

## 26- Being the Greatest Mark 9:33-37

**Mark 9:33-41** *And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? 34 But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. 35 And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. 36 And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, 37 Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.*

We have a lot of competitions to see who is the greatest. The super bowl crowns the greatest football team for the year. The craziness of March Madness produces a national champion, the greatest, college basketball team. The World Series, from little league, college and the major leagues produce a champion, the greatest. Men ride until their bodies are exhausted in the tour de France to see who is the greatest cyclists. We have men and women of the year, dove awards, Emmy awards, and others such things to honor the greatest.

Love him or hate him Mohammad Ali was indeed one of the greatest fighters to ever step in to a ring. I will admit that I never was a great fan of Ali. One reason was that he was what I considered a blow hard and to make matters worse he went out and backed it up in the ring. He could constantly say, "I am the greatest," which stuck in my craw.

I guess the reason it set wrong with me was because I did not want any completion. What do I mean by that? In the flesh a lot of us human struggle with thinking we are the greatest and do not like anyone to claim it and put us in second place. I initially entitled the sections of scripture, along with some of Mark 10, *Guard Against Trying to Be the Greatest* in my initial outline of Mark. May we look at the Word of God here and learn how to be the greatest.

### I- The Question:

The disciples and Jesus move south from Caesarea Philippi to back to Capernaum. There is a discussion on the way that gives rise to the next teaching that Jesus will do. I want us to remember that Jesus was trying to get them to understand that His was not a kingdom on this earth but a spiritual kingdom that was coming in the hearts of men.

**Mark 9:33** *And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?*

Jesus certainly heard them talking on the journey. He already knew what they were discussing, as evidenced by the fact that they did not tell Him and He still knew. Why did He asks the question? May I suggest it was so that they would look at themselves deeper and not only on the surface?

### II- The Shame:

**Mark 9:34** *But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.*

Have you ever been busted; caught red handed? No, I am not talking about it necessarily being evident to everyone else but caught in the heart. Caught guilty as sin on the inside, regardless of how we look outside. These disciples were caught, busted in their souls. Jesus asked them what they were talking about and they did not comment, the shame. *Layman's Bible Book Commentary* says, "Their silence was noisy with embarrassment." (p 80)

*Wycliffe Bible Commentary* says, "...they persisted in their silence. They were ashamed to reveal the unworthy subject of their discussion. He had tried to explain his coming death, but their minds were occupied with thoughts of personal greatness in the Messianic kingdom." (p152)

Many times we are convicted of attitude and actions that are internal. The world never sees them, never sees the thoughts and motives behind our actions. The outward appearance looks right but our heart knows. Look at **1 John**

**Mark 10:45** For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

**3:20-21** For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. **21** Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

The reason men reject the Word of God is for the same reason. Their hearts condemn them so they suppress it from their minds and attempt to cover it over. **Romans 3:19** Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

**Hebrews 4:12** For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

A living example of this is presented here by the silence. They could not justify their bickering and profiling for position among themselves so they stood in silence before Christ. This reminds me of what the word says about the coming judgment. **Philippians 2:10-11** That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; **11** And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

One thing that makes a Christian great may I say is that we develop the ability to correctly know our own heart. We need to be honest with ourselves about our motives many times. At times we may not need to change our actions but the motive behind them.

### III- The Example:

**Mark 9:35** And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them... Barclay says, "Jesus dealt with this very seriously. It says that he sat down and called the Twelve to him. When a Rabbi was teaching as a Rabbi, as a master teaches his scholars and disciples, when he was really making a pronouncement, he sat to teach. Jesus deliberately took up the position of a Rabbi teaching his pupils before he spoke."

Knowing, the hearts of the disciples, their desired to be great, along with the question that had opened their hearts like a parachute ready to be filled with the wind of His teaching, Jesus sat to teach. He seized the moment.

**Mark 9:35b** ...If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. This ran counter to their thinking of being a ruler and having a high place of prominence by position and rank. Servant of all, what did He mean. The word servant is the Greek word *diakonos* from which get the word deacon from.

Again Barclay says, "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."

Notice it says servant of all. *The People's New Testament* says, "The two conditions of true greatness are humility and service; not to be the servant of friends, or kindred, or of a class, or even of church members, but of all, like Christ."

The example that Jesus used to drive home His point was a child. Someone who can do nothing for us but only has needs, someone who is not in position to elevate someone in position. **Mark 9: 36** And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, **37** Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.

Jesus acting out the example of a child before them taught the lesson deeply into the heart. What a contrast, wanting to rule and be great and then being told that they would be great by the way they treated others and all.

Does this mean that we should not be ambitious and surrender fatalistically to whatever befall us? I think not. Jesus was not necessarily condemning them for wanting to be great. He was simply teaching them how. How to be great is to serve others and all for by serving them we serve Him and point them toward the Messiah and not toward us. Oh, to hear the words at the end of life found on the lips of Jesus in **Matthew 25:21** His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

So let's go challenge each other to be the greatest by serving as we all "Learn to Serve."