

Intro:

How do you define greatness?

Our text today will challenge us to think about it in light of Jesus.

Read text: Luke 7:24-25.

We are meant for a greatness beyond ourselves, defined by Jesus.

The story starts with Jesus defending John. You'll remember that John's messengers have just come and asked Jesus a question showing John's doubt- are you the one, or should we expect another? This was done in front of quite a crowd; it was not a private conversation. Jesus gives his answer, of course, but you can guess how the crowd might be abuzz- remember from last week that John was a great spiritual man. How could he doubt? Wasn't he supposed to have it all together? And so Jesus starts this defense of his good companion John. (read v.25-26. Some notes: 1) "reed swayed by the wind"- popular image from the region, a scenic thing that people would go out to see, 2) Citation is from Malachi and Exodus- see extra study notes. Main gist- this is the one who is to prepare the way for God's Messiah, the Savior, Jesus.)

But as he nears the end, Jesus says some radical- the least in the Kingdom are greater than John! Three things to clarify.

First, what is the Kingdom of God? It is the all-defining rule of God where everything God wants- all the good and just things he wants- happens. It is a rule that began when Jesus first came, and it will reach its ultimate conclusion when Jesus comes back again. It includes good and amazing things for those who have said yes to being a part of this kingdom.

Second, who are the least in the Kingdom? A: Spiritual and social nobodies who have said Yes to Jesus' rule in their lives- that is how you enter into the kingdom. In other words, those who popular or religious culture deem as maybe not the spiritual type- the poor, the player, the intellectual, the Hindu, the progressive- but they then say yes to Jesus. We are all the least in some ways.

Third, what does it mean to be greater? A: Given we're talking about John's role in God's plan- he is the one getting things ready for a new way God is going to work- I believe we're talking about greater in terms of both **role** and an **era** as it relates to God's plan in history. Yes, John prepared people for Jesus before Jesus came (his role), getting people ready for the new way God would do things in and through Jesus (an era). But we get to live in this new era (the era) where we all can invite others to join in the new way (purpose).

We can also see greatness in terms of **knowledge** and **experience**. We don't have to say, hey, get ready for God to make himself known to us, as John had to say (knowledge). We say- here is God in Jesus- meet him and know him now! We don't have to say, hey, get ready for God to do amazing things in and through our lives; we can say hey, join in on what Jesus has already done and continues to do today (experience)!

One imperfect (and perhaps crude) example: Imagine doing R&D for a company or idea, brainstorming and vision casting for a new product or drug that will redefine human history. Say you were on R&D for the internet, or penicillin. That sort of R&D work plays important role for sure. But to live in the completely redefined world, with the knowledge, experience, and new roles available to contribute to the world because of what you have in front of you- how much greater this is!

Our context: what if we embraced the reality of our moment in history? What if we realized that to know Jesus the way we do, to experience Him the way we do, to have a role in His plan in the way we have- was truly something so amazing, so great, that all other ideas of greatness out there paled in comparison?

Israel lived in a time where greatness was defined by the prophets, among other things. We live in a world where greatness is defined by this or that latest technological innovation, fashion trend, job skill, educational degree, social network, and so on. Trendsetter.com says that status today is built around:

1. Bigger and Better (consuming the most, and the most expensive)
2. Generosity (giving instead of taking)
3. Green credentials and unconsumption (greener or less consumption)

4. In the know and Skills (knowing and doing versus consuming)
5. Connectivity (social status, especially online)

Some of this is actually good, and it is not wrong to pursue it per say. But it is all for not if Jesus is not at center. We were meant for a greatness defined by Jesus.
It reminds me of Jeremiah 9:22-24.

Our Response: Say “Yes” or Reject

The question is, of course, where do we go from here? How do we respond to this radical way of life? This is what the rest of the passage is about. We either say yes to God’s way in Jesus or we reject it. Yes, or reject. After Jesus makes this claim about greatness in the new way of God’s Kingdom through Jesus, the people react (see v. 29-30) One group reacts “acknowledging that God’s way was right.” The original word there is “justified,” to declare somebody as right and just. So they respond saying, “yes Jesus, you are good.” The other group, however, reject God’s purpose for them. Our author Luke notes that this is essentially in line with how they responded to John the Baptist- those who accepted John accept the teaching of Jesus, those who didn’t won’t accept the teaching of Jesus.

This leads to Jesus making a statement, clarifying that their rejection is not a good thing; in fact, it is a child-like, self-centered way of responding to God. (read v.31-34). They are like children who don’t get their way (v.32). How God works does not fit their own terms: John doesn’t fit their expectations- he’s too holy, to set apart- so they rejected him. Jesus doesn’t either- he’s too open and radical with the non-religious- so they brushed him off as well. They’re too preoccupied with their own terms of spirituality that they cannot accept Jesus.

Yet, Jesus says, the wise will be those who say yes to Jesus and how God is working in and through him. This is what v. 35 is getting at (note Extra Study Notes)

So the application is clear:

- Will we say yes to a new life of greatness defined by Jesus, or will we reject, because we don’t like the terms Jesus seems to be setting down? Regardless of if we’re the spiritual type or not, this is the question.
- A second application: discover what this greatness about. I mentioned briefly that is includes our roles, our knowledge, and our experiences in this new era. I want to highlight a few things about the summer that will aide in this.: 1) CG curriculum- the meaning of work. 2) Origins Conference.

Conclusion

How are we defining greatness? Regardless of if we’re the spiritual type or not, regardless of if we’re seekers or followers, will we say yes to embracing the greatness of this moment?

Extra Study Notes:

v. 27- citation is from Malachi 3:1 and Exodus 23:20. The differences between this verse and what is in Malachi (namely the difference between “me” and “you”) is due to Exodus 23:20. Exodus is often cited in contexts like this because it is understood that the expected Savior is supposed to lead a sort of second “exodus.” The “you” in the prophecy can be understood as referring to Jesus or the Israelites. The text of Malachi is about Jesus; the context of the current passage makes it seem to refer to the Israelites. Also see Luke 1:17.

v. 29- The tax collectors have had an important part in Luke thus far. See 3:12, 5:27ff.

v.30- “purpose” is used in the NT nine out of twelve times by Luke. See Luke 23:51, Acts 2:23, 4:28, 5:38, 13:36, 20:27, 27:12, 27:42.

v.35- note that “proved right” is the same word used in v.29 for “acknowledge... right.” These verses are meant to be understood together. As such, “wisdom” here is in reference to God and His purposes.