Ask yourself, this afternoon, if you think of yourself as a servant of other people around you? Are you a servant to your family? Are you a servant to others in your church? Do you see yourself in this holy way which Jesus outlines for His Apostles when He speaks to them of true greatness? This is our subject this afternoon; true greatness. True greatness in the eyes of our God is becoming a servant to others that they might be saved by Christ. True greatness exercises that wonderful grace of humility so that those who you are in charge of leading might be led to see Christ in you. If they are Christians this servant attitude of yours will help them farther along the path of righteousness; all because you are a person who knows how to serve them as you serve Christ. This is not something which is easily attained by the Christian. These Apostles were all Christians with the exception of Judas. And it was 2 of Christ’s closest Apostles who had these desires for greatness. They wanted so much to have the seats on Christ’s right and left in the kingdom, that they asked Him straight out for them. But they didn’t know what they asked, Jesus told them. Were they willing to undergo the baptism of sufferings? They say that they are. He tells them that, yes, they would. Jesus said that it was not His to give, but that these seats were to be given to those for those for whom it had already been prepared. Well word got around to the other 10 Apostles, of what James and John had asked for. And it says in verse 41 that when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. The desire for greatness will often lead to the displeasure of people around you for one of two reasons. Either it is because they themselves want to be great and the do not like it that you are trying for same high position which they covet. Or they understand that you possibly have a problem with selfish ambition and pride. So you can see that Jesus knew that He would have to address this problem of selfish ambition head on. He knew that it is especially important for people who are in positions of authority to know how to become a servant. But I hope that you and I will also see that we need to learn this as well, so that each of us will have attitudes and actions which are pleasing to God. So I would like to give you some characteristics of true greatness this afternoon. The 1st characteristic of true greatness is not lording it over those under your charge. The 2nd characteristic of greatness is learning to become a servant and even the slave of all if need be. The 3rd characteristic of true greatness is to remember Jesus. Let’s see if we can glean what the Lord would have for us from this passage.

1st of all – True Greatness in God’s sight does not lord it over those under your charge.

“And when the 10 heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John.” “But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those
who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.” “Yet it shall not be so among you....” True greatness does not want to be so great that their position is above other believers. God may have placed an Apostle over other believers but he is still to desire to consider himself just one of the Lord Jesus’ many friends. It is true that Apostles and pastor-teachers do have an authority given to them by God. And it must be taken up in right way. But all the while that person in authority should want to simply be on the level with other believers and to let Christ have all the glory. To lord it over someone is to want to have the high position and to exercise that authority over people under your charge in such a way that they always know and remember that you are under that authority. This is often very common in world around us. And the reason that men in worldly positions of authority are often this way is because they forget that God is the One who gave them their authority to begin with. Turn with me over to Romans chapter 13, verse 1. We will look at political authorities first. “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.” “For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” “Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.” We see here that we as Christians are to respect those who have been placed over us in positions of authority in our Civil Government. And we are to be “subject” to them. We are to have a respect for the President of the United States because of his office, even if we cannot agreed with his policies or even with many of the decisions that he makes. Nevertheless, we are to be subject to His authority. But sometimes in kingdoms and governments among the nations there are men who are not acting as public servants in government; they are acting as tyrants. They lord it over their people by oppressing them. What is the Christian to do in such cases? Well, we find an indication of what he should do in verses 3-5. “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.” “Do you want to be unafraid of the authority?” “Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.” “For he is God’s minister to you for good.” “But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.” The Christian is to be subject to the governing authorities, for the goal of government is to commend and to promote what is good and to punish what is evil and bad. But if the Christian who is trying to do the good and right things finds himself and many other people being treated repeatedly in an unjust way by the government; do they then have the right to respectfully decline obedience to that authority? I believe that they do. But they may have to endure whatever punishment the unjust government might bring upon them. However, revolution is very seldom the Christian way. Submission and being a servant is. Working to change laws and policies that are unjust is the usual way for the Christian. Civil disobedience or revolution must always be the last resort, even as our American Revolution was. It should not be that men in a passion to change government take matters into their own hands to overthrow government without a just cause; a
cause which is provably just in the sight of God, and in the sight of other Christian people. Issues of what the Christian can submit to and what he believes that he cannot submit to must be carefully considered and worked through in calm deliberation, using the truth of the Bible, and taking counsel with many godly men. Disregard of authority or disobedience to authority are not the way of the Christian. He is not to allow himself to fall into the sinful passion of rebellion which might lead to violence against authorities at any level. A Christian should be able to submit to authority even when he finds that he disagrees with it, in most cases. This is true whether the problem of lording is found in family, coming from the head of the household, or whether it is in relation to the laws of the society that we live in. But there may be times of extreme lording which need to be resisted.

Let’s look at a Biblical example of what lording it over people, politically, looks like. Turn with me to 1 Kings Chapter 12. Solomon had sinned against the Lord in allowing the false worship of his 700 wives and 300 concubines to come into Israel. Because of that, the Lord decided that He would take the kingdom out of his son Rehoboam’s hands. But Rehoboam made a real mistake which confirmed that the kingdom ought to be taken out of his hands. Verse 1 – “And Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king.” “So it happened, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard it (he was still in Egypt), that they sent and called him.” “Then Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your faith, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you.” So he said to them, “Depart for three days, then come back to me.” “And the people departed.” “the King Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, and he said, ‘How do you advise me to answer these people?’ “And they spoke to him, saying, ‘If you will be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.” “But he rejected the advice which the elders had given him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him.” “And he said to them, ‘What advice do you give?’ “How should we answer this people who have spoken to me saying, ‘Lighten the yoke which your father put on us?’ “Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him saying, ‘Thus you should speak to this people who spoken to you, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke lighter on us’—thus you shall say to them: ‘My little finger shall be thicker than my father’s waist!’ “And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!” So that is exactly what Rehoboam did, and look at the outcome in verse 16 – “Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying: “What share have we in David?” “We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.” “To your tents, O Israel!” “Now see to your own house.”

This is a good example of lording, when a person in authority is only interested in oppressing others, laying heavy burdens on them, and only wanting to be seen
as someone powerful and great, and not listening to them at all. In spiritual matters it can become the same in churches as well. Those who lead in the church are not called to lord it over the faith of those to whom they minister. Instead they are called to serve. Turn to 1 Peter 5: 1 – “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ‘Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.’ You see, men in positions of authority in the church are not to see themselves as lords over the flock. They are to be examples of service to Christ. That is true greatness which Christ Himself will reward. The Lord of glory knows how to give grace and glory. First comes humble service; then the reward in glory. Let us all strive to be servants instead of lords.

The 2nd characteristic of greatness is learning to become a servant and even the slave of all if need be.

Verses 43 and 44 say – “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.” “And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.” This shows us the steps of obedience to Christ in order to become a truly great person; not great in your own eyes; but great in God’s eyes. There are certain steps to becoming great in God’s eyes. We are to serve men by serving God, and we are to serve God by serving men. This does not mean that we are always taking instructions from other people if we are a pastor. It does not mean that we are someone else’s doormat for them to walk upon us if we are a Christian. But the steps referred to here in this passage are steps which are taken to humble ourselves in relation to our duty, and what He would have us do in regard to people around us. The path of duty is the path of obedience to God in relation to all of His commandments. Christ has very definite things that He would have each one of us to do in relation to people around us. We are not to simply live to ourselves or isolate ourselves from other Christians or our neighbors. We are to think of how we can minister to them. Many, many Christians today have not caught on to what is being asked of them from their Lord. Turn with me to Luke Chapter 17 and verse 5. These verses of this parable are spoken in the context of our being able to forgive our brother if he sins against us seven times in the day and repents for each of those times of sin. We are commanded to forgive him. We may not want to do it. We may not to do what our Lord has commanded. This is why the disciples said in verse 5, “Lord, increase our faith.” Then Jesus says, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.” “And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘come at once and sit down to eat?” “But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird
yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink?” “Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him?” “I think not.” “So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants.’ “We have done what was our duty to do.” The lesson of the parable is that it takes faith to freely and willingly become a servant to God and to other people. The way that those outside of Christ think; is to serve themselves first, and then, maybe after they have eaten and drunk of their own pursuit of pleasure, they might then begin to think about serving God and other people. The Christian not only thinks about God first, he actually goes about to serve God first in the way that he lives his life. He does not seek to please and satisfy himself first and then the Master. He will seek to please the Master first, and serve Him, and even after he has done that, he confesses that he is an unprofitable servant. That is true greatness. Let me ask you, dear Christian whether you are beginning to learn this way to true greatness and glorifying your Father who is in heaven? Are you the bond-servant of Jesus Christ? Are you serving Him first in your spirit, or are you serving yourself and the spirit of this world?

Lastly - The 3rd characteristic of true greatness is to remember Jesus. Verse 45 says, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” The Lord Jesus took the position of a servant in terms of His ransoming us from sin. He had to pay the greatest of prices when He went to the cross. He had to give His life to turn with me to Philippians Chapter 2, verse 1. Here is how you become a servant to God and to others. “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” How do I do this Paul? Verse 5 – “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, (no one greater than God) did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. Now that is true greatness. And you and I should take Jesus for our pattern as to how we will get there. We have been given great privileges from God and have been seated in the heavenly places with Christ, but what God would have us to learn in our earthly pilgrimage is ask Christ for grace to humble ourselves and to take the form of a bond-servant. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 19 – “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more.” That is what you and I are called to do.