



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

Mark 9:30-37 Who is the greatest? (22 August)

Jesus has just come down from the mountain where his transfiguration took place, and he has healed a boy whom his disciples had failed to heal – perhaps leaving the disciples feeling far less certain and self-assured (v.32). Now he spends some time teaching his disciples as they travel together, again insisting on his coming suffering, death and vindication. Although this is the second time he has told them about this (and there will be a third), his ‘blind’ and ‘deaf’ disciples (8:17-18), still fail to grasp what he is trying to explain to them. Jesus says that it is God’s intention to use the murderous hostility of the Jewish leaders and unbelieving Gentiles to accomplish his redemptive purposes. They are afraid to ask him to explain it – perhaps because they suspect that his answer will be something disturbing that they would rather not hear.

Not for the first time, the disciples show their fallibility: they seem to have completely missed the point of so much that Jesus has been saying and have been arguing about which of them is the greatest. Jesus has been talking about his self-sacrifice; they have been thinking about status – perhaps about who will have leadership positions as the Jesus movement continues.

Jesus reminds them that, in the kingdom of God, the world’s values are turned upside-down – the first will be last. He makes it clear that true greatness involves humble service, and of course he is a great example as the suffering servant. He illustrates what he is saying by taking in his arms a little child – at the bottom of that society’s pecking order – someone who needs you to do things for them, has nothing that they can do for you, and has no power or status. Life as a disciple should be about self-denial, humility and service, not about seeking after gain or greatness or status. The believer should welcome even – especially – the least, the most humble, in the world’s eyes.

1. In what ways are Jesus’ ideas about greatness and personal worth different from the world’s?
2. The disciples had a blind spot in their understanding of what it mean to follow Jesus. What blind spot or area of spiritual immaturity do you need to work on?
3. We can see the pride of the disciples in v.33-34. What remedy does Jesus provide? How does that challenge you?

4. Is it possible to be humble towards God without being humble towards other people?
5. Can you give examples of humble service you have received?
6. How do you think servanthood might be worked out in your own life and relationship with people?
7. What can we learn about ourselves from the disciples' failure? And what can we do, practically, to ensure that we listen to Jesus?
8. In what circumstances do you find it most difficult to live up to Jesus' teaching about humility?
9. Read the parable of the sheep and the goats in Mat 25:31-46. What parallels can you see with Jesus' teaching in Mark 9:35-37?
10. When Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he showed great humility and servant-heartedness.
What might be the equivalent today of such service?
Can you give other examples of occasions when Jesus lived out the values he speaks about here?



The greatest? - What do we mean?

