

GOAT: Greatest of All Time | How to Be Great

Petie Kinder | Mark 10:35-45

What's up everybody? How are we doing?

Hey, we can't jump into this weekend too quickly without recognizing and celebrating what happened last weekend. Across all four campuses we had over 150 people who decided to start following Jesus, and got baptized, which is incredible. That's so awesome.

So if you were one of those 150 plus people, your next step is to get into a group. Groups are where we grow around here, so we'd love to help you get connected to one. You can stop by Connection Central on your way out and they can help you get connected, if you haven't already done so.

We are starting a brand new teaching series today called *G.O.A.T.* and it's not about animals.

G.O.A.T. – Greatest of All Time

And if you're a sports fan, you are familiar with this term because it is often used in sports discussions. The big argument always seems to come up, it is between Michael Jordan and LeBron James for who is the greatest of all time. Now I grew up in the 90s. I was born in the mid-80s, so I grew up watching Jordan and all of his greatness. We need to face the facts that LeBron is making it a discussion. If you saw that game winner last night, my man is legit. He is at least making it a discussion.

When it comes to the greatest football player of all time—as we get into that if you're new around here you don't know we're this kind of church. We say the tough things to each other. We speak the truth in love. I know it is very hard and unpopular to say this in the city of Indianapolis, but the greatest football player of all time—and let's just face it—Tom Brady has got that thing on lock down.

Don't boo me. I'm not Tom Brady. Good grief.

Now when we go to a different discussion about what is the greatest college basketball program of all time... Wait, wait—I think we should have an unbiased, objective way to determine this. We should just go to who has the most wins, the most winning college basketball program which, if you didn't know, belongs to my Kentucky Wildcats.

Now, I'm sorry. I couldn't help myself. It is too easy.

I actually was thinking about this last week. I feel bad for my son. I actually feel bad for all of my children but I feel bad for my eldest son. He is six-years-old and just getting into sports. He doesn't know any better. He doesn't get the whole IU versus Kentucky and all that stuff. He's grown up in a home where we've indoctrinated him to the Wildcats, but he's got a double whammy. My dad, his grandpa, is a Patriots fan. So he doesn't know.

He actually went to school this entire winter in this outfit—Kentucky backpack, Patriots hat. Buddy, I am so sorry. He has no idea he is unintentionally picking fights on the playground. He has no clue. He is at least going to grow up with some thick skin, that's for sure.

This is not a series about sports either. That's not the focal point of this series. What we're going to talk about for the next four weeks is the concept of greatness. We all have a desire within, no matter what our background is, whether we grew up in church, and no matter what our current beliefs look like we all can find some common ground here because we all have a desire to be significant.

Let's put it like this: We all want to be great **in some way**.

We're under no impression we're going to be like LeBron, MJ or world leaders or anything like that, but we all have a desire to be great in some way. We're going to spend the next four weeks talking about what it means to be great and how we can be great. We're going to look at Jesus' words and his teaching on greatness.

Jesus had a lot to say about greatness, and I think Jesus is a good person to go to and talk about what it means to be great. No matter what your spiritual beliefs are, all of us respect and revere Jesus, at least the idea of him. If you don't like Jesus, you probably don't like Mother Theresa and what's wrong with you? It is like a normal thing, he is a good guy and we all like Jesus.

Jesus, by the way, lived 2,000 years ago and yet we're still talking about him. His ministry was 2,000 years ago, yet it is still changing lives, impacting people. So if there is anyone who has something to say about what it means to be great, Jesus is a prime candidate for it.

Here is the problem with Jesus. The idea of Jesus is one we can all get behind, like the idea of a good, loving person—a historical figure. Yes, Jesus is a good guy. The problem is when you get into his teaching. His teachings were very problematic for you and for me. His teachings confronted us with some really difficult realities we have to face. His teachings were challenging, and always demanded change in our lives.

Today is no different. Jesus' teaching on greatness is so counter-cultural, it is so challenging to us. It's going to turn our world upside down as we study this for the next four weeks. But I'm telling you, if we can receive and apply this teaching, I think it has the power to change our lives.

Here's in a nutshell what Jesus is going to show us today. There is a path you and I take to greatness. We've all be taking the same path to get there. It's the path humanity has tried to take to achieve significance and value and greatness in our lives for thousands and thousands of years. But there is a nasty consequence that comes from taking this path we all tend to take toward greatness. There is a consequence that comes with it.

So Jesus is going to show us that consequence. But past that, he is not going to leave us there. He is going to show us a different path, a different way to greatness, the path the he took. And it's one I believe we can take as well.

So grab a Bible or a Bible App, or Google and get to Mark 10. If you don't have a Bible, don't want to do the Bible App, and don't want to do Google, I've got a screen for you right here. I'll have all the verses on it.

In Mark 10 we are starting in verse 35. We are going to see a conversation that two of Jesus' closest followers, his disciples, have with him. They come to him and they ask something. So let's jump into Mark 10:35.

"Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came over and spoke to him, 'Teacher' they said, 'we want you to do us a favor.'"

I love that they have no qualms in sounding selfish. They are like: I know this is going to sound weird and you are this great guy, but we want you to do us a solid. We need a favor from you. We need something.

Here it is. Here is the request. "What is your request?' he asked. They replied, 'When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left.'"

Now pause for some context here. The disciples were still under the impression, even though Jesus had told them multiple times that this wasn't true, they were still under the impression that Jesus came to be a physical, earthly king, a political ruler. The disciples were still under the impression that Jesus was going to bring power and kingship back to the nation of Israel, that Jesus would be the King of Israel. He was going to overthrow the government and restore order. He was going to be an earthly king.

Now Jesus said multiple times: My kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. I'm a spiritual leader. I'm not going to do what you think I'm going to do. That's not me. But they were hearing what they wanted to hear. What they are saying now is: Jesus, when you rise to greatness, we want the seats of honor—one on your right, one on your left.

In other words: We want to be your posse. We want to be your crew. Because they know if Jesus is going to be this great, the closer they can get to greatness the greater chance they too would be great. There would be some power, fame, influence, and prestige that would come

with being close to Jesus. Really what the disciples are asking Jesus here was: Hey, will you make us great? Will you make us great?

Now Jesus' response was interesting. Here's what he says. "But Jesus said to them, 'You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?'"

He says: Guys, I don't think you're getting it. Following me is not going to be this path of comfort, fame, and power, and status. It's going to cost you something. It's going to hurt. And are you ready for that?

Again, the disciples were typical—kind of dumb, average guys. They hear this and think: This is probably the red tape you have to cut through to get to greatness. I'll just sign my name. I don't know what the form is, but I'll just sign it because look at their reply.

"'Oh yes,' they replied, 'we are able!' Then Jesus told them, 'You will indeed drink from my bitter cup and be baptized with my baptism of suffering. But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. God has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen.'"

This is a double whammy for the disciples here. Not only do they not get the seats of honor, they get the suffering. It's like a lose-lose situation here.

The next verses are some of my favorites in this whole narrative. Here is verse 41. "When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant."

They were ticked. Do you know why they were ticked? They wanted the same thing. They wanted the same thing James and John wanted. They wanted the seats of honor. Like: No, no, no you can't have them. They are supposed to be mine. They wanted the power. They wanted the influence. They wanted the greatness.

What I love about that verse is that it shows us we are no different than the disciples. They are no different than us. They may have had this closeness, this proximity to Jesus and they are written about in the Bible, but they are just like you and me. They are going down this path to achieve greatness and it's the same path you and I are going down.

The way we've been doing it for thousands of years is very similar. Do whatever you can to clamor for, to fight for, to strive for, to hold onto the things the world tells us will make us significant. The things the world has shown us will make us great in the world's eyes. Hold onto them and fight for them. When you can get them, just grasp on to them as tight as you can. Things like these:

power
fame
skills

influence
intelligence
beauty
wealth
achievements
success
security

The path that we've been taking to make our lives significant, to feel viable, and to have something at the end of day we can hang our hats on and we can say, "You know what? Our lives were worth it," is to fight and clamor for these kinds of things.

Here is the key. We just need a few of them. We're under no impression that we can get all of them. No one thinks they are going to be the most powerful, the most famous, the most skillful or the most wealthy and beautiful. No. We just want to get a few of them so we can feel significant and great.

For instance, we may not feel we can be the most powerful and most famous, but we can maybe be the most skillful and influential in our workplace. We can maybe get there. So we work 60, 70, 80 hours a week, and that justifies that kind of crazy workaholic behavior. This workaholic behavior that says, "This is going to be impactful." It's going to negatively impact your family, your friendships, your relationships, your personal health, your sanity, but it's worth it because you'll get to be great. You'll get to be significant.

You may not feel like you can be the most intelligent person in the world, maybe you don't have the most book smarts. But you can control your beauty a little bit. You can get into the gym, you can work on your fitness. You can buy some new clothes and spend a little extra time in front of the mirror getting ready and make sure you look good.

If you couple that with a little bit of fame, and you put just the right filter on your social media post and just the right caps you're going to get some more likes and followers. Before you know it, you're a pretty good looking person with a good social media account. Everything else may be awful, but at least you've got this. At least you've got something to consider yourself to be significant.

And wealth. Why do we spend so much time looking at our bank account? Why do we spend so much time obsessing over our 401K number? It makes us feel some type of way. It's because we're hanging our hat on it. We're saying that makes us great, that makes us significant.

Why do we put so much pressure on our kids to perform and behave a certain way? You know why? Because they are a reflection of us as parents. If we can produce great kids who have a positive impact on society—good, fine, outstanding citizens—we can feel like we've achieved something and we are successful. We can hang our hat on it and then we'll feel significant.

This is what we've done to show the world we are great. This is the path we take.

Now here is the thing. We don't go about this path with impure motives in the beginning, most of us don't. I'm not suggesting we're a bunch of people plotting world domination like, "How am I going to get all the power, fame, and money?" No, we start with pure motives. The reason we want the promotion at work oftentimes is because we want to provide for our family. That's an honorable, noble motive.

Why do we want the wealth? Well, sometimes we want to buy something for ourselves, but a lot of us think we could do a lot of good with that wealth. The careers we chose, most of us, we chose a profession because at the end of the day we want to help people. We think that with whatever career that is, we can help people. There are some noble and admirable motives, pure motives, at the beginning of this path to greatness.

But something happens. Something happens to each and every one of us as we go down the path to greatness. And Jesus is about to unpack it for us. When we read it, it is going to confront us and challenge and convict us, but we know it is true. There is something that changes. Here is what it says in the very next verse. In verse 42, Jesus sees the disciples are worried about this issue of greatness, they are mad at each other, jockeying for influence, and envying the people who have authority and they want to be those people.

"So Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them.'"

Now pause for a second. We've got to dissect this. Because when you read the words rulers and officials, very few of us think of us. We often think of people in high positions of authority. We think about rulers and officials in a different way, as people who are seen as an authority with power and influence, which, by the way, is all of us to some degree.

He says: When you get into that position, when you have power, influence, and authority here's what happens in this world. You lord it over people and you flaunt your authority over those underneath you.

Now, you know this is true. We've seen this in so many other people's lives, haven't we? You've seen it in other people left and right. Have you ever had a friend you knew when they were starting out at the bottom? But now they are here [higher]. They are successful, they've got a different kind of lifestyle, and they are doing the thing. All of a sudden they treat you a little differently now that they live in a different economic stratosphere.

If you're single, have you ever been looked down on by a married person? Given the whole, "What's wrong with you? Why are you still single vibe?" Yeah. Have you ever had a peer at work who got promoted, and you didn't get promoted and all of a sudden he starts treating you a little differently? And all of a sudden you notice he's starting to pull the ladder up a little bit,

making it harder for you and his former peers to get promoted like he did? Whoa, what's happening?

We see this in other people. We see this kind of arrogance and flaunting in celebrities and world leaders. We see it in other people, but the real uncomfortable truth is this whole thing is not just true of other people, it's true of us.

Here's how I know it. We're going to get real. Are you ready for some raw, real talk? This is going to get uncomfortable. I'm not going to make you stand up and confess your deepest, darkest. I'm not going to make you raise your hand. I'm just going to give you an example, and it's an example you will not want to admit is true but it is so true of every single one of us.

I want you to go back to the last time you ran into somebody you went to high school or college with, and you haven't seen them in five, 10, 15, 20 years. Maybe you ran into them in the grocery store. Maybe you ran into them at a social gathering or when you went to your high school reunion. Maybe you got a random Facebook friend request. It's someone you haven't seen in years.

Now, what happens inside of your heart when you come across this person? There is something that happens in a millisecond to every single one of us. There is a snap judgment. You remember how they used to be, and then you size them up a little bit. How did they do? Well, they used to be super cute and super smart. It seemed like they were poised for greatness, but they let it go a little bit. They didn't make the best of life choices.

Or, opposite, you're like, "They used to not be something and I never knew they had it in them. This is amazing." And then what happens a millisecond later—and this is so subconscious and so sick and sadistic inside of us—is that once we size them up, then we compare ourselves to them. And it makes us feel some type of way. You either feel really good about yourself, or bad about yourself.

If you see this person and they've made a mess out of their life, their relationship status isn't great, maybe they're not looking great anymore and they don't have a great career, all of a sudden you are like, "Man, I didn't do too bad." Or you feel the opposite way. All of a sudden you're like, "Gosh, I played way too many video games in college. I didn't go on a diet. What have I done? They have really made something out of their life, and I haven't made anything out of mine."

It's so sick, but it is so true. Here's the deal. Our path to greatness—our usual path to greatness leads to comparison. When you're clamoring for the things of this world that will make you great and significant, that path always leads to a comparison game. That's what is happening to the disciples here and Jesus is the example.

The disciples are saying: Will you put us in the seats of authority? Will you make us great? We see them and we want what they've got. We're envious of their positions. We feel really bad about ourselves, we want to be about them.

And Jesus is like: If you get there and get that seat you're going to look down at people and flaunt it and lord it over people. You're going to compare yourself to them.

Our path to greatness leads to comparison.

Either way, our path to greatness puts us in a game of comparison. Friends, there is always someone to compare up to, and there's always someone to compare down to. There is always someone who is going to make you feel good about yourself, and there is always someone who is going to make you feel bad about yourself.

Here's the reason that it is such a problem for us and this is such a nasty consequence of this path to greatness. Comparison is a life killer. It will steal your joy. It will rob you of any satisfaction God intended for you to experience through the good gifts he has given you. If you're constantly comparing, you can't enjoy what you have. You're always looking at others saying, "I wish I had what they had. I'll never be as good of a mom as she is," or, "Man, I'll never be as ripped as he is." Or the opposite and that never leads to peace.

That is the real reason this path to greatness is so devastating. It never leads you to a place at the end of day where you lay your head down on the pillow and you have peace. That's not what Jesus wants for you. Jesus is not going to leave us there. He is going a different path.

I want to brace you for it because it is very, very different. It is so counter-culture, so opposite of what this world and everything you have observed has taught us, but I believe it has the power to change your life.

Let's go to the next verse. I love these first seven words. "But among you it will be different." Let's pause for a second. He says: I see you playing the comparison game. I see you doing this, but for my followers we are not going to get into this rat race. Among us, among people who follow me, we're going to do it differently. Here's how it will go.

"Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The concept of slavery and servanthood, when we hear that we think of the evils of American slavery, and rightfully so. In Jesus' time slavery and servanthood looked different, but there are some common threads. The most foundational one is they are at the bottom of the ladder, socially. They have no influence and no one will perceive slaves and servants to be great, to be significant. They are very, very common.

If you are a pragmatist in the room, you've got to be raging because this does not make sense, and this doesn't work. You think, "As I read it, it just seems like it is not going to work. I don't know if you are familiar with the concept of servants, Jesus. Servants typically don't speak, Jesus. You understand servants don't have any influence. Jesus, you understand that the path to greatness means you've got to be able to lead people. You've got to be able to make changes in society, to be a difference maker. To do that you've got to be able to lead people. You've got to be able to have a platform, to be seen, to be known.

"Jesus, you understand that servants don't have a platform. The servant's whole job is to not be seen. Servants don't lead people, they serve people. Jesus, this is crazy. You see, Jesus, this just doesn't work. Because if I do this, if I become like a servant, I'm putting myself, my career, my goals, and my ambitions at a major risk. Servants don't have their voice heard. Servants don't stand out as unique. Servants end up doing all the dirty work. They end up in uncomfortable situations. They don't have their dreams fulfilled.

"Servants get overlooked for promotions. Servants don't fulfill their potential. Servants probably have a lot more under the hood they could have offered the world, but no one will ever know because they aren't recognized, they are forgotten. They are always at the mercy of others. Servants aren't even noticed, Jesus."

And I hear you. And I'm with you. I think the same thing. It doesn't make sense. But here is the problem. Jesus makes it really, really hard to argue with him. He makes it really hard to argue with him on this one, because his argument for why this way of life works, his argument for why this path to greatness is not a principle or a theory, his argument for it is a person. He says: For even the Son of Man," even me, even the GOAT, even the greatest of all time, "came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life for the ransom of many."

He says: If you want to talk about greatness, let me show you how it is done. Look to me. Even the Son of Man, the one who has more of a birthright than anyone in this world, the very same guy—he is the one who has limitless power and resources at his disposal, who created the world and everything in it and has proven time and time again that the laws of the universe do not apply to him. He could do whatever he wanted whenever he wanted it and was the very definition of greatness, power, fame, prestige, influence, resources, fame, and wealth.

Don't forget, he was born in a barn in nobody town, to a nobody family, willing to enter this world living in complete poverty. He gave up all his rights and privileges. He was a man without a home throughout his ministry, a nomad going from town to town, never using his status as the Son of God for any perks. He never lorded his power and authority over anyone.

Did you know that Jesus' voice wasn't always heard? Did you know that he actually went to his death on the cross without a sound? Like a sheep led to the slaughter, never defending himself? Did you know that Jesus did not stand out as unique in his life? He had a common Jewish name. He looked like a common Jewish man, and he died a common death.

When we see the cross we automatically think of Jesus. That wouldn't have been the case when Jesus died. Hundreds of people were crucified every week. It was a very common way to execute criminals. In fact, Jesus was crucified between two common criminals. They treated him as a complete nobody until the very end.

Did you know Jesus left a ton of potential on the table? As a type "A" leader we're always thinking, "Let's fulfill our purpose without leaving anything on the table?" Jesus left a lot on the table. He could have fixed the whole world and everything in it with the snap of a finger. But he didn't. He could have healed more people than he did. But he just humbly submitted to his Father's plan and did what he was supposed to do, what he was told to do.

Did you know he was forgotten? It's hard to believe since we are talking about him 2,000 years later. His closest followers abandoned him when he died and many of his followers just forgot about him because they assumed his death was the end of him.

You see, Jesus was poised and set up to follow the path of greatness that you and I want to follow. He could have had it all. He could have been the greatest world leader we've ever known, all the power, the fame, the wealth, the skills—he could have had it all. Instead he laid it all down in service to others. He laid down everything, even his own life, for you and for me. And that's why he is the greatest. That's why we're still talking about him 2,000 years later.

We're going to take the next four weeks and we're going to deep dive into this concept of servant leadership and what it means to make a difference with our lives. So we're going to deep dive into how this applies to us and how to live this out.

But there is a foundational question still lurking out there. That question is: how? How is it even possible to begin to live a life like that? Let's cut through and get to some bare bones reality here. I know you, you know me, and we are some selfish people. When my kids ask me for a bite of my ice cream, the first thing I think in my head is, "No, buger-face, get your own ice cream. You've got bowls and spoons. Get your own."

I give them ice cream. I'm not a horrible person. But our snap reality, our defense is selfish. What Jesus is suggesting is the way to be great is to be selfless. So how can we even get to the place where our heart is in the disposition to be like that? How is that even possible? It seems so idealistic, it seems so out of reach, and it seems impossible.

A couple of weeks ago I was on the west coast to spend some time with a lead pastor out there. I felt like it was an honor. I was with some other pastors learning from this lead pastor, a very famous lead pastor on the west coast. He has written many books. They have impacted the churches. He has spoken at conferences and at churches to ten thousands of people every week.

I felt like I was sitting with greatness. By the world's definition and my definition it was like this guy is great. He has achieved all the marks of greatness. So I felt like I was sitting down with a

legend. I'll tell you, my experience with him was very different than I thought it would be. As I sat down with him and we all started talking and asking some questions, there were some things I noticed about him that were very, very different.

So like for instance, he never seemed to be that excited about or impressed by his own achievements. He was like, "Yeah, I've written some books, whatever. Yeah, church has grown, okay." In fact, he started referencing churches he was trying to learn from. He was really curious about them and was interviewing leaders of churches that were way smaller than his. He was like, "I love what they are doing. It is really interesting." I was like, "Huh, that's weird." He just seemed very uninterested in the things our world has defined as great and significant, very uninterested in them.

I also noticed he spends his time in weird ways. For instance, one thing I found out about him is he feels like one of his life callings is to influence and help pastors. But he doesn't discern between pastors who are more worthy of his time versus those who are not. If anyone calls or emails him and says, "Hey, I need help with a problem," he schedules a 30 minute phone call with them and it doesn't matter if you're a pastor of 30 or 30,000, he is going to give you the same number of minutes. He is uninterested in what the world defines as significant. I just thought that was so weird.

But I think the thing that struck me the most about him was this level of peace he seemed to have. He just seemed so comfortable with who he was. He knew his weaknesses, he wasn't pretending. He shared a lot of his weaknesses with us, but he seemed so at peace. I think the best way to put it is it didn't seem like he was running the same rat race the rest of us are running. It didn't seem like he was caught up with the, "I've got to one-up people. I've got to run up the ladder. I've got to prove myself and make sure I'm significant." He was just at a real rest place, in peace.

He actually verbalized it at one point. We asked him, "There is something different about you. What is it? What's your vibe? How are you like you are?" He was like, "I can tell you that." And I'll never forget his words. He said, "I think I started out on third base compared to most people. I feel like I've started out with an advantage. I've never had this deep desire to achieve more than the next person. I've never had this deep desire to prove myself to be more significant or greater than someone else. I've never had the desire to climb the ladder.

"I've never had the desire to do any of that stuff. I've just kind of like gone to work every day and I do the best I can with what I've got. I'm not worried about who thinks what about me. I'm not thinking about the approval of people." He said, "I just go to work and do the best I can under my current circumstances, and then I go home and take a nap."

I was like, "That sounds really nice. It sounds beautiful." Because, honestly, that's not me. I am just getting raw with you. That's not my reality. Sometimes it is. Most oftentimes I find myself getting worked up about what other people think of me. Most oftentimes I get myself wrapped up in, "Am I significant enough? Am I leaving anything on the table? Am I maximizing my

impact?” Truthfully, most of the time what I’m worried about is, “Am I enough? At the end of my life will I have done enough? Am I enough as a person?”

So I am sitting there looking at this guy and he is at peace with himself. And I am like, “I wish I could have that. It looks incredible.” So we asked him, “How did you get there? How did you get an advantage? How did you start out on third base?” And I’ll never forget his response.

“I started out on third base, with an advantage over everyone, because of my mother and father. My mom and dad were my heroes, still are my heroes. They are dead and gone but they were the greatest people I’ve ever known. My mom and my dad loved me with an unconditional love. They never put work over me. They were always at every sporting event, but they never treated me differently based on my performance. They always encouraged me to do well in school, but they never held it over me that I had to get good grades. They were just always there loving me, supporting me, and telling me I was significant. They were just the best parents I could ever imagine.”

He said, “That’s why I started out on third base with an advantage. I just know at the end of the day that regardless of the output of my career, regardless of the output of my life, I am going to go home at the end of the day to a mom and a dad who think I am great and I am significant and loved no matter what I do.”

When he said that I couldn’t help but think of Jesus. How is Jesus able to lay down all the greatness he has and be a servant of others? You see, I was reminded of Jesus’ baptism specifically. I want to read it to you real quick. It’s from Matthew 3.

I want you to remember that Jesus’ baptism was the signal to begin his ministry. So he hadn’t actually done anything yet. He hadn’t achieved anything yet. He had no followers. He had no one who was spreading the word about Jesus’ teaching. He hadn’t healed anybody yet. He hadn’t done anything. He had accomplished nothing the world would say would make him significant.

I want you to look at what happens at his baptism in Matthew 3. “After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.’”

“This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy,” before he has done anything. He’s not accomplished anything yet, but the Father looks at him and says: This is my dearly loved Son. He brings me great joy. One translation says, “In him I am well pleased.” I am pleased with him and he hasn’t done anything yet.

You see, Jesus was able to enjoy the unconditional love of his heavenly Father, and that’s what enabled him to do what he did, to live the life he led. You see, Jesus wasn’t looking to the things

the world tells us makes us significant. Jesus knew he was significant because his heavenly Father loved him. That's what made him great. That's what made him valuable.

And maybe that's the best question you can ask yourself and your groups this week: What makes you valuable?

What makes you valuable? What makes you significant? What makes you worth it? You need to know, somebody needs to know in this room and on every campus, that you can start out on third base too. You can start out with an advantage regardless of how your parents raised you, regardless of how your earthly father treated you, because you need to know you are valuable to God.

God, your heavenly Father, knit you together in your mother's womb and he decided, long before you ever did anything, that you were worth it, that you were great in his eyes, that you were valuable. You need to know that God is crazy about you. You need to know he is wild about you. He sees you and he sees greatness. He sees the thing he created.

When I put my kids to bed every night, and I've got a six, three, and a one-year-old, I say the same thing to them every single night. If I do one good thing as a parent, I am trying to do this thing over, and over, and over. I say the same thing to them every night. I tuck them in, look them in the eye, and say, "No matter what happens I'll always love you and there is nothing you can do to make me stop loving you."

I say that to them every night. And the reason I say it to them is I want them to know, deep down in their heart, I want them to hear it in their heads a million times and know beyond a shadow of a doubt how their heavenly Father feels about them by way of how their earthly father treats them. And I'm hoping and praying that makes a difference in their lives and that they are able to start out on third base.

But you need to know that that's how God feels about you. No matter what happens, he is always going to love you. There is nothing you can ever do to make him stop loving you. I don't care how bad it's been. I don't care what you did 10 years ago. I don't care what you did last night. I don't care what deep, dark secret you are hiding.

It doesn't change God's affection and love for you. He is crazy about you. Did you know he is actually hot after you right now? Jesus told us at one point that his love was like a shepherd who has 100 sheep. And then one of them wanders away and gets lost. He says: Guess what? If you were that one, I love you so much I would leave the 99 and come find you. That's how much I love you.

If you can start there. If you can build your life on the foundation of God's wild love for you, then you poise yourself, you position yourself, for true greatness because:

God's love frees us up to lay everything down.

God's love will free you up to lay it all down. Because if God's love is where you find your significance, your value, and your worth you know that at the end of the day nothing can take that away from you. You can lose the power, fame, wealth, and beauty. Guess what? You're going to lose it all one day anyway. If you can, stop looking there for your greatness and just know God has declared you to be great in his sight. He loves you and you are lovely because he loves you. If you start there, you can make a difference with your life. You can be great.

I want to pray that God would ground our church in that love as we start this series off. I think in doing so it will open our hearts up for what he wants to do.

Let me pray that for us right now.

Father, we love you but we love you only because you first loved us. So we just thank you for that. I pray for anyone in the room right now wrestling with whether or not this is true—that you would show them in these next moments that it is. You are the way, the truth, and the life. God, you didn't just say you loved us, but you proved it when you sent your Son Jesus to stretch out his arms and die on a cross for us as a concrete statement of your love for us.

God, I pray for our church, that you would settle our foundation on you. That you would help us to fight against the cultural current that pushes us to look to the things of this world for greatness, that pushes us to clamor for power, fame, and wealth, influence, and leadership and to hang our head on those things. At the end of the day we want to rest in you and rest in your love. God, I pray you would help us to do that as we move forward. It is in Jesus' name. The church prays together. Amen.