The Greatest

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 November 2026

Preacher: Dr. Daniel Heeringa

[0:00] Mark chapter 10, there's a common acronym today that I don't remember hearing until about the last decade and that is GOAT.! Who's the GOAT? The greatest of all time in NBA basketball, there's a common argument about the GOAT being the longevity of LeBron James or the dominance of Bill Russell or the marvels and championships of Michael Jordan.

And I can see where young people that never saw Jordan play may not think he's the GOAT. They have a right to be wrong. Today our text talks about the greatest.
It's not talking about the greatest in basketball, but much bigger than that. Greatness in sports is about accomplishment. It's about records, championships, and recognition and those type things. However, when Jesus speaks of greatness, it's completely different. And nobody demonstrates it any better than he does himself. Jesus was actually born to die.
He did so many other things before he died, but his greatest purpose, the one that makes an eternal impact, is his death and resurrection.
[1:18] He has lived sinless. He has taught. He has healed. He has raised the dead. He has cast out demons. He has ministered.

He has discipled. In today's passage, he takes a noticeable turn that I want you to see. It's found in Mark chapter 10, beginning in verse 32, and it says this.
And they were on the road going up to Jerusalem. And Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed.
And those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was happening to them, saying, See, we are going to Jerusalem.
And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him.
[2:18] And after three days, he will rise. And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.

And he said to them, What do you want me to do for you? And they said to him, Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.
And Jesus said to them, You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the baptism from which I'm baptized?
And they said to him, We are able. And Jesus said to them, The cup that I drink, you'll drink. And the baptism with which I am baptized, you'll be baptized.
But to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to grant, for it is for those from whom it has been prepared. And when the ten of them heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.
[3:24] And Jesus called to them and said to them, You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you.

But whoever would be great among you must be your servant. And whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
This is the third time in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus has foretold his death and resurrection. He had tried to prepare them for it when they were at Caesarea Philippi.
That's found in Mark 8, verse 31-33. And when he said it, Peter rebuked him for it. And Jesus looked at Peter and said, Get behind me, Satan.
Jesus knew that he had a mission to accomplish, and he didn't want to be hindered in that. They came down that mountain and were down at the bottom toward the Sea of Galilee at Capernaum,

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

the home base for Jesus.
[4:45] And he tried to tell them there in Capernaum. But it says in Mark 9, verse 32, But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him.

Now, as they approach Jerusalem, they moved from Capernaum around the top of the Sea of Galilee. They are either headed or right at Jericho, because we know the next passage will be as they leave Jericho.
They're on their way to Jerusalem, and Jesus tells them again. Now, timing is crucial here because they're on their way to Jerusalem. The Passion Week of Christ is approaching, and Jesus is preparing his disciples for the days ahead.
His earthly ministry is drawing to a close, and they need to be ready. And this time, his prediction is more graphic than it's been before. It's more plainly spoken than it's been before.
And their response is worth noticing. I want to ask you something. If someone that you were close to were to walk up to you and say, I'm going to die in the coming days, and it's going to be savage, and I want you to be ready, what would you do?
[6:12] Would you ask them, do you like me more than anyone else? Would you ask them, do you think that I'm great? Would you ask them, what are you going to leave for me?

I hope not. If that's what you're thinking to ask them, don't, okay? That would be inappropriate. But what James and John did was inappropriate as well.
They asked something like that. James and John, their nickname is the Sons of Thunder. And the reason why they're called the Sons of Thunder is because they wanted to call down fire upon people.
Sons of Thunder coming up in NWA wrestling days sounds like a tag team wrestling prep duo to me. But they were concerned about who gets the place of honor in his kingdom, who gets the place of honor at his great banquet.
They're seeking to be on top and to make the most of the opportunity. Matthew's account tells us even more.
[7:22] And he tells us that their mother was involved in this as well, that she even came with them for the request. Now, can you imagine this? Jesus turns the awkward situation into a teaching point.

He does it for them, and thank God he does it for us as well. He has just predicted his torturous death, along with his glorious resurrection. And they respond like children trying to sneak an answer out of a parent.
I want you to notice the question that they asked him in verse 35. It said, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.
You know what that sounds like? That sounds like a child wanting to get a favor out of a parent. Will you do for me whatever I ask of you? Will you do me this favor?
It's an attempt to get someone to agree before they even know what they're agreeing to. And what they wanted was position. What they wanted was promotion.
[8:22] And what makes this request so troubling is the timing of it. Because Jesus had just told them that he was approaching death. And here they are trying to outmaneuver their fellow disciples for positions of power.

Kind of makes the whole bunch of disciples look seedy and selfish, doesn't it? Well, the rest of them didn't like it. They got upset about it. What exactly were they asking for? Well, the seat on the right was the place of greatest honor.
While the seat on the left was generally considered the second in honor. So why were they asking this? Well, there's a couple of reasons.
For one, they were familiar with Old Testament prophecy. And in Old Testament prophecy, they might have been thinking of Daniel 7, verse 27. And Daniel 7, verse 27 says this, In other words, when they ask him for the right and the left, they're asking to have a hand in governing a restored Israel as they saw was his position.
Position. But they also had another reason. If you dig a little deeper, it gets a little interesting in what you'll find. Because Matthew 27, verse 55 and 56 tells us that the mother of the sons of Zebedee was at the cross watching him die with the mother of Jesus.
[10:07] Mark 15, verse 40 seems to speak of the same woman and tells us that her name is Salome. John 19, verse 25 seems to identify her as Mary's sister.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

If she's Mary's sister, then James and John were Jesus' cousins, which possibly explains they don't get Johns mixed up.
John the Baptist was his cousin as well. But now James and John apparently are cousins as well. That possibly explains why they wanted a special spot of recognition, you know.
They're warming up saying, hey, cuz, why don't you do for us, you know. Now, I'll be honest. Most scholars believe that there is that connection. But even if there's not that connection, remember they left their daddy's fishing business to follow him.
Like some of the other disciples, they followed at a great cost. And now they want to secure their next position. And Jesus responded to them by warning them that a greater cost would come to them.
[11:16] He speaks of the cup. Now, the cup is a symbol of suffering and agony. In other words, before honor ever comes, there's going to be heartache.

Now, for Christ, the cup that he drank was enduring the wrath of God for our sins and paying for the cost of our salvation. For James and John and for the followers of Christ, the cup symbolized the misery of persecution.
When you study the cup in Old Testament prophecy, as they would have understood it, we find that the cup is a symbol of a kind of suffering. And that kind of suffering is compared to the curse of alcohol or drug addiction.
And if you've ever seen anyone or experienced it, and most families have, someone who's dealing with alcohol and drug addiction, you see the misery that it causes. Not only to them, but also to those around them.
People are haunted by such addiction with great misery. And there was a lot of misery that was to follow for Christ's followers after their death and resurrection, after his death and resurrection and ascension of Christ.
[12:31] Now, don't misunderstand me. They thought the message of Christ was worth the persecution. But the martyrdom was misery, and the misery was bad. The church was heavily persecuted, and many were killed for their stand of faith.

In the second generation after Christ, there was a man named Polycarp that was quite a Christian leader. He was appointed the bishop of Smyrna by some of the disciples.
He took on a common heresy of that day that Scripture speaks to as well, Gnosticism. It was around during the days of Jesus, and it was around during the book of Acts.
And Paul writes against it some. You don't name it by name, but you can tell that's what he's speaking of. And that Gnosticism invaded the church and led many away from Christ.
Polycarp fought it hard. However, at the age of 86, he made the wrong people mad. And the authorities pursued him to kill him.
[13:35] They interrogated him. And as they interrogated him, he appeared unfazed. The procouncil got so mad at him because it wasn't bothering him that he told him that he'd throw him to wild beast or he would burn him at the stake.

And Polycarp told the authorities that the procouncil's fire lasts but a little while, but the fires of judgment that they could face could not be quenched.
He said that God had showed him a vision that he was to burn at the stake. And he looked at the procouncil and said, come do what you will.
When they went to nail him to the pyre, that's the heap they would burn him on top of, he stopped them. And he said, leave me as I am.
For he who grants me to endure the fire will enable me also to remain on the pyre unmoved without the security you desire from nails.
[14:40] And as he prayed out loud, they lit the fire. His biographer said that he did not burn as burning flesh, but instead as bread baking or as gold and silver refining in a furnace.

The fire was surrounding him, but he was not being consumed. And an executioner stepped up and stabbed him with a spear to take his life.
What a man of God. However, I brought him up because when talking about the cup of persecution, because he was once prayed, he once prayed on that burning stake.
He said, I bless you in that you may deem me worthy that I might take a portion among the martyrs in the cup of your Christ.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

That's the kind of cup that Jesus was speaking to. He also spoke of baptism. But it's not the baptism that we celebrate when one gets saved.
[15:56] The baptism that he speaks of here is a baptism of the fires of persecution. In other words, he's warning them that they would be, in the real meaning of the word baptism, that they would be submerged, that they would be dumped into deep persecution.

And what Jesus said about them was true for them. James died by the sword. We know that. It's recorded in Acts chapter 12, verse 2. And we also know that John was exiled on the Isle of Patmos at an old age because he would not stop sharing the gospel.
It was from that Isle of Patmos that he wrote the book of Revelation that we have in the back of our New Testament. Christ's predictions were fulfilled. He told them that it was not his place to seat them.
But when they gave their lives to him and even for him, there would be an eternal reward place, rewarding place for them. We need to be aware, folks, that there are still many who die for their faith today.
And I don't want us to grow numb about that because people are still being martyred for their faith. Two weeks ago, 30 Christians were killed in Nigeria for their faith. 60 Christians were killed last week in Ethiopia.
[17:22] I think the American Christian church has become so Americanized in our thinking that we fail to notice the evil in the world.

And if we ignore that, and if we're not careful, we'll open ourselves up to just that. James and John did not hear that, though.
They were jockeying for position. All this talk of positioning and importance caused an upheaval among the disciples. You can only imagine. Verse 41 says they were indignant with the two of them that made that request.
And that's what self-promotion does. Self-promotion will cause upheavals. Selfishness will destroy the work of the Lord. When we promote ourselves, it will always cause upheavals.
You can count on it. Instead of focusing on self, we instead ought to focus on Christ. How do we do that? Well, first, we listen to Jesus.
[18:20] Jesus' words here are clear. He speaks of what we do to fulfill the gospel. They didn't hear it. They heard that it was a time to jockey for position.

It was not a time for them to do that, though. And it's not a time for us to do that now. We need to stick to the gospel. I want you to hear me, and I hope you hear my heart when I say this.
We've got to stick to the gospel. There's a lot of things that can distract us today for being everything that we need to be as Christians and as a church. There are matters that I could bring up today that we may all be in agreement on.
Some people say today that preachers ought to focus today on telling people how they need to vote. Other people are scorning pastors that even bother to mention it.
All I'm going to tell you is this, that you need to pray and you need to vote. And if you need guidance on how to do that, just see me afterwards, I'll tell you.
[19:23] However, I want you to hear me. If we're not careful, that kind of talk will become a distraction for what we're here for.

That kind of talk will become a distraction for the job that we're to do. What's the job that we're to do? It's the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
Listen, my job is not to reform Washington. I'm about to give up on Washington. My job is to share the clear, unmistakable, simply explained gospel.
We need not be ashamed of the gospel. Let everything else get out of the way. Let nothing else come in the way of the gospel.
As Romans 1.16 says, the power of God for salvation to everyone is the gospel. So you listen to Jesus. He does not speak on every topic.
[20:26] You know what he talks about? He talks about the gospel. And that will change lives. Listen to Jesus. Second thing is this, be like Jesus.

Notice the lesson that he wants them to learn in our passage. And there's actually two. The first one is found in verse 43 and 44. And he said this, whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. It's interesting to me that those that strive to be recognized and be great tend not to be. Those that strive to serve and treat others before they treat themselves tend to be the ones that people look to.
Jesus' concern for them was that they lead in the interest of others and not themselves. Years ago Life Magazine did an editorial comparing the lives of great people.
And they brought up people like Winston Churchill. And they brought up Pope John Paul XXIII. And they brought up Albert Switzer. And none of them aspired to greatness as their primary goal.
[21:36] Each of them sacrificed himself in order to be a servant to the people. And according to the conclusion of this article, they were great because they chose first to be good.

They weren't choosing to be great. They just wanted to be good. I got news for you. Jesus said that before Life Magazine did. Because we have Jesus, we ought to respond differently to others.
We ought to be like Christ. Serve others instead of serving ourselves. Just like he did. And then lastly, we ought to look to Jesus.
Notice in verse 32, in the very first passage that I read today, that Jesus is walking ahead of them. It's always better when Jesus walks ahead of us.
We always do better when we're following Christ. We don't need to run ahead of him. We don't need to lag behind. We need to follow Christ. And the second lesson he taught them was the most valuable.
[22:45] It's found in verse 45 of our passage today. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

My friend, that's where the power is. It's in the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. Some years ago, one of the world's renowned scholars of the classics, Dr. E.V. Rowe completed a great translation of Homer in modern English for the Penguin Classic series.
He was 60 years old. He had been an agnostic all of his life. And the publisher enjoyed his interpretation and translation of Homer so well that he approached him again, and he asked him to translate the Gospels.
When Rowe's son heard that he said that, they asked him to do that, he said, it'll be interesting to see what Father will make of the four Gospels.
It'll be even more interesting to see what the four Gospels will make of Father. He didn't have long to wonder, because within a year, Dr. E.V. Rowe, the lifelong agnostic responded to the Gospels that he was translating, and he gave his heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, and he became a committed Christian.
[24:15] And his story is a marvelous testimony to the transforming power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The greatest that ever lived is Jesus Christ.

The greatest achievement we can ever accomplish in life is serving Christ by serving others. And the greatest decision that we could ever make is to give our life to Christ.
I want you to make no mistake today. He is the greatest. With every head bowed and every eye closed, I want to ask you this morning, if you've ever surrendered your life to follow the Lord Jesus. I didn't ask if you were a member of church. I didn't ask if you were a member of this church. I didn't ask if you held some leadership position somewhere. I didn't ask what people think of you and how well they think you are.
I ask you, has there ever been a time in your life when you've surrendered your life to follow the Lord Jesus Christ? It's not enough just to become familiar with him. It's not enough just to be close beside him.
[25:26] Instead, you need to commit your life to follow him. And if you've never committed your life to follow Christ, we're going to stand in a moment and we're going to sing. And as we do, I encourage you to come and say, Pastor, I need to give my life to Jesus Christ today.

I need to surrender who I am to Christ. I'll be happy to guide you in that. Maybe you're here this morning and you have done that. But you've never acknowledged that publicly.
Jesus, by his commission and by his example, show us that the first step in obedience to follow Christ after we give our life to Christ is through baptism. And if you've never acknowledged Christ through baptism, I encourage you to come this morning and say, Pastor, I need to line up and be baptized as a believer.
I've never publicly confessed my faith in that way. We'll be happy to line that up for you. Maybe God's drawing you to Pickens First Baptist Church, and this is the place that God would have you to

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

serve.
I want to assure you that I'll never ask you to do anything that God's not leading you to do. But I also want to assure you that I never want you to feel comfortable with not doing everything that God would have you to do.
[26:41] And if this is the place that God would have you to serve, I encourage you to come. We'll be happy to join you with us and with our family. Or maybe you're here this morning and there's matters in your life where Christ is not the greatest.

Christ, you've placed yourself in a position of leadership that he deserves in your life. And there's traits and there's habits and there's lifestyles that's not pleasing to God in you.
Will you make that right today? I'm thankful for the grace and mercy of Christ that accepts us as we are and makes us what he'd have us to be. So if you need to get something right with the Lord today, I encourage you to do that.
You can come to this altar to do that. You can do it in the pew where you'll stand. I'll be happy to pray with you. Whatever you feel like you need to do to make it right with the Lord today, I encourage you, don't leave here the same as you was when you came in.
Allow God to do what he wants to do in your heart and life right now. Heavenly Father, I love you and I thank you for the love that you have for us. And I ask right now that, Lord, not only will you guide us, but I pray that you'll give us the boldness and the obedience to respond to exactly what you would have us to do.
[28:10] Right now we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host