



Matthew 23:11–12

11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Reflection

The chief priests who are in charge of the synagogue are there. The elders, representatives of the leading Jewish ruling

families in Jerusalem are there. So are the Pharisees and their disciples. And the Herodians, who'd like to regain control of Jerusalem, and the Sadducees who have it, in a comprising sort of way. They control the temple, the Jewish ruling council and have an 'arrangement of sorts' with the Romans. They're all there. The whole Jewish religious establishment, standing out amongst the crowds in their finery and their pride.

And then there's Jesus. The son of God. The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. Born in a manger. Not a palace. The feeding trough of an animal in a stable, not into a wealthy Jewish family. No Rabbinic schooling in Jerusalem for him, he's worked with his hands for most of his life. As a carpenter, one of the lowliest jobs in

ancient world, in Nazareth, a place which many thought was the very end of the world. No not a palace, in fact, for the last three years he hasn't really had a roof over his head at all. Not parading around the temple and attending banquets and feasts, not debating the finer points of the law to the applause of a crowd; but working tirelessly amongst the poor, the blind, the lame, those who are sick, elderly and distraught. He's been teaching and healing from sunrise to sunset, often praying late into the night and training others to do the same. He rode into Jerusalem not on a stallion or a war horse but on a donkey. He's here to do battle but battle of a different kind. Satan's terrified of him, but oh-so delighted in them. Standing there, his clothes aren't fine, they're travel worn, and look much like everyone else's. In

fact, he looks much like everyone else, because he is one of them; he had to be so that he could die for them. As Isaiah said about him,

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him (Isa 53:2)

They think that they are great. He is here to show the world what true greatness is. And Jesus will practice what he preaches. Today he preaches; Friday he will practice. And because of what he does on Friday people will be pouring over his words even two thousand years later, just as we are doing today right now. Here are his words,

11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

We've heard them before haven't we? Many times in Matthew's gospel. These words are directed at his disciples to train them, the Pharisees and teachers of the law to shame them, and to the crowds to teach them about true greatness. Jesus has lived out every one of these words and in his death, resurrection and ascension, he will prove every one of them to be true. Because he is the greatest amongst them. And he proves this by becoming the servant of all, laying down his life for the sins of the world. He humbled himself. Even though he is God he stepped down,

becoming fully human, and humbling himself even further to death on a cross, on behalf of all humankind. And now he is exalted to the highest place and his name is above every name. And one day soon at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord.

The greatest among you will be your servant ... and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

But those who exalt themselves, who place themselves at the centre of life, who turn their backs on the kingdom of God so that they can build their own kingdoms on earth; they will be humbled. The Jewish religious leaders were being humbled in this very moment. They've been utterly silenced by Jesus' wisdom. And now he's

turning them inside out so that the whole world can get past their outward show and see the motivations of their hearts. But this humbling is nothing compared to what will await them at the end of days if they do not turn and repent and acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

Jesus didn't come to earth as a point of historical interest. Nor did he come to earth to contribute to humankind's ethical thought. He came to earth to die as the only way that we can escape slavery to sin and death. He is our only hope. He is the way the truth and the life. The only way to the Father. And the only way to eternal life with the Father is through humility that leads to repentance and faith in Jesus' name.

What is humility? It's seeing clearly enough to realise that we're not all we're cracked up to be. That we fall short. That try as we might we live inconsistent lives. We want to do good but we often don't. We try to do good but often find ourselves doing exactly opposite and that, despite our best intentions. And sometimes, we even enjoy doing what we know is not right. The bible calls this sin. And describes our tendency to live this way as our sinful nature. The humble person owns up to it. And asks for forgiveness. And puts their trust in Jesus whose death has purchased forgiveness on their behalf. Jesus promises them not only forgiveness but eternal life, a promise that is written in his blood, and that he's claiming right now in heaven before his Father for all who put their faith in his name. Have you put your faith in his

name?

Think

Look to Jesus this morning. Take however much time your day allows right now to consider him. Consider his humility. Consider his life. Consider his glory. Jesus wants you to be great. Great on his terms, truly great, not great as this world conceives of greatness, but great like him. Are you humble? Do you have a servant heart?

As you look down at the clothes you're wearing and the life you're living are you more like the Pharisees and the teachers of the law or are you more like Jesus? Is the story of your life more like theirs or more like his? How can you make your life more like his?

And most importantly have you given your life to him? If Jesus were to turn you inside out what would he see? Perhaps he's doing so now. If you don't like what you see then give your life over to him right now and be washed clean of your past by his blood. Accept the forgiveness that is only available in him and begin a new life in this very moment.

Pray

Pray today that you would be great on Jesus' terms. Pray that you would be transformed by his Holy Spirit into a person who is increasingly characterised by his humility and his servant heart. Pray against the temptation to exalt yourself over him. And pray especially for the people that he has

put in your life who have not yet come to him in repentance and faith. Wouldn't it be great if it were your humility and service of them, that God uses to bring them to him? How you can start even today?