

Rarely do we have Christmas Day on Sunday, but what a blessing it is so this year. We will resume in 2 Corinthians next week. I have chosen a message I preached over a decade ago from Luke 1:32,33. <sup>32</sup> *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,* <sup>33</sup> *and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.* Luke 1:32,33

**He will be great.** Those were the words of the archangel Gabriel to Mary. It is a part of the speech called the Annunciation. The sight of these magnificent angelic creatures is usually enough to drop a man in helplessness to the ground (Revelation 1:17<sup>i</sup>). He must have toned down his glorious reflection of the Lord so that Mary could focus on his message. Gabriel was declaring that the baby in the womb of Mary will be great! It is a simple statement. It is a profound statement. It is also an understatement!

Many men become great in our eyes, such as athletes, selfless politicians, or evangelists, but in the eyes of this supernatural archangel, what is greatness? The Spirit, through the prophet Isaiah, used a number of other expressions, **“Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace”** (Isaiah 9:6<sup>ii</sup>). That sounds about as great as one can imagine. There is nothing greater than Mighty God, Creator of all that is, visible and invisible (Colossians 1:16<sup>iii</sup>).

On this side of Jesus’ earthly life, we can see just what was so great. It is not the kind of greatness we might have imagined if we had been there in Nazareth when Mary first heard the announcement. We may have imagined a powerful prince that rallied troops, expelled Rome, and expanded the nation to its former glory. Or perhaps we may have thought of a great rebel like Samson, only unlike Samson, in complete self-control, punishing the enemies of Israel and God. But that would be shortsighted. The angel was speaking of something much greater.

Jesus was so great that He needed no royal position that the world offers. In fact, He could be born in poverty with a feed trough for a bassinette and even that would not hinder Him in the least. He would be raised in an insignificant town in the hill country of Galilee, and it would still be nothing to overcome. He could do little of any worldly significance for 30 years of his life and still be the most influential person to ever live. This kind of greatness needs no outward trappings or circumstances. It comes from within.

The greatness of Jesus began to be revealed from the very start of His ministry. **Greatness is obedience to God.** Jesus began by going to His cousin John to be baptized. Even John could not comprehend why. He said He was not worthy to untie the Messiah’s sandal (John 1:27<sup>iv</sup>), so how could Jesus be asking for the sign of repentance, which was the meaning of John’s baptism? <sup>14</sup> *John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”* <sup>15</sup> *But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.* Matthew 3:14,15 Only then did John consent. A sign of just how great Jesus is immediately followed. The Spirit came down like a dove upon Jesus and a voice came from heaven saying, **“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”** Matthew 3:17<sup>v</sup> Seven hundred years before Isaiah predicted God would give His Son to us (Isaiah 9:6a<sup>vi</sup>).

What had Jesus done to receive such a heavenly acknowledgement, but to humbly ask to be baptized? We know of nothing else, except a time of questioning and answering the rabbis when He was twelve years of age (Luke 2:49<sup>vii</sup>). How could He be so great that heaven should open, the Spirit descend, and the voice of God declare His love and pleasure in Him? His greatness was in His very nature, not in anything He had done to that point as a man. Just as Gabriel predicted, Jesus was called the Son of the Most High, by the Most High Himself.

Greatness is not in what you do. Yes, a great person will do great things, but they were great first. **Action flows from being. God was pleased with who Jesus is before He was pleased with what He did.** Those of us who are not so great tend to turn that around and think great actions make a great person (2 Chronicles 16:9a<sup>viii</sup>).

Jesus had been great from all eternity past (John 1:1<sup>ix</sup>). His incarnation did not change that. But it is instructive for us to see that greatness waited 30 years in obedience to the will of His Father before making a significant act. That first act was one of utter humility in associating with our need to repent and be changed. He was the only One ever born who did not need to be baptized, and yet as our perfect example, He showed us the way of humble obedience (Philippians 2:6,7<sup>x</sup>). He was also great in not doing what He could do, but always waiting for the direction from His heavenly Father.

Immediately after the baptism, He went into the wilderness to fast and pray for 40 days. He was tempted there by Satan. Greatness can be tempted, but true greatness does not yield. Greatness uses the Word of God to be guided in the way of truth. He resisted shortcuts and any other way but that which His Father led in obedience to the Word (Luke 4:4<sup>xi</sup>).

**He was great in His ministry.** The bulk of Jesus' time was spent training twelve men, not an army of soldiers, but twelve men of ordinary occupations. Why these twelve? He spent the night in prayer asking which ones (Luke 6:12,13<sup>xii</sup>). Greatness looks through the eyes of God and sees what man cannot see. His greatness was seen in three years of patient instruction, dealing with their misconceptions, again and again, demonstrating what true greatness is and does. I suppose that was the minimum amount of time required to retrain people like us whose ideas are so distorted by our fallen nature. If it took Jesus three years, how long must we patiently disciple those in our care?

**Greatness was seen in His words.** The soldiers who came to arrest Him went back empty handed and said, *"No one ever spoke like this man"* (John 7:46<sup>xiii</sup>). Numerous times it was stated, *"They marveled at the words that came from His lips"* (Luke 4:22<sup>xiv</sup>). His great words came from His listening ear, for He only spoke what He heard from His Father (John 8:26<sup>xv</sup>).

And yet He was so great that He allowed many to reject the greatness in His words. The people of Nazareth, Pharisees, Judas, and Pilate, all heard the greatness and turned from it, rejecting Him. We should learn that if our words are to have any greatness, we must develop a listening ear and take the time to exercise that ability daily (Proverbs 8:34<sup>xvi</sup>). We must also patiently allow others to reject any manifestation of the greatness of God in the words He may give us.

His actions that proceeded from His greatness were indeed evidence of just how great He is. The blind see; the deaf hear; the lame walk; and the dead are raised to life (Matthew 11:4,5<sup>xvii</sup>)! He is the great restorer of all sin has robbed from us. He could restore a crippled man's nervous system as easily as He could calm the waves of Lake

Galilee. He could not only enable limbs to function, but instantly give the ability to use them to their full capacity, with balance and control. That kind of greatness defies imagination (Mark 2:12<sup>xviii</sup>).

**He is great in compassion**, as is God who saw and heard the cries of the children of Israel in the captivity of Egypt (Exodus 3:7<sup>xix</sup>) He saw the hopelessness of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:8,9<sup>xx</sup>), the agony in the face of the ruler of the synagogue whose daughter was ill (Mark 5:22-24<sup>xxi</sup>). He saw and felt the pain of the widow of Nain as she was about to bury her only son (Luke 7:13<sup>xxii</sup>). He saw, felt, and cried with Martha and Mary at the loss of their dear brother Lazarus (John 11:35<sup>xxiii</sup>). As the great Deliverer of Israel, He delivered them from their agony. He is great in compassion!

**He made great claims** about Himself. *I am the light of the world* (John 8:12). *I am the bread of life* (John 6:38). *I am the Good Shepherd* (John 10:11). *I am the Gate of the sheepfold* (John 10:7). *I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me* (John 14:6). *No one has come down from heaven except the Son of man who is from heaven* (John 3:13). *I came to give myself a ransom for many* (Matthew 20:28). *No one knows the Father but the Son* (Matthew 11:27). *Before Abraham was, I am* (John 8:58)! *I and my Father are one* (John 10:30)! *I came from the Father and entered the world, now I am leaving the world and going back to my Father* (John 16:28). *Whoever believes in the Son has passed from death to life* (John 5:24). Amazing claims! In the mouth of any other person, we would consider them to be the ravings of an ego maniac, but in the mouth of the humble Jesus of Nazareth, there is a ring of credulity.

**His love is great**. He said, *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends”* (John 15:9,13). And then He proceeded to do just that. Even on the last day of His life, He washed His disciples’ feet and taught them as long as they were able to remain awake and pray (John 13:5<sup>xxiv</sup>). He poured out His life for them, and then poured out His life blood on the cross for us all.

**He was great in His death**. Even the thief on the other cross came to recognize that greatness and was given the promise of life (Luke 23:43<sup>xxv</sup>). Offered a pain deadening drug, Jesus refused to take it (Mark 15:23<sup>xxvi</sup>). With legions of angels ready to deliver Him, He refused to call them to assist Him (Mark 26:53<sup>xxvii</sup>). Alone, He bore the sins of the ages of man from the fall to the last scream of rebellion at Armageddon, and He took the wrath we all deserve so that justice might be met, and that we might have the offer of life from the author of life.

In agony on the cross, He met the needs of His mother (John 19:27<sup>xxviii</sup>). He quoted the Scriptures (Psalm 22:1<sup>xxix</sup>). He finished the work the Father had given Him to do (John 17:4<sup>xxx</sup>). He handed His Spirit into the hands of His Father and declared the work complete (John 19:30<sup>xxxi</sup>). Even the hardened centurion at the foot of the cross recognized greatness and declared, *“Surely this was the Son of God”* (Matthew 27:54).

But His greatness was about to be fully displayed. In death He took the keys of death and hell and in a glorious burst of greatness, the likes of which the world had never seen, He conquered death itself and rose victorious (Matthew 28:6<sup>xxxii</sup>)! **He was great in conquering death!** That greatness nursed the heart of Mary Magdalene and encouraged frightened disciples. He even patiently appeared again to resolve the doubts of Thomas (John 20:27<sup>xxxiii</sup>). Thomas recognized greatness. He declared, *“My Lord and My God!”*

For 40 days, greatness ministered in a resurrected body, appearing here and there until they were finally ready for Him to depart. **In greatness He ascended** into heaven (Acts 1:9<sup>xxxiv</sup>!

Why do we never tire of this story? It is because it is the greatest story ever told. “*He shall be great.*” But the story does not end there. **He was great in keeping His promise** to not leave us as orphans but to dwell in our hearts His Spirit (John 14:8<sup>xxxv</sup>). He is great in doing the same in us today, patiently discipling us, training us to walk in His ways, teaching us to follow His great example, to listen and obey, to take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24<sup>xxxvi</sup>). Oh, what great patience!

**He is great in making a beautiful bride** for Himself from such raw material as you and me! And what great promises He gives us as well, to transform us into His own image so that we might be like Him. Why, He even promises to share His glory with us! How gracious is that (Romans 8:17<sup>xxxvii</sup>)!

**How great is His power toward us who believe!** The same great resurrection power that raised Him from the dead is working in us to transform us and make us like Him (Ephesians 1:19,20<sup>xxxviii</sup>). That great power will transform these lowly bodies to be like His glorious body by the same power with which He subdues all things to Himself (Philippians 3:21<sup>xxxix</sup>).

He is still exercising His great patience as He waits till all things are put under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:28<sup>xl</sup>). The day is coming when everyone will recognize that greatness, and at the sight of Him every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is the greatest. None compares! There is no higher name on earth or all of heaven, for He is King of kings and Lord of lords (Philippians 2:9-11<sup>xli</sup>).

When Gabriel said, “*He shall be great!*” he said a mouthful! His greatness is in who He is. He is great in love, great in patience, great in compassion, great in justice, and great in power. His claims are great because He cannot lie. His promises are great because He has great plans. True human greatness is only found in being a faint echo of the Great One.

Let me close these thoughts on the greatness of the One that was to be born with **Psalm 145**. There the psalmist attempts to tell of the greatness of our God. Stand with me while I read it to you.

*<sup>1</sup> I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. <sup>2</sup> Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. <sup>3</sup> Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. <sup>4</sup> One generation shall commend your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts. <sup>5</sup> On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. <sup>6</sup> They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. <sup>7</sup> They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. <sup>8</sup> The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. <sup>9</sup> The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. <sup>10</sup> All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you! <sup>11</sup> They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power, <sup>12</sup> to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. <sup>13</sup> Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. [The LORD is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works.] <sup>14</sup> The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down. <sup>15</sup> The eyes of all look to you, and you give*

*them their food in due season. <sup>16</sup> You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. <sup>17</sup> The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works. <sup>18</sup> The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. <sup>19</sup> He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them. <sup>20</sup> The LORD preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. <sup>21</sup> My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.* Psalm 145

Upon His resurrection He was declared to be begotten of the Father. The prediction of Psalm 2 came to pass, “You are my Son, today I have begotten You (Psalm 2:7<sup>xlii</sup>). Acts 13:33<sup>xliii</sup> tells us that was the day of the resurrection, not the birth, for rising from the dead was a rebirth much like ours, but to the title of Lord to whom every knee will bow (Philippians 2:8-11<sup>xliiv</sup>). We will bow to His righteous judgment upon our lives. It all hinges on whether we accept His gift of salvation or refuse His forgiveness and cling to our pride and self-reliance. The greatest choice we can ever make is to accept the Great One as our Lord and the Savior of our soul.

An angel told Joseph to name the baby Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21<sup>xlv</sup>). Is there any reason you should not do that at this time of year in which we celebrate His coming into the world as a baby to save us all?

Remain standing as we sing the closing carol and receive the benediction.

Questions:

1 Who said He will be great?

2 Go through the following list and talk about the ways Jesus is great and how we should follow His example:

Obedience-

Ministry-

Words-

Compassion-

Claims-

Love-

Patience-

Promises-

Death-

Resurrection-

3 How was He great in creating a bride?

4 What is the source of greatness?

5 Read 1John 3:1,2 and John 15

### **Romans 11:33-36**

<sup>33</sup> Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

<sup>34</sup> “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

<sup>35</sup> “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

<sup>36</sup> For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> **Revelation 1:17 (ESV)**

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last,

<sup>ii</sup> **Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)** 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>iii</sup> **Colossians 1:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

<sup>iv</sup> **John 1:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."

<sup>v</sup> **Matthew 3:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

<sup>vi</sup> **Isaiah 9:6a (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;

<sup>vii</sup> **Luke 2:49 (ESV)**

<sup>49</sup> And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

<sup>viii</sup> **2 Chronicles 16:9a (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.

<sup>ix</sup> **John 1:1 (ESV)** 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

<sup>x</sup> **Philippians 2:5-7 (ESV)** 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

<sup>xi</sup> **Luke 4:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.

<sup>xii</sup> **Luke 6:12-13 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.

<sup>13</sup> And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles:

<sup>xiii</sup> **John 7:46 (ESV)** 46 The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!"

<sup>xiv</sup> **Luke 4:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

<sup>xv</sup> **John 8:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Proverbs 8:34 (ESV)** 34 Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

<sup>xvii</sup> **Matthew 11:4-5 (ESV)** 4 And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Mark 2:12 (NIV)** 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

<sup>xix</sup> **Exodus 3:7 (NIV)** 7 The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.

<sup>xx</sup> **John 5:8-9 (NIV)**

<sup>8</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." <sup>9</sup> At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,

<sup>xxi</sup> **Mark 5:22-24 (ESV)** 22 Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet 23 and implored him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live. 24 And he went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Luke 7:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **John 11:35 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.

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<sup>xxiv</sup> **John 13:5 (ESV)** 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Luke 23:43 (ESV)**

43 And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Mark 15:23 (ESV)**

23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Matthew 26:53 (ESV)**

53 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?

<sup>xxviii</sup> **John 19:27 (ESV)** 27 Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother! And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

<sup>xxix</sup> **Psalms 22:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

<sup>xxx</sup> **John 17:4 (ESV)**

4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **John 19:30 (ESV)** 30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished, and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

<sup>xxxii</sup> **Matthew 28:6 (ESV)**

6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> **John 20:27 (ESV)**

27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> **Acts 1:9 (ESV)**

9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

<sup>xxxv</sup> **John 14:18 (ESV)**

18 “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> **Matthew 16:24 (ESV)**

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> **Romans 8:17 (NIV)** 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> **Ephesians 1:19-20 (NIV)** 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,

<sup>xxxix</sup> **Philippians 3:21 (NIV)**

21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

<sup>xl</sup> **1 Corinthians 15:28 (ESV)** 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

<sup>xli</sup> **Philippians 2:9-11 (ESV)** 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

<sup>xlii</sup> **Psalms 2:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

<sup>xliii</sup> **Acts 13:33 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, “‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’”

<sup>xliv</sup> **Philippians 2:8-11 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

<sup>xlv</sup> **Matthew 1:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”