's image.*

True greatness welcomes the least — Jesus reaches for a child with no status to redefine greatness in his kingdom

Jesus interrupts the ranking contest not with an answer but with a child — a confrontational move, Cormac Parker Jr. explains, since children in that culture 'had no status,' were excluded from hospitality, and could be sold into slavery. He notes the word rendered 'receives' carries the sense of welcome or hospitality, meaning Jesus deliberately places beside himself someone customarily excluded from receiving it: 'he is flipping on its head the idea of what it means to be great in the kingdom of God.' Parker presses this personally through his son Ezra, who befriended an unaccompanied child at the playground without auditing his status, confessing his own instinct to size people up before extending welcome.

Insight — Kingdom greatness is measured by who you welcome when they have nothing to offer you in return.

True greatness celebrates God's work in others — John's gatekeeping over an outsider casting out demons repeats the same disease as the status contest

John reports stopping a man casting out demons in Jesus's name 'because he does not follow with us' — status seeking now through exclusion rather than comparison. Jesus answers with a proverb: 'the one who is not against you is for you.' Cormac Parker Jr. compares the disciples to firefighters demanding credentials before entering a burning house — irrelevant when lives are at stake. He applies this to interchurch rivalry, praising his congregation's practice of praying for other churches by name, and presses the question personally: can we celebrate what God does through someone who never 'tapped us on the shoulder,' since 'if God's kingdom is advancing, we all win'?

Insight — Greatness celebrates God's work wherever it appears, refusing to gatekeep his power for your own circle.

Jesus defines greatness by descending, not climbing — The road to Jerusalem enacts the lesson the argument on the road couldn't grasp

Cormac Parker Jr. locates this teaching at the hinge of Luke's Gospel — the end of the Galilean ministry, just before Jesus turns toward Jerusalem and the cross. Greatness, he insists, was not merely taught but shown, quoting Paul: 'though he was in the very form of God, he didn't cling to his status... humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross.' Where the Twelve wanted to climb, 'the king of kings' came down. Parker frames the whole passage as gospel rather than mere ethics: Jesus's stooping is what rescues, and any imitation of his welcome and celebration of others flows from having first been welcomed by him.

Insight — The measure of greatness Jesus gives is the same posture he took to the cross: descent, not ascent.

Cross-references

- [Luke 24:21](#) — cited to show the disciples still expected a political redemption of Israel even after Jesus's ministry and toward the resurrection

DEVOTIONAL

There is a scoreboard most of us carry that no one else can read, tallying who is ahead and who is behind — the promotion someone else got, the child who excelled where ours struggled, the follower count, the invitation we didn't receive. We think we are the only ones keeping it, until we remember twelve men once argued about it out loud, on a dusty road, with the Son of God walking just ahead of them toward a cross he had already named. He did not settle their argument by naming a winner. He reached for a child — someone with no vote, no rank, no way to return the favor — and set that child beside himself as the measure of everything. Welcome the one who cannot help you. That is greatness. Celebrate the work you did not do, through the hands you did not choose. That is greatness too. And behind all of it, the deeper mercy: whatever we could ever hold up as proof of our own worth was never ours to begin with. The invitation, the gift, the opportunity — grace, all the way down. Which means the scoreboard was rigged from the start, not against us, but against the whole game. We were never meant to be climbing. We were meant to notice who was already kneeling beside the least of us, arms open, on his way down to a cross, so that we might be lifted without ever having earned the lift.

Reflection

- Where in your life do you keep a hidden scoreboard, and whose credentials are you quietly ranking against your own?
- Who is the 'child' in your neighborhood, workplace, or church — someone with no status to offer you — and what would it cost you to welcome them this week?
- Is there a person, group, or ministry doing God's work outside your circle whom you've been slow to celebrate — what would it look like to bless them by name?

Closing prayer

God, we thank you for your word and for Jesus, who has shown us what greatness actually means — loving others, welcoming others, celebrating others. Forgive us for the ways we have taken our cues from the culture around us instead. By your Spirit, empower us to be countercultural, to love those the world has deemed insignificant, because you first loved us and crossed the room for us. We could never deserve it or earn it, but in response to your goodness, let us love others well. In Jesus' name, amen.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

Greatness in God's kingdom is measured by welcoming those with no status and celebrating God's work in others, not by rank.

This week

This week, name one person in your path who has nothing to offer you in return — no status, no favor — and spend a few unhurried minutes with them. Afterward, bring their name before God in prayer, thanking him for making them in his image.

Return to [Luke 9:47-48](#)
