

True Greatness: Mark 9:30-50

Get on the Bus: What a wonderful text we have in front of us as we continue to answer the question Who Is Jesus – In this text we also get a fuller picture OF WHAT THOSE WHO FOLLOW THIS JESUS are supposed to look like

- So whether you are in this room and you have been a Christian most of your life or whether you are an unbeliever just checking out Christianity – *Today we get a look at what True Greatness is!*
Pray – ... *these are ancient words for which men and women have bled and died!*

Illustration: We live in a world that says Pride is a virtue and where what is elevated is survival of the fittest (me at Murray) But that true greatness in the eyes of God is through being a servant of all rather than one at the head of the table!

Context: We find ourselves in the middle of Jesus' discipleship discourse in the gospel of Mark in which the Lord again predicts His death and Resurrection – *And then follows that with instructions are shocking compared to the wisdom of this world as He narrows in on humble service and mortification of sin!*

- The wisdom of Jesus is not the wisdom of the world – *I mean who in their right mind would say the way to greatness is taking up a death instrument/or being a servant rather than at the head of the table/or radical surgery in order to fight sin*
- Yet this is exactly what Jesus is about to put before His disciples as He comes to tell them and us in a world that says everything should be about me – *That actual greatness is found in looking out for the interests of others* – And then He will punctuate His teaching by carrying out the very instructions He gives as He walks the Calvary road!

Main Idea – *True Greatness is found in humble service and radical discipleship*

I. Greatness is found in being a humble servant (Mark 9:30-41)

(Read v. 30-32) Jesus doesn't want the fan fare that usually surrounds Him because He wants to focus His teaching now on the 12 as He instructs them again about His mission and then what their mission should be – Jesus presses in on what is expected of Him and then turns to what He will require of them

- Jesus wants more time with His disciples because He has now set His sights toward Jerusalem – *And so for a second time He tells them what will happen once He gets there with one new added piece of info which is that He will be betrayed!*
- In this scene Jesus continues to use the title of Son of Man for Himself (84 times) – *He is making a clear declaration to His disciples that He is the man of Daniel 7 in whom God will hand over to the authority/glory/rule of the kingdoms of men which will smash all other kingdoms* – And yet this Son of man is going to be delivered over and killed as Jesus CONNECTS THE MAN OF DANIEL 7 WITH THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF ISAIAH 53 who will be despised and rejected and killed
- This is Jesus' Mission all along – The Cross is not Plan B but Plan A – *I have heard of a gospel song in which it is said that God says we've got a big problem on earth and then God looks all over heaven asking who can I send and Jesus steps up and says "Daddy, its me!"* (That is not the gospel!)

In light of what He is about to teach them He wants them to see the kind of Messiah He is going to be as He sets side by side images of great glory and images of suffering in order to radically reorient their concept of Greatness – *He will be a Messiah who gets the Crown by way of the Cross!* (read 1 Cor. 1 here???)
– And yet they still don't get it as Luke's parallel account (Luke 9:45) indicates that it was concealed from them

- But let's not be too hard on them and try to put ourselves in their shoes – *Keller likened this to a political candidate running for President and then telling his campaign staff towards the end that not only would he lose the election but he would get assassinated* – It is hard for us to grasp this because we know the rest of the Story as it were!

- They did believe in Resurrection but they believed in one that came at the end of the age – *They had no concept of one in the current era* – And who could blame them that is not something you normally see (Resurrections should be shocking!)

When I was a Kid I used to read ENCYCLOPEDIA BROWN, But you can never go back and read the story the same again because you know the ending – *In the same way ONCE THE RESURRECTION OCCURS all of these things begin to make sense for the disciples but before they see the end of the story they don't get it!*

- And their lack of comprehension is now matched only by their fear as they are afraid to even ask Him to clarify – They must be sitting there think what does he mean, “Hey Peter go ask him” and Peter says “I’m not going to ask Him I did the rebuke thing remember!” – **One commentator said:** “They understood enough to be afraid of understanding more”

(Read v. 33 – 35) – Now as they likely go back to Peter’s House Jesus asks what were you guys debating – Has this ever happened to you perhaps when you were a Kid

- Jesus here asks the question not out of ignorance but as a means of setting up a Teachable moment – *As here you have this group on which the future mission of the gospel to the World rests and instead of them asking Him who is going to betray you they fight with one another over who would be the greatest* – Giving further evidence that they just aren’t getting was Jesus is laying down!
- This is further indication that they still see Him as a political liberator and so they dream of seats of power in His earthly Kingdom – *And that they hadn’t comprehended at all what taking up their cross meant! Do we?*

Now they’ve been caught with their hand in the cookie jar when He asks the question and so they don’t answer: This happened a lot to me as a kid – Not surprisingly my first word other than Momma and Dadda was cookie – But we have all had those moments when our parents ask us a question and we know answering is worse than just being silent and trying to ride it out!

- But Jesus uses this as a teachable moment to instruct them in the ways of the Kingdom which are the opposite of this world as He radically redirects their thing – *He has previously said the one who will gain life is the one who loses their life and now another paradox those that would be first must instead be last* – This teaching flows from the reality of the sort of Messiah He is and BECAUSE THIS IS WHO HE IS THIS IS WHO HIS PEOPLE SHOULD BE, ones marked by the Kingdom ethic of humility/love/service!

True Greatness doesn’t come with jockeying for position or fantasizing about the seat of honor – *But instead there is a position you should aspire to and that is the one of the Diaknos (Deacon) as you seek to be the one serving the table rather than sitting at the head of it* – I so often fail at this (Liederbach in Turkey – I want to be like him when I grow up, as he emulates Jesus!)

- This is the way of Greatness which is so counter-intuitive to our world which says we deserve this and we should be waited on hand and foot – *I mean we stew if our food doesn’t come out in what we deem a reasonable time* – In a generation of SELFIES AND CULT OF PERSONALITIES we need a revival of selfless servants!

Application: If we would be great we will be Phil. 2 Christians who humble themselves and look out for the interests of others ahead of our own – Ironically very ones who will be lifted up in the Kingdom are the ones who don’t care for any prestige – Is that you? Is that you seminarian, church planter? GGL? Church Member?

- As we examine ourselves on this we should ask some tough questions of ourselves like: 1) Am I upset if I am not praised for my work? 2) Do I long to sit in privileged places or seats? 3) What goes on in my heart when I don’t get what I feel I deserve? 4) Do I serve because of the recognition in might get me? 5) Do I feel a sense of rivalry in ministry?

- Greatness is found right over there in that hallway with women joyfully changing diapers – *Just two weeks ago during the 11am Service as Shane Shaddix and I came out of a member interview the childcare wing was in Chaos as they were undermanned* – Shane instead of going on to the service and saying that is someone else’s responsibility since I was not scheduled to serve today stepped in one of the rooms and served
- That is not near as glamorous in the eyes of the World as what I am doing right now – *But Jesus is saying here that is greatness*

(Read v. 36 – 37) – Now Christ uses a child as an illustration of what He is teaching them – *And He is not saying Children are example of humility (don’t have to take a stroll in Target long to see that) but the reception of them is*

- At first we may not understand this example because we live in a culture that at least outside the womb values children – *We have Disney’s and chucky cheese* – But in the disciples day children weren’t treated well at all especially by the Greeks and Romans who would often abandon children on trash heaps
- So Jesus illustration would have been striking – *Jesus is saying here to a group of men who had just been fighting over status and whom Jesus is trying to teach to be servants of all* – IN CONTRAST RECEIVE THOSE WHO HAVE NO STANDING/status/prestige and who are considered lowest in the social order
- He is saying go and serve those who in no way can increase your status but those who cant do anything for you in return – *Those that are completely reliant like a child and when you do realize you are receiving me and my father* – If you want to be great give your time TO THOSE WHO ARE REGARDED AS INSIGNIFICANT in the eyes of the World, which is what our Christ has done!

Application Church is we must fight for those who the world would scoff at serving – *Fight for the unborn, fight for the orphan, fight for the underprivileged, fight for the AIDS patient, fight for the mentally impaired, fight for the physically disabled* – This may mean going through Foster Care training or it may mean something as simple as stepping in to help with childcare

- The early church was known for this as Aristedes said before the King that the church: *“Rescues the orphan from the one who does him violence!”* – **Jesus is telling us something counter-cultural to serve the one who cannot do anything for themselves but we know that is the gospel!**

Some questions to wrestle through: 1) How do you treat those under you (perhaps in a job or something)? 2) Would you jump at the opportunity to wash LBJ’s car and then scoff at the idea of washing the car of a widow or single mom?

- **Sadly I think often I would see greatness in the way the world does** – But if we will seek out true greatness Jesus is telling us here WE WILL HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM AND WITH HIS FATHER!

(READ V. 38 – 41) – Now we have this scene where a guy who is not part of the 12 is casting out Demons – *I mean the disciples just cant help themselves, they are a bless your hear group if there ever was one* – I mean they just cant get it right

- John goes all Dwight Schrute and tattles on this unknown exorcist – *John must think he is about to get an attaboy and that is not what happens* – Instead he gets the Peter treatment and gets a rebuke from Jesus
- The disciples response is he is not following us or in our group so told him to stop – *And isn’t this ironic that he is being successful at the very thing they just failed to do in the previous passage* – So even though they cant do it they don’t hesitate to seek to obstruct someone else from doing

I believe this as well fits with the whole context of the text – *It is appears to be an act of rivalry as they see someone being successful where they failed and so likely are concerned about this man undermining their position of status in the Kingdom* – They just aren't getting that the Kingdom of Christ is not a matter of status and achievement but of grace!

- It appears that the disciples are more concerned that they be honored than Jesus – Is that ever true of us?

Jesus uses this as another teachable moment as He responds to John and says do not stop this man for 3 Reasons:

- 1) If he is doing this in my name he won't be able to speak ill of me – *He is likely a follower just not part of the inner circle and he cannot trust me in one moment to cast out demons and then deny me in the next* – Earlier when the scribes accused Jesus of being possessed by the devil He had said, “how can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that Kingdom cannot stand!”
- 2) If he's not against us, he is for us – **Reminds me of that disappointing movie series the Matrix when Morpheus says, “If you are not one of us, you are one of them!”** – But Jesus is saying there is no 3rd way when it comes to me
 - a. We also must be careful to use this verse to preach people in to heaven as long as they did not openly oppose Christ – *That is not what Jesus is saying, ultimately we know those who pledge allegiance to Him because they repent of sin and call Him Lord*
- 3) All acts, including minor ones in my name are rewarded – *You may think no one notices but even the smallest act of kindness in Jesus name has eternal value* – Jesus wants them to see the measure of His kingdom is that NOT ONLY IS SPECTACULAR STUFF LIKE EXORCISMS OR MIRACLES BUT SIMPLE ACTS of service even a cold cup given in His name is a sign of Kingdom conduct which will be rewarded

Application – We must not erect useless boundaries either out of disagreement or fear of losing our status – *There are times when divisions are necessary but we must understand there is a difference between preaching a different gospel and preaching the gospel differently*

- **Questions:** 1) Let's examine ourselves to see if we do things out of rivalry or vain conceit? 2) Do we jockey for position and in so doing dismiss the work of others?
- We need others in this mission (our planters – SLC and India know this) – *But we do here in RDU as well so lets know we have a common enemy and not shoot one another in the BARRACKS!*

Implication – Again we get a not so flattering view of the men who would lead in Jesus' mission and eventually turn the world upside – *So be encouraged that Jesus picks up people on the road who are a mess and uses them for His glory* – It is ok to not be ok it is just not ok to stay that way and Jesus can turn your mess in to His message!

II. Greatness is found in being a radical disciple (Mark 9:42-50)

(READ V. 42) – Jesus now in keeping with His teaching on receiving others continues to address John with warnings for the disciples as he address – *The serious nature of discipleship and sin* – Jesus says here it would be better for you to drown (IMAGINE THAT) than to lead a little one astray

- Jesus in this section is saying it is better to drown and cut off limbs than to sin or cause someone else to be lead astray or to go to hell yourself – *He says little ones here so he means those young in the faith not necessarily age* – Likely has in mind both the unknown exorcist and the child
- God does not ignore the smallest act toward a little one whether that be in receiving them or doing anything to harm their child-like faith – So Christian be both encouraged and warned:

- **ENCOURAGED** that Christ has such regard for your fragile faith and wants to protect you – *This in turn means our concern must not be for our status or greatness but for the godliness of others*
- **WARNED** that we must do nothing to lead people astray – *Just know that acts that lead astray are viewed very seriously by God* – **This could be as simple as sinning in front of them or as major as blunting the truth for them and saying, “*well its ok to live with your boyfriend*” because you are afraid telling the truth may get awkward!**

(READ v. 43-48) Here is how vigilant we must be in not stumbling ourselves or causing others to – **Here is how serious we must take sin** – Rather than play with sin we must do radical spiritual surgery to kill it (Piper at t4g on porn???)

- My dad says, a saving faith is a fighting faith – *And this is intense but it shows us how God views Sin because Sin leads to hell and Jesus was murdered because of sin* – So sin is not to be played with but Killed
- Sin leads to hell and thus our interaction with it may be an indicator of whether we are actually a part of the people of God or not – *Even if you have the Spirit and sin does not now reign in your life it is not gone so make war with it* – So don't play fast and loose with greed, lust, gossip, anger and so on but instead do whatever is necessary to root it out because you know how serious and destructive it is!

Jesus is not intending for actual mutilation because this was forbidden in the Torah so this isn't about mutilation but mortification – *But instead is using hyperbole to state in the strongest terms that sin needs radical spiritual surgery* – In current idiom we might say if the internet causes you to look at porn drop your computer off the roof!

- Satan would seek to have you DEAL WITH IT TOMORROW (sort of how I view starting a diet, well I will start Monday) or have you JUSTIFY IT (I need my computer for emails!) – **Jesus would have you deal with it immediately and decisively** – Imagine if you received news that you had a fatal cancer but if you started this certain regiment there would be a chance (you wouldn't say I will start on Monday you would start immediately and this has even more at stake so see it with eyes of faith and make war!)

A short note on how the Lord views Hell before we close – *It is clear from this passage that Jesus believes Hell is real and despite what popular “Christian” writers might tell you it is eternal*

- We are not a hell fire and brimstone church – **We do not preach this message every week instead we just walk through books of the bible and address things as they come** – BUT I DON'T WANT TO BLUNT the force of what Jesus is saying here because it would actually be unloving to you
- **Thomas Vincent describes that judgment like this:** “*The torments of hell will not in one part only, but in every part; not in a weaker degree, but in the greatest extremity; not for a day, or a month, or a year, but forever: the wicked will be always dying, never dead...if they could die, they would think themselves happy; they will...never breathe out their last...always burning in those flames, and never consumed; the eternity of hell will be the hell of hell.*”
- Hell is real and it is worse than not having money or the status in this world that you like or not having sex or pornography – *It is way worse and it is what is in store for those who reject Christ* – So do whatever is necessary to avoid it

Implication – We live in a world that trivializes hell or uses the word as an intensifier for our feelings but then sadly in the church there seem to be some preachers who delight in hell fire and brimstone – **Jesus does neither of these things as He weeps over Jerusalem because God does not desire that any should perish** – Christian we should not trivialize it nor doubt it nor delight over it but we should weep for those that are perishing

- So unbelievers hear me God is loving but He is also a judge who will by no means clear the guilty – *And Jesus warns you here because He loves you and He wishes that no one would perish*

- And here is how much He loves you He would actually go through the fiery judgment for you if you would just turn to Him in Repentance and Faith – *If you don't see how serious Hell is you will never see how serious Jesus' love for you demonstrated at the Cross!*

(READ v. 49-50) – Now Jesus ends His discourse on discipleship with a couple of words about Salt which are only found in Mark's gospel – *One commentator said V. 49 is one of the most difficult verses in the NT*
 – Probably why Tony gave it to me

- But in God's grace I have a father that has written a commentary on the book of Mark which was quite helpful – *So in the interest of time I am going to give you what I think it means*

Essentially what I think it is saying drawing upon Lev. 2:12 which speaks of the Grain offerings is that all people will face the fire and be salted in a manner consistent with their relationship with Christ:

- *UNBELIEVER will be salted by the perpetual fires of Hell in keeping with what has just been taught*
- Believers will be salted with the fiery trials and tribulations of this world connected with the costliness of discipleship and taking up a Cross – *But just as salt preserves this will be a refining fire and not a destroying fire!*

And verse 50 is saying salt is good as a preservative but if it loses it's taste it is worthless – *I think connected to the verses above that if you succumb to these things and don't root out sin you won't be useful to society as salt and light and an agent in the Mission of God* – If we live like the world we will be no good to the world so watch your life and doctrine closely so you can stay salty/useful

- And one way we will see that you are good salt is by peace between the brothers – *IF you are going to be useful in my mission and to this world you won't war over one another for status nor be rivals* – But you will live at peace with one another and in so doing be a collective salty group that is a community of light in a world of darkness!

I think Alistair Begg sums up the 2nd section well: *“we dare not treat sin casually, be aware that we must be refined continually, we may then make an impact on society as we learn increasingly to live in peace and in unity!*

Conclusion – How is any of this possible? Well we must look to the one who is both our source for power and our example – *Jesus does not ask His disciples to get on the Calvary Road if He himself is not going to walk it!*

- And He is the one who though He was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped by made Himself a servant – *A selfless servant who made the ultimate sacrifice to come as a ransom for many... who so sought the interest of others that He would stand there hour after hour drowning in His own blood in our place and for our good!*
- **We look to the meek and mild and lowly Nazarene** – *of whom it was said can anything good thing come from Nazareth*
- **We look to the one who came to help those who could not help themselves** – *Us who were orphans that are totally dependent on His mercy and Grace*

Unbeliever – This is the gospel – *JESUS WILL BE HANDED OVER THOUGH HE HAS DONE NOTHING WRONG and will be crucified and killed, but this is not the end of the story in 3 days He will be vindicated in Resurrection so that if you turn to Him in repentance and faith He will receive you like a Father receives an orphan and He will care for you!*

Believer – See true greatness in the kingdom ethic marked by humility and not swagger, by teamwork and not rivalry, by small acts of service to the least of these, and by radical commitment to holiness so as to be useful to others – *We must be Phil 2 Christians who seek the interests of others as more significant than your selves as we seek to be servants to all even as Jesus was to the weak and dependent as Jesus was*

even if the it goes unnoticed – It will go unnoticed for long even if you have to wait till the other side of a Cross

- **Brothers and sisters:** I think there is danger here for IDC because we are at a very educated church and some perceive as the cool church – *But we should not miss the fact that the Kingdom of God dawns and is made manifest all over this world with people who don't have near the education level we have but who have become servants of all even if they don't have a clue who Charles Spurgeon is* – But they are future rulers in waiting of the Cosmos we need to recognize that!
- I don't want us to be the cool church; I want us to be a great church and that comes through humble service and radical discipleship!

My dad ends his chapter on this passage speaking about one such lady – I will close reading it to you

- **May we see with eyes of faith what true greatness is so that we can be salt and light for a world that needs it – Even if we wont get any attaboys until that day when our Christ looks us in the face and says “well done good and faithful servant!”**