

Luke 22:24-30  
June 13, 2010 Graduate Recognition Sunday (11:00)

Hampton Baptist  
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### “What Will Your Verse Be?”

I am intrigued that the official name of a graduation ceremony is “Commencement.” The word “commence” means “to begin,” but we attend these ceremonies with our eyes on the rear view mirror, noting the accomplishment of receiving a diploma. For our high school graduates, directly in front of you is a door through which you pass when reaching the milestone of completing a thirteen-year dream. As you go through it, you are exiting one episode of life and entering another. You will continue to walk through doorways for the rest of your life.

When Jesus gathered his disciples in the upper room for that last supper, he knew that they would face uncertainty after his death. He knew that they too had learned many lessons, yet the true test was yet to come. Graduates, you have been well-taught; the greatest test comes when you leave home. Let’s look at what transpired with Jesus and the twelve disciples as he sought to prepare them for *their* futures.

Jesus knew the end was near; he had deliberately planned this last supper with his disciples. Dr. Luke, who was a stickler for details, recorded that after serving the bread and the cup, Jesus said that one among them was going to betray him. The disciples then began to discuss among themselves who the culprit might be. I wonder if they employed reasoning something like this, “I think it must be one of those fishermen, because since Jesus has made them fishers of people, they have missed the adventure of the sea.” “I think it is probably the tax collector, because he was dishonest before he joined us, and I have never really trusted him.” “I think it is probably the Zealot, because Jesus is not as patriotic as expected.” We don’t know. All Luke stated was they discussed among themselves which one might be the betrayer.

But then their conversation took a turn. After wondering about who was the one to betray Jesus, the disciples began to seek *personal* validation. They not only spoke of the *faults* of the others, but individually they began to feel pretty good about themselves. Funny how that happens, isn’t it? Often, we speak *ill* of others as an unconscious act of making us feel *better* about ourselves. It is not a *conscious* act; we don’t think, “Hmmm. Perhaps I’ll talk bad about someone else so I’ll feel better about myself.” This was what happened in the upper room. Jesus said someone was going to betray him; the disciples tried to determine who it was by pointing out the other’s faults, which led to inflations of their own egos.

Luke used the phrase “as to which one of them was regarded to be the greatest.” The greatest what? The greatest eater, since they had just finished a meal? The greatest disciple? Were they jockeying for the highest rank in the movement? I wonder if Andrew said, “I was the first disciple, so I must be the greatest,” or if Philip said, “I’m from his native Galilee; that has to carry some weight.” James may have said, “I’m the greatest, because I was present at the transfiguration and when Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead.” John then would have piped in, “Me, too, but Jesus loves me more than any of you.” Peter could have said, “I saw those two events also, but I am the greatest, because Jesus called me Rock and said ‘Upon this rock, I’ll build my church.’”

So these disciples debated in Mohammad Ali fashion by saying, “I am the greatest.”

They, like Ali, had convinced themselves of the title because of what they had *done*. They had achieved, had been present for the miracles, had learned from the master teacher and now felt ready to pass along what they *thought* they knew. Their idea of greatness was hierarchical, meaning the *great* person was at the top giving orders to the *little* people.

Graduates, there are many in your class who would lay claim to the statement, “I am the greatest.” Some may have achieved academically in all subjects; others in particular subjects. Some may have excelled in all sports; others in select sports. Some may have been popular with all the seniors; others may have been the favorite of their small group. Some may think they are the greatest because of their chosen college/university. Yet, can anyone rightfully lay claim to a blanket statement, “I am the greatest?” Someone might say, “I am the greatest member of a specific club.” Does that mean the best leader or the person who attended the most events? Or “I’m the greatest baseball player.” Does that mean the best batter or fielder? Or, “I’m the best Senior in my class.” Does that indicate the highest grade point average, the person involved in the most extracurricular activities, or the person with the largest number of friends on Facebook?

Jesus interrupted their arguing. Remember, Jesus knew he was on death’s row; he knew that he was going to die the next day. So at a time when he was trying to give last-minute instructions to those who would extend the mission that he began, the disciples argued among themselves.

Yet the disciples were simply following the pattern they had been taught. For them, greatness came because of *notoriety*. In the structures of their society, the greatest, most noble and honored people were those who possessed and exercised power over others. They wanted to *be* somebody; their ideas of the Kingdom which Jesus was initiating were not accurate though. Some of them thought they would be able to have power over *other* people, specifically those who had had power over them, namely the Romans. They were just following what they had seen and what they had been taught.

Graduates, you are no different from the disciples in that regard; for that matter, all of us here are no different from the disciples. You and I have learned by what we have *seen* and by what we have been taught. Graduates, you have been molded by your families and by this church. You have learned math, English, history, science, etc. at school, but you have learned about *life* from your families.

You have also been learning at church. Through *structured* ministries such as Youth Group, Sunday School, Worship, Mission Trips, and other church events, you have learned about God and how God’s people should relate in the world. Through *unstructured* interactions, you have watched others and learned. What you *do* with your learned behavior is left up to you. As Christians, you have been taught here and at home how to live for Jesus. In his discourse with the disciples, Jesus told them that the greatest among them is the servant of all.

The normal patterns of society are to be completely reversed in the Kingdom of God. The *greatest* was to become as the *youngest*. Age was an extremely important factor in their culture, especially in family relationships. The youngest was the least important member of the family, the one who had to do the most menial tasks and could expect the smallest reward.

Ally, I can identify with you as the oldest child. The oldest are generally given the duties of taking care of the younger ones, which can be deduced from the text. Marshall, as the youngest in your family, perhaps there were times when you may have felt like the least

important member of the family because of your age. But the example of Jesus instituted a new set of values, a completely revolutionary approach to human relations for his followers. Your place in the family, your status in society, your position on the ladder has nothing to do with birth order, bank accounts, stock portfolios, grade point averages, athletic ability, leadership prowess, or any other designation which determines importance by the world's standards. Greatness is determined by service to others. The manner in which we display our love for God is how we treat others, including the people who are not like us; those who don't speak our language; those who have different values; even those we don't like.

In Luke's gospel, we find Jesus words detailing how one achieves greatness through service. Words of service are explained in the gospel of John as action by Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Foot-washing in that society was a menial task reserved for slaves, yet Jesus, as their teacher, displayed servant leadership as the way to greatness in his kingdom.

Graduates, you have achieved. Getting your diplomas has taken persistence, stamina, and will-power. But you have not done it alone. You have been encouraged by your families, your friends, and your church. And now you stand at a door to your future as you look toward college in August. But how do you become great? You serve others.

In furthering your education, you are creating new goals. Obviously a primary aspiration will be the next diploma. There are choices to consider for your future. How can your education serve others? What you have learned thus far has brought you to this station in your life. To be considered great, Jesus says to use your education to serve others. What will you do to help people? How can God use your life?

The poet Walt Whitman wrote, "That the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse." This morning I ask you, what will your verse be? Will the drama of your life be consumed with the accumulation of more things? Will your focus be on how much money you can make and how many toys you can buy? What will your verse be? Will you seek to climb that ladder of status and success always fixating your attention at someone a little higher on the ladder? What will your verse be?

Will you see a world that is filled with injustice and seek to contribute toward the solutions rather than to contribute toward the problem? What will your verse be? Will you see yourself as being created in the image of God, or will you abuse your body by not taking care of yourself? What will your verse be? Will you live your life in relationship with Jesus Christ, knowing that God is always with you, or will you try to live life your own way? What will your verse be? Will you try to be the greatest in the eyes of our society and play by their rules, or will you seek to be great in the Kingdom of God by serving others? "That the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse." Graduates, once more I pose the question, "What will your verse be?"