

Mark 9:30-37
Who is the Greatest?

If you follow professional sports then you've likely heard discussions / arguments about who deserves the MVP award for the NFL, or the Cy Young for the MBL.

When they aren't discussing the current season, the conversation often goes to the GOAT – for Football, Boxing, Basketball, Soccer, Golf, tennis etc.

Similar discussions happen in the areas of Presidents, Artists, Singers, Composers, Actors, Directors, etc.

On a local level there are awards for the Teacher of the Year or business of the Year – you get a decal to display – “Voted best _____ of the year in the NW GA area”, etc.

As human beings, we seem to have a built-in default mode of measuring ourselves against one another and the desire to be recognized as THE Best or THE GREATEST.

We are addicted to ourselves and our own greatness.

What we see in today's passage is that the disciples of Jesus were all too human.

30 From there they went out and *began* to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know *about it*. 31 For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, “The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.” 32 But they did not understand *this* statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.

33 They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He *began* to question them, “What were you discussing on the way?” 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another *which of them* was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, He called the twelve and *said* to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.” 36 Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, 37 “Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.”

V. 30-32 Future suffering and resurrection foretold.... Again

And again, they did not understand the statement and were afraid to ask Him.

“the son of man is being delivered to the hands of men”.

Who is in view? We think of Judas, Peter who denied Him, the religious leaders and the people. *In a much bigger sense, it is the Father who give Him over to the hands of men. Jesus came to do the will of the Father. For Jesus to do the will of the Father, He must suffer at the hands of sinful people.* So, the point comes where the Father hands Him over to fulfill His destiny. The disciples don't understand these things.

Again, let's not be too hard on those guys. It's easy for us to understand what Jesus was saying because we live on this side of the cross and resurrection. It's all we know. But a dying Messiah wasn't on their Bingo Card. It wasn't part of their worldview.

v. 33- 37 “Who is the greatest?”

Wow. Here they are walking with Jesus, seeing miracles, demons are cast out, storms are calmed...

And they are discussing the pecking order among themselves.

Obviously, they limited it to themselves because Jesus was clearly THE GREATEST.

So, they're really discussing is who is in distant second place.

It is not uncommon for those in the inner crowd of a leader to jockey for positions of influence. Among the twelve there was already a sense in which three – Peter, James, and John were given a place of prominence.

We don't know why that was the case. I doubt that Jesus was guilty of having a ‘teacher's pet’ approach where he clearly shows that they are his favorites.

This discussion comes off the heels of the Mt. of Transfiguration and the nine who didn't go up with Jesus may have been jealous. We don't know. We do know that there was a discussion among them about who was the greatest.

Dr. Rayburn notes that

"Interestingly, there was quite a bit of interest in this matter of status and position in the kingdom of God in the Judaism of the day. The rabbis would talk about the seating order in Paradise and orders of seating here on earth, at worship and at banquets, was thought to reflect what would be the case in heaven. One's place was thought to be determined by one's various achievements, depending upon which rabbi was making up the list."

**** Note the contrast with Jesus. He is talking about His SUFFERING, and they are talking about their status. He'll be forsaken; they want accolades.**

This says a lot about the disciples – they are ordinary people. They are a lot like us.

v. 33 BUSTED – Jesus asks them what they were discussing on the road. A TRICK QUESTION? Did he already know the answer?

Jesus would be a good lawyer – Rule #1 – never ask a question you don't already know the answer to.

v. 34 – they kept silent. Why? Because it becomes apparent how absurd this conversation is. It is also embarrassing. They don't want to own up to their discussion.

**** EX:** Who is the most important to Highlands? To the kingdom?

imagine having that conversation at your community group, WOCA, MOCA, men's group, family reunion.

(Actually, I think I could imagine our kids having fun with that discussion.)

The pride of the disciples seems so obvious to us but are we honest about pride in our own lives?

Here's a little pride test...

- 1. Am I upset if I am not sufficiently praised for my work?**
- 2. Do I like and even long to sit at the head table in the seat of honor?**
- 3. Do I seek credit for what others have done?**
- 4. Is popularity crucial to my sense of self-worth?**
- 5. Am I a name dropper of those I know (or pretend to know?)**
- 6. Do I think I have something valuable to say about almost everything?**

v. 35-37 Jesus INSTRUCTS ON GREATNESS (Matt 20:26; Luke 22:26 – Last Supper)

NOTE: Jesus DOESN'T DISMISS THE QUESTION as irrelevant. In fact, he goes on to discuss True Greatness. He doesn't say, "Well, that's a silly question to discuss. We all know that there is no difference. We're all equally great. Everybody gets a Blue Ribbon. Everyone is an MVP in my book.

REMEMBER, Mark writes to tell us who Jesus is and what His kingdom is like, and it often defies our expectations.

Rather than dismiss the subject of greatness, Jesus leans in and teaches about true greatness. He doesn't repudiate greatness; He redefines it.

He called the twelve and *said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.

Easier said than done, right?

It is UPSIDE DOWN when compared to the philosophy of the world.

Jesus compares greatness with the commonplace role of a servant of all. Servant = diakonos = deacon (ness).

While we have those who are ordained as Deacons or set apart as deaconesses, the call that Jesus gives here is for every believer.

In the Roman world, servants were very common. His or her work was in the routine drudgery of everyday life. It was often overlooked and was not seen as inspiring or dignified. A servant may not have been noticed unless he or she failed to do what was required. Otherwise, a servant was part of the wallpaper. (Rayburn)

But Jesus turns the evaluation UPSIDE DOWN.

Many of you may feel that way about where you are in life. If so, take heart because Jesus says that you are on a path to GREATNESS. It may not seem so great right now but remember Col 3:24 that it is from the Lord that you will receive the reward of the inheritance.

EX: Josh McDowell – “I don’t mind you calling me a servant as long as you don’t treat me like one.”

v. 36 Next, Jesus goes for the living prop – he brings in a child

Brennan Manning writes, “In the competitive game of one-upmanship, the disciples are driven by the need to be important and significant. They want to be somebody”

Jesus doesn’t bring in the child to be an example of humility. It doesn’t take long to know that children are tempted by self-advancement. There is a pecking order in the nursery and the sandbox. **The child illustrates what it is like to be lightly regarded. In that culture a child was of little importance and was not taken seriously. In those days, a child was the least likely to live and who needed the most help.** While the place and treatment of children in society has changed, children are typically not regarded as having a place of power and prestige – although a two year old does yearn for power.

Jesus uses the child as an illustration to say that greatness begins with a mindset that says, “I’m the one who is the most dependent on others for everything I have. I don’t have to be the most consequential person in the room or the conversation. I don’t have to have the main character energy.”

EX: It makes one wonder what Jesus would think about so much social media.

Jesus exemplifies the reality of the God who hides himself in the low, the ordinary, the unambitious, the last, and the least. He laid aside His glory to come and be made sin for us. He did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasp.

EX: I doubt that Jesus ever uttered the complaint, “That’s NOT FAIR” or “I’m not being treated as equal.”.

Chad Bird

Jesus holds up children as models of greatness because they lack every quality of greatness the world lusts for. They can’t boast prestige, power, influence, wealth, or wisdom. Not despite these qualities but because of them, children are ideal models for the disciples of Jesus.

The good news of the Gospel is that we don’t have to make a name for ourselves, but we can rejoice that in Christ our names are written in the Lamb’s book of Life.

Jesus gives a simple instruction and illustration of the humility of a servant. It is a struggle for all of us.

EX: I like to look good, sound smart, and have the last word in an argument. I thought I would be a lawyer and go into politics and right all the wrongs because I had it all figured out. Then I got saved after realizing that I was in trouble with life. But after 50 years as a Christian, I still struggle to sound smart and have the last word in an argument.

v. 37 the UPSIDE DOWN RECEPTION

“Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.”

NOTE: He equates Himself with the one who sent Him.

Children and servants are easy to overlook or ignore. But the evidence of receiving Jesus and the One who sent Him is receiving a “child in His Name.”. That certainly includes children but also others who may be overlooked or ignored.

***APPLY – here’s a simple, if not easy, take away. Sign up to help in some way with our children’s ministry – SS, Child Church, Wed night, VBS, NURSERY, CHILDREN’S CHURCH.

You will find that it will be instructive for you personally, and it will probably push you out of your comfort zone into your faith zone. It will be sanctifying if you do it as unto the Lord. That application is obvious.

This radical UPSIDE DOWN view of greatness takes the focus off of “ME” and puts it on others. It fits well with the teaching of **Hebrews 10:24-25 which tells us to “consider one another toward provoking one another to love and good deeds.”**

Piper... “This is God’s call on us to consider one another, that is, to look at one another, think about one another, focus on one another, study one another, let your mind be occupied with one another. And the goal of this focus on others is to think of ways of stimulating them to love and good deeds.”

MEMBERSHIP CLASS REVIEW FOR ALL OF US...

“Consider one another” doesn’t happen in isolation; it doesn’t even happen in an 80 minute worship service which is why our approach to membership is Worship + Some “one anothering” participation.

This means that there are two sides-to all our ministries: serving our children or others AND actively participating in Children’s, Youth, and adult ministries. .

On the topic of children, YOUR kids are worth the investment that the dedicated teachers are willing to provide. The kids and teachers would also love to have whatever help you can provide.

Last week we heard a mom’s testimony of her child who trusted Jesus and she expressed appreciation for those who have ministered to her children. That was so encouraging to hear.

Those who labor regularly are following the path of service that Jesus describes in this passage.

Ministry often means that you give and give and give without expecting anything in return other than the promise that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. Our workers have demonstrated a willingness to do that.

While they don’t demand anything in return from the kids, it does make their job harder when they have no idea how many to plan for.

Friends, our children’s ministry is not sanctified babysitting. From an early age the kids are taught the word which is able to give wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. (2 Tim 3:15).

A coloring page may be the only thing you see, there are songs, bible lessons, AND small groups for application and prayer. The curriculum is solid and comprehensive. A considerable investment of time and energy goes into bringing the gospel to your kids each week.

The children’s ministry, adult SS, youth SS, youth group, men’s and women’s bible study groups are like the LOTTERY – you’ve got to play to win. Unlike the Lottery, each of those is a WIN.

This may seem like a stretch in terms of application, but I think it is legit.

A hesitancy to serve or simply attend as a participant in SS, children’s ministry, small group etc might flow from a perspective that thinks, “I’m just one person. I won’t be missed or needed.”

Unintentionally, that short-circuits “Consider one another.” We are overlooking how others may minister to you or how you might minister to others.

There MIGHT be someone in that group of men, women, children, youth, teachers, etc who could use a word from you that day. If you show up, then God might show up and use You to bring some insight from your knowledge and experience that would encourage someone else.

The application of this passage to children’s ministry is legitimate, but it’s not the sole point of the

illustration. The child illustrates those who don't or can't pay back the ministry that is provided them. We will find plenty of opportunities to serve in that we if we are paying attention to the doors that God opens in our lives – individually and as a body.

It is easy for us who have a 2000 year history of the life of Christ to forget how radically unique Jesus is.

The gods of Greece and Rome and the other gods of antiquity knew nothing of this humility, this willingness to stoop so low for the salvation of men and women. The gods of the world's great religions today also lack such humility and compassion.

Only Christ is the suffering savior.

And we who are saved by his grace and are welcomed as beloved children are equipped to walk in humility with God and with others. We're in no position to argue for our greatness.

Jesus frees us from the pursuit of a self-righteous greatness so that we might rest in the righteousness of Christ alone.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Was there something in the passage that got your attention?

What questions did the passage raise for you?

AGREE – DISAGREE (have everyone 'agree or disagree' and "Why?")

The greatness that Jesus describes can only happen in community.

1. What evidence is manifest in our current culture that, before redemption, we are addicted to ourselves? How does that temptation persist even after we are saved?
2. How does "consider one another" lead to the kind of greatness that Jesus describes?
3. How is pride viewed in our current culture? Is this the same kind of pride that is condemned in the Bible, or is it different?
4. How does Jesus redefine aspiring to greatness and seeking a reward? How does this fit together with Him condemning pride and encouraging sacrificial service?