

Title: What are you fighting about?  
Text: Luke 9.46-48  
Theme: True Greatness  
Series: Luke  
Prop Stmt True Greatness is loving those who are not perceived as being great.

Read Text:

If I told you that the coach of the Detroit Lions was interested in joining our church, would you be tempted to be more excited than usual about someone joining? If so, why? Because we all long for significance. We want to know that we matter. It is assumed that we are great if great people know us and tell us or tell others that we are great. That great person could be an influencer, a professor, an athlete, a professional, a doctor, etc. Greatness is defined as the quality of being eminent or distinguished. But how do you know if you are eminent or distinguished? Typically, we view greatness as the upper rungs of the ladder of success. Parents push their children to climb higher. Coaches push their athletes to climb higher. Jesus comes along and says the opposite. The way up, is actually the way down. True greatness is not being admired by great people, it is something way different. This was hard for his disciples to grasp. This misconception of greatness is like a massive boulder and the Word of God is like a hammer that keeps hitting it over and over and over, until for some, it finally breaks. This was true of the disciples and true of us. Jesus is the king of the upside-down kingdom. His disciples thought in terms of power, politics, positions and influence. Jesus was talking about dying, taking up your cross, laying down your life, being a servant and now paying careful attention to insignificant people around you. This was no way to aspire to greatness, or set up a kingdom, was it?

We are studying Luke's account of the incredible life of Christ. There are so many things about Christ that stop us in our tracks. He is not what we expect. He doesn't say what we assume and he doesn't do what we think. This is important for us to take to heart. Beloved, what we naturally expect is often wrong. What we think will give us significance and happiness, betrays us and sucks the life out of us.

The life and ministry of Jesus exposes those false beliefs. Jesus knows what will give you true significance and joy. He knows what your heart really needs. It is not what you think. That is why Jesus is the King of the Upside-down kingdom. He does not play by your rules, or the rules of this world because our rules are broken and do not work. But we find it so hard to give up our rules of how we think things should be, particularly as it relates to power. Remember this from 1 Samuel? Saul tried to use power to advance himself and it betrayed him, like Tolkein's ring. Saul had political power and military power, but he had no power over himself. He was a man, out of control, governed by his own fear, consumed by the terror of losing power. He thought power was his god, his savior. And he was willing to kill anybody, OT priests, David, his son Jonathan, and anyone who got in his way. Earthly power is delusional. It makes one mad.

In this recent election we are tempted to believe that if we can just get our hands on the levers of power in the government, then we can use them to do so much good and reverse the course

of our nation. But can government power advance the kingdom of God? No. Beloved, the kingdom of God is not dependent on earthly power. All earthly powers answer to the One True King. Our God is in the heavens and he does what he pleases. It is true that earthly powers can provide peaceful or hostile environments for the life of the church. But if the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church, what can an earthly government do to stop God's church? It can try, but it cannot succeed. The early church had no levers of power in the government. They prayed. Why did they pray? Because their ultimate source of power was God. The local government issued a wave of persecution against the Christians and charged a leader named Saul to wreak havoc on the early church. On his way to Samaria, Jesus knocked him out. Acts 9 tells the account of how Saul was laid out on the ground by this light from heaven. When Saul realized he was waging war against God's people, who apparently took that rather personally, Saul repented and was then sent on another mission. This time, by God to advance the church instead of ravaging it. God doesn't need earthly power to advance his cause. But we assume that if we are great, if we are influential, if we are large and in charge, if we control the levers of power, that we can create a world that is comfortable for us. *"An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest."* That is not surprising. Every organization has to deal with outsized egos and people who are woefully lacking in self-awareness. But, when your leader has just told you, that he is going to be delivered into the hands of sinful men and urged you to "let these words sink into your ears" wouldn't you think that this would cause some serious reflection? (Sigh) Our beliefs are so hard to give up.

### 1. **What are you fighting about?** (46)

Every parent has asked it and every kid has heard it. "What are you fighting about?" In the moment, it seemed so important. Now beloved, there are things that are worth fighting about and worth defending. However, in many cases, we tend to fight about things that do not rise to that level. And when we do, we cause a great deal of damage to others and worse, to the reputation of the gospel. But what is worse, is the setting in which this argument broke out. Imagine that you just received the results of some tests that revealed some serious cancer that is likely inoperable and terminal. So, at dinner with your family, you share this troubling news. They listen, but don't say anything. It's like they are afraid to ask you anymore. It's, needless to say, awkward. But then a couple of your kids start arguing about who gets first dibs on dessert, or which one of them is prettier, as if, what you just said meant nothing to them at all. They are fighting about what doesn't matter and ignoring what does.

One of the reasons I caution you over and over about being divisive, argumentative, combative and launching missiles on social media, is because when you engage in fighting about things that really don't matter, then you will miss what really does matter. The disciples never really seemed to grasp the reality of Jesus' words that he was going to die. The reality of the cross had not set in on them. Beloved, when you really understand the cross, when you understand what it means to take up your cross daily and follow Jesus, it will completely change what you fight about. When you take Christ seriously, then you won't take yourself so seriously. That is why it is good for us to examine what we are inclined to fight about, because ...

### **A. What you fight about reveals what you want.**

The disciples were arguing about which one of them was the greatest. This was probably connected to their misunderstanding the mission of Christ. Who would have the corner office? Who would have the highest title and greatest honor? They fought about this because “greatness” mattered to them and it motivated them.

It is hard to be offended and argumentative when you have chosen to pick up your cross and be identified with Christ. You don’t fight about things that you don’t care about, but you fight about things that matter to you and the things that matter to you reveal what you want. How do you respond when you feel disrespected? How do you respond when you feel wronged? My wife pays more attention to our kids or grandkids than she does me. It makes me so angry! My husband cares more time on his fantasy football team than he does asking me about my day. It makes me so angry! How do you respond when you feel overlooked or neglected? How do you respond when you feel threatened, insecure, exposed or cheated? How do you respond to another driver who tailgates you, pulls in front of you, drives too fast, or too slow, flips you off or takes the parking spot you wanted? Your response reveals what you want.

### **B. What you want reveals what you trust in.**

Drive this car so people will envy you. Look beautiful so people will desire you. Dress like this, so people will notice you. Be smart and informed so people will look up to you. This thinking is all around us and we are tempted to believe that the envy of others is the basis of our happiness, or having others desire us or look up to us will satisfy our longing for meaning and significance.

### **C. What you trust in reveals what you look to, to give you worth.**

What we are doing is creating idols and we are propping up these idols to be our saviors. When you think about it, our fighting is our attempt at defending our idols that we are looking to in order to make us think we are worthy, secure and important. Have you ever heard someone say, “Oh that really triggered me.” Or, “that conversation really pushed some of my buttons.” When you say, “that triggered me.” You are not only blaming someone else for your response, but you are revealing the fact that you have given to others the control of your life. You need to think deeper. Why do you have triggers and buttons to begin with?

Jesus is going to take a child and set this child right next to himself and he is going to address this issue in a way that they will never forget. This scene is absolutely stunning to me. Jesus handles this is so that disciples will have to face why they have triggers and buttons in the first place. If that button wasn’t there, it couldn’t be pushed, right? This is exactly what James puts his finger on in his epistle (4.1). “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? (What are you fighting about?) “Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?”

## **2. We are so prone to fight over the wrong things. (47a)**

*“But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts...”*

Jesus knew that this was a heart issue and He addressed this, because this was a serious matter. These guys were fighting over something that was not only foolish, it was sinful. They were fighting over which of them should get the attention and esteem. It happens all the time, even in church. I should be asked to serve on this committee. I should be asked to teach this class, hold this office, lead this ministry, sing this solo, etc. Where does that come from? Is that war in your heart really worth fighting? We are prone to fight and to fight over the wrong things...

**A. Because we foolishly believe in the wrong things to save us.**

Think about this. If you define yourself, then you have to defend yourself. If you try to define or determine your own worth based on what you accomplish, accumulate, or experience, then you have to defend this. But if you have to defend and prop up what it is that you determine will save you, what kind of a savior is that? If your savior cannot defend itself, then how can it save you? This is easy to see on large religious type of setting. A group of zealots are outraged that someone has disrespected their god, so they march in the streets, burn cars, protest, beat up or kill a few people in order to defend the honor of their god. Is your god not capable of defending his own honor? That's easy to see.

What is harder to see are the things that we have set up in our hearts that we look to save us because often times, we set up things that look good. Look at the disciples. These guys had left their lives in order to follow Christ. They had given up their plans and comforts to follow Jesus without knowing exactly how this entire thing was going to turn out. The idea of serving in the kingdom of Christ is a noble idea, but some of them had made their position of power in the kingdom as their goal and they were going to fight in order to defend it because this was their ticket to esteem and glory. It happens to missionaries, Sunday school teachers, and charitable ministries. You can serve and even sacrifice in order to be noticed and made much of.

When I serve Jesus in a way to gain esteem in the eyes of others, I am not actually serving Jesus. My service of Jesus is just another means in my life to gain admiration from others. If I look to my children to save me (that is their success, popularity, accomplishments, even love and loyalty validate me), then my parenting is not actually for them, but for me. You see this at the soccer or baseball games, when a parent goes berserk on a coach or umpire for a perceived slight of their child. Why the intensity? Because I love my child and want to defend my child? No. It is because I love myself and I want my child's success to make much of me and if anyone threatens that then they will face my wrath. John Calvin said that our hearts are like idol producing factories. And what is worse...

**B. We are usually too proud to consider how wrong we are capable of being.**

Our blindness to our own blindness is stunning. The disciples were in the presence of the Son of God and were arguing over which of them was the greatest! It is difficult to give up our gods and admit that they cannot actually save us. It is so difficult for us to see just how wrong we are

capable of being. But God is so good to expose your false systems of belief and God is so good to show you what really matters. What happens next is powerful. If Jesus was hurt by their failure to consider the weight of what he had just told them, he doesn't show it. He doesn't lash out at them and rebuke them for failing to consider all that he has done for them and is going through for them. Jesus wants to get under your skin. He wants to get into and take over your heart. He wants you to understand him that you may actually love him so that you display him. His response to their fighting is amazing. We find out from the other gospels that Jesus waited until he was in a home in Capernaum where he called for a child to come to him. The child is old enough to hear and respond and does. Jesus then holds the child in his arms and at some point, set the child next to him. So, the child is old enough to hear and obey and yet small enough to be held. I would guess somewhere around 3-5 years old. Then he says, "*Whoever receives this child in my name receives me...*" (hold it there).

### 3. True Greatness does not look like greatness to our world. (47b-48)

In our world, greatness is found in the accolades and applause of other great people. Build your resume. Get references from great people and you will be great. Once again, Jesus shows that he is the King of the upside-down kingdom. Greatness is not found in other people saying that you are great. True greatness is caring for what God cares about. Does God care about the mighty and powerful? Yes, of course. But they already get attention. When you care about the lowly, the marginalized, the overlooked, the misfits, and you do this, not because people will applaud your humility, but because you truly recognize the value of this person, then you are receiving, you welcoming, you are embracing, you are taking to yourself, you are esteeming and placing value on one that God cares for.

God cares for you not because you have anything to add to him. You have nothing that he needs. He does not love you because you have a swimming pool in your backyard that he would like to be invited to in the summer, or a cabin up north that he would like to use sometime. You do not add value to him. You bring need. All need. And he loves you. That is greatness! So, when you love someone who is needy, like a child, who in the eyes of the world cannot add value, but you have time for them, listen to them, care for them, sacrifice for them because Jesus does that, then you are welcoming, embracing Jesus. And when you embrace and welcome Jesus, you are welcoming and embracing God, the Father.

The crisis pregnancy center that we support will send out an S.O.S. email requesting prayer for a client who appears to be abortion minded. I know that if I open that email that I will need to stop what I am doing and pray. What if I see in my inbox, an email invitation to speak at a conference? Which one will I prioritize? Do I see the marginalized and overlooked as being of inestimable value in the eyes of God or am I tempted to think that my reputation is my worth?

This is so good for us to take to heart because we are tempted to think that greatness as a church is found in people saying good things about us, or if successful and great people are members here, or if we are polished, smooth, professional and seamless then we will be impressive. But Jesus turns all of that on its head. "For he who is least among you all is the one

who is great.” True greatness is genuinely caring for those who cannot make you great. That is what Jesus did for you. You and I are the lowly, needy, empty, insignificant, and broken. And Jesus did that for you because the Father sent him here to do that. That is greatness.

#### 4. **True Greatness is found in Christ.** (48)

The text we read at the beginning of the service is from Philippians 2. Here Paul is helping the believers in a local church at Philippi apply the theology of the cross to a specific situation that is harming the congregation. The theology of the cross (the gospel) is not only the means by which we become believers. (explain). And the theology of the gospel is the glue that holds us together and the air that we breathe. There are two people in the church who have had a falling out. They were both a great help to Paul when he was there and he describes them as women who labored side by side with him in the gospel. But they have a disagreement and it has caused a rupture in the church. That is why Paul says what he says in 2.1-11. When you live with a fresh vision of the cross, then you realize that your ego, your respect, your rights, do not really matter. When you live with a fresh vision of the cross, then you really care about how your social media posts affect others. You care about the fact that you may have wounded another with your words. Instead of thinking that you can get along just fine without certain people in your life, you take everyone of them to heart because they matter to Christ. And if they matter to Christ, then they matter to us. Even the marginalized and overlooked. Beloved, this is greatness.