

The Greatest in the Kingdom

Mark 9:30-37

The Britannica website defines *social class*, as a group of people within a society who possess the same socioeconomic status.

The term “*class*” began to be used widely in the early 19th century, replacing such terms as rank and order, as descriptions of the major group ranking in society.

The term “*class*” reflected changes in western societies after the industrial and political revolutions of the 18th century; however, places like India, have had class systems for much longer.

For over 3,000 years, the *caste* system divides Hindus into four main categories, based on their religious belief of who they were in a past life, their karma, and what family line they come from.

Many of us have come to expect the use of a *caste* system in India; but followers of Christ, have all too often fallen into this kind of bigotry as well.

Please open your Bibles to *Mark 9*, as we return to that verse by verse study of that Gospel.

A few weeks ago, in *Mark*, Jesus showed His Deity and Glory to three of His Apostles, on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Then two weeks ago, we studied decisive prayer, where Jesus healed the demon possessed boy as He taught the Disciples the importance of maintaining their spiritual walks.

Today, Jesus is going to have to settle an argument among the Disciples about who the greatest is, in Jesus' kingdom.

I. A prediction about Jesus' death and Resurrection.

Read *Mark 9:30-32*

Some people believe this account is eight days after the time the identity of Jesus and the mission of Jesus were made plain on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Then we learned how all were astonished when Jesus set a boy free from a lifetime under the destructive power of a demon.

Here, Jesus and His Disciples have left Caesarea Philippi and were back in Galilee. Most commentators believe this narrative is approximately six months before the cross.

Jesus was speaking with His Disciples alone and again He warns them of His upcoming death.

John Stott said, "*What dominated His mind was not the living, but the giving of His life.*" (John Stott)

There were several times that Jesus spoke about His death and Resurrection; but, the Disciples either didn't really believe Jesus, or else they quickly forgot when He spoke of these things.

On the day of His Resurrection when the women ran to the tomb, we are told in...

Luke 24:6 He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee,

Luke 24:7 saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'"

Luke 24:8 And they remembered His words. NKJV

This was the third time Jesus told the Disciples He would be killed and rise again; but, this was the first time He mentions being **betrayed**.

Matthew 17:23 says they were *exceedingly sorrowful*.

We don't know if the Disciples were sad because Jesus spoke of His death or if they were sad because He revealed He would be *betrayed*.

They had to be wondering who was going to Betray Jesus.

Again, *Mark 9:32* tells us, "*They did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him*". *NKJV*

During the Last Supper, Jesus said, *Matthew 26:20*, "*When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve.*"

Matthew 26:21 Now as they were eating, He said, "*Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.*"

Matthew 26:22 And they were exceedingly **sorrowful**, and each of them began to say to Him, "*Lord, is it I?*" *NKJV*

The dictionary defines *betrayal*, "*to deliver or expose to an enemy by treachery or disloyalty: to be unfaithful in guarding, maintaining, or fulfilling:*

...to betray a trust; to disappoint the hopes or expectations of; be disloyal to”

Again, **Matthew 17** tells us they were *exceedingly sorrowful*, about this statement from Jesus.

Imagine how devastating this was for these followers who had left their entire life, to follow this Rabbi.

The Disciples had left everything they believed in, left their families, their livelihood, and their belief system. Here they are hearing that someone in the group would betray their leader.

Dr. John Amodeo, wrote an article on betrayal and said, *“Betrayal is one of the most painful human experiences.*

Discovering that someone we trusted has deeply hurt us pulls the reality rug from under us. When we see the word “betrayal” we may immediately think “affair.”

But betrayal comes in many forms. Abandonment, vicious gossip, and spreading lies also may be experienced as betrayal.

A damaging aspect of betrayal is that our sense of reality is undermined. What felt like solid trust, suddenly crumbles.

Our innocence is shattered. We’re left wondering: What happened? How could this happen? Who is this person?

Some betrayals leave us with little choice but to heal and move on with our lives, such as when we’re suddenly abandoned.

Jesus knew He would be *betrayed* by the very people He loved and created and yet on the cross,

He said in *Luke 23:34* "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.*" *NKJV*

II. Infighting over position and title.

Read *Mark 9:33-35*

Maybe the Disciples were discussing position within the kingdom because Jesus only took three of them onto the Mount of Transfiguration.

When they were coming off of the Mountain, Jesus told Peter, James, and John not to tell anyone what happened until after He was raised from the dead.

Maybe the other nine Disciples were saying, "*So what happened up there?*", and Peter, James, and John would not discuss it.

Jesus finished telling them about His upcoming Death and Resurrection and how He would be betrayed; yet His Disciples were disputing over who would be the **greatest** in His Kingdom.

Luke 9:46 *Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. (NKJV)* **I think the answer is Jesus!!!**

After Jesus took Peter, James and John up the Mountain, the other nine Disciples were arguing with the religious Scribes.

Then a man had brought his only child, his son to the Disciples, to get the demon cast out of the boy;

But they were spiritually weak and distracted so they could not heal the boy.

Jesus and the three come down off the Mountain; He healed the boy, and taught the Disciples the importance of spiritual walks.

Here we find out that while they were traveling from Galilee to Capernaum, the Disciples continued to dispute over greatness and Jesus asks them about it.

Instead of the Disciples being humbled by Jesus' announcement about His Death, Resurrection and *betrayal*; the Disciples are concerned with personal position and greatness.

Jesus has shifted His focus from public ministry to these Disciples, since they will become the men **defining** the Kingdom, once Jesus goes back to heaven.

Soon these men will be commissioned to go and preach the Gospel and Jesus has been trying to teach them the entire time that the path to Glory is the cross.

Even in light of the fact, Jesus was going to take the cross for our sin; these Disciples keep fighting and arguing over position.

These men are consumed with the idea of a kingdom of power, instead of being a servant within the Kingdom of Heaven.

Later, the mother of James and John came to Jesus just before His arrest, to ask if her two sons could be at the right and left of Jesus in His kingdom; which are the highest political positions.

Pride and striving for worldly greatness is of the flesh and evil.

Re-read *Mark 9:35*

Jesus took up the position of a Rabbi teaching His pupils; Jesus is the King, and here He is teaching Kingdom Values 101.

I love how Jesus teaches by example, when He said, ***“If anyone wants to be first, he must be last and servant of all”***

With that statement, Jesus was describing Himself.

When we get to *Mark 10*, we will hear Jesus say...***Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” NKJV***

You may remember the story of how Jesus washed the Disciples feet on the same night He was betrayed.

John 13:12 He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you?”

John 13:13 You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.

John 13:14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

John 13:15 For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. NKJV

If the King of the Kingdom humbled Himself to serve; how much more should His subjects of the Kingdom, serve others as well?

If the King was willing to get His hands dirty; how can we think we are above getting our hands dirty?

Jesus' Kingdom is unlike the kingdoms of this world because His Kingdom reveals His heart and care for His creation.

True greatness in the Kingdom of God is found in following the model of our servant King.

As Kingdom citizens we should embrace the position of being last and placing others in positions above ourselves.

We realize the only reason we are in the Kingdom of God is because our King came to serve and give Himself as a **ransom** for us from the power and penalty of sin.

Arguing over who is going to be the greatest in the Kingdom of Jesus actually prevents us from seeing the glory of the cross of our King.

If you want to know who the greatest in the Kingdom is; it is Jesus Himself; the argument is settled.

William Barclay said, *"It was not that Jesus abolished ambition. For the ambition to rule He substituted the ambition to serve.*

*"For the ambition to have things done for us He substituted the ambition to do things for **others**."* (William Barclay)

III. Receive the children.

Read ***Mark 9:36-37***

As these men were hoping to receive an answer from Jesus about which one of them would be the leader in the kingdom; Jesus gives them a different answer through an illustration.

Richard Cimino said, *“To expose their selfish ambition and to illustrate what true greatness looks like in His Kingdom, He used a child as an example.”*

Why a child? Even their Talmud said that it was a waste of time for men to spend time with children.

Jesus picked up this child and set him in the midst of them.

Matthew’s Gospel tells us that Jesus then made a proclamation for anyone who wants to enter the Kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them,

Matthew 18:3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. NKJV

Jesus says, *“In order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, you must be **converted** and become as little children.”*

The word **converted** means *“To turn one's self from one's course of conduct, i.e. to change one's mind.”*

So Jesus says this is not an option, you must be *converted* in order to enter the Kingdom.

Another time Jesus placed a condition on entrance to heaven

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him (Nicodemus), "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." NKJV

The only way you can truly be **converted** is by the power of the Holy Spirit working in your life, and that takes place when you are born again of the Spirit of God.

Once the Spirit of God is living within you, He will change the course of your behavior and this is how we go from a self-governed person; to a God-governed person.

1 Peter 2:25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Now let's talk about the idea of becoming as *little children*.

Many people have struggled with the meaning of these verses and what exactly Jesus was trying to say.

*Was Jesus saying that adults had to **behave** as children?*

J. Vernon McGee has said, "*The Lord is not talking about going back to a former childhood, but rather going on to a **new life***"

Genuine conversion within a person produces a child-like faith. The world's seeks power by intimidation and self exaltation; but Child-like faith, trusts the Lord without reservation.

A person who has gone through a genuine conversion will gain attributes of a child; which are: humility, honesty, and sincerity; all of these attributes are produced through a new **nature**.

Taking care of children was a low place in their culture was actually the job of a servant.

And to receive a child in that day meant to care for them, feed them, and educate them.

Children are easy to serve, especially when they are really little.

Little children don't care whether you are sleeping or have a headache or if you are sick.

They know they want to eat, they know if they scream loud enough and long enough; they'll get what they want.

Serving children didn't make a person great or advance someone's status in their culture; in fact, it was seen as a liability.

Here these Disciples were worried about power, position and exaltation of self...

John Walvoord said, *“Jesus, in effect, was saying that they were asking the wrong question. They should have been asking, How can I best serve the King.”*

True greatness in the Kingdom only happens through true humility; and through this narrative we see humility is needed for unity as well.

These Disciples have been together for 2 ½ years and some jealousy and rivalry has begun.

Peter was able to walk on the water with Jesus;

Jesus only took Peter, James, and John up on the Mountain to see His glory; and here we see this argument over who is the greatest in the Kingdom.

James 3:16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. NKJV

The King of the Kingdom, Jesus, is our best example of humility
Jesus didn't enter the world like a boastful world ruler; He came in humility as a baby and as a servant who came to die.

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus

Philippians 2:6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

Philippians 2:7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

Philippians 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. NKJV

In the flesh, we are all rebels who want to be celebrities instead of servants; but Jesus said, we must be as “*Little Children*”.

IV. Practical Application.

Jesus made it clear, the way people act toward the lowly of the world, reveals whether they are actually related to Him.

Our fallen world tells us we should build our greatness by associating with those who are great.

Jesus said a truly great person is someone willing to identify with the lowly, because this is what the King Himself does.

This teaching from Jesus exposes our pride and our desire to be seen as the greatest.

Jesus exposed the Disciples ambition and communicated that their attitude was the very thing that made it impossible for them to understand the cross.

Many of us have come to expect the use of a *caste* system in India; but followers of Christ have all too often fallen into this kind of **bigotry** as well.

If we only seek to get near to those who are “great” by man’s standards; we are not living like our King, nor are we becoming the Kingdom citizens He has called us to be.

Jesus exposed the Disciples’ ambition and called His Disciples to receive Him and the Father, by receiving humble children.

Again, *Matthew 18:2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them,*

Matthew 18:3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. NKJV

Let's end discussing what Child like faith involves.

Molly Howard has said, "Having faith like a child means we should have confidence in the promises of Christ and faith even in situations where we cannot see."

Jesus says whoever is humble like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. This requires putting aside our own will.

We also have to admit that we do not always know what is best, so we have to humble ourselves, which is unnatural for people.

Children trust what their parents, teachers or other adults say without doubts or fear. For example, when a young child is shown a magic trick, their eyes light up with wonder.

So let's list some attributes of a little child...

- Little Children are **humble**.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. NKJV

- Little Children are **forgiving**.

Colossians 3:13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. NKJV

- Little children are aware of their **need** for help from someone bigger than themselves.
- Little children are trusting, **teachable**, honest, and don't try to change things they can't control.

Spirit led Followers come to Jesus in child like faith.

Spirit led Followers humble ourselves.

Spirit led Followers are willing to forgive others.

Spirit led Followers are teachable.

Spirit lead Followers want to know more about Jesus.

Spirit led Followers set good examples for children who are watching us.

Mark 9:35 "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." NKJV

When we live for the purpose the Lord created us for as we serve Him in His kingdom...

We enjoy the Abundant Life He promised His followers.