

Jesus' Last Day and Our New Year: Finding Greatness

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[0 : 00] And to give his life a ransom for many. To give his life a ransom for many.

The year was 1888. It was in Paris. Alfred Nobel was going down to lunch, as he would normally do, to the small cafe near where he was staying.

Nobel was a famous entrepreneur, a munitions expert. He actually invented TNT. Before he just had nitroglycerin, which was very unstable. And he invented TNT and he invented a lot of the blasting caps.

The ability to mold TNT into shells and to cause a lot of destructive power. And he had amassed this massive fortune in that, in about 300 other patents that he had developed in his lifetime.

And he sat down at the table and he opened the newspaper. And on the front page of the French paper were these headlines. The merchant of death is dead.

[1 : 01] And then he began to read his own obituary. Someone in the newspaper got it confused. And it was actually Alfred's brother who died.

But they wrote Alfred's obituary. And we're told that as he read it, he became disgusted at what he read. And he read this long obituary with platitudes like, He invented and he made it possible to kill more people more quickly than anyone else had ever done in the history of mankind.

Nobel convinced off his obituary and he realized two things. He realized that when he died, this is how he was going to be remembered. And he also realized that that's not how he wanted to be remembered.

That was not success for him. That was not greatness for him. All his life he had strived to be the best, to have success, to be great. And that was not the greatness that he wanted.

And so the story goes that he ran down to this shop. He laid out his will. And for the next several hours, he continued to rewrite his will. What it would look like to be successful.

[2 : 14] What it would look like to be reminded as being great. We're told that he went over it several times. Had men look at it and check it. And he took his fortune, which at that time was \$9 million.

So I know for all you bankers here, you're thinking in your mind, what does that translate? That translates to \$250 million. And he took all of that and he put it into a fund to establish five awards.

These awards we know today as the Nobel Peace Prize, the Nobel Prize for Humanity, the Nobel Prize for Science. Because Nobel had this unique opportunity to change his history.

And he wanted to make sure that success, power, greatness, all these things that he had dreamed about were translated in the correct way.

Why do I share that story? And why do I share that story as we begin the new year? I realize even as I'm sharing and talking and preaching and coming to God's word, that there are many of us in here right now who've already started thinking about what success is going to look like for this year.

[3 : 28] I realize that some of us in here have already received goals and KPIs and things that our bosses have given to us and said, These are the numbers that I want you to meet this year.

You did great last year. You were a success. You were incredible. But this year, this is what I need. And some of us are thinking, what happened to my success? Because it was quickly changed and increased a little more.

I realize that there's some of us in here right now who are thinking about our own lives. And we're writing KPIs for our lives. And what this next year should entail. What it should look like. And what would it mean for us to be successful and significant.

My question for us is, what would it be like if we could read our own obituary? What would we want to be known for?

What would you hope that you would look down at the newspaper and read? What would it look like to have a great life? What would it look like to be a success?

[4 : 37] Well, that's what this passage is all about. I come to this passage often because it talks about greatness. It talks about success. I know sometimes we feel uncomfortable about the word great.

If I said, do you want to be great? Do you want your career to be great? Do you want your kids to be great? Maybe you feel, ugh, I don't know if I feel good about that. But what if we just say we want you to be significant? Do you want your lives to be a success?

Do you want your lives to be influential? Do you want your lives to be significant? I mean, maybe that sounds better than asking, do you want to be great?

But the passage talks a lot about what does it mean for us to be significant in God's kingdom. The amazing thing to me about this story that we heard Bernard read is that over and over and over, Jesus is coming to his disciples, and at least four times, he's having to come into their world and talk to them about what success means, what greatness means, what does it look like to be influential, what does it look like to be powerful.

Over and over in the Gospels, he sees them arguing. Mark 9, Mark 20, Mark 10, Matthew 18, Matthew 20, Luke 22. Over and over, they argue about they want to be the greatest, they want to be successful.

[5 : 57] And over and over, it's amazing to me, I find some kind of comfort in this because I feel like I struggle with this. I mean, I feel like sometimes I get so caught up in my world, I get so caught up in my significance that I don't hear God talking to me.

I don't know if you struggle with that, but his disciples did. They struggled with it over and over and over. And the amazing thing to me is that Jesus is so gracious because over and over and over, he comes to them gently.

Over and over and over, he comes to them kindly. He comes to them patiently, and he corrects their idea of success. He corrects their idea of greatness. He corrects their idea of significance.

And he talks about there's these two kingdoms, the kingdom of the world and my kingdom, and those things look very different in my kingdom. What I want to draw in this next couple minutes is really, again, I'm hoping that you will come back and read this again this week.

I want to look at greatness. I want to look at significance. I want to look at success. And I want to look at this passage. I think this passage has three things to teach us. First thing it teaches us is what is significance in God's kingdom.

[7 : 12] What does it mean to be successful in God's kingdom? The second thing this passage teaches us is what is our greatest enemy to success? What is the thing in my heart that keeps me from being successful in God's kingdom?

This passage talks about it over and over and over. And the third thing I want to look at is what is the cure for that thing that keeps me from doing it? So let's see where we're going. So where is success?

What does it look like? What does it mean to be influential? What is the thing in my life that prevents me from doing that? And then what is the thing that is a cure for my prevention? And at the end I want to do a little exercise. You have a little envelope in your chair.

Don't open it up right now. But in the end we're going to open it up and do a little exercise and thought on success. First the passage says this. What is success?

What does success look like in God's kingdom? Now remember this is the last day of Jesus' life. Jesus is about to be arrested. He's about to go to the cross.

[8 : 10] He's about to be persecuted. And it's the last day. He is about to give everything. But all the people around him, they're acting like it is not that way.

I mean all the people around them, they're acting like it's the greatest IPO that's about to happen in the history of the world. They're acting like, okay, God's kingdom is about to happen. And here's the franchise. It's about to open up in Jerusalem. And I want to get a piece of that kingdom.

And so everybody is coming to Jesus and they all want to exercise their stock options. They all want to get in on the power play. They all want to get significance. They all want to get power. And in verse 20 we see this amazing story of this woman, Salome.

She's Jesus' aunt. She's Jesus' aunt. She's Mary's sister. And she comes to him with her two sons. And it's asked different ways in different gospels. In the Gospel of Mark, she basically says this.

She says to him, I'm going to ask you a question and I want you to answer yes for whatever I ask you. Whatever I ask you, I want you to do it. Is that bold?

[9 : 15] I mean, whatever I ask, you're going to do it. I need you to do this. I mean, sometimes that sounds a lot like us, doesn't it?

That we come to God and we say, okay, God, I need you to do this. You have to do this, God. If you don't do this, I'm going to fail. And so she comes to him and she asked him something very special. She asked for her sons to sit on the right and left hand of him in the kingdom of God.

Now, the right and the left hand were the places of the greatest power and significance. They were the places of honor. They were the places of authority. They were the places of making people do what they need to do.

And Salome says, hey, I want James and John, the sons of thunder, the sons of Zebedee, these really loud, boisterous guys. I want them to have all the power in your kingdom. I want them to be the greatest success in your kingdom.

And again, when you read the passage, what you see is that Jesus gently, you don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup I'm about to drink? They said we are, but in Greek, they're actually saying, yeah, yeah, we can do it.

[10 : 20] They don't even really know what they're doing. But they say they can do it. And over and over and over, Jesus graciously redirects them.

He takes his disciples' hearts and he teaches them what does it mean to be great in his kingdom. In verse 25, he says this.

In the world, in Hong Kong, greatness is seen in power. Greatness is seen in authority. Greatness is seen in people under you. The words there, lord it over, means to use your power of position to control people, to kind of put them in a wrestling hold and to make them do what you want them to do.

In Hong Kong, that's significance. In the world, that's power. In the world, power is your title. In the world, power is your office that looks out over the harbor.

One friend told me like this. He said in his office, greatness, success, means doing whatever you have to do to whoever you have to do it in order to get to the top and to stay on top.

[11 : 38] The verse goes on and it says, The words actually mean they use their charisma, their clever, their wise.

They know how to charm. They know how to manipulate. They know how to use their personality to control the people under them. I don't know if you've ever had that in your office. But Jesus says, In the kingdom of the world, that's what success is like.

That's what power is like. And then in verse 26 and 27, he says something very counterintuitive to us. He says, In his kingdom, success is measured by serving.

Success is measured by being a servant. Success is measured by being a slave. Success isn't measured by how many people you can control, but success is measured by how many people you serve.

When I think of the word serve in the scripture, it basically has this idea. You look at a person and you say, What does that person need that I can supply? And then you do it.

[12 : 53] Success in God's kingdom is measured in self-giving. Success in God's kingdom, Jesus says, is measured in pouring yourself out by serving others.

I came across this article, which I felt like was so powerful. It was written by Helen Rubin. She wrote it for the magazine Fast Company, and this is what she said as she dealt with the idea and the idols of success and power and significance in the publishing world.

This is what she said. Of all the subjects we assess about, success is the one we lie about the most. The success in its cousin money will make us secure.

The success in its cousin power will make us important. The success in its cousin fame will make us happy. It's time to tell the truth. Why are our generation's smartest, most talented, most successful people flirting with disaster in record numbers?

People are using all their means to get money, power, and glory, and then they're self-destructing. Maybe they didn't want it in the first place. Or maybe once they got it, they realized they didn't like it at all.

[14 : 06] She went on to say that greatness, success never last. I mean, think about that. I can read you report after report in psychological journals, and what they're telling us today is that we live in a generation that is so enamored with success and power and control, they're actually calling it a sickness.

And the problem is that people get so used to being successful wherever they're at that it gets harder and harder to keep being successful. And eventually things start to fall apart, and people start to fall apart.

Jesus compares these two kingdoms in Scripture, and he says this. Listen very carefully. He says, Worldly success, worldly serving, requires massive external rewards and recognition.

But if you serve in my kingdom, it often rests in hiddenness. Worldly serving is affected by our moods and our feelings.

We're going to do it if we feel like it. We're going to serve if we have the time. If we don't have something even greater to do, we're going to do that. But kingdom serving serves simply and faithfully just because there's a need.

[15 : 30] Worldly serving is temporary, but kingdom serving is a lifestyle. Worldly serving in success often fractures communities.

I mean, you see it happen all the time. When people become successful, their relationships break apart. But Jesus says that kingdom success kingdom greatness builds communities.

Worldly success says that greatness is found in being served. And Jesus says over and over and over, the people who are going to be called great for eternity are those who serve others now.

The question is, what kind of success do we want? The question is, what does greatness look like for us?

And what does greatness look like in your home? Are you serving the people around you? Are they serving you? What does greatness look like in your work?

[16 : 38] Are you serving the people in your work? Are they serving you? What does greatness look like in your marriage? What does greatness look like with your friends? Do you expect them to serve you?

Are you serving them? Are you serving them? I know that I am going to offend probably everybody in here, even myself, when I say this.

But after 10 years in Hong Kong, I wonder how many of us are like Salome. Are we teaching them to be servants?

Are we teaching them to serve? Greatness in God's kingdom is seen in serving others, looking at people and saying, what is their need and how can I supply that need?

The second thing we see in this passage is that greatness is hindered or our success is hindered in verses 21 and 23. And it's the question that she asks. And the question has to do with ambition and pride and self-sufficiency.

[18 : 03] And let's face it, we all struggle with ambition. I mean, we wouldn't be in Hong Kong if we weren't struggling with ambition, if we weren't struggling with self-esteem, if we weren't struggling with self-righteousness, if we weren't struggling with self-love, if we weren't thinking about ourselves more often than we think about other people.

John Calvin once said, he said, it's within our nature, the greatest thing that we desire, the thing that we go after the most in all of our life is to be flattered by other people.

And the world says, if you want to be great, you build yourself up. You pad your resume, you do a lot of other things. I mean, it's about position, it's about power, it's about rank.

It's what these disciples were doing. They were coming into Jesus' world and they were trying to build up their resume, they were trying to pad themselves up. And what the passage says is, if we live like that, if we do that, that only feeds competition.

Greatness in the world's eyes is going to separate us. Greatness in the world's eyes leads to fighting and arguing over who's the greatest. And it's interesting because right after Jesus teaches his disciples this, all the others see what he's doing and they get angry.

[19 : 21] The passage says, they are furious at what these two guys asked. And I wonder if they're angry because they wanted to ask it first. But James and John got a chance to ask it instead.

And he goes on and he says that competition fractures God's kingdom. I mean, you see it at work, you see it at school, you see it at home, you see it sometimes in churches.

I mean, sometimes as pastors, we want to build the greatest programs. We want to build the greatest building. We want to build the greatest staff team. We want to build the greatest music. We want to have the greatest preachers.

We want to have the greatest sermons. Because if we make it great, then everybody's going to want to be about greatness and they're going to want to come because they want to be a part of something great. And Jesus warns us in his passage that if we do that, we're not going to miss, we're going to miss, if we do that, we're going to miss his kingdom.

Now, please don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that greatness is bad. I'm not saying that ambition is bad.

[20 : 34] What I am saying is, who's it for? Who's it for? Is it for yourself? Is it self-centered?

Or is it God-centered? Are you ambitious in your work because you want to make God's name great? Or do you want to make your name great? Here's some questions maybe we should ask ourselves as a church as we enter into the new year.

Have I cared more about the spread of the gospel than the spread of my wealth? Am I more concerned about the name of Jesus than my own reputation?

Have I neglected to seek God's will and purpose in my life or for my church by being too occupied by my own dreams and ambitions?

Have I been concerned for the well-being of my brother or sister in Christ? Or have I just been concerned about my personal needs and my feelings?

[21 : 50] And my thoughts. The passage says that until we let go of ourself, until we let go of our selfish ambition, until we let go of our desire to control everything and think only about ourselves, that we'll never become significant in God's kingdom.

Success for us will not look like what God wants us to look like. Success will be all about us and not a lot about him and his kingdom.

So you see what success is. Success is seeing where other people have a need and meeting that need. We see what the enemy to success is. It's our pride. It's our ambition.

And the third thing, the final thing I want to look at is just basically this passage answers how we stop our troubles. And it's found in verses 27 and 28.

Look at it in your passage. Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just as the Son of Man did not come to serve but to be served.

[23 : 06] This is the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

It's interesting, the answer to our problems, the answer to our struggles, the answer to our pride, the answer to our selfish ambition. And we say it all the time here. The answer is Jesus and what he's done in our life.

If you look at that word ransom there, it's a very, very special word. It's the word *lutro*. It basically means to loosen, to cut loose. But it actually has something even stronger in it. It's the only time it's used in the New Testament.

And what it says to us is this, that you and I were slaves. That you and I were in bondage.

That you and I were held captive by a master. And this master was so bad that eventually this master was going to kill us. And Jesus came to come into that relationship and to break that hold that that master has over us.

[24 : 22] The passage says that we were slaves, that we were held in captivity, that we couldn't do anything that we wanted to do. And it says that Jesus came and he exchanged his life for our life.

Jesus came to pay your debt. Jesus came to set you free.

When the first disciples asked, hey, we want to do this, he goes, you don't know what you ask. Can you drink the cup that I'm about to drink? Well, that cup is a huge symbolism. It's throughout the whole Old Testament. It's seen in Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah and even in Revelation.

And that cup is a cup of wrath. And the Bible says that God's wrath is in this cup for all the sin of the world, for all the wrong, for all the things that have been done wrong.

And it says that one day that cup of wrath will be poured out on people. But this passage says that Jesus came into our life.

[25 : 31] He came into our world. He took that cup and he drank the wrath of God for you and for me.

I don't know how you feel when you hear those words. I don't know what emotions come up inside of you.

But the passage says that the only reason that we're here, I mean, it says really clearly that one day someone's going to have to drink that cup. And there's only two choices.

Either Christ or either yourself. And yet he says here on the last day on earth is I've come to drink that cup so that you'll be free.

So that you'll be free. How do you feel when you hear that? It was the year 2000. Christine and I were in China and we were just coming out of China and we'd had Rachel.

[26 : 41] We had two miscarriages and we were trying to have our second child. We found out that we were pregnant when we were in the country of Laos. We got to Thailand and we said, hey, let's go to the doctor.

We're at this conference for missionaries and let's get a checkup. We got a checkup and the doctor couldn't find the baby. And he looked at us and he goes, well, you're pregnant but we can't find the baby. And I said, okay, what's going on? He goes, well, maybe it's a little too small or maybe it's in a fallopian tube.

You need to watch out. So how will we know if it's in a fallopian tube if something bad happens? And she described everything to us. And right as we were walking out, for some reason, I turned around to her and I said, can I have your business card?

And she gave me her business card with her personal phone number. Ten days later, we were playing cards with friends in our room that night and about 11 o'clock, Rachel was about one and a half and we were going to bed and all of a sudden, Christina sits down in the bed and she sits up and her fallopian tube ruptures and her artery starts ruptured and she's bleeding out internally inside of herself.

And we were 30 minutes outside of the nearest city and I grabbed her and I carried her down the stairs in the largest hotel in Thailand and there was no one at the front desk.

[28 : 00] And I ran out with her in my arms and this Thai guy just happened to pull up in his little van and he couldn't speak English and I couldn't speak any Thai. I said, hospital, now! And he gets in and he's flying and as he's flying I call up this doctor and I say, it happened.

She's had an atopic pregnancy. It's ruptured. She's bleeding out right now and they said, I'll be there, I'll be there. Get there, get there, get there. And so we're flying through the streets of Patia trying to get to this place and all of a sudden we get there and as we pull up, the doctor's there, she has her team there.

They take Christina in, they do a sonogram. You're right, she's bleeding out. We gotta get her into surgery right now. They send her off into surgery and I'm sitting in the aisles and I'm thinking, okay, what am I gonna do with a one and a half year old?

It'd be better if I were to die because she's a much better parent than I am and you know that. I can't even dress my kids. And I sit there hour after hour wondering what's gonna happen and the doctor comes out and she says, five minutes.

And she would have been dead. But she's okay. And I had this incredible feel of joy and I picked the doctor up and I kiss her and I'm like out of control.

[29 : 16] And I had this feeling of I can never pay you back for what you've done for me. No matter what you ask, if that doctor were to say, hey, can you help us fund the new wing of the hospital?

I said, yeah, sure, that's great, I'll do it right now. I mean, I was trying to figure out how you say thank you in Thailand. I didn't know how to say, so I ended up just buying some plants. I put these plants all around her office as a thank you.

I hope she likes plants. I don't know. But every time I go by that hospital, I think of what that doctor did.

how she saved Christina's wife. The passage says, until we understand the cup, until we understand the cross, until we understand the sacrifice that Jesus made for us, until we understand those things, we'll never live a successful life.

We'll never live a great life in God's kingdom. Because it's until we understand those things that we're able to free ourselves and give ourselves up to people. Until we understand what Christ has done for us, we're not able to go to people and to serve them.

[30 : 41] But if we understand what he did when he took the cross and the cup, our reaction should be just like my reaction to the doctor. Yeah, whatever you need, that's great, I'll do it.

Because everything else pales. Everything else pales in comparison to taking the cup of God's wrath.

The passage says that to be great in God's kingdom is to serve. Look at where there's a need in people's lives, meet that need.

The passage says that the biggest enemy for that in our lives is going to be our pride and our selfish ambition. And the passage says that the only way that we can get past that, the only way we can work through that is by understanding that Christ took the ransom.

He took the debt. And then anything else after that, anything else after that, that's gravy.

[31 : 56] That's gravy. What does it mean to be successful in your life? What does it mean to be successful at your home?

The passage says it means to serve and to think of other people more than yourself. Well, I don't want to do that because they're not worthy of it because if I do that, they're going to let me down.

Well, this passage is amazing because Jesus is about to go to the cross and his disciples continually let him down.

And he continually, gently, graciously, lovingly comes to us. He says, Tobin, do you know what you're really asking?

Tobin, do you know what I'm about to do for you? I'm about to do all these things for you and you're bringing this big shopping list for me. I'm about to give everything and you're asking for things until we understand that.

[33 : 10] would never be a success in God's kingdom. Would never be great. In your chair, there's an envelope.

I want you to open that up for me right now if you can. I just want you to do a little exercise for ourselves.

If success is serving, and serving means seeing where people have a need and then meeting that need, we would like for us as a church to pray about what does that look like in our lives.

I mean, what does it look like for this year as we think about our KPIs for this year and as we look at what we want to do in our business, in our work, in our home, in our self? What does it look like for us to serve God?

I mean, in light of the cross, in light of the cup, in light of all that he's done, what does it look like to serve him? In light of the cup, in light of the wrath, in light of what Christ has done for us in a call to be successful as a church and to make God's name great, not self-ambition, but God's ambition.

[34 : 33] This year, what does it look like for us to serve the Watermark family? If success and greatness is in serving, what does that look like for us as a church family?

Sometimes churches are a family and there's like 20 people in the church and only two of them are doing everything and everybody else is just watching. That's not really a family.

That's a club. But God has called us to be a family. What does that look like for us to serve each other this year? And finally, this year, I commit to serving somebody by doing something.

I want you to think about that. We prayed about this a long time, guys. I mean, what does it look like for you as a single person to serve the other singles around you? And as you look at the journey that you're on, are you being more self-centered than other-centered?

Are you using your singleness for the maximum of God's kingdom? Are you using your singleness for the maximum of your kingdom? Husbands, what does it look like for you to serve your wives?

[35 : 59] What's the need that your wife has? To be listened to? To be loved? To be cared for?

What does it look like as a husband to serve our wives? I know you're sitting here going, well, she doesn't respect me. I do it. I try it like five times, and every time I do it, it just blows up in my face.

But you know, I go back to this passage. Paige, some of you, as guys, are tired of serving your wives because you feel like you never get what you want.

Some of you, as guys, are tired of serving your children because you get more respect and acclaim in the office place than you do in your family.

If that's you, then that's me. The passage says that Christ took the cup.

[37 : 06] He drank the wrath of judgment for us. He will take care of us. We can trust him. Some of you wives, you don't want to serve your husbands.

You're tired of it. How do you serve your wife? What does it look like to be available to him physically? What does it look like to be available to him and ask him questions about his work? And I say that, and you're saying, yeah, but every time I do that, it just happens, and that happens, and it never turns out the way I want, and it just never works out.

The passage says to be great in God's kingdom is to serve. And you can serve even though your husband doesn't come through for you the way you want him to, because Jesus did.

Jesus came through for you. And you can trust him because he'll take care of you, and he'll take care of your marriage.