

## True Greatness Mark 9:30-37

A pastor and a bus driver both went to heaven at the same time. So St. Peter shows the bus driver his home, which is three houses away from where God is. Then St. Peter turns towards the pastor and beckons him to follow. The pastor followed him for three miles when they finally come to a house. St. Peter tells the pastor that that will be his home. The pastor was so horrified that he said, "I don't understand! Why is the bus driver's house closer to God? I have preached most of my life. That doesn't make sense! St. Peter replied, "Oh, that's easy to explain. When you preach, people sleep, but when the bus driver drives, people pray."

Well, who is greater than the other? That seemed to be the same question that the disciples were arguing about on the way to Capernaum. In v. 33, Jesus said <sup>33</sup>"What were you arguing about on the road?" <sup>34</sup>But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

Here they were talking about who was the greatest while just a few verses back, Jesus was talking about his death in v.31. But instead of talking about the things that were to come, they were more concerned about their status. Who has done more? Who is the greatest among us? So that's why when Jesus asked them what they were talking about... "they kept quiet." Why? Because they knew they weren't supposed to be talking about it. But Jesus knew exactly what they were arguing about, and so he told them about the principle of true greatness. So what is true greatness? The first principle Jesus tells them is this...

### 1. Be the Very Last

In verse 35, Jesus said, *"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last..."*

The truth is, we are always inclined to pick the best spot isn't it When we park our cars at the grocery store, our instincts tell us that we should take the closest spot? There's nothing wrong with that... that's just how we are wired to do things. But why do we tend to act that way?

Because when you get the best spot it means you get the best benefit. That means less walking—that means more convenience on your part. Another good example is when we line up to get food during potluck. When you are first in line, you get to pick from a lot of choices—the more choices you have the more benefits you get. But the farther you get in that line the lesser your choices become. And when you are on the very last of the line, you just have to make do with what is left—that is, if there is still anything left. You're just left with little choice anymore.

The instinct to seek the best spot extends to everything we do in life. Be it at work, be it with the way we conduct business and relate with other people. The best spot offers the best opportunities and therefore that equates to greatness. But what is "greatness," anyway? It's a very elusive and deceptive word. Why? Because when you think you already achieved it, you realized that your not so great after all—that other areas in your life are not doing great. I'm sure we know famous people who are great in the one thing they do, but often score poorly on other important matters.

In the pursuit of "greatness," we often wind up sacrificing not only time with family but also end up caring less for other people. Because all we care about is achieving that greatness that we feel will make us feel better about ourselves. The pursuit for greatness is like a drug that can consume us, and worse even affect the people around us. I think it is the path that has led us to great the financial meltdown of 2008. If you'll summarize what brought us all in this situation—it's simply called greed—greed of not just one person or entity but a collective greed that has spiraled out of control.

Jesus is actually telling us that that's not real greatness. You want to feel great and be great? Well, learn how to pause... be humble to let others go first. Stop joining the race to the first spot. You take the path less traveled. You take the spot less taken. Why? Because when we're in Christ, the best spot is not the first spot, the best spot is the last spot. When you're in Christ, you are not insecure. You're self-worth is not dependent on the things you accumulate or your achievements or how much money you have. Your security is in Christ.

So how do you take the last spot? He explains this further through this second principle. While you intentionally make way for other people, we also need to...

## **2. Be A Servant of all**

So looking back at v.35, Jesus also said "*If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.*"

So what does it mean to be a servant? Well the answer to this is be like a waiter. A waiter doesn't eat until everyone is served. While everyone is eating, the waiter is the only person who doesn't eat. He waits. To be a servant means to be selfless. You don't think too much about yourself, but you think about others. It's not about what you need or like but its what others need. When we become servants it means its no longer about us. It's no longer about satisfying our needs or our wants. It's now about what benefit others.

Rick Warren said that the mark of spiritual maturity occurs when a believer "takes off the bib and puts on an apron." Immature people wear bibs and expect others to serve them and satisfy their wants. But those who wear aprons serve others. So the question we should ask ourselves is this, "which attire do I love wearing? Am I wearing a bib or am I wearing an apron?"

But there is a twist to being a servant—Jesus added the word "all." "Be a servant of all." All means all. All is not some. A servant is not supposed to be selective. Sometimes there are those who see themselves as "servants" but in reality they only serve those who they can benefit from. To be the very last—you need to be the servant of all—rich or poor, young and old, man and woman, black or white—we are called to serve all.

But Jesus, didn't end there. He also gave them a third principle. To be truly great, we need to...

## **3. Welcome a child**

Jesus seems to tell his disciples. “Okay you still don’t get it do you?” So what did he do? Well, in verse 36-37, Mark says: <sup>36</sup>*He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them,* <sup>37</sup>*“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”*

Here, we find Jesus actually lifting up the person who welcomes the child. He is literally saying, “be somebody who welcomes a child.” In other translations the word “welcome” is replaced by the word “embrace.” To embrace someone is to value, to affirm or to comfort someone. To embrace someone is to love someone. It is a positive gesture. A child in Jesus’ day was considered as belonging to the lowest levels of society. Why? Because they are viewed as contributing nothing. They are weak—they can’t take care of themselves. A child is going to depend on you, instead of you depending on them.

So what does it mean to welcome a child then? It means to serve somebody without asking for anything in return. Why? children cannot pay you back. When you welcome a child, it means you’re giving away without expecting anything back in return. Welcoming a child is the most selfless act we can ever do. A child takes a lot of commitment. That’s why parents who take care of their kids are to be commended. Moreso, I also admire those who adopts kids and welcomes them in their home. Children do require lots of work and attention. You provide for them—they won’t provide for you.

Of course, Jesus is not talking about adoption here. I think he’s using the child as a test case. If you can’t welcome a child, how much more can you welcome other people who can’t help themselves? Children are cute, harmless...they’re fun and interesting to be with—but if you can’t even love them, how much more those who are considered undesirables in our society. Do you want to be a servant all? Then welcome a child. Do we want to be great as a church—then let us be a kid-loving church. Because it is in welcoming a child lies the key to true greatness.

But it doesn’t end there, Jesus also said <sup>37</sup>*“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me...”*

Church, here’s the key. To welcome a child is to welcome Christ. So if you want to be great we need to welcome Christ in our lives. Because Jesus is the perfect example of true greatness. According Paul in Philippians 2:7-11. Jesus...

*...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! <sup>9</sup>Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...*

Church, God exalted Jesus to the highest place because he became a servant and humbled himself. Well, the question before us right now is this...do you want to be great? Then let us be like Christ. Let us be willing to be the very last, to be a servant of all, and to welcome a child. Let us pray...

Dear Lord Jesus, there are a lot of reasons why we want to put ourselves first. There are a lot of reasons why we want to be at the head and not the last. There a lot reasons why greatness is all about how we define it to be. Help us to redefine greatness in our lives, and that it may be based on how you define it.

That true greatness means to be the very last, that true greatness means to be a servant of all and that true greatness means to welcome child. Lord, we need you to change our hearts. We need you to teach us everyday the path to true greatness-the path to humility and servanthood. We welcome you in our hearts today. Inhabit our hearts and make us more like you. Amen.