

An MG Midget pulled alongside a Rolls-Royce at a traffic light. *"Do you have a car phone?"* its driver asked the guy in the Rolls. *"Of course, I do,"* replied the haughty deluxe-car driver. "Well, do you have a fax machine?" asked the Midget driver. The driver in the Rolls sighed. "I have that too." "Then do you have a double bed in the back?" the Midget driver wanted to know. Ashen-faced, the Rolls driver sped off. That afternoon, he had a double bed installed in his auto. A week later, the Rolls driver passed the same MG Midget, which was parked on the side of the road, back windows fogged up and steam pouring out. The driver pulled over, got out of the Rolls and banged on the MG's back window until the driver stuck his head out. "I want you to know that I had a double bed installed," bragged the Rolls driver. The MG driver was unimpressed. *"You got me out of the shower to tell me that?"* he asked.

A ridiculous story to expose a ridiculous emotion. **There is a drive within the heart of every one of us to have the biggest and best: to be No. 1.**

Two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, made a request of Jesus, in private, away from the other disciples. *"Teacher," they asked, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."* Uh-oh. When someone asks you to grant a favor before specifying what the favor is, watch out. *"Grant us to sit," they said, "one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."*

**So, this is what discipleship is all about, a power play in the executive suite.** James and John were brothers who left their father Zebedee sitting in a boat in the middle of the lake when they responded to Jesus' teaching. **Being part of the inner circle with Peter, they felt they should have the top positions when Jesus established his kingdom.**

**Is there anyone who can't relate to James and John? The drive to be number one is one of the most common instincts of humanity.**

The month of July was named after Julius Caesar. Not to be outdone, the Emperor Augustus called the following month August after himself. Since that month had only thirty days at the time, he borrowed a day from February and added it to August, making sure that his month would not be inferior to Julius Caesar's. **Augustus was a spiritual ancestor of James and John.**

Back in the years just before World War II, Charlie Chaplin did a motion picture called THE GREAT DICTATOR. A delightful sequence in that movie takes place in a barber shop. Chaplin as Hitler and Jack Oakie as Mussolini are shown getting shaves in adjacent chairs. The scene centers around the attempts of each to put himself in a dominant position in order to assert his superior leadership. Trapped within their chairs, there is only one way to achieve dominance, and that is by controlling the height of the chairs. They can reach down and jack them up. **The higher man wins, so the scene revolves around their attempts to jack their own chair to a higher position.** They work wildly to outdo one another. **Finally, they move off the top of the screen altogether.**

James and John envisioned themselves at Jesus' right and left side in the coming kingdom. They viewed themselves as VIPs, perhaps one as Secretary of State and the other as Secretary of Defense. They longed to have positions of power and prestige. *"You do not know what you are asking,"* Jesus said. "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" **To which the brothers James and John replied. "WE ARE ABLE!!"**

On February 4, 1993, Larry Bird said good-bye to his fans at Boston Garden. A special 2-1/2-hour affair marked the retiring of Bird's jersey and the ceremonial placing of number 33 in the Garden's famed Rafter Heaven. His words were all chosen with the typical class he displayed on the court. His most significant words came when he said, *"I never put on a uniform to play a game. I put on a uniform to win."*

Think about those words for a moment. The former Hoosier, who worked on a garbage truck before finding his niche in basketball, said something you and I need to apply to our faith. If you are truly committed, you will never be satisfied with just playing. **YOU PLAY TO WIN!!**

There was an article in Sports Illustrated sometime back about a winning streak put together by the girls' volleyball team at Dayville High School in Oregon. These young women ran off a string of 65 victories before losing. What makes this streak so appealing is that Dayville High has only 18 female students: 16 are on the volleyball squad and a 17th keeps score.

Although Dayville is one of the smallest Class B high schools in the state, it won the Class A volleyball championship for three years running. Part of its success must be due to its unbridled optimism. The letter that brought word of the winning streak said that after the defeat, "The team rebounded and has a winning streak of one." I like that.

**The point I am making is this. Those who followed Jesus were not wimps! THEY WERE STRONG!!!**

*They were confident people who didn't mind risking their lives for what they believed in.*

**James and John were called "Sons of Thunder."** Peter tried to take on a whole Roman garrison by himself when they came to arrest Jesus in the garden. Many Christians take the teaching from the New Testament about meekness and humility all wrong.

**Jesus did not mean that his disciples should become Casper Milk-toast individuals.** Quite the contrary. Wimps are much more of a problem to Jesus than sons and daughters of thunder. Wimps make the faith look weak and pathetic. They have difficulty standing and being counted. They are followers, not leaders. What Jesus needs are leaders. He needs people who have the drum major instinct, people who are willing to step out from the crowd and make a difference.

Jesus asked James and John, "***Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?***" To which the brothers James and John replied. "***We are able.***"

Before too long, of course, word of James' and John's request filtered back to the other ten disciples. As you might imagine the others were upset with the brothers. They were angry with them for sneaking off and cornering Jesus that way. **For you see, they also longed for the top positions in the coming kingdom.** They too dreamed of positions of power and prestige. So much for unity within the disciples. Now they were arguing among themselves. It was at this point that Jesus called them together. Notice that Jesus didn't scold James and John for their ambition. He didn't try to make them feel small. Instead Jesus showed them an alternative path to greatness.

**Instead of thinking in worldly ways of success, power and privilege, Jesus taught them, "*Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave to all.*"** This certainly wasn't what James and John had in mind. They wanted power and prestige, but Jesus turned their notion of greatness upside down.

**Jesus taught that, in the kingdom, true greatness is found in SERVING OTHERS!**

**Bob Pierce knew how to find true greatness.** He knew he was dying, and he wanted to see his friend, **Borneo Bob Williams, a missionary** who had started hundreds of churches in Indonesia. When Pierce arrived at Borneo Bob's mission, he noticed a girl lying on a bamboo mat. He asked his friend about her. Borneo Bob explained that the girl was dying and probably had only a few days left to live. "***How come this girl is living down there in the mud when she could be up there in that nice, clean clinic?***" Pierce asked angrily.

Borneo Bob explained that the girl was a jungle girl who had asked to be near the river that day because it was cooler. A great sense of sadness and pity filled Bob Pierce's heart. He knelt beside the girl, held her hand, and began rubbing her forehead tenderly. Then he prayed for her. The girl said something to him which someone nearby translated. She was telling him of her tremendous pain and how she was unable to sleep because of it. "***If I could only sleep again,***" she told him. "If I could only sleep again!" This was more than Pierce could stand. He began crying for the girl, knowing what it was like not being able to sleep, since he experienced the same problem with his illness. Pierce reached into his pocket and handed his only bottle of sleeping pills to Borneo Bob. "You make sure she gets a good night's sleep from now on," he said to his friend. Pierce knew that it would be at least ten days before he could get to Singapore to refill his prescription. **He knew that he would have to forfeit ten nights of sleep to help this girl, but he obviously felt that it was worth it. GREATNESS IS FOUND IN SERVING OTHERS.**

**Jesus knew what it is to be human.** He knew that when we accomplish something we want recognition, we want awards and plaques to hang on our walls. We want everyone to know what we've done. **He understands that.**

**But what he wants us to know is that true greatness is found in SERVICE, *service to the community, service to the church, service to the least and the lowest.***

If you think I'm wrong, look at the people who receive awards in our city. We honor those who serve. Not only that, but we pay them quite well. Who do we give our dollars to? Doctors, lawyers, grocers, people who best serve our most profound needs. TRUE GREATNESS IS FOUND IN SERVICE TO OTHERS.

If you feel that you are not getting the success or recognition that you deserve, ask yourself this question: ***Who am I serving? SELF OR OTHERS? GOD call those great who serve those in need.***

**James and John wanted to take the easy road. They wanted success without service.** They wanted prestige and power without having to earn it. **They did not understand that service is the key to greatness.** Even more important, **service to our brothers and sisters is what the kingdom is all about.**

As Jesus said about his own life, ***"For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."***

When Doug Meland and his wife moved into a village of Brazil's Fulnio Indians, he was referred to as ***"the white man,"*** an uncomplimentary term. Other white men had exploited the villagers, burned their homes, and robbed their lands.

But after the missionaries learned the language and began to help people with medicine and in other ways, ***they began to call Doug, "the good white man."*** And when the Meland's began adopting the customs of the people, ***the Fulnio Indians spoke of Doug as the "white Indian."***

Then one day, as Doug was washing the dirty, blood-caked foot of an injured boy, he heard a bystander say, ***"Who ever heard of a white man washing an Indian's foot? Certainly, this man is from God."***

From that day, whenever Doug entered an Indian home, it would be announced, ***"Here comes the man God sent us."***

**That's the secret of greatness: SERVICE.** That's also the **chief characteristic** of those who follow Jesus. ***"For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."***

**AMEN.**