

Who is The Greatest?

Many times in our interactions with other people, whether formally or informally, the issue of ranking emerges. At times this occurs quite openly, while at other times it is seething just below the surface. This ranking plays itself out in concerns about who is better or worse, richer or poorer, bigger or smaller, brighter or duller, attractive or less attractive, more important or less important, more popular or less popular, faster or slower, and so on.

Often there is really nothing wrong with having such concerns. Clearly one may say that in certain areas of life e.g. sports, business, etc., ranking is an integral and healthy ingredient. It is quite acceptable in several areas of life to be highly competitive. Indeed such a characteristic may serve to promote high levels of discipline, commitment and resourcefulness; and as we work or play with each other we may all be forced to become better.

On the other hand one may be so consumed by the desire to be the greatest or the best or the richest or the most popular, that one is driven to being dishonest, unethical and totally self-serving in one's actions.

The Bible records an incident where Jesus had to make a comment on ranking. While the apostles were partaking of the last supper with Jesus Christ it became clear that they were not fully focused on the meal. In Luke 22 (NIV) we have the following account:

vs14-15: When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

v17: After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you."

v19: And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

v21: But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table.

v24: A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

It is obvious that this was a very serious ceremony. I have provided a few verses here to remind you of the sequence of events. This was the last Passover supper that Jesus was having with His apostles. This Passover was being used by Jesus to show the apostles through the symbolism of the cup and the bread that He was their Passover lamb. By accepting this gift of Himself (Jesus as the sacrificial lamb) everyone can be reconciled to God and walk in fellowship with Him.

However, somewhat surprisingly, there was something else on the minds of the apostles – **who is the greatest?** As I indicated earlier this is often a very public concern or a rather private simmering issue. Therefore how should we deal with it?

What did Jesus say? Reading from the same account in Luke 22:

vs26-27: “ ... the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”

So there you have it. Let us not be embroiled in disputes about ranking. Let us not be inordinately consumed by thoughts of ranking. Someone will be the greatest at some specific task, maybe it’s going to be you or maybe me. But whether we are the greatest or not, here are two important things that we should always remember and practice:

- “Be like the youngest” – recognize, appreciate and respect authority and elders; graciously acknowledge that in several areas there are others better at it than we are; be humble.
- Be “like the one who serves” – always look for opportunities to serve; be selfless.