**Uniquely Jesus** January 29, 2017

Mark 9:33-50

Jesus had grown up in Nazareth, but Matthew tells us that after John the Baptist was arrested and put in prison, 4:13, *“…[Jesus] went and lived in Capernaum…”*

The passage we’re going to study this morning, Mark 9:33-50, records one conversation which took place between Jesus and his disciples, either in his home, or in Peter’s home, who by the way, also lived in Capernaum.

THE QUESTION

**v.33:** *They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them,*

*“What were you arguing about on the road?”*

Probably the disciples had hoped Jesus hadn’t heard them.

But his question, made it clear that he had.

And because they’d repeatedly observed Jesus’ Spirit-given ability to see into the hearts and minds of people, they knew, trying to put a spin on their argument wouldn’t work.

THE EMBARRASSED SILENCE

**v.34:** *But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.*

I imagine they all avoided eye contact with Jesus, looking at different places in the room, hoping somebody else would answer. But no one did.

**Coffee/Question:**

How do people today typically measure greatness?

Feedback:

accomplishments

fame

wealth

power

influence

affirmation of others

What did you think the disciples were using as a measuring stick?

Before we can answer that, we need to ask, **“why,”** they were arguing about

**“who”** among them was the greatest?

The context of Mark 9 helps to answer that question.

9:2-13 – the transfiguration of Jesus.

Peter, James and John saw and heard things the 9 didn’t.

Did this stir up pride in them?

9:14 – the 9 who hadn’t gone with Jesus had argued with the teachers of the law,

more than likely over their inability to help a demon possessed boy.

In Mark 6, the 12 had been sent out by Jesus on a ministry road trip.

When they’d returned, they were excited because with the authority Jesus had given them, they’d preached and healed and driven out demons.

But here in Mark 9, they’d failed.

Did this cause them to feel embarrassed; frustrated?

9:30-32 – as they journeyed from Caesarea Philippi to Capernaum, Jesus again had taught them things they couldn’t understand.

What kind of things?

That he would *“…be betrayed into the hands of men.”*

“Betrayal” meant someone in relationship with Jesus, someone close to him, would turn on him.

The disciples didn’t ask questions about Jesus’ betrayal, not because they couldn’t, or that they didn’t have questions, but because *“they were afraid;”* they didn’t want to hear the answer.

Haven’t we all done this at some point?

Someone brings up a topic we don’t want to discuss or hear about, and we respond, “Let’s not talk about that!”

Can you better appreciate, that with all these varying emotions - elation, frustration, pride, bewilderment, enthusiasm, disappointment... that it wouldn’t have taken much to set off an argument.

Did it start with Peter, James and John?

When asked, what had happened up on the mountain, did they give a knowing smile to each other and then say, “Sorry we can’t tell you. Jesus said it was just for us to know?” (implying we’re more important than the rest of you)

Or did it start because of the 9’s failure to help free the boy of the demon?

Did someone blame someone else for their botched efforts?

You also need to know this wasn’t the only time the Twelve argued about which one of them was the greatest.

At their last Passover supper with Jesus, while they were eating, Luke tells us, (22:24), *“a dispute rose among them as to which of them was considered to be the greatest.”*

The real issue behind the argument about “who was the greatest” had everything to do with ***“who would be first.”***

THE RE-ORIENTATION

**v.35:** *Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”*

Is the desire to be great wrong?

When God created us, he placed within humans a desire to achieve; to accomplish; to do great things.

Every person wants their life to matter.

But the desire to be great has been corrupted by the infection of sin within the human heart.

We were created to be God-focused, but have become self-focused.

Our default now is to do what is best for us; even at the expense of others.

But Jesus teaches his followers that the measure of greatness in the kingdom of God is different than in the kingdoms of man.

What Jesus proposed to his disciples, “*If anyone wants to be first, they must be the very last, and the servant of all,”* in the words of John Hicks, required Jesus’ followers to undergo **“a radical reorientation.”**

johnmarkhicks.com/2012/03/05/mark-933-50-wanna-be-great-don’t-scandalize-my-little-ones/

It would appear that in the many months they’d been with Jesus, the 12 had come to view themselves as being the “firsts” in the kingdom of God.

But now it seemed that this was not enough.

Each of them wanted to be “the first” among the firsts.

In their minds, the first, the greatest one, would wield the most authority and power; would be closest to Jesus.

Can you imagine their bewilderment; yet alone their disappointment – when Jesus told them that “the firsts” in his kingdom were “the lasts” and that “the greatest” was “the servant” of all?

THE ILLUSTRATION

**v.36:** *He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them…*

We aren’t told whose child was in the house.

But Jesus had this little child stand among them, waiting until every eye was on the child; then he took the child in his arms, and continued to speak to them.

**v.37:** *“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.”*

William Barclay writes:

*A child has no influence at all. A child cannot advance [one’s] career, nor enhance [one’s] prestige. A child cannot give us things; it’s the other way around.*

*A child needs things. A child must have things done for them. And so, Jesus is saying, “[Whoever] welcomes the poor, ordinary people, the people who have no influence, and no wealth, and no power, the people who need things done for them, then [this person is] welcoming me. And more than that, [they’re] welcoming God.”*

raystedman.org/new-testament/mark/the-child-in-our-midst

**Jesus wanted the disciples to be ambitious… for the right things.**

He wanted them to be ambitious to welcome people in his name, like he’d welcomed the child. What was Jesus’ point?

When a follower of his, welcome others in his name, they will discover that the presence of God has drawn near to them.

And it is then, they’ll realize experientially, that when they have God, they have what is most important; for it is God who satisfies our soul.



When you have God, you won’t need to clamber over others, or put others down, in order to make yourself feel significant.



**True greatness, which validates your worth as a person, is determined and measured by, whose you are!!!!**

As incredible as this teaching is; we need to appreciate that it was an incredibly uncomfortable experience for the 12 to hear what Jesus said to them.

He uncovered stuff within them, that was out of sync with how life works in the kingdom of God.

Is this why John tried to change the subject??

THE DEFLECTION

**v.38:** *“Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”*

In essence John asked Jesus – isn’t there a time when you have to exclude?

You can’t always welcome!

How did Jesus respond?

What Jesus said kept the teaching session on track.

THE CORRECTION

**v.39-41:** *“Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me,****40****for whoever is not against us is for us.****41****Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.*

What was the point being made by Jesus?

Anyone who would come to Jesus is welcome.

Anyone who acts in Jesus’ name is with Jesus.

THE WARNING

**v.42:** *“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea.”*

v.37 – Jesus spoke of *“…one of these little children.”*

v.42 – Jesus spoke of *“…one of these little ones.”*

The ‘little one’ in v.42 was the man who was driving out demons in Jesus’ name.

Like the little child in Jesus’ arms, this man was a “little one” in the faith.

John and the others had told this man to stop.

In doing so, they had potentially “scandalized” him (caused him to sin), when they should have welcomed and encouraged him.

This practice of exclusion was not an issue that Jesus could gloss over or ignore.

It was one the disciples had to get right.

If they didn’t understand what life in the kingdom was about, (who was welcome) ….how could they go into all the world?

KEEP FIRST THINGS FIRST

**v.43-49:** *If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.****[44****]* ***45****And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.****[46]******47****And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell,****48****where “‘the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ (Isaiah 66:24)* ***49*** *Everyone will be salted with fire.*

Hyperbole is a figurative language technique that uses [exaggeration](http://www.yourdictionary.com/exaggeration) to make a point. <http://www.ereadingworksheets.com/figurative-language/figurative-language-examples/hyperbole-examples/>

For example:

 I am so hungry I could eat a horse.

 I have a million things to do.

 she’s as old as the hills.

By using the technique of hyperbole, Jesus emphatically emphasized to the 12 that “being gripped by an all-consuming passion for God,” and living as he said to live, by “being a servant of all,” was of the utmost importance.

In fact, it was so important, Jesus said, that if anything got in their way; if anything distracted them, any sin, no matter how small it might seem, they should decisively and radically deal with that distraction.

Why did Jesus ask for such an intensity of commitment?

Because the default trajectory of everyone’s life will take them to Gehenna.

If we are to enter life, that will require us to change –our minds; our priorities; our focus; our allegiance.

*Gehenna was the name of a valley at the south-west corner of the old city of Jerusalem. It was the place where some of the kings of Israel had offered their children to the god Molech, to be burned with fire. It [eventually] became the garbage dump of Jerusalem. Fires smoldered there continuously, as repulsive and ugly worms ate the garbage.* raystedman.org/new-testament/mark/the-child-in-our-midst

By the time of Jesus, Gehenna had become a metaphor for the fate, after death, of those who reject God and his way.

What was the point being made by Jesus?

**A life lived without God; a life turned in on itself, will end up in an eternal garbage dump.**

THE CHALLENGE

**v.50** *- “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?*

*Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”*

When they first came into the house at Capernaum, Jesus could have simply said to the Twelve: *be at peace with each other.*

But he wanted them to know why being at peace was so important.

He wanted them to know what was important to him and his Father.

He wanted to teach them to live by the values of heaven and this would require them to think and to live in ways that not only felt, but were upside down and inside out to normal life.

We are a community of servant leaders.

**Discussion Questions: Mark 9:33-50**

1. What does the disciples’ argument tell you about their understanding of who Jesus was and why he had come?

2. Put in your own words what it means to be great in Jesus’ eyes.

3. What issue concerned the disciples in verse 38? What did they do about it?

What sort of issues confront us? How do we voice and deal with them?

4. State the key principle of verses 39-41.

Share examples of what it would look like in action today.

5. What does the Bible say about causing others to stumble - Matthew 18:6, 10, 14; Romans 14:13; 15:1; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 1 Timothy 2:9-10; 2 Timothy 2:15.

How do you see our church putting these truths into practice?

6. Interact with verses 43-48. What did Jesus mean? How do we follow this teaching?

Dallas Willard writes: *If a person could avoid sinning by simply eliminating the body parts that make sinful actions possible, most of us would roll into heaven a mutilated stump...But if cutting off body parts could help a person achieve acceptance with God, one would be wise to cut them off... But even if you dismembered your body to the point where you could never murder or even look hatefully at another, never commit adultery or even look to lust, your heart could still be full of anger, contempt, and obsessive desire for what is wrong, no matter how thoroughly stifled or suppressed it may be. For “from within, out of the heart, the thoughts of evil proceed...”*

The Divine Conspiracy, p.167-168.

7. How did Jesus describe hell?

8. What is the meaning of verse 49-50?

N.T. Wright says*, “Salt purifies...[The disciples] are called, as Jesus’ people, to be the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13), but, as with the rest of the nation, they must beware of losing their particular flavor and so becoming worthless. If they are to be followers of the prince of peace they must learn to live at peace within themselves.” Mark for Everyone, p.128.*