

Mark 9:30-37 Being Greatest

After a summer off we are returning to our study of Mark's Gospel. We will finish that study before we begin our Advent studies. Just for information, we are over 50 studies so far. I know we are only in Mark 9 with 7 more chapters to go but we have actually looked at some of the later chapters during our Lenten studies.

Read Mark 9:30. **"That place"** was the northern border of Israel around Mt. Hermon and Caesarea Philippi. In that region Jesus made His first prediction of impending death (8:31). That was followed by Peter's rebuke (8:32) and Jesus rebuke of Peter, saying to him, **"Get behind me Satan."** Mark 9 opened with the account of the events on the Mount of Transfiguration (9:1-13) and the healing of a demon possessed boy (9:14-31), including a discussion of why the disciples had been unable to cast the demon out.

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem where shortly He would be crucified. What follows in the next few chapters of Mark could easily be called Jesus' private teaching to the disciples, getting them ready for His death, resurrection and ascension. Read Mark 9:30-31.

Read in Mark 9:31 what Jesus said to His disciples. This is Jesus' second of three declarations in Mark concerning His impending crucifixion (8:31-32; 9:31; 10:32-34). The interesting thing here is Jesus' declaration that He was **"going to be delivered."** The word **"delivered"** has a variety of meanings in the Greek and can mean *"betrayed,"* which is the way it will be used in Mark 14:41 to describe Judas' betrayal of Jesus, but the word also means *"handed over"* or *"delivered."* It is natural to read into this the betrayal of Jesus by Judas but there is no reason to think that the disciples understood it that way. Read how Peter used the word in Acts 2:23.

One of the important truths of the Bible is that the Cross was part of the triune God's plan for our redemption. Daniel Akin wrote in his commentary, *"We must never forget: God purposefully killed His Son in order that He might not kill us."* Loc 4141

Over the centuries men have debated who killed Jesus. Some say it was the Jews who called for His crucifixion, others say it was the Roman authorities who ordered His death. Many have noted that we caused His death because of our sin. There is an element of truth in all, especially the truth that it was for our sins that He died. In the end, it was God. Read John 3:16.

Read Mark 9:32. That they did not understand is easy to understand. The idea of a dead Messiah had no place in their thinking. If Jesus was the Messiah, and they were sure He was, then His task was to overthrow Rome, not be put to death by them.

Mark did not tell us why the disciples **"were afraid to ask him about it."** Jesus was always approachable, even as He is today. Perhaps they were unwilling to ask about it because He had already mentioned it and they felt they should have understood it. Perhaps they remembered that after Jesus' first announcement that He was going to die Peter got in trouble for telling Jesus He

was wrong. They certainly did not want to make that mistake again. Perhaps it was simply a case of deciding to remain in ignorance rather than face a truth.

Read Mark 9:33. Capernaum was back in Galilee and was the headquarters for the ministry of Jesus in Galilee and the home town of several of His disciples.

With a little imagination you can picture them all arriving, looking forward to a much-needed rest after several hours of walking and of course some homecooked food. I doubt they were expecting what came next. Read Mark 9:33-34. Oops! He wasn't supposed to hear that discussion. We can almost see the shame and embarrassment on their faces. I am sure they wished that they could fade away and hide.

A scary thought is that God always knows what we say even if others don't hear us. God hears what we say under our breath when we are upset with someone. God hears what we say when we are alone in the car and someone cuts us off and we assume no one knows. God hears it all. He also hears us when we say in our hearts "Praise God" and when we say a silent "Thank You." It is important to watch our words. Read James 3:9-10. How many conversations would we wish we could take back if we thought that Jesus was listening in.

Read Mark 9:35. Talk about turning their world upside down. The problem is that our sinful nature always seeks to be first. That was Satan's sin when he rebelled against God. He wanted to be as important and perhaps even more important than God. We sometimes think this is an American culture trait but in truth it is a sinful trait. Americans have focused on being the best and we tell ourselves that is what makes us who we are. Have you ever heard anyone ask who is the second-best baseball player of all time? We only want to know who is the greatest. Being great is OK but being the greatest is the aim of our culture because the greatest is served, not the one serving.

That attitude can be a challenge in the church also. Too many pastors want to be known as having the biggest church in the area. Being a servant instead of being Numero Uno that others wait on is a difficult lesson to learn. In the next chapter of Mark, we learn that even after this lesson the disciples still do not get it. In Mark 10:35ff we read that James and John went to Jesus and asked to be number one and two in His kingdom, expressed there as sitting on His right and left side. Jesus simply told them they had no idea what they were asking for. Mark went on there to write that the other 10 were upset because James and John had asked for positions they hoped would be theirs. To show us how difficult this truth is to apply, Read Luke 22:24.

Jesus was telling His disciples and us to be radically different from societal standards. In Mark 8:35 we have another example of how Jesus turned everything upside down.

It wasn't long after that Jesus gave an example of being a servant to all when He took a towel and washed the feet of His disciples, Read what Jesus said in John 13:15-16.

Remember, there is a difference between doing our best and striving to be number one so others are expected to serve us or praise us instead of God. God wants us to do our best but to do so for the right reason. He wants us to do our very best and then give Him the glory.

Read Mark 9:36-37. It is easy in a culture that values babies to miss the point that Jesus was making. In the culture of His day children were nothing. In fact, the Aramaic word that Jesus probably used can be translated either as “child” or servant” which gives one an idea of how children were viewed then. Perhaps because the infant mortality rate was so high or perhaps because children have so many needs and seem to have little to offer to society, they were not considered important. No one in Jesus day who had Facebook posted daily pictures of their kids for all the world to see. The rabbis even believed it was a waste of their time to teach the Scriptures to a child under 12.

Children, technically, have little to offer to the world. We dream of what our children will become. (Side bar, do we dream of them becoming men and women of faith?) We dream of what they will become because realistically at this point in their lives they have no real accomplishments to brag about, no fame or developed ability nor are they a significant influence over anyone but grandpa. They are children.

But Jesus told His disciple and us, that the ones who are first with Him are those who see themselves as children just trying to be faithful. (Jesus will pick up on His discussion of children beginning in verse 41.)

Want to be first in Jesus’ kingdom? Find the least of those in our community who have no hope of every repaying a kindness and practically love them in Jesus name. Are they dirty and unkept? Figuratively pick them up and sit them on your lap and assure them that both you and Jesus love them. It’s God’s standard of greatness.

Jesus gave us a hard lesson to learn, especially in the American culture, so He will have a lot more to say about this in the lessons ahead. The challenge for us is to follow the example of Jesus who came not to be served but to serve. (Matthew 20:28)