

You Are the Greatest!

A sermon based on Mark 10:35-45.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You know me. You know I enjoy sports. I enjoy playing sports. I enjoy watching sports. I enjoy listening about sports. Well, a few days ago, I was listening to a sports podcast,, where the host was interviewing Maurice Clarrett. I doubt many of you know Maurice. He was a superstar running back in college. Went to the Ohio State University, was dubbed Big Ten Freshman of the Year, carried his team to a National College Football Championship that same year. He had all the potential for a great career in the NFL, maybe even to be the greatest...until he ruined his chances by getting caught receiving preferential treatment from his professors and receiving special benefits totaling close to \$30,000...eventually landed in prison for robbery, illegally carrying a concealed weapon without permit, amongst other charges.

He has since worked towards turning his life around But anyways, this podcast, this interview, it gave a little bit of insight into his mindset during those troubling years. Here's some of what he said, **"You start to feel entitled, creating a different reality than your peers...at 18,19,20 years old, to have infinite power...I had a natural sense of entitlement, since I entertain you all and since you all find so much adulation from watching me play or so much feeling entitled to everything I'm given, I didn't feel like I'm breaking the rules by accepting a car or meals from people or stuff like that...because you're a superstar, and you don't have the finances of an NFL athlete but you still feel entitled, you still feel like the world owes you something. And a lot of your decision making is driven by ego."**

Did you hear it? There's a word he kept repeating over and over again...did you catch it? Yeah, it was 'entitled' or 'entitlement.' When you're on the top of the world...when you're one of the greatest, and everyone loves you and sings your praises, you feel the world owes you something.

And it's not the attitude only for some professional athletes or even celebrities today, although I'm sure you could probably come up with a few examples. I read a couple of online articles this past week concerning the whole philosophy behind this idea of self-entitlement, which one defined as **"when an individual perceives themselves as deserving of unearned privileges. These are the people who believe life owes them something; a reward, a measure of success, a particular standard of living."**

That article was so, I thought it was so spot on with its thoughts that I've included the website address in your worship folders if you'd like to read more yourself. But it talks about 5 ways self-entitlement reveals itself in a person....to somewhat summarize, 1) A person is narcissistic...the whole "I comes before you" mindset...having an over-exaggerated sense of self-importance, it's all about me, with a "my way or the highway" mentality, being **"totally unaware of the carnage that lays in their wake...and in complete denial about holding any personal responsibility for their actions,"** as the article mentions.

2) Could be summarized with the phrase, **"What's yours is mine and what's mine is my own."** It's being oblivious to how your own happiness comes at another's expense. It's having an ungrateful attitude. It's being in one-sided relationships where you're all take and no give, and there's no guilt or shame there.

3) Certainly there's a feeling of superiority; the thought of equality almost feels like oppression. You expect to start at the top of the ladder; you don't have to work your way up, like everyone else. The example the article uses is of taking turns driving. The self-entitled person will find excuses not to reciprocate and drive themselves,

or, when they're forced into taking a turn at the wheel, **"they do so dramatically,"** the article says, **"making sure everyone is aware of their great deed."**

4) When angry, they feel their anger is justified. And often, that anger will be more of the passive nature, like, where praise for someone else getting a promotion at work would be expected, they'll give a back-handed "compliment," like, "you were close with the boss, they had to choose someone, or about time you were promoted." But, usually, their lashing out in anger is a cover-up to their own insecurities.

And then 5) They always play the poor, innocent victim. Self-pity is noticeable as they're constantly seeking attention. They have this driving desire and constant need to have validation from their peers because they crave being admired and adored.

You know, I hear all of that, and I have this picture of a young toddler, who still hasn't completely grasped the concept that life isn't all about me; the world doesn't revolve only around me, you have to do what I want or else I'll throw a temper tantrum. And you might have a similar picture as well. The article certainly doesn't paint self-entitlement in a positive light.

But is that a trait our cultures holds up as being desirable? I mean, what does the Declaration of Independence say? **"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."** Unalienable rights? Maybe that's not to the extent of being self-absolved and narcissistic, but it's still the idea that simply because a person exists, they are entitled to certain rights. Is that true?

And well, it's certainly not too much of a jump to go to a mindset that emerges from that, a mindset that says to itself, "You are incredible! Everyone loves you, or else they're jealous of you. You are the greatest. You deserve this. You deserve happiness."

The bottom line...we live in a society that may not exalt a sense of entitlement, but it does certainly exemplify a culture of entitlement, a "pound-your-fist-on-the-table-and-stand-on-your-rights" mentality. And it's parasitic. It's pervasive. It breeds arrogance, conceit, pride, contempt.

Jesus could sense it. The question James and John had just posed to him wreaked of selfishness, **"Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask."** Like, "sign us a blank check, no questions asked."

Of course, he didn't, but they continued with their request anyways, **"Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."** Do you get what they were asking? They didn't just want a seat at the table. In heaven, they wanted positions of prominence. They wanted positions of authority. They wanted positions of glory. They wanted greatness.

And even when Jesus further pushed the envelope, asking, **"Can you drink the cup I drink,"** as in, "are you willing to go through what I have to endure to ascend to that throne," they, still cocky as can be, said, **"We can!"**

What was so wrong with that? Can't we chalk that up to ambition, like the disciples on the night Jesus was betrayed, confidently saying, "Yes, Lord, we will stick by your side; we will fight for you; we will never desert you!"

Was it ambitious? Yes! Selfish? Yes! Contentious? Oh yeah! I mean, just the whole way they brought forth their request had this sense of entitlement, "Jesus, we've been with you for three years; we've suffered along with you; we've stuck by your side through thick and thin. You owe us. We deserve the greatest reward...glory."

Isn't that how the rest of the Twelve took it? What was their response? "When the ten heard about this, they became indignant." They were outraged. They were jealous they hadn't thought to ask that first.

Can you see all that was wrong with this situation? All the disciples could think about was worldly ambition, which one of them should be first. In their minds, I could see them thinking, "No, I deserve the place closest to Jesus." It was all about me.

Same as our culture today. Same as our lives sometimes, too.

Do you remember the whole United Airlines incident from last year, where one of the passengers was dragged off an overbooked flight? The other online article I read this past week rehashed the situation, and here's what it had to say, **"Most Americans deal with such frustrations (missing a flight and having to take a later flight) with a reasonable mixture of grace and grumbling, without going ballistic and throwing a huge tantrum...[But] when the airline and airport police tried to remove [the man], he threw a terrific tantrum, screaming, refusing to leave, and was dragged down the aisle and off the plane. His behavior seemed to be deliberately intended to maximize the stress and trauma for everyone – including not just the United employees and airport police but also all of the other passengers on the plane.**

He succeeded in doing that. Somehow he got back on the plane and had to be removed a second time. Apparently that passenger claimed to be a doctor who had patients to see the next day. Certainly that is a relevant consideration. But is it really dispositive? Are doctors really so much more (that much more) important than other passengers?

Are doctors somehow morally superior to other passengers who are teachers, students, public employees, and business men and women who are working hard to provide for their families? Are they more important than moms and dads who are trying to get back to their families, to help their children get off to school the next morning?"

And we shake our heads at the whole ordeal. But has that ever been us?

"They stole my PFD." I've heard numerous people say that before, especially in recent years with the PFD amount getting slashed from what it could be. Are we really entitled to that? Is that our money? That might be open for discussion, but should the attitude be? No.

Karma...what about that? "I've taken my lumps. Life's dealt me numerous bad hands. I'm due to have something good happen in my life...a promotion at work, the girl of my dreams, a sudden influx in cash, kids that behave like angels...whatever it is. I deserve it."

Or maybe, taking it one step further, "God, I've suffered greatly for you. I've stressed myself out in trying to live for you, to wear my faith on my shoulder, to do the right thing. Throw me a bone. Give me some recognition. You owe me."

What does God owe you? What does owe me? What do I deserve for a sense of entitlement that is so focused on me and only me? We used this passage last week, but it's still fitting today, **"The wages of sin is death."** What we've worked for with our lives, what we've earned with our selfish and entitled attitudes is not a position of glory but instead the punishment of death and hell.

You know, I wonder if the story of the prodigal son flashed through Jesus' head as he responded to James' and John's absurdly conceited request...and to the other disciples who lashed out in jealous anger. Do you recall the

story? The younger of two sons got tired of staying at home. He wanted to experience the world. So, he went to his father with the request, "Give me my portion of the inheritance right now." Entitled, much?

And then what happened? He wasted it...on bars and women and gambling...cheap thrills. And then he was moneyless, homeless, broken to the point where he would just as well eat the slop fed to the pigs. But then his epiphany, "I'm so sorry for what I've done. I'll go home and request to work as a servant. That would be enough."

The solution to entitlement? The real path to true greatness? ***"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."***

Our culture says, "It's all about me!" Christ culture shows, "It's all about you!" You walk through Scripture and see how God was all about you...to the point where Jesus left heaven for you...to live and die and rise for you. Jesus lived in perfection so it could be yours. Jesus spread his arms on the cross, bearing pain and suffering and death for your sins...so you will never have to face eternal punishment (what you deserve) for them. Jesus rose for you...to show you your death isn't the end...to assure you there is a place in eternal glory for you.

Jesus – God – gave himself as the ransom to pay for you...gave himself in service to God for you.. That's true greatness.

And that's what being the greatest looks like for you and me as well...following in Jesus' footsteps, living a life of service to God and others. You see, the servant living for Jesus is rewarded by Lord in his grace. There are rewards here on earth. We have peace and comfort because we know our sins are forgiven and we are children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. There will be rewards in heaven. We will sit with our Lord Jesus, eating and drinking at his table. We will be in God's home singing the praises of the Almighty and enjoying his protection day and night. These rewards we will have because Christ Jesus suffered and died for us. We're not entitled to any of that. But it's ours because of Christ.

And now, we look to the One who has led by example! The One who alone deserves to be served has served the lowliest of the low. He served me, even me, by coming to find, to rescue, to save me by giving his own life for my ransom. SO now we live to serve. Right? The great on earth exercise authority and entitlement; the great in God's kingdom are servants to one another. That is their greatness, where our service is ever asking: "How can I thank you, God?" rather than "What do you owe me?" It's "How can I help?" instead of "When is it my turn?"

Or, like the miracle of the feeding of the 5000, what prompted Jesus to feed all them or even to preach to them? ***"He had compassion on them."*** Instead of being indignant with how greedy for his time these people were being, like how the disciples felt with James' and John's request, Jesus had compassion on them. How can you do the same?

The article that summarized self-entitlement had this encouragement: ***"Now to cast your eye upon your own soul...Do you pay attention to the needs of others? Show an awareness of other people's feelings and situations? Are you able to forgive those who have, either by intent or negligence, done you wrong? Entitled traits are within us all, we can re-address the balance with humility and gratitude."***

It's true. It's not all about you. It's not all about me. It's all about Jesus. What he's done for...what he's made you...you are the greatest. And we will live our lives showing that...in humility, in gratitude, in compassion, in loving service. Amen.