

Hymn: "Lord, to You I Make Confession" - 608 LSM
Psalm: Ps. 143

I am Among You as One who Serves
Luke 22:24-30

Lord Jesus, though You were rich You became poor that we might become rich with grace and eternal blessing. Open our ears to the preaching of Your Word that turned to You in repentance we might live in the joy of Your salvation. Amen.

Who is the greatest? That is not a surprising or uncommon question in the world. Who is the greatest sports figure? Who is the greatest musician? Who is the greatest scholar? And in the United States right now, as you probably know, we hear from politician after another claim to the greatest, the best candidate for the presidency. Or closer to home here in South Africa, listen to the rhetoric in the parliament.

These indeed are worldly questions. That is where we expect to hear them raised. They are naturally at home there. And to an extent we might say that they are even legitimate in the world where these distinctions must be made. Some rugby players are greater than other rugby players. Not all musical performers are great. Some scholars are more competent and qualified than others. Not all politicians are as great as they would claim and some do have greater potential for leadership than do others. Jesus simply states a fact of life in the world when He says that kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them and so are called benefactors. No surprises there! That is the way things are in the world.

But what is surprising is that that this dispute erupts among Jesus' disciples. The very men hand-picked by Jesus who had been under His tutelage for three years now are caught up in a disagreeable argument as to who is the greatest. We are not told the dirty details of the controversy between the disciples. Jesus does not adjudicate the dispute, making a case for one disciple over another as deserving of the title "The Greatest." No, Jesus cuts the argument off. "But it is not with you." Jesus spoke these words not only for the sake of His erring disciples in the upper room but also for your sake. Your sin is not different from theirs. The envy, the pride of place, the trust in personal righteousness, can and do characterize your life and mine.

Our Lord's words draw the disciples away from whatever claims they might voice to His own person and work. Listen again to what He says: "The greatest among you becomes as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as one who serves."

"I am among you as one who serves" pretty much sums up the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus. Even though He is true God begotten of His Father from all eternity, He humbles Himself and takes on the form of a servant becoming obedient even to the point of death on a cross that He might reconcile the undeserving to His Father. As He goes to that cross, He announces that the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. Jesus comes not simply as an example or role-model of servanthood, but as the Servant who lays down His life as the perfect sacrifice which takes away the sin of the world, your sin.

The envy that you have toward your fellow disciples, Jesus takes it away. The pride of place and the claims of entitlement - that He too bears in His own body. The petty quarreling and self-righteousness, it is all covered by the blood of the Lamb without spot or blemish.

The only way that sin can condemn you is if you insist on holding on to it, carrying it yourself, living as if Christ had not carried that sin for you. Confession is the acknowledgment of our sins. It is the recognition that we have no claim on God other than His mercy freely offered to us in Christ Jesus. The bounty of that mercy we see in our Lord's promise to His disciples who have endured with Him in His sufferings that they will indeed have a place at His heavenly table. By extension this promise is also for you. Humbled, you will be exalted. Afflicted, you will be comforted. Dead to sin, you will be made alive to live with your Lord in His kingdom and serve Him in righteousness, innocence, and blessedness forever even as He has been raised from the dead never to die again.

Come, then, confess your guilt. Cast it all on Christ, Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and trusting in His absolution live in the freedom which belongs to the children of God. He is still among us as the one who serves.

Amen.

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