

Matthew 23:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

Analysis

But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant—the Greek construction *ho de meizōn hymōn estai hymōn diakonos* (ο δε μείζων υμῶν ἔσται υμῶν διάκονος) presents a radical redefinition of greatness. *Meizōn* (μείζων, greater) and *diakonos* (διάκονος, servant/minister) appear contradictory—yet Jesus makes servanthood the criterion for kingdom greatness, directly inverting worldly values.

This principle, repeated throughout Jesus's teaching (Matthew 20:26-27; Mark 9:35; Luke 22:26), finds its ultimate demonstration in Christ Himself, who came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). The future tense *estai* (ἔσται, will be) indicates eschatological vindication: those who serve humbly now will be exalted in God's kingdom. The term *diakonos*, from which we derive 'deacon,' originally meant table-waiter—the humblest domestic service.

Historical Context

In Greco-Roman society, greatness meant exercising power over others. Masters ruled slaves, patrons dominated clients, emperors commanded subjects. Jesus's teaching that leaders must serve those under them was revolutionary, contradicting every cultural assumption about authority and honor.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus's definition of greatness expose the bankruptcy of worldly ambition?
2. What does Christ's own servanthood teach about the nature of true spiritual authority?
3. In what practical ways should Christian leadership embody servanthood rather than domination?

Interlinear Text

ο	δε	μείζων	ὑμῶν	ἔσται	ὑμῶν	διάκονος
G3588	But	he that is greatest	among you	shall be	among you	servant
G1161		G3187	G5216	G2071	G5216	G1249

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 9:19 (Parallel theme): For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

2 Corinthians 4:5 (Parallel theme): For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

Galatians 5:13 (Parallel theme): For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

2 Corinthians 11:23 (Parallel theme): Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

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