The Gospel of Mark – Part 33  
Ministry Matters – Mark 9:30-41  
Mosaic Rockford – Dave Spooner – May 3rd, 2020

Intro:

- Jesus now has a primary focus of training and equipping His 12 disciples. He knows that His time is short and His time with them is ending. They are on their way to Jerusalem and Jesus must prepare them for what is to come and equip them for their ministry after He is gone.
- From our passage for today, we will again see what Jesus came to do, what we are to do to be great in the eyes of heaven, and what legitimate ministry is all about.
- Jesus again explains to them a second time what He must do, and this time He adds a little more detail.

The mission of Jesus

Mark 9:30-32 ESV
They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” 32 But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.

- They left the region after the transfiguration on the mountain and the ministry to the boy with a demon and head through the region of Galilee to the coastal town of Capernaum. Jesus primary task as this point was to teach and prepare the 12 for what was to come. He wanted to slip through the region unnoticed as to not draw a crowd.
- As they were traveling, Jesus was teaching His disciples. We don’t know all that they were taught on this trip, but we do know the most important thing that He taught them. That He was “going to be delivered into the hands of men”, he would be killed and rise again.
- The added detail is that “he would be delivered into the hands of man”. This meant that someone was going to hand Him over to those who were going to kill him.
- This was a new revelation. It was not going to go down that those who wanted to kill Him were going to find Him and take Him away. What was going to happen is that someone was going to turn Him into them.
- It is safe to say that Jesus knew exactly who was going to do this, because of what happened in the upper room. What is shocking is that none of them knew who it was because Jesus treated them all the same and never gave away who it was by his words or actions until the final moment.
- What does this tell us about Jesus? He loves us all equally, even those who would betray him and cause Him the deepest of pain. Jesus knew that Him mission required betrayal and suffering and yet gave Himself over to the will of the Father. And in fulfilling His ministry, He loved and treated them all just the same.
- This is a good lesson to each of us. In fulfilling our calling to be like Christ, we to must love and care for people all the same, not just giving the best of us to those who will love and treat us well, but also give the same love to everyone, even to those who mean to do us harm. That will twist our words and use our love against us.
• The disciples still had a hard time accepting the hard truth of what Jesus was telling them was going to happen. He ended up having to tell them the same truth over and over for them to grasp the reality of it. And the same is true for us. If the truth is something that we are strongly opposed to, we have a hard time receive the truth, and will fight against anything that does not line up with what we think is reality, especially when the truth in contrary to what we want.

• As Jesus was leading them toward Capernaum on the way to Jerusalem, to be betrayed by one of them, to suffer and give His life for them, they were arguing among themselves about who was the greatest among them.

The greatest among you

Mark 9:33-37 ESV
And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” 36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

• The finally made their way to the town of Capernaum and they were gathered into a house (perhaps they were in the house of Peter or Andrew). Jesus asked them a question about what they had been talking about along the way – obviously, He knew what they were arguing about and needed to address the subject with them. In asking them this question, it made them take ownership of what they were talking about and made them focus on that conversation. No one answered the question, because I am guessing after they thought about it, they did not want to admit what they had been talking about.

• Approach does matter especially when there is need of a conversation to bring correction. (It would be good for us to think about our approach in sensitive conversations as well. Most of the time we want to be seen as right or better and the approach of Jesus is that we will see the truth and align ourselves with it).

• Jesus addressed them as a group, because the conversation had been had by them all and affected them all. Then He radically transforms the quest for greatness. “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”

• He says true greatness is not wanting to be first while others are second and third and fourth, but true greatness is the willingness to be last. And true greatness is not positioning yourself so that others praise you, but true greatness is putting yourself in a position to serve everyone—to be a blessing to as many as you possibly can.

• So, Jesus doesn’t condemn the quest for greatness. He radically transforms it. Go ahead and pursue it, he says. But the path is down, not up. The measure of true greatness is to what degree has the impulse to self-glory been crucified? How much heartfelt desire to serve others has there been? Do you serve them because it serves you or do you serve others out of a humble heart for them out of love for God? How much readiness and willingness to decrease do you possess while others increase?
We have to be careful to use the measure of greatness God uses, then to judge with the measure of greatness the world uses. The world says that the more people serve you and follow you and talk about you, the more you have, the greater you are. God measures success by the more you give, the more you serve, the more you look like Christ the greater you are. Jesus reminds us

**John 7:24 ESV**
Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

Paul gives us this reminder as well:

**1 Cor 4:5 ESV**
Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Be very careful what you call a “success” and failure” you don’t know all the facts, and you don’t see the whole picture. At that time God will bring all things to light, even the motives of the heart. At that point, each one will receive his reward and honor from God. Work and live for the honor of that day, not for the honor of men and to be seen as a “success in their eyes” look to be judged as a “success” in God’s eyes.

To drive His point home, Jesus brought a small child to stand with them. Why a small child, what is the point? The point is that children are among the "all" of verse 35: "You must be the servant of all . . . " For example, here's a child. I am taking this child in my arms to show you that if you would be great, if you would be first, you must be the servant of children. You must take time for children. You must not look down on or despise children. You must not say this is and they are “beneath you”. If you would be great, you will not rule out nursery duty; you will pray earnestly about teaching primaries; you will think hard about being apart of tutor club, you will give your life for the “least of these”.

Why does Jesus illustrate his point about serving . . . with a child? The discussion wasn't about children. Why does Jesus bring them in? The answer is that there is no political payback in serving children: they can't vote. There is no financial gain from children, there is no social clout you will gain from them. And they don't give speeches about how great is your helpfulness and then rarely, if ever, thank you for it. In fact, they pretty much take for granted that you will take care of them. They don't make a big deal out of the fact that you pour your life out for them. And so, children prove, more clearly than any other kind of people, whether you are truly great or not—whether you live to serve or live to be praised. Jesus also taught in Luke 14:12–14 that if you want a reward from God, then serve those who can’t serve you back, give to those who can’t give back to you, honor those who are dishonored in the world. This is how you will be great in the eyes of God, and God will reward you for this. Measure success the way God measures it.

Now put the two things Jesus said together. In verse 35 he said: if you would be first, you must be last of all and servant of all (especially children). And in verse 37 he said: if you receive a child in my name, you receive God. In other words, when I call you to be the servant of all, including children, I am not calling you to some heroic self-sacrifice. I am calling you to stop chasing the bubbles of man's praise and start pursuing God. Stop trying to receive praise in the service of
men and start receiving God in the service of children. What do you want? Do you want the fleeting praise of mortal men? Or do you want God?

- Another great example of this is when Jesus washed the disciples feet in John 13:14. They thought that they were “above” doing this, and the greatest person who ever lived did this lowly task for them. The path to greatness is the path of service, to gain your life you must lose it in love and service to all, especially to the “lowest” and the “last”. This is true greatness. (portions of this point were adapted from John Piper’s sermon [https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/receiving-children-in-jesus-name](https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/receiving-children-in-jesus-name))

- Mark also records and puts together for us another point that fits along with these teachings, about what is and who is doing “legitimate” ministry.

### Legitimate ministry

**Mark 9:38-41 ESV**

John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” 39 But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 For the one who is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

- John noticed a man using Jesus’s name to cast out a demon and he tried to stop the man from doing so because he was not part of their group. And tragically we have the same issue today. We think that in order for ministry to be “legitimate” is must be done by someone in our group, or in our denomination, or with our exact theological persuasion. Jesus told John not to stop that man from doing this “mighty work” because if they are doing it in the name of Jesus, they will not then turn around and speak evil of Jesus.

- If they are truly doing ministry in the love of Christ and in the love for Christ, then they will not loose their reward. And if they are not against Christ, they are for Him. There are indeed other people in other groups that are doing the ministry of Jesus. They may not be at the exact place you are theologically, and they may not do things the exact way that you or we would do them, but if they are making a difference in the name of Jesus and if they are spreading light in a dark world, then let them, and appreciate the good work that they are doing. Commend them for the good that they are doing and let’s hope they are doing so for the greatness of the name of Christ.

- Now this does not mean that doctrine does not matter, because it does and we can and should discuss it. And remember motivation matters as well regardless of theological positions. At least we are to applaud and acknowledge the good that they are doing and not fall for the lie that what every “they” are doing can’t be right and everything that “we” are doing is always right. Take an honest look at your heart, take an honest look at what is being done and recognized that God is the one who will ultimately determine who and what is rewarded, and who and what is successful in His sight.

### Conclusion

- I hope the Holy Spirit has highlighted a few things from our time in the word together. Here are some of the key points I want you to take away from today.
• In following after Jesus, make sure you treat all people like Christ regardless if they will betray and hurt you.
• In following after Jesus, make sure to serve all people, given special attention to those who cannot give you anything back in return.
• In following after Jesus, make sure to make a right judgement about who and what is a success or not. Know that God is the one who has the final say and live to be a success in God’s eyes.
• Jesus said “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13 ESV) Lay down your life for the benefit and service of others because of your love for God and His love for them. And this is what Jesus did for us, by literally laying His life down for us. We now turn to communion in remembering what He has done for us.