

Greatness Gives

Mark 9:30-37

Halifax: 29 March 2020 AM

Introduction

We have taken a couple of weeks away from Mark that I might preach to you about the Coronavirus.

- I hope you remember the overall thrust of these two messages...
 - The first one was essentially that you need to keep God in perspective and make sure that you return to Him when He afflicts us.
 - The second message was about how to pray to Him in times of affliction, looking at Daniel 9 as a model of such prayer, showing us that we should be inspired to earnest prayer from God's gracious promises, that we should fully confess our sin and that of our people, and that we should cry in hope for mercy and restoration.

I hope that you have found this time of difficulty to be a true time of growth in your walk with God.

- I might have continued to preach special messages, but I decided that it might also be good to return to our regular sermon series in Mark. We need something regular.
- We are in chapter 9 now where we find Jesus on His way to Jerusalem, knowing that there He will crucified.
 - We saw a change in His ministry in chapter 8.
 - In 8:27-30, His disciples confessed that He was the Christ and from that time we saw how He began to withdraw from the crowds and spend time in more focused ministry with His disciples,
 - telling them of His coming rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection
 - as well as giving them lessons in how they should therefore live.

In our text today, Mark 9:30-37, we find all three of these features...

- deliberate avoidance of the crowds to be with His disciples...
- revelation to them (teaching) about His coming death and resurrection...
- and instruction to them about how they should therefore live.

Listen as I read this passage to you—Mark 9:30-37:

Mark 9:30-37: Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know *it*.³¹ For He taught His disciples and said to them, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.”³² But they did not understand this saying, and

were afraid to ask Him.³³ Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, “What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?”³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who *would be the greatest*.³⁵ And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “If anyone desires

to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”³⁶ Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them,³⁷ “Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and

whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.”

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading and to the exposition of His word.

I. Let us not pass by the marvellous things that are said about our Lord in the opening verses of our text.

- The heart of it is found in verse 31: **For He taught His disciples and said to them, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.”**

A. This is very familiar information for us.

1. This is the third time since Peter’s confession that Jesus has spoken of His death and resurrection.
 - This was unintelligible to the disciples, but for us it is something we know very well—that our Lord would be killed by men and would rise the third day.
2. But we must never glibly pass over such declarations.
 - Ours is to be much more than a mere knowledge of the facts surrounding our Lord’s death and resurrection.
 - We are to be His worshippers!
 - Yes indeed.
 - Let the knowledge of His death and resurrection sink into you by the Spirit of God.
 - Let the manifestation of His love be seen and let your love and adoration of Him grow and multiply each time you think of His passion.
 - Pity the soul for whom this has become old and uninteresting.

B. Behold the wonder of it—

1. Here is the Son of Man delivered into the hands of men...
 - of sinful men—to do whatever they want with Him...
 - with Him! their Maker...
 - with Him! their promised Redeemer...
 - with Him! their judge and the judge of all men to whom they must one day stand and give an account.
 - How could it be?—the Son of Man delivered into the hands of men.
 - In our version, it says: **The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men.**
 - The word “betrayed” is a bit of an over-translation.
 - It is the word that is used of Judas who betrayed Him, but the same word is often translated “delivered,” especially when it speaks of God the

Father delivering up His Son to be crucified, or as here, delivering Him into the hands of men.

- It is clear that this refers to the Father because it speaks of Him as already being delivered into the hands of men.
- Ultimately it was not Judas, but God who delivered the Son of Man into the hands of men.

➤ What a marvel that this should be done!

2. And an even greater marvel that He should be killed. Think of it!

- He who is the source of all life, the creator of all, killed by men.
 - He who is self-existing, eternal, unchangeable, now made flesh—His glorious person in human flesh—delivered to die.
- He Himself took the sentence that He had passed against us for our sin.
 - He took *our* shame and bore *our* guilt and *our* curse before the Father.
 - He who knew no sin, who could not sin, who would not sin, who despises sin, who is repulsed by sin in ways that we cannot fathom...
 - There He is bearing it—killed—experiencing eternal rejection.
- This One! The Son of Man who loves the Father and the Spirit—
 - under the curse, cut off, cast out...
 - He whose whole being is eternally close to them—He who is pleasing and united with them—cut off, despised, unclean, rejected.

➤ What a marvel it all is.

3. And even more so when we remember that it was for the likes of us...

- We who were so guilty before Him and His Father that when our guilt was transferred to Him, it put even Him, the eternal Son, to such grief.
 - That shows how undeserving we are.
- If we had been worthy, it would still be a marvel for anyone to take such measures for us—but how much more marvellous is it that He did this when we were such wretched sinners to Him and His Father.
 - So ungodly—yet in love it is all for us.

➤ What a marvel it all is—how it ought to move us to consider it—

- but the wonder of His death does not end here. No indeed.

4. How marvellous that though He died, He also rose again.

- He says it at the end of ver. 31: **And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.**
 - The marvel here is not just that He rises—that might be expected of Him as the Son of God—but it is that He rises as the One who died bearing our sins!
 - Even with the sin of the world upon Him, charged to Him, bearing the guilt of us all, He cannot remain in the grave.
 - He is life, He has life in Himself—our death cannot keep Him dead.
 - He arises having won life for us all—

- He cannot remain rejected even when our rejection is upon Him and that means acceptance for Him and for all of us by Him.
- All of God’s elect, known in the world by their trust in Him.
- In rising again, all those promises of God under Moses and the prophets to cleanse us, to save us, to redeem us, to pardon us, to wash us, to take us as His people and to accept us forever—
 - all of them are fulfilled in His rising again.
 - The whole church shares in the acceptance of Him who shared in our sin.

TRANS> Marvel of marvels, He was delivered into the hands of men to be killed by them that He might save them! Let it never tire us to hear the wonderful truth.

C. But how well do we really understand the marvel of it all?

1. The disciples, we are told, did not understand it at all:
 - **v. 32: But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.**
 - At this time, before He had actually gone to the cross, they could not understand that He would actually be delivered up to die, and rise again.
 - They thought it must be figurative—like it is for us!
 - Jesus says we all must “take up our cross,” but for us it is figurative.
 - But the main reason they could not understand it was because they had not been clear on what had been revealed to them all along at the temple...
 - that God Himself must cleanse them from their sin and that this must be done by the shedding of the blood, not of the lambs that they offered on the altar, but the blood of sacrifice that He would provide—that the LORD Himself would be the One who would save them.
 - They didn’t even want to hear about this—they were afraid to ask for more.
2. But alas, how well do we really understand the width and length and depth and height of all that Christ has done? How well?
 - We know the facts now and can tell the story better than they could... but do we really grasp the marvel of how the Son of God became flesh and gave Himself over to men to die and then rise again?
 - Do we know this so that it changes our whole perception about what is really important and beautiful?
 - That Him laying down His life for us becomes the very joy and delight of our soul to which we all aspire?
 - We understand it only to the extent that it transforms the way we live.

II. See how our gracious Saviour exposes how out of touch His disciples (all of us) really are with His work—with His mission.

- I say that it is *our gracious Saviour* who exposes us because it is good for us to be exposed—that we might grow.

A. He exposes them with a question—what were you disputing?

- Verse 33: **Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, “What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?”**

1. It is not just *that* they were disputing that was the problem.
 - It was *what* they were disputing.
 - Verse 34 tells us—they were disputing among themselves which of them would be the greatest.
 - This was a huge thing among the Jews. They would rank people as to who they thought would have the best places in heaven... first the priests, then the Levites, or some said the teachers would be ranked first...
 - But they had this ranking system and often sat in arrangements at meetings where the most important people had higher seats.
 - It is not likely that all of the disciples thought they would be at the top, but they were probably disputing as to whether it would be Peter, James, or John.
2. The problem, in any case, was that they were measuring the way men measure.
 - Who has the highest rank?
 - Who is the most to be respected?
 - Who is at the top and able to have his own way—to tell others to go and they must go, and to come and they must come? That is the greatest one in their minds.
3. The question from Jesus was enough to expose their wrong.
 - “What were you disputing?”
 - They were silent because they were ashamed.
 - They were ashamed about their ambition, and their way of measuring greatness by rank and position.
 - They knew, when Jesus asked them, that there was something wrong about this...
 - You know how it is if you are talking about something that has a lot to do with selfishness and pride—and someone comes along who is a very godly person—and you are exposed—kind of ashamed and embarrassed.
 - If they ask what you were talking about, you don’t really want to say.
 - Our words so often give us reason to be ashamed of ourselves—there is so much sin in us as soon as we start talking.

B. Let Jesus’ question expose you!

- “What were *you* talking about?”
 - To phrase it a little differently, “What kind of greatness are you looking for?”
1. Is your concern that others would think well of you?
 - a. Perhaps that you would be respected by them?
 - Are you worried about your image? whether they liked your selfie or not?
 - Or is it that you want them to think you are smart or fun to be with?
 - Or that you are such a nice person?
 - b. Maybe you just want to be loved, despite all your imperfections.
 - Or for people to accept you and to appreciate you for who you are.
 - Maybe you just want to matter—to be important to others.

- c. There may be other things you want.
 - That you would be comfortable? have a decent retirement?
 - That you would be free of stress?
 - That you'd be healthy?
 - Perhaps it is prosperity or success that you want—or just stability?
- 2. But there is something wrong with what you want—with the greatness you seek.
 - Do you sense that?
 - If Jesus were to come and to ask you what you are seeking, would you not be a little ashamed?
 - Surely it is not wrong in itself to want to be great in God's kingdom?
 - Jesus Himself talks about those that will be great in His kingdom and receive great rewards.
 - Our society is wrong in thinking that looking to be great is wrong in itself.
 - The problem is in how greatness is measured.
 - The kind of greatness you are yearning for is not quite right.

III. Jesus reveals what the right kind of greatness is—

- A. He tells us that greatness in His kingdom is not in being served but in serving.
 - **35 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”**
 - 1. Do you see the point?
 - It is not so much in being loved by others as it is in loving others...
 - Not in being the one that receives the most, but the one that gives the most.
 - Not to be most honoured, but the one who honours others.
 - Not in having everyone respect you and think you are important, but in respecting others and treating them as if they are important.
 - 2. Of course we do want other people to love and respect us.
 - That goes without saying.
 - Jesus wanted that too.
 - He loved the people around Him and wanted them to love Him too.
 - But unlike us, His primary concern in this fallen world where there was not a lot of love to be received was to minister to others.
 - He knew that greatness did not come from how others treated Him, but from how He treated them.
 - 3. His way to greatness was to lay down His life in service to those who were unable to benefit Him in any way or even to love Him.
 - He loved us and cared about us and gave His life for us.
 - He did that because we really do matter to Him.
- B. Our problem is that we really don't care much about other people.
 - When you really think about it, we mainly care about what they can do for us.
 - That's why people will play up to others—because I can further my own interests—not because I really care.

- Others matter because they do something for me—and if they don't, then I have little use for them. So sad, but so true.
1. Jesus is telling us that we become great when that changes—when other people start matter to us—when we start to look at how we can really be of service to them.
 - When we become last of all (as far as our own self-importance) and become servant to all (because we consider others to more important than ourselves).
 - The relationship becomes, “I am here for you,” instead of “you are here for me.” “My life for yours,” instead of “your life for mine.”
 - The question that concerns us is not, “what will you do for me,” but “what can I do for you.”
 - Again, **“If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”**
 - Jesus Himself is the one who abandons His own interests and lays down His life on the cross for others.
 - He is delivered over into the hands of men to be killed and to rise again on the third day.
 - That is the model of greatness in Jesus' kingdom.
 2. In the world, the great one is the one who rises to the highest rank so that everyone serves him, in but in Christ's kingdom it is the one who does the serving who is the greatest.
 - a. It is not the rich man who drives those who work for him and gives them meager wages who is great, however many billions he may have...
 - but it is his gardener, who only has a fifth grade education, but serves his master with honesty, diligence, and good will each day, whether he is thanked or recognised or not.
 - It is the girl in the kitchen that few people know about—not the chief cook, but the lowly girl who does the cleaning and the grunt work and who refuses to speak ill of her master—who looks for the extra that she can do instead of complaining about what she is asked to do.
 - b. It is not the famous preacher who bathes himself in the accolades of those who hear him and thanks no one who serves him,
 - nor is it his flatterers who hope to get his attention in hopes of improving their rank and their status,
 - but it is the ones among his hearers who give thanks because they truly feed their souls on the word of God that they hear.

TRANS> It is easy to be all wrong about greatness in the kingdom of Christ.

C. Jesus drives home His point with a powerful illustration.

- **Verse 36 & 37: Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.”**

1. Here the child is not presented to them as a model to imitate.

- That is done elsewhere, where Jesus tells us to receive His kingdom like a little child.
 - But here the child is presented as a model of the ones that we serve and highly esteem—treat as important—when we are those who become **the last of all and the servant of all**.
 - Notice that it is a little child—small enough that he takes the child up in His arms—perhaps one of the children of His disciples.
 - He is saying,
 - “Here is one that you serve if you want to be great in my kingdom.”
 - “Here is one you consider to be important.”
 - “Here is someone that matters to you—if you are great.”
2. This opens up another possibility.
- That rich man with the kitchen girl and the gardener with the fifth grade education...
 - What if he is a rich man who truly loves those who work for him and who honestly seeks to do them good—a rich man like Boaz in the book of Ruth who blesses his servants, and blesses the poor?
 - Suppose he treats that gardener well and that kitchen girl with true courtesy and love, if he pays them well and speaks words of encouragement to them when he sees them.
 - And suppose that they have a hostile attitude toward him, because he is rich, and are lazy and steal from him.
 - He prays for them but they curse him.
 - Then it is not they, but he who is the great one in the kingdom of Christ!
 - To him, they matter, but to them, he doesn’t matter.
 - You see that it can work both ways.
 - This is an important point in our society where we often envy those who have a lot and have the wealth and position that the world admires.
 - Jesus is not saying that they are bad simply for being great in the way the world counts greatness.
 - He is saying that greatness is not measured that way in His kingdom—it is measured by whether or not everyone else matters to you and whether or not you truly serve them—whether you are the servant of all.
 - You can be rich and powerful and godly like Job...
 - Or you can be rich and powerful and wicked like Jezebel...
 - You can be poor and lowly and godly like the widow with the two mites...
 - or you can be poor and lowly and wicked like the harlot who tried to steal her friend’s baby when her own baby died—and who would have been content to have the living baby sawn in two.

3. Our Lord Jesus tells us that He receives us when we love the lowly ones in His kingdom—the ones like the little child He has taken up in His arms.
 - Verse 37: **“Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.”**
 - a. He gave His life to save them just as much as He gave His life to save Peter, James, and John.
 - How great is His love for these little ones!
 - b. Can anyone claim that they love Jesus when they do not regard all who belong to Him with the highest regard?
 - Surely they cannot claim to love Him.
 - Can they expect Him to receive them when they have no regard for those that He loves and refuse to serve and care for those He laid down His life to save?
 - Of course they cannot.
 - Such an attitude shows that they do not have the grace that saves in their hearts.
 - If you don’t love those that Christ’s redeems, you are yet a stranger to His saving grace—you simply don’t believe in our glorious Saviour who died to redeem unworthy sinners.
 - Your mind has not been changed in the way that it will be changed if you are born again.
 - c. When you turn to Jesus to save you from your sin, then you will know Him and you will receive these little children in His name.
 - You will love His love and you will want to love the way He loves.
 - He says that by receiving them, you will receive Him—
 - He is inseparably attached to them.
 - If you reject them, you reject Him, if you receive them in His name, you receive Him also.
 - He also says that by receiving Him, you receive His Father in heaven who sent Him to save these little ones.
 - You reject God the Father and God the Son if you reject His people and treat them as if they don’t matter.
 - How He loves His people!
 - How they matter to Him.
 - How He serves them all from the least to the greatest of them.
 - Do you?

Conclusion: Jesus’ disciples will understand greatness after Jesus shows them what greatness is by actually dying on the cross.

- Telling them did not do it for them.
- It was when they looked upon the Lord Jesus as crucified for them and for those He came to save that they became the servants of all.
- So for each one of us.