



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 10:35-45

Mark

“Greatness in Service”

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Mark. We are in the gospel of Mark again, resuming our studies, and we will be in chapter 10 looking at verses 35-45. Mark 10:35-45. “And James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to him saying to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” They said to him, “Grant that we may sit in your glory, one on your right and one on your left.” Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you shall drink and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized, but to sit on my right or on my left, this is not mine to give. But it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” And hearing this the 10 began to feel indignant toward James and John and calling them to himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the gentiles lord it over them and that great men exercise authority over them, but it is not so among you. But whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all for even the Son of Man could not come to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.” We’ll spend some time developing that last verse, verse 45, but first let’s bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank you for this time of study together and this time in which we can come together to sing praises to your grace and to be reminded as we look at this text of scripture of how great that grace is; how effective that grace is. How, because of your work that you’ve performed through your son on the cross, we have life that’s eternal. We have been ransomed from slavery to sin and to Satan into death, a ransom – that of a condition from which we could not free ourselves. But you, through the powerful work of the cross, have done that for us. As we consider these things this morning, we pray that you give us ears to hear and hearts to respond and may we be moved from that very important understanding of the work of grace the work of the cross to the very important act of service that we are called to because we are called to be servants and yet that is such a difficult thing for any of us to perform and yield to and seek to be. We want to be served, not to serve and yet in your work of grace you change hearts and you change lives and we pray that you do that. And you use your work to do that and we pray through our time of study you might increase our appreciation of grace, increase our appreciation of the work that your son performed on behalf of sinners, and through that produce the kind of gratitude that gives willing hearts to the service of the Lord.

So we pray that you would work a spiritual work within us this morning as we gather together here, and again as we come together this evening we pray that the time that we spend in remembrance of the Lord and his death and his burial and his resurrection and do so in anticipation of his coming again, we pray that you would bless and strengthen our hearts and teach us and build us up in the faith. We are a needy people. We need to be continually fed spiritually and we pray that you would do that. And we are a dependent people upon you for everything, for the very breath that we take, for the bread that we eat. And you instruct us – your son has instructed us to pray that you provide our daily bread. We thank you that you do that. We thank you for the good gifts that are ours and the blessings that are ours and all the provisions that you make. We thank you for that. We pray that you would extend that to those who are in particular need at this time. We pray that you might make provision for them and bless them and encourage them – those who are in financial difficulty; those who are in physical difficulty due to sickness. We pray that you would extend mercy to them. We pray for our nation, Lord. We pray that you would bless and bless those who are in authority over us. Give wisdom and give guidance and direction. Bless this land and bless this assembly. Bless us now as we sing our final hymn and may you prepare our hearts for the teaching of the scriptures and prepare our hearts to receive the truth that you would have us to understand. We pray these things in our Savior’s name. Amen.

I always enjoy singing that hymn. It’s full of great truth – written by a man, Augustus Toplady, who had a deep understanding of the truth and grace of God; certainly an understanding of the things that we will study this morning. Our subject this morning concerns greatness and where it is to be found. The world thinks that it knows where it can find greatness, and that’s reflected in the kinds of people that it calls great – men and women, I should add, of power, conquest; of wealth. Alexander the Great, Caesar Augustus, Frederick the Great, Peter the Great, Catherine the Great – we don’t want to leave the ladies out. One of the most audacious men of history in that regard was the Turkish sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, at least that’s how he was known in Europe. They called him The Magnificent, but he called himself Suleiman the Leader of the Lords, the Crown of the Sovereigns of the World, the Shadow of God on Earth. Not a man lacking in self esteem. He was the Rush Limbaugh of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but he was also a conqueror and his armies almost overran Europe. In fact, it was so severe that Luther wrote a prayer that was turned into a hymn, “Lord keep us steadfast in my word and curve the Turk swords.”

Well we can multiply the examples from history of men who earned the title Great or Magnificent from their conquests and from their glory from the human standpoint and their wealth and all of that, but we don’t need to dip into history. Greatness today is really measured in the same way, by conquering. Maybe not conquering armies, but conquering the corporate ladder or in terms of annual salaries, in terms of political position – things of this kind. It’s the standard of personal accomplishment, personal achievement, personal advancement. And we might ask is there anything wrong with that? Is it wrong to seek greatness? Is it wrong to enjoy the fruits of one’s labor in that regard? After all, the Proverbs – Proverbs 18:16 states: “A man’s gift makes room for him and brings him before great men.” Should we not use our gifts and use our talents to the best of our ability? They’re God-given and we should be seeking to do that, shouldn’t we? Well that’s certainly the instruction of scripture. It exhorts us to redeem the time; if you remember from last week’s lesson, that was some of the exhortations in the Book of Ephesians. And if they’re God-given gifts then we should be employing our gifts and our abilities to the best of our ability because when we do that we’re not only blessed by that but others are blessed as well.

So should we use our gifts and should we seek to work hard and all of that? Well of course we should, but that’s not really the point. The real question is how do we measure greatness? What is true greatness? Do we measure it in power or position? Is it found in authority? Is it found in accomplishments? Well according to the world, it is and the great evidence of greatness is found in the fact that people are served and have many people under them and under their authority. When we turn to the scriptures, and particularly when we look at the words of Christ, we find out that real greatness is not found in being served, but it’s found in serving. It’s found in self-denial. Now coming to this subject in chapter 10, we’re returning to a subject that we’ve already covered back in chapter 9, and so we could entitle this passage, “Greatness Revisited.” Because in chapter 9, verse 35 the Lord had to put down a dispute among his disciples as to who would be the greatest in the Kingdom and there he gave them the instruction that if anyone wants to be first he shall be last of all and servant of all. You would think that might take care of the problem and settle the issue and give some real understanding in the lives and understanding of these men, but such was not the case because that’s a very hard thing for anyone to accept. It goes against the grain and it did so with the disciples. It just didn’t sink in.

We don’t want to be servants. We want to have people serve us, and so the subject comes up again when James and John approach the Lord and ask if he wouldn’t mind making them the two greatest men in the Kingdom. You might wonder what brought this on, particularly since the Lord has already given them clear instruction on this subject and he very recently rebuked them for this craving for power and greatness. But I think it’s understandable – at least it’s somewhat understandable in light of the context. The Lord’s Galilean ministry has come to an end. It’s finished. It’s over. Now he’s on the road to Jerusalem and in a striking way Mark has pointed that out when in verse 32 he states that Jesus was walking on ahead of the 12 and he was setting his face, as it were, like flint to go to Jerusalem because that is the place where the crucifixion would occur. He was single-minded in his purpose to go there and accomplish that work on the cross, and the disciples recognized this. They recognized a singleness of purpose in what he was doing and Mark makes that very clear because it states that they were amazed and they were fearful.

From this, the fact that the Lord had this singleness of purpose about him and the predictions of the cross that he made just after that – and not only of the cross but of the resurrection – evidently James and John sensed that the Kingdom was at hand. They could sense that something climactic was about to occur and they concluded from that that the Kingdom was about to be established and so they wanted to hurry up and secure a good position for themselves in that Kingdom. So they come to the Lord with a request: “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” In other words, don’t ask what we want just promise it because they knew that their request was a bit outrageous and so they were afraid to be very candid about it and they simply wanted him to agree to it before they made that request known. But the Lord doesn’t work that way and he wasn’t going to grant their request before they made explicit that request and so he presses them on this point in verse 36. “What do you want me to do for you?” And in verse 37 they answer him: “Grant that we may sit in your glory, one on your right and one on your left.”

Now that strikes us as a bit self serving and it certainly is, but I think before we criticize their request we should see some of the good points in it because there are some. First of all it shows that they had faith. The religious leaders at that day didn’t. The religious leaders didn’t recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah. They didn’t believe that he was going to establish his Kingdom, that the Kingdom that had been promised to Israel would come through him. They rejected all of that and yet these two men believed firmly in that. They believed that Jesus was the King and anticipated his Kingdom. They were men of faith and this shows faith on their behalf. Secondly, they valued that

Kingdom that they were anticipating. Their interest and their desires were in future glory and they were seeking that. How many of us, if we look at our lives from day to day, can say that? How many of us really live for that greater glory that’s to come? It’s so easy, with all of this going on around us, to be caught up and to be enamored with the present glory of this world rather than looking forward to the glory of the world to come. And yet we’re seeing these men, these sons of Zebedee, agending with faith in Christ and an earnestness about what’s coming. They valued what was coming. They were looking forward to the glory to come and they wanted a stake in that, and that’s good but the reality is their motives were not good.

Their motives were far from pure and reflected selfish ambition. They were trying to advance themselves at the expense of the others. They were trying to get in before the others did and secure the best place. Calvin says that in their request is a bright mirror of human vanity, and it certainly is that. This is an expression of their vanity and the Lord knew that and he knew that they had a very shallow understanding of his approaching death and what would follow leading up to the establishment of the Kingdom. And so he asks some probing questions, verse 38: “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with a baptism which I am baptized?” In other words, are you able to suffer as I would suffer? That’s the meaning of those figures that our Lord uses. That’s the significance of the cup and the idea of baptism. It represents various places throughout the Bible in both the old and New Testament, the ideas of trials and trouble and suffering. Isaiah 15:17 speaks of the cup of the Lord’s wrath. We find that expression in the Book of Revelation. We find it in Jesus’ own words, as you’ll remember. He speaks of the cross as “this cup” when he is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And we have the same sense with this word baptism, at least that’s the imagery – imagery at least that’s reflective of baptism found throughout the Bible. Psalms 42:7, David writes describing all of the trials and the difficulties he’s going through in words that are reminiscent of being baptized, of going under the water, when he says, “All thy breakers and thy waves have rolled over me.” So the Lord, in these words, is describing great trials that have come upon him and he’s asking them are they ready to undergo those themselves. What James and John didn’t realize was that in asking this question he was making known to them that the way to glory, the way to lasting glory – of eternal glory – is through suffering. And so he asks them if they were able to drink his cup, to suffer his suffering. Not, of course, sufferings with atoning value. Only Christ’s sufferings have atoning value, and we’ll talk about that in a moment. But the sufferings he’s speaking of here are the sufferings that naturally follow when a man or woman have put their faith in Christ and in so doing have identified with him. We become his representatives on Earth and as his representatives, the world responds to us in the same way they have responded to him – with rejection.

That’s what Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 1:5 when he states that the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, and Paul is a good example of that. After he had been stoned in Lystra on his first missionary journey he told the believers there in Acts 14:22, “Through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God.” That’s to be characteristic of the Christian life when we step out in faith. We begin to represent him in a physical way. We can expect to go through many tribulations and here the Lord was asking James and John, “Are you prepared to enter the Kingdom through many tribulations?” Now you’d think that that would sober them up a bit, but it doesn’t. They eagerly reply, “We are able.” It was a naïve response. They didn’t understand what was involved in his suffering. Very likely they thought in terms of Maccabean warriors. They’d go out and they’d fight this great climactic battle that was soon coming and they might receive some wounds and they might make some sacrifices for a moment, but it would all be a bit glorious. What they didn’t realize was the sufferings that Christ would undergo were sufferings of humiliation and

rejection as well as physical difficulty. They were to be rejected by the world and be a disgrace in the eyes of the world.

Nevertheless, as naïve as their response was they would participate in sufferings. The Lord prophetically assures them of that: “You shall drink of the cup and be baptized,” he says. And as you trace out the history you see that’s exactly what happens to James and John. James was killed in Jerusalem. He was the first martyr of the apostles; the first one to die. John was the last to be martyred. He was banished to the barren, rocky isle of Patmos. So they would drink the cup of martyrdom, but he says it was not within his authority to grant their request for privileged positions in the Kingdom. He wondered why could he not do that. He was the son of God. Well as our mediator, in his humanity, he was under the authority of his father who had already determined those places of honor. As the Lord said, it is for those for whom it has been prepared. God has already set that out. So they don’t get their request. What they do is stir up another controversy. The other disciples by this time had overheard the discussion, and they being just as ambitious as James and John, felt indignant toward them Mark writes. So it starts all over again.

The Lord had rebuked this spirit of jealousy and ambition earlier and gave them a lesson on it – a very clear lesson on it – but ambition was still alive in the disciples and so we read in verse 42 that he called them to himself and gave them another lesson on greatness. He begins by putting things in perspective with a description of how the great men of this world do things. They lord it over people. They exercise authority and they do it for selfish purposes. Think of the Pharaohs of Egypt with vast armies of slaves building their pyramids. Imagine all of the time and all of the energy, all of the planning that went into building one tomb for one man. It’s really staggering. All of Egyptian society was moved to the service of one man to fulfill his pride and his pleasure. Think of the Caesars and perhaps that was more on the minds of our Lord and the disciples; the Caesars of Rome and all their power and cruelty and all the political intrigue that filled the palace. Caesars killing their rivals in order to protect their position, and usually in the end – at least many of them in the first century were assassinated. When Nero committed suicide, he was followed by Galba, who was reported to have said now that I am emperor I can do what I like and do it to anyone. Well he lasted about seven months and then he was assassinated by a man who lasted five days who was assassinated by a man who was also assassinated – and all of that in the year 69. It wasn’t a good year for emperors.

But this attitude of doing whatever I like to whomever I like is not only seen in these emperors who came along, but it’s seen really at the heart of what the disciples were doing. Trying to cut in line, so to speak, and sort of make their own way at the expense of the others. And that’s the way of the world and that’s the Lord’s point. It’s the way of the world, it’s the way of pushing for power and the way of self glory and self indulgence, but it is not the way of the Kingdom. And the Lord corrects them in verse 43 saying, “But it is not so among you.” And there’s great emphasis there on that word not. Not thus is it among you is the sense of that. We can translate it like that. You’re not to be like them. You’re not like them so do not entertain those kinds of desires and those aspirations. And then I can imagine he looks around at his disciples and he says do you want to be truly great? Do you want to be truly great? I’m not talking about great in the sense that the world counts greatness. I’m not talking about the greatness of the Caesars. I’m talking about something even greater than that. You want to be great with God. You want to know the way to that kind of greatness? You can imagine that they said yeah. He says then become servants. “Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant.”

There’s nothing wrong with striving for greatness. In fact, it’s the fool who doesn’t do that. In fact, the man or the woman who does not strive for greatness and seek to use gifts and the

abilities that God has given them to the fullest is like that wicked servant in the parable of the talents who was given the one talent but squandered it. He buried it. He didn’t use it. That’s evil. That’s a sinful, sinful way to live. We’re to be a people that strive for greatness, but in the right way and for the right reason. And the way to obtain greatness that is eternal – greatness that really lasts, is by seeking it in service. One writer calls this the paradox of the Kingdom of God; greatness that’s achieved by humble servants by self denial. William Hendrickson refers to this as the inverted pyramid. The Lord doesn’t condemn the desire to be great; he condemns their perception of greatness and the way they were trying to obtain it and the reasons for which they were trying to obtain it. So he says, in effect, do you want to be great then stop envying Herod, stop envying the Caesars and be servants.

I have been reading a biography on George Müller. I should say rereading it. I read it about 20 years ago and picked it up again to read. It’s an excellent story, an excellent account of a man’s life who was a great example of faith. I know most of you are familiar with Mr. Müller and how his whole ministry, his whole life was based on faith – based on simply trusting in the promises of God and watching God make provision, and he lived consistently with that conviction. He had a large ministry of orphans for a long period of time and with all the demands that were put upon him was every day, without fail, able to provide for those orphans without ever having made one appeal for money or letting his needs to be known to the public. He was a man of great faith who wanted, in his life, to be a great example of that as one of his ministries. Really a goal of his ministry was not so much to provide for orphans, as important as that was, but to be an example to others of how God honors His promises and fulfills them. Like I say, a great man of faith, but like all of us he had his peaks and his valleys and early in his Christian life he went through a period of spiritual declension in which his affection for a young woman and the attraction of the world drew his interest away from the things of the Lord.

That lasted about six weeks before the Lord brought him out of that by means of a friend. Not by anything that the friend said, but by the example he set. He was a young, wealthy, cultured German man who had very promising prospects before him to attract him into the world and to the things of the world, but he chose self sacrifice instead of the treasures of the world and he left Germany for Poland to minister to the Jewish people there and ministered for some years until his health broke and he had to return. But it was that act of that young man with all that the world had to offer, trading ease and comfort for hard ministry that influenced Müller to change his course and adopt a similar life. And that is what all of us are to do. Not necessarily go to a foreign land to minister, but put our service for the Lord and others ahead of our own desires for comfort, for ease, for the things of this world. We are to be servants. Verse 44: “And whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.” Now as I said, that’s a hard thing. That goes against the grain. By nature, as people in a sinful world infected with the principal of sin, we are by nature self-seeking people. It’s not what we want to do, but as the Lord says we are to be slaves of others. We are to seek to serve others rather than seek to have others serve us and the one who makes this great demand upon us is not one who ignored that himself but rather one who’s the greatest example of it, the greatest example of doing this. The King of Kings is the greatest servant of all.

Verse 45: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.” That’s a statement that calls for some careful study. One writer has said every part of this verse is important. I suppose you could say that about every verse of the Bible. I can’t think of one that has parts that aren’t important, but this is particularly an important verse with important details and so we want to look at some of the details carefully. The first detail that is important is the title Son of Man. We have considered this before in some detail, but it’s important

to reflect on it again because this is what underscores the greatness of the sacrifice. To understand what our Lord did and understand the greatness of it, we have to understand the person of the one who did this great work. And the title Son of Man is certainly reflective of his greatness. It was the Lord’s favored way of referring to himself during his earthly ministry. It is a term that refers to his humanity, as would seem obvious from the word “man,” but its meaning is much greater than that.

The origin of this term is probably to be found in Daniel 7:13-14 which describes a heavenly person, the Son of Man, approaching the throne of the Ancient of Days and was receiving from him dominion, glory and a Kingdom. And so among the Jews in our Lord’s day it was common and recognized as a messianic title. To speak of the Son of Man was, for the most part, understood as a messianic title, a title which both suggests its deity and his humanity and presents him as the King of this world. He’s given a Kingdom. He’s given dominion. And yet though the King, the Son of Man came into this world not to rule, not to be served as one of the great rulers of the gentiles, but to serve. The only man who truly deserved to be served waved that right in order to be the servant and save the people from himself. Now if he served, what should you and I do? That, I think, is the natural inference and question that we should draw from this. If Christ, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the King of Kings came and served and served his enemies, of which all of us at one time were – allies of Satan, captives of Satan – and then he served us, what should we do for one another? What should we do for our enemies? Obviously we should be servants as well and that’s what we should seek to do.

Notice his service occurred in his act of giving. This is the greatest kind of service. He gave his life for ransom for many. This word ransom is a very important word and a word that’s very vivid. It was a term used in ancient Greek literature of money paid for the release of captives and slaves. After battles, the victors would sometimes ride around the battlefield and they would round up as many of the defeated enemy as they could. Some of them they would keep as slaves to work their fields and serve in their homes, but others they would offer for sale and so they would let it be known in the home of the vanquished that many of their friends and relatives were being held as captives and they could be freed for a price. So the people back home would take up a collection and would buy the prisoners out of their captivity. And that’s the basic idea of this word ransom or redeem, paying a ransom price to free captives or to free slaves. Slaves in the ancient world were not necessarily slaves for life. If the master liked the slave he might free him. Or if a friend of the slave had the means and the desire, he could buy that slave out of slavery. Sometimes the slaves themselves could do that if they saved up some of the money that they were periodically able to make. Sometimes this involved a religious ceremony in which the money was put into a treasury in a pagan temple so that the slave was in effect sold to Apollo or some other god for freedom. So when the price was paid, the slave was freed from men and no longer a slave when that price was paid.

Do you see the point of that? When the price was paid, freedom was secured and that’s a very important point to that word ransom. Now all of that in a secular way pictures our spiritual condition and our spiritual outcome. When Adam sinned, we went into captivity. He fell into the strong grip of evil as did all of his descendents. He and we could not break free from that grip, from that domain, from that captivity into which we fell. We were helpless. We were held slaves, held captives of sin, of Satan and death. But when the price was paid, when the ransom price was paid, the result was freedom. We went free. And what was the price? It was the price of Christ’s blood. Christ doesn’t say that here. He says give himself a ransom for many, but Paul makes that clear in Ephesians 1:7. “In him that is in Christ we have redemption” or we have a ransom price. Through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses. And so it was a payment in punishment, a

payment of death and a death which was substitutionary in its nature, made in the place of others. That’s indicated by the preposition for – for many. The Greek word is *anti* and it means in the place of or instead of. We’re familiar with that preposition in words such as antitype. If you’ve been coming on Wednesday nights, we’ve been studying the type and the antitype. Melchizedek is a type of Christ we’ve been studying. The type and the antitype. Melchizedek is a type of Christ. Christ is the antitype of Melchizedek. He’s the one that replaces the type. He’s the one that fulfills the type.

And so this word has the idea of replacing, of being a substitute, and here he was the substitute for many. Now that brings out the bounty of his grace. He wasn’t a substitute for a few. He was a substitute for many – for a multitude. In the language of the Abrahamic covenant, a people who number as the dust of the earth, too many to count as the Lord says – as the Lord promises to Abraham. But as you think about it, you must ask the question how is it that one man can be a substitute for many? We can understand one man substituting for another man – one for one – but this isn’t that. This is one for many. How can that be? Well the answer to that is found in his unique person. He is a man, but he’s more than a man. He is a theanthropic person. That is he is the God-Man; one person with two natures. In his human nature he is qualified and able to be the substitute for humans. As a man he is able to stand in the place of men. He couldn’t do that if he was an angel. Angels can’t substitute for men. Bulls and goats cannot be an adequate substitute for people. It must be a human person and in his humanity he qualified to be the substitute for other men and women and in his divine nature that sacrifice has infinite value. That is what gives the death of Christ value for more than one and gives it value for a multitude – for the many. And because he is the theanthropic person, because he is the God-Man, he is able to stand in the place of the many in judgment.

Who are the many? Well, they are those whom he has released from the slavery and captivity of sin. They are those whom he has ransomed. Now that raises a point that I want to spend a little bit of time on in the remaining minutes that we have, and one that is somewhat controversial, dealing with the extent and the nature of the atonement that our Lord is describing here and the scope of that atonement. That is was it universal? That is did he die to be a substitute universally for all without exception, for every single individual that lived for Judas as well as the antichrist to come? Or is the scope of that atonement, the scope of his ransom price to be restricted to the elect only? How are we to understand that? How are we to understand that word many? Well this verse has come up in that discussion quite often and it’s often pointed out that he uses the word many and not the word all, which it seems to support the idea of restricting this to a particular group – to the elect themselves. And in support of that, the term many was used by the rabbis and by the scribes of Qumran in a technical sense to describe the elect. Nevertheless, some think that’s pressing the word too far and argue that this expression “many” was simply chosen to make a contrast with the single life of our Lord given in ransom for a multitude of lives, so we’re not to press the point beyond that and not to seek to define the many in terms of the numbers.

But even if that’s so, the nature of the ransom requires that the scope of those ransomed be limited, be restricted, to those who are actually free. After all, what kind of a payment would it be after making the payment the slaves or the captives didn’t go free. What kind of payment would it have been having advertised in the land of the vanquished that for a payment price the captives would go free and having made the payment they didn’t go free. Roger Nicole, former professor of theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, made a similar point in the illustration that he gives in which he imagines a situation in which a friend of his is arrested and thrown into jail and so the responsibility rests with him to get the bail money and go down and get him out of jail. So he



gets the money and goes down to the jail and makes the payment. Later he comes home alone, so his wife asks him, “Where is your friend?” And he answers, “He’s still in jail.” And so she says, “Didn’t you go down and make the necessary payment of bail?” And he says, “Yes, I did.” She says, “Well, where is he?” He says, “He’s still in jail. It hasn’t worked.” Now can we say that about the ransom price that our Lord speaks of here and our Lord paid that didn’t work, that didn’t have any effect?

Well we have to say that if we maintain that he died for every individual who ever lived without exception, because multitudes go unredeemed and are lost, guilty without forgiveness. If that death was for them, then it had no effect upon them, but the Bible does not present the work of Christ in that way. It doesn’t present it as weak and as ineffective, it presents it as effective in achieving the very end for which Christ made the payment, accomplishing the purpose for which he came. It presents it as a payment that was accepted in full by the Father. As the Lord says it is finished. The payment has been accepted and being accepted the captives must go free. Those who reject this interpretation argue that it severely limits the grace of God. In fact, they construe the popular term that’s used to describe that doctrine, limited atonement, as doing just that. It limits the grace of God. It shows that the grace of God is not great enough for all men. But really that’s a misunderstanding of the doctrine, actually, unless you are a Universalist in the sense that you don’t believe that there is a Hell and you believe that everyone is ultimately going to be saved someday. Unless you believe that – and if you’re an Evangelical you don’t believe that – if you don’t believe that, then you in some way limit the atonement.

Either you limit the extent of the atonement, as do Calvinists, or you limit the power of the atonement, as do the Arminians. At least that is what the Arminians would have to acknowledge, because if a person maintains Christ’s death doesn’t actually say that it didn’t actually secure salvation for the sinner but it only made a provision of salvation, only made salvation possible, then he really didn’t save anyone. In fact, he failed to save a vast number of those people that he came to save, that he desired to save. Loraine Boettner has illustrated the point in his book *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. He’s illustrated it this way, recognizing that the Calvinists limit the extent of the atonement and Arminians limit the power of the atonement, he writes that “For Calvinists, the atonement – or the cross – is like a narrow bridge that goes all the way across the stream, while for the Arminian, the cross is like a great, wide bridge which only goes halfway across the stream.” Do you see the point? Either the death of Christ saves or the death of Christ doesn’t save and it’s only a provision of salvation. If it only lays out the possibility or makes it possible for men to save, then the whole work of salvation, the whole plan of redemption does not rest with God it rests with men.

How does the scripture describe mankind in a fallen condition? Dead. Unable to believe. Blind. Unable to see the truth. In fact men love the darkness rather than the light. They are repelled by that gospel. They’re repelled by the cross and left to themselves they won’t come to it. It will repel them. So if that’s the case, no one will be saved and the work of Christ would fail. You say what about faith, though? There must be faith. Where does that fit in? Yes, of course there must be faith. Justification is by faith alone and apart from faith there’s no justification. But to speak of the cross as securing salvation as a bridge that goes all the way across, as that which actually saves, is to say not only does it secure forgiveness and eternal life for all who believe, but it secures the very faith to lay hold of it. It is effective. It truly is a finished work of salvation. And so we are saying in saying this that Christ is truly a savior. He came to pay the ransom price. He paid the ransom price and secured the freedom and the deliverance of all for whom he came to free. The power of his atonement is infinite and it is effective and has released many. It has released a

multitude and so let’s think of that term many again, because it means regardless of whether we restrict the scope of the atonement to the elect, if we do that we’re not saying it’s a small group. It’s many. It’s a multitude. So call it limited if you like, but it is a vast number of people that are saved. It is a number no man can number. In other words what we’re saying is Salvation is of the Lord. It’s his work.

And the Salvation that he secured for us he secured at the infinite and terrible cost of his own life. He gave his life in order that we might be saved. Now why am I underscoring this point? Is it simply a theological exercise, a debatable point that raises the temperatures of some people and creates some debate? It certainly does that, but that’s not my point. The point is to underscore the greatness of the work of Christ. There’s a very practice effect in that, a natural and inevitable effect from that, a natural results from understanding my inability to save myself. There’s no halfway measure that he does some and I do the rest. Certainly I must believe and you must believe and everyone who is to come to salvation must believe, but when you understand that in and of yourself you could not believe and that Christ, in his death secured everything for us and guaranteed that it occurred, does that not raise in your minds the greatness of the work of the Lord on your behalf and instill within your heart a deeper sense of gratitude? I have nothing that I can offer him. I did nothing that deserves what I receive. I received it all from him and he’s done it all for me. And that’s the point, because as we understand those things then perhaps we will be moved to do the very thing that the Lord is urging his disciples to do, urging all of us to do, which is reflected in his own life, in his own ministry – be servants. To serve one another; to serve him.

That’s where greatness is to be found, in service to the Lord and his people. David Livingstone is a man who did that, a man who believed in the sovereignty of God and spent his life in Africa. He ended his life in Africa out of a love of the Lord and the confidence that his sovereignty and his power would take care of him. He had a brother, and one day after Sunday school they discussed their goals. His brother’s desire was to become rich and famous. Livingstone, however, states that his goal was to follow Christ to the fullest. He went on to achieve that goal as well as become one of the most celebrated men in his day. You can walk down Princess Street in Edinburgh and see a statue of David Livingstone standing there. The other brother went on to be rich, but the epitaph on his tombstone reads “Here lies the brothers of David Livingstone.” Which of the two brothers was great? In the eyes of the world, which of the two was great? The servant. And you don’t have to go to Africa to serve the Lord. You don’t have to go to seminary to become qualified to be a servant of the Lord. We’re all called to be his servants and our mission field is wherever he has put us in the office, in the home, in the neighborhood – wherever that is – at school. We’re called to be his servants and that’s where our opportunity is to serve him there and in this place.

John puts it all very well, very succinctly. He puts everything in perspective when he writes in John 3:16, “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” The Lord came and gave himself, his life, a ransom for many. He came to serve. And he is, in many ways, an example to us, certainly much more than an example as we see in this verse. But he is an example. I mean the example that he gives to us is that of service. That’s where greatness lies and that’s what he calls us to do. We should aspire to greatness, but greatness in service. If you’re here this morning and you don’t know Christ as your savior and you’re wondering well, maybe he didn’t die for me, maybe I’m not one of the elect. Maybe I’m not one of the many and since he died for the elect, maybe I’m outside of that and I’m in despair over that. This is not something that’s given me a great deal of comfort. Let me say that’s not really a question you need to puzzle over. The many, the elect, are those who believe. They’re not the elect

because they believe, they believe because they elect. It’s characteristic of them and that which identifies them, that which makes them known is the fact that they believe.

God sent his son to the world to die that those who believe would have eternal life, so if you desire that eternal life, if you want the salvation that Christ has purchased , if you want to enter into that life and if you want to be numbered among the many, then believe and know that in believing you are one of the elect. It’s that simple. Simply trust in Christ. Whether you understand those things are not, simply trust in him. He sees all who come to him. He sees all who come to him in faith. Believe in Jesus Christ if you’ve never done so. May God help you to do that and may God help each of us to take these things to heart and seek to serve him. Shall we stand now for the benediction.

Our Gracious, Heavenly Father we do thank you for the great truth that’s set before us. You sent your son into the world not to be served, but to serve and to give his life of ransom for many. He’s done that and he has accomplished that work. He has not failed at all. He has not lost any that you gave to him as he told you in that great high priestly prayer he is our savior – truly our savior. We praise you for that and praise you still within our hearts a deep appreciation for him and what he’s done. And may that have its good effect in our lives. We pray these things in the savior’s name. Amen.