

Mark 9:30-50

“A desire to be first”

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I. **Introduction**

As Jesus enters the final 18 months of His life; Mark not only records the events but directed by the Holy Spirit demonstrates the lengths to which Jesus as Son of God would go for those in His kingdom: Namely His death burial and resurrection. Along the way Mark will also answer the question that John stated in his gospel 1:11 but only implied in Mark: “*Why didn’t His own people receive Him as the Son of God.*” So far we have seen two such reasons: ***Bad theology*** and ***the wrong focus of faith***. In the section we will be studying yet another reason why people reject His testimony, ***a faulty view of one’s own importance!***

II. **Vs. 30-32 Afraid of the answer**

Vs. 30-32 We notice that this story takes place after the disciples had left the foot of Mount Hermon and the scene of the delivered demon possessed young man. The journey is around 30 miles as the crow flies but based upon this passage Jesus took His disciples on the back roads to avoid the crowds. It seems as though the purpose of this was to instruct them further on the details of His death and resurrection. ***I’m always amazed at the critics as they insist upon saying that Jesus’ death was do to a series events that were beyond His control. Predicting the exact detail of the events 18 months before they***

happen doesn't indicate that His death was do to escalating political and religious situations that got out of control. In Jesus' previous conversations with His Disciples He

had mentioned differing aspects about His death each time adding something new:

- He had said that He would suffer many things
- That He would be rejected be the religious elite and establishment
- That He would be murdered
- That after three days He would rise again

But here Jesus adds yet another aspect of His death: *That all of the above would be set in motion by His **betrayal**.* What this revealed to His Disciples was that not only was His impending **death not accidental** **it was premeditated by a close friend**. I have also noticed that each time Jesus mentions His death, He finishes with words on His resurrection. ***It is clear that as far as Jesus was concerned that no matter how ghastly and gruesome His murder was; it would not spell His defeat but instead it would usher in His victory.*** Yet even though He continually wanted His Disciples to understand his death, with each new revelation they became more startled by it while ignoring the resurrection. I maintain that every time Jesus gave a little more information instead of clarifying the upcoming event it left them in greater puzzlement. I can only imagine the disciples hearing this new realization that not only was He going to suffer, be rejected and die but that one of them, ***His closest friends***, was ***the instigator*** as they were going to betray Him. Though they didn't understand this they were afraid to ask Him what it all meant, *"Who among Your closest friends; Jesus, would do such a thing?"* That's the question they wanted to ask but were afraid to do so. One may assume that the reason behind their fear was that they would be rebuked but in truth there is not one verse where Jesus rebukes them for asking a question. ***So what were they afraid of?*** Well I believe that *they were afraid **not of Jesus' response in asking the question** but in **His answer.***

Further more I believe that *what each of them feared in the answer was that Jesus would say their name*. I say this because eighteen months later Jesus will be at a Passover meal with His disciples and again say that one of His closest friends was about to betray Him. It is there in John 13:25 that after each of them looked at each other John said what all were no doubt thinking, “*Is it I?*” So here 18 months before this they thought it safer to *just not to ask Him*.

III. Vs. 33-36 Servant of all verse served by all

Vs. 33-36 Yet with that said I find a very interesting truth with regards to humanity; *instead of being confronted by the Lord as to who among them is WORST they found it far better to dispute who among themselves would be the GREATEST!* I suggest to you that statement says a lot about the human condition as *we tend to avoid the truth so that we can argue a lie!* What we see in the remainder of this chapter all centers around Jesus’ answer to this dispute as to who among them would be the greatest. There are several things that must be addressed generally:

- Vs. 33-34 First is the fact that nothing escapes our Lord’s eye’s and ear’s. It is clear that these 12 knew that such a dispute wasn’t something that they were comfortable having in front of the Jesus but they just couldn’t help themselves and did so quietly among themselves so as to not raise His suspicions and obviously failed. I believe that it is a far better tact on the part of us disciples to have an open communication with Jesus about our heart than to be under the mistaken illusion that we can hide our heart from Him, after all He is all knowing!
- Vs. 35 Second, *I’m amazed at the response of Jesus* in dealing with such prideful hearts; especially in light of the fact that clearly these 12 disciples knew that such a dispute was an embarrassment. *Instead of REBUKING them about ever thinking such a thing Jesus INSTRUCTS them on not only “How to accomplish the feat” but “How they would be able to judge they have done so.”* God has built into every human heart the desire to succeed and be great and such a desire is a good desire not an evil one. Such ambition only becomes evil when it has **CHANGED ITS FOCUS** from “**BEING A SERVANT OF ALL**” to that of “**BEING SERVED BY ALL**”! Being “*served by all*” has become the chief way in which the world gauge’s greatness and such ambition has become

approved and applauded by people, but not by God. God, sees greatness upon “*How many I have served today!*” and not in “*How many servants I have today!*”

- Vs. 36 Finally, the dispute centered upon who would be “**the greatest among themselves**”. It was an argument as to *which of them possessed the superior qualities that establish their preeminence above others*; as to make them greater than their fellow man. And as an illustration of what those qualities were Jesus used a prop as “*He took a **little child** and set him in the midst of them.*” The gauge of qualities; Jesus said by using this child, all centered how they responded to a child. **There are three qualities mentioned in verses 37-48 and in each of them we need to understand had as an illustration a child sitting on Jesus lap in front of them.** Greatness is to be measured by how we treat the least and most vulnerable among society. **It is this greatness that Jesus wants His disciples to be in pursuit of with such a hunger as one would have if they were in a contest to which only one can win!** Why? **Because if we make such greatness our aim all of humanity would become better and all the world a picture of His kingdom.** William Penn knew of this, he was born to wealth and privilege in 1644, he was aimless in his youth, expelled from Oxford. In his 20’s he heard a sermon from a Quaker preacher that transformed his life and plunged his life into radical Christianity. His activities landed him in jail and at the age of 24 he wrote a book called, “*No Cross, No Crown*” which was about self denial as the only way to enter into rest and the Kingdom of God. In 1677 Penn sailed with Quaker leader George Fox to America to found a colony named after his late father “*Pennsylvania*” and a city with a heavenly goal to be a society of Christian love and brotherhood that he named “*Philadelphia*”. This city he prayed would become the seed of a new nation founded upon being a servant of all. This was the idea found in Jesus’ words here about being the greatest. Saint’s the ideal has not failed but we Christians have failed to maintain the ideal!

IV. Vs. 37-50 Three qualities of greatness

Vs. 37 Here we are given the first of three godly ambitions of greatness: “**BE A SERVANT OF ALL**”! The important phrase of reference is the motive behind this first action, “*In My name*”. Having the child on His lap as Jesus said these words made the words all the more impactful as the significance of showing kindness to a little child who to most seems insignificant as to a means to personal greatness. A child can not advance a person’s career, their prestige, they have no influence that would benefit us or advance us in the world’s quest for greatness, they are the opposite. It is the child who must have things done for them. Far too many folks are interested in being “*big shots*”

instead of having “***BIG HEARTS***” and Jesus say’s “*If you want to be a big shot you will have to have a big heart*”! *When we welcome the poor ordinary person who has no influence, no wealth, no power who can not advance us then we are on the road to greatness.* Greatness is measured upon valuing everyone, even the least, as we lavish them with the gifts God as given us to benefit them not ourselves.

Vs. 38-40 Apparently this first illustration was to much for John as he wanted a clarification on the rules of “*Being a Servant of all*”. At issue with John was, “*Who was included in the competition?*” The disciples had observed someone engaged in helping the least who wasn’t an immediate part of following of Jesus. So they had stopped the fellow from doing so. ***There is nothing more intolerable to us in our competition than a successful rival!*** And John wanted to win the competition and the first order of ***business was to get the person successful disqualified!*** Jesus response was to not forbid the fellow simply because he wasn’t part of their group as he was clearly casting out the demons in “*Jesus name*”. The fact that it was being done in Jesus name and that it was successful, **authenticated** the man’s work. God doesn’t respond to anything but faith and this man obviously exhibited faith. “***Don’t quench the flame of faith, fan it into a fire***”, Jesus said. The application at hand is to **quit spending all your time on seeking to disqualify folks from the competition and instead get back to the matter at hand** “**BEING A SERVANT OF ALL**”.

Vs. 41-42 Right on the heels of this Jesus delivers the 2nd illustration of greatness again with the child still on His lap as we note in verse 42 Jesus “*whoever causes **one of these little ones** who believes in Me to stumble.*” The 2nd sign of the godly ambition of greatness is: **A HEART FOR THE HURTING!** The slightest act of kindness towards

those who are hurting is recognized by the Lord but the flip side of a lack of concern for the hurting is also recognized. Notice the severity in the warning as any moral or spiritual damage done to a young believer is seen as serious as murder. Oh the damage that has been done by those who had power over the vulnerable people in our society. Spiritual greatness is measured upon compassion for those who are hurting.

Vs. 43-50 The final illustration of godly ambition of greatness is: **A REALIZATION THAT WE ARE THE WORSE SINNER WE HAVE EVER MET!** Did you notice that **Jesus brings them back to the one question that they were afraid to ask and it is here used as a sign of greatness!** Judgment must always begin with self evaluation instead of blame shifting! With a powerful illustration, Jesus illustrates the seriousness we must take with regards to our own personal failures and sins. A willingness to cut it off, cast it away. This of course is figurative as the problem is not in our sinning foot or eye but in our heart. Jesus' point is that **we are often far more concerned with our neighbor's feet and eyes than our own.** We would all be far more effective for His kingdom if we had the same seriousness for our sins as we have we have for others!

Saints we have given by Jesus; **three marks of the godly ambition of greatness that we all ought to strive for:**

- **BE A SERVANT OF ALL**
- **HAVE A HEART FOR THE HURTING!**
- **HAVE A REALIZATION THAT WE ARE THE WORSE SINNER WE HAVE EVER MET!**