

TEXT: Mark 9:30-37

TITLE: GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM

BIG IDEA:

GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM MUST BE MEASURED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CROSS

INTRODUCTION:

I wanted to begin this morning by considering some famous quotes on the subject of Greatness – what makes someone attain to Greatness? What is the pathway or the secret to Greatness?

“Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them.” Greatness comes in various forms; you need to embrace it, not fear it
– **William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night**

“You were put on this earth to achieve your greatest self, to live out your purpose, and to do it courageously.” Be the best YOU (sounds more like the Joel Osteen self-help approach)
– **Steve Maraboli, Life, the Truth, and Being Free**

“The mark of a great man is one who knows when to set aside the important things in order to accomplish the vital ones.” Matter of priorities
– **Brandon Sanderson, The Alloy of Law**

“All greatness of character is dependent on individuality. The man who has no other existence than that which he partakes in common with all around him, will never have any other than an existence of mediocrity.” Be the unique YOU
-- **James F. Cooper**

Probably closest to the truth – but still not capturing the biblical perspective:
“A great man is always willing to be little.”
– **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Nothing wrong with having **ambition** and wanting to make a difference with your life – in fact there is something very wrong with not caring about greatness and excellence and just being comfortable with **mediocrity**

It is a matter of our motivation and whether we are self-centered or God-centered

What does Jesus teach and what did Jesus practice with respect to the **Pathway to Greatness?**

GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM MUST BE MEASURED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CROSS

I. (:30-32) FUNDAMENTAL LESSON: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE MESSIAH – DEATH IS NECESSARY BUT RESURRECTION IS CERTAIN

The **perspective of the Cross** is fundamental to all that we are as Christians; it is fundamental to all that we do as Christians

A. (:30-31a) Urgent Need for Indoctrination

*“And from there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He was unwilling for anyone to know about it. For **He was teaching His disciples and telling them,**”*

Shift to what has been called the **Retirement ministry** of Jesus – where He pulls back from the crowds and invests his final time (**last 6 months**) in intimate training of his closest disciples; journey from the northern area of Galilee down to Jerusalem in the south of Judah

People today don't place much importance on indoctrination

Cults do – they make it a point to carefully educate their members in all of the details of the catechism of their religious system

But evangelicals today place a very low priority on systematic instruction – Why is that?

- Jesus taught **Truth** – He presented Himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life
- Jesus taught the Truth with **authority** – not just suggesting some possible interpretations of what God might want to communicate; not a sharing or pooling of ignorance
- Jesus taught the Truth with **repetition** – understood that His disciples were slow to pick up on new truths; used everyday illustrations to make the truth memorable
- Jesus taught the Truth with **practical application** – not just ivory tower truths; these were essential truths for wise living – listen to Dean belting out the simple gospel song: The wise man built his house upon the rock ...
- Jesus taught the Truth to those He was equipping to **teach others** the exact same content

Edwards: Although Mark often refers to Jesus as a teacher, he seldom reports what Jesus taught. This pericope is an exception, however.

B. (:31b) Significance of His Death – Death is Necessary – 8:31 – followed by interaction with **Peter; 9:31** – followed by interaction with **John; 10:33-34** – followed by interaction with **James and John**

“The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him;”

“delivered” -- Technical, legal term used for a criminal being handed over to judgment and punishment

Hiebert: a futuristic present – carries a note of the certainty of the thing announced

Contrast between *“Son of Man”* and sinful *“men”*

MacArthur: It starts with Judas who delivers Him up, to the Jews. The Jews deliver Him up to Pilate. Pilate delivers Him up to the executioners. But the real story is not understood until you read **Acts 2:23** where Peter on the Day of Pentecost says, “This man,” meaning Christ, *“delivered by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.”* God delivered Him up. Judas delivered Him up. The Jews delivered Him up. The Romans delivered Him up. And after all of that, He is crucified. He was delivered into the hands of men. Judas put Him in the hands of the

Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders put Him in the hands of Pilate. Pilate put Him in the hands of the Roman executioners.

C. (:31c) Significance of His Resurrection – Resurrection is Certain

“and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.”

The Death of Jesus is not the end of the story

Hendriksen: Mark represents Jesus as predicting that he shall *“rise again”*; Matthew, *“be raised up.”* These are not in conflict. Both are true. What Mark reports Jesus as saying is that he is going to rise again by his own power. This is in harmony not only with Christ’s own teaching as found elsewhere but also with other passages of Scripture.

John 10:17-18 *“For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”*

D. (:32) Two Impediments to Learning

1. Lack of Comprehension – Too Short-sighted

“But they did not understand this statement,”

Why didn’t they understand?

2. Lack of Humility – Too Proud

“and they were afraid to ask Him.”

Why were they fearful?

II. (:33-37) LESSON ON STATUS IN THE KINGDOM – THE PATHWAY TO GREATNESS IS HUMBLE SERVICE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CROSS

A. (:33-34) Lesson Introduced – Concern Over Status in the Kingdom

“And they came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, ‘What were you discussing on the way?’ But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.”

MacArthur: They’d been walking for a long time, we don’t know exactly how long, but it would be a significant journey from...for miles, 20, 30 who knows miles, up Caesarea Philippi, coming all the way down to Capernaum. And on the way, they were having a discussion, it was a prolonged discussion. It was a heated discussion. It was, frankly, a really ugly discussion. . . Pride destroys unity.

Edwards: a jarring contrast between Jesus’ humility and the disciples’ desire for distinction and recognition. . . Jesus speaks of surrendering his life; the disciples speak of fulfilling theirs. He counts the cost of discipleship; they count its assets. The disciples have yet to learn that the rewards of discipleship come only as a consequence of following Christ on the costly way to Jerusalem.

Hiebert: The dispute shows that the disciples did not regard Peter as having been assigned a position of primacy among them at Caesarea Philippi (Mt 16:17-19).

“*the house*” in Capernaum – possibly Peter’s

Illustration: all the politics at work regarding who has the parking spot closest to the door – the spot of rank and distinction; just as you would assign seats at a banquet

Greatness in Christ’s kingdom is different than kingdoms of men - cf. **Mt 20:20-26**

What is the **pathway to Greatness?**

- Hard work?
- Sacrifice and Discipline?
- Great Intellect?
- Impressive Achievements?
- Loyalty and Faithfulness?
- Popularity?
- Riches?
- How does Trump plan to “Make America Great Again?” – compete and win
- How does Hillary Clinton plan to “Keep America Great?” – everyone has their platform; their gameplan; their pathway that they expect will lead to Greatness

B. (:35) Lesson Taught – The Way Up is Down

*“And 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.’”*

Surprising and Shocking when Jesus first said this

Despite Jesus having clearly laid out this proven road map centuries ago – you still don’t find people today advocating for such an approach – it is still Surprising and Shocking

Edwards: The challenge is to be great in things that matter to God. Nothing is greater in God’s eyes than giving, and no vocation affords the opportunity to give more than that of a servant (10:43).

Hendriksen: their idea of what it means to be “*great*” must be changed, in fact, radically reversed. True greatness does not consist in this, that from a towering height a person, in a self-congratulatory manner, has the right now to look down upon all others (Luke 18:9-12); but in this, that he immerses himself in the needs of others, sympathizes with them and helps them in every way possible. So, if any person – whether he be one of the Twelve or anyone else – wishes to be first, he must be last; that is, servant of all.

What does it look like to be last of all and servant of all??

Luke 22:27 “*For I am among you as one who serves*”

Cf. the role of a **deacon** in the church

C. (:36-37) Lesson Illustrated and Applied – Greatness in the Kingdom is Measured by How You Humbly Serve the Most Insignificant?

“And taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, ‘Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.’”

Ministry to those who need it most

Child is not here just an example of humility – but one of being insignificant and helpless

Hendriksen: Jesus is telling his disciples to forget all about rank, pre-eminence, prominence. Instead, they should concentrate their attention on the needs of one, *any* one, even just one, of such little ones; for example, the child which Jesus is now holding in his arms, or any similar one. . . in his weakness, need, and humble dependence

Constable: A child was the least significant person in Jewish and in Greco-Roman culture. By using "a child" as His object lesson, Jesus was saying that service involves caring about people, even insignificant people such as children.

CONCLUSION:

The **lessons of the Cross** are foolishness to our human reasoning – these lessons can only be comprehended by the insight provided by the Spirit of God – 1 Cor. 1-2 *“For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.’”*

Phil. 2:1-11 Look at Jesus Christ and His humble service for our **pattern for Greatness**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can I focus more on the centrality of the gospel – the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ?
- 2) What are some indicators that people are concerned about their spiritual status?
- 3) What are some illustrations in my life of actively serving others in a way that puts me last and makes me the servant of all?
- 4) What ministries do I perform to individuals whom society would judge to be relatively insignificant?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

MacArthur: The Virtue of Being Last – Lessons on Humility

In our society, to diagnose people's ills because they lack self-esteem, our culture has poured gas on a fire. Nobody lacks self-esteem. That's a lie. People are dominated by self-esteem, dominated by pride. It just comes in many forms. And in those forms people manipulate the things around them and the people around them the way they want to manipulate them and using the means they use. Nobody lacks self-esteem, everybody is consumed with himself, or herself, in one way or another. . .

God is looking for humble people. Micah 6:8 says, "What does the Lord require of you but to walk humbly with your God." Luke 14:11; 18:14, our Lord says, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted." That is a spiritual principle. Ephesians 4:1 and 2 where we are enjoined to walk worthy of the calling to which we are called is followed by, "Walk with all humility." Colossians 3:12, "Put on a heart of humility." James 4:6, "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." Verse 10, "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you."

Edwards: At first glance the material in this unit seems to be a sundry patchwork of unrelated sayings lacking a unifying theme. Closer inspection, however, reveals an underlying theme of humility and suffering that is demonstrated by Jesus, in word and deed, as he is with the disciples on the way to Jerusalem. Jesus establishes the theme by a second reminder of his own impending rejection and death (9:30-32). He follows this with lessons intended to inculcate an attitude of humility in the Twelve: warnings against pride and an exhortation to receive the small and powerless (vv. 33-37), appeals for clemency and mercy for outsider (vv. 38-41), warnings against causing "*little ones to stumble*" (v. 42), and the necessity of suffering in fulfillment of God's kingdom (vv. 43-50). This collage of instructions and object lessons forms an extended commentary on Jesus' call to self-denial and cross-bearing (8:34), which was ratified by the divine ultimatum at the transfiguration for the disciples to "*hear him*" (9:8).

Brian Borgman: True Greatness in the Kingdom

Jesus = a man with a mission = death by crucifixion; headed to Jerusalem; time of intensive instruction for his closest disciples; gives the gospel in a nutshell; they were totally ignorant of the words Jesus spoke; Why were they afraid to ask for clarification: Mark 8-9 – chastised for having hard hearts and being slow to get it – "Do you not yet understand?" cf. rebuke of Peter; 9:19; they had been stung by their Master's rebuke before – so they had another debate among themselves – ended up being rebuked anyway!

Disciples keep silent because of their embarrassment; Matt. reports that they then blurted out the subject matter of their debate; Jesus has just set the context for this teaching; Jesus' death has everything to do with true greatness in the kingdom and they missed it; Son of Man did not come to be ministered to but to serve and to lay down his life for others; Jesus does not criticize their desire for greatness; He doesn't say "You shouldn't want to be great." He redirects them to what true greatness really is. Spoke against unworthy motivation; self-centered motivation;

Kingdom of God is always counter-cultural; against the values of the world; you want to be great? Wait on people; do the most menial tasks for someone else; true greatness begins with killing pride and carnal ambition and putting on genuine humility; humble yourself under the mighty hand of God; with a proud heart we will never serve anyone but ourselves; whom do you welcome and embrace? Cf. example of great men starting orphanages: George Whitfield, George Mueller, Charles Spurgeon [Abraham Thomas] ... importance of mother and father pouring their lives into their children; SS workers and nursery workers; those who work at

community pregnancy centers; those who save little babies from abortion ... that is greatness in the kingdom of God

Vs. 38ff – must be patient in serving God’s servants; John and James (sons of thunder); John’s conscience is pricked about the possible wrong deed that was done in trying to stop this man; no prospect of neutrality (Matt. 12:30 = the counterpart – not saying the same thing – different context); this person does have faith – he has acknowledged the power of Jesus; not a warrant for indifference; there is a need for patience on the part of the disciples;

- The first mark of true greatness – revealed by **those whom you receive** – embracing little children
- The second mark of true greatness – revealed by **those whom you serve** – serving God’s servants

Even in what might seem the most mundane of matters – like giving him a cup of cold water in the name of Jesus (instead of trying to hinder him) – then you won’t lose your reward

Where is your ambition? What drives you? What do you want to be great at? Choose an ambition that won’t be burned up before the judgment seat of Christ; have a holy ambition to be great in His kingdom and labor by His grace for His glory; be a servant; become last; don’t give a false piety; serve the lowliest; serve the very servants of Christ; you run the risk of not being properly thanked or recognized; some people don’t serve because of pride; some people don’t serve because of low ambition; needs abound – not hard to find opportunities for service

Steven Lawson: Jesus Foretells His Death

Sense the drama in Mark’s account (John’s gospel focused on the discourses; Matthew on fulfilled prophecies; Luke on the parables)

Christian faith built on substitutionary death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ;

Church is built with His shed blood and empty tomb;

No other religion in the world compares to this;

Concentrate on this core of the gospel and you will be majoring on what is major;

Key central feature of these middle chapters of Mark – repetition of teaching on the cross – 8:31; 9:12; 9:31; 10:33

Insider information – only told to the Twelve – not to the multitude;

Disciples never really understood despite the simplicity and clarity of these prophecies;

1. (:30) The Isolation Jesus Sought –

Passing through NE Galilee; headed for Capernaum – sits on top of Sea of Galilee in NW corner; progressing without any prolonged stay in any one place; intentionally bypassing the multitude; He is in a withdrawal mode; pouring His life into the 12; His public ministry in Galilee is now ended; door of opportunity closed; strategic 6 months of training the 12; sometimes when we are in isolation, Jesus is preparing us for future ministry;

2. (:31) The Instruction Jesus Gave –

The reason for the withdrawal in previous verse; full disclosure of full counsel of God is commanded in the Great Commission; said these things repeatedly;

- The **humility** of Jesus’ death – “*the Son of Man*” -- Son of God became the Son of Man in His incarnation; laid aside His crown to take up a cross; His favorite way to refer to Himself; used 83 times in the gospels and always from the lips of Jesus; Messianic title from Daniel 7; He has come down to our level; born of a woman; came for a purpose

- The **sovereignty** of Jesus' death – "*is to be delivered*" by God the Father Himself; Jesus was not a victim; not an out of control situation; Acts 2:23;
- The **certainty** of Jesus' death – "*they will kill Him*" – 8:31 "*must suffer*" – Jesus had to die in order to save sinners and reconcile them to a holy God; there is no other way; there is no Plan B; this will certainly come to pass; inevitability and immutability of this plan that God is orchestrating; no turning back;
- The **extremity** of Jesus' death – "*kill*" – a violent death that He would suffer; a gruesome and gory death; not simply passing away; crucified Him; nailed Him to the cross; put Him to death; put to death by hanging Him on a cross; pierced through; crushed; cut off out of the land of the living;
- The **victory** of Jesus' death – "*He will rise the third day*" – no swoon theory possible;

3. (:32) The Ignorance Jesus Faced –

"*But*" – sad transition – they are so dull of understanding; they had their own preconceived ideas in their own little minds of how the Messiah would come to Jerusalem; stubborn; "*filled with deep grief*" – but could not grasp the significance and full reality of this death;

Why were they afraid to ask Him – because of how Peter had been stung with rebuke earlier; unwilling to swallow their pride and humble themselves and ask for further clarification