

## The Least shall be Greatest

Mark 9: 30-41

After delivering the young man from the unclean spirit, Jesus and His disciples have departed and are on their way back to Capernaum. As they journeyed, Jesus again reminded the disciples that he would be delivered into the hands of sinful men, die, and rise again on the third day. Like previous encounters, these men heard what Jesus said, but they failed to comprehend the enormity of His words. They remained afraid to ask for clarification, ([Vvs.30-32.](#))

It is important to keep that in mind as we move through these verses. In fact, we must always keep the Gospel of Jesus Christ in mind as we seek to serve Him and others. The Gospel should dictate our lives and purpose. Jesus wanted to emphasize His purpose for coming to earth. He had not come to establish a kingdom, and be seated as King. He had not come to be served of others, but to serve them through His great sacrifice on the cross for the sin of mankind. Our Lord humbled Himself, laying aside His glory, and hid His deity in a robe of flesh. The eternal God became man, coming to earth to die so that the children of men could become the children of God. Deity tasted death for the depraved, providing for our salvation!

With all of this in mind, I want to examine the [principles](#) revealed in the text as we consider the thought: [The Least shall be Greatest.](#)

**I. The Contention among the Disciples** (33-34) – [And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?](#) <sup>[34]</sup> [But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who \*should be\* the greatest.](#) Mark reveals a debate that took place between the disciples as they journeyed toward Capernaum. Consider:

**A. The Quarrel** – As they journeyed a dispute arose among the disciples about which of them held the highest rank within their group. There were twelve of them, and one had to be the greatest. The men were jockeying for position, trying to determine the ranks of authority among them. While they clearly didn't understand that Jesus would soon be taken from them, they were concerned with who would be in charge in His absence. Keep in mind what Jesus had told them as they journeyed to Capernaum. He had revealed that He would give His life for them, and all the world. The Christ came to serve and surrender to the Father's will, and the disciples were arguing about who held the highest rank. Clearly they missed the point again!

- Like previous passages, it would be easy for us to be judgmental toward the disciples, but things have not changed in our day. We are well aware of all that Jesus endured for us. He provided the supreme example for service, giving His life in our place. He humbled Himself and

became a servant to all, and yet we worry about who is in charge or who will get the credit for our efforts. Many churches face turmoil today because personal agendas and the hunger for authority take priority over the will of God. We often want our way more than we want to please the Lord.

**B. The Quietness** (34) – *But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.* The disciples knew that Jesus would not have been pleased with their argument, so they refused to answer His question. While the Lord knew what was in their hearts, these men spoke not a word. Apparently they were convicted and ashamed, knowing the Lord would have rebuked such nonsense.

- While I would never encourage disobedience, the disciples were wise to let this argument end. There would have been no point in arguing with the Lord. In fact, He is about to give them a lesson in regard to their selfish ambitions. It is never wise to argue with truth. Our Lord has given His Word to guide our lives. If the Word says it, that settles it. There is no need to argue. We can submit to God's will or remain in disobedience. There is no other option!

**II. The Illustration of Jesus** (35-37) – Knowing the debate the disciples had, Jesus used a simple illustration to make a profound point. Notice:

**A. The Explanation** (35) – *And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.* In regard to their debate, Jesus offered a startling truth. He declared that if a man desired to be first in kingdom work, he must be willing to be last, submitting to serve all others. The way to be used of the Lord and secure a position of value is to be willing to be of service to the Lord and others. Greatness in ministry is secured through service.

- It is interesting to note that the word translated servant in our text is also translated deacon in other passages. Those in places of leadership within in the church are called to serve, not lord over the congregation. I realize that pastors and deacons must lead, but the greatest form of leadership is service. Servant leadership was modeled by our Lord and expected in the church.

**B. The Example** (36a) – *And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them.* As Jesus spoke with the disciples, He took a child into His lap and continued to teach. This was done with purpose. Jesus would use the example of a child to teach eternal truth to these men. These men would have understood what the Lord was about to say. Children were viewed in the lowest position of social status. They were dependent upon adults for their well-being. Children had to be served;

they were unable to do much for others. They could not be used for advantage, lacking ability to promote one's social status. These men were called to be servants, willing to serve all, even those who could offer nothing in return.

**C. The Expansion** (37) – *Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.* As Jesus taught these men, He expanded His teaching. If they willingly submitted to a place of service, receiving or showing hospitality to a child, one who was unable to help themselves or offer anything in return, they were in fact showing hospitality unto the Lord as well. Jesus even took it a step further. By serving others, they served not only Jesus, but His Father as well. Serving others would bring the approval of the Lord and the Father. In essence, these men were pleasing to God, fulfilling His will for their lives, when they served others.

- We live in a selfish and competitive world. It seems as if everyone is seeking a “higher position.” We like to have our needs and wants met, but much too often we fail to consider the needs of others. This is prevalent even among the church. People often ask – how can I know God's will for my life; what does God want me to do? Jesus revealed a great place to start. We can always make ourselves available in service to others. If this is pleasing to the Father, then we can rest assured that we are doing His will for our lives. I fear we are often like the disciples, desiring something that is viewed in our culture as more desirable. I don't know about you, but I have a desire to conform to the image of my Lord. He was willing to serve, and if I am to be like Christ, I too must be willing to serve.

**III. The Clarification of Jesus** (38-41) – Here Jesus offered clarification in regard to some of the attitudes the disciples held toward others. Consider:

**A. John's Assumption** (38) – *And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us.* John admitted that he and the others had rebuked a man for casting out devils in Jesus' name because he was not part of their group. John assumed since he wasn't one of the disciples, he had no right to be doing any work in the name of Jesus.

- Such an attitude was akin to the attitudes of the Pharisees. We know that John loved the Lord and wanted what was best, but his heart was not right in this matter. Sadly this attitude remains prevalent within the church today. We tend to assume that we are serving the Lord in the best and most biblical way possible. Falsely we think that those who do things differently have

missed it and cannot be pleasing unto the Lord. We tend to criticize and even condemn those who do things differently. As we continue, we will discover what Jesus thought of this. Notice:

**B. Jesus' Admonition** (39) – But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. Jesus admonished John for rebuking one who was doing a work in His name. Jesus declared that if these were serving in the name of the Lord, doing miracles in His name, they could not speak evil of Him or be a detriment to the kingdom. They were among a different group, but they were all working toward the same goal. We need to embrace this truth today as well.

**C. Jesus' Affirmation** (40-41) – For he that is not against us is on our part. <sup>[41]</sup> For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. Jesus affirmed that those who were not working against Jesus were actually working for Him, even though they did not travel with Him. He declared that all who gave even a cup of water in His name, revealing they belonged to Him, would not lose their reward. Jesus was saying that although their approach may have been different, that did not mean it was wrong. Jesus could work through others the same as He did through the twelve.

- This is a lesson the western church needs to learn. We can be so judgmental of others who operate or serve the Lord differently than we do. We assume that their differences disqualify them from service or accomplishing anything of value for the Lord. We need to be careful with such thinking and attitudes. The Lord has dealt with my heart regarding this. You all know that I prefer the King James Version, but that doesn't mean the Lord is unable to speak to people through other translations, revealing truth that leads to salvation. I prefer our choir to sing, but does that mean that any other type of music is wrong and can't glorify God? I am a Baptist and will be until I die, but are we the only denomination that is reaching people with the Gospel? Just because others are different, doesn't mean that God is not working through them. I may have different preferences, and even disagree with some of their methods, but I can't condemn the work of the Lord. If they are saved by grace, seeking to advance the Gospel, we are on the same team, working toward the same goals! Time will eventually reveal the truth; it will endure if it's of God.

**Conclusion:** This has been a convicting passage. Again, I am convinced we are more like the disciples than we care to admit. Often we allow our desires and preferences to hinder what the Lord genuinely seeks to do through us. We must be willing to serve Him and others, without being judgmental and condemning just because someone else has a different approach. I pray we will seek the Lord to guide our hearts as we strive to serve Him. If there are needs in your life, particularly regarding salvation, come to Jesus today!