

This morning we are going to explore the idea of greatness.... and usually when we think about greatness we think about ability and/or rank. We may think of Lincoln as a great U.S. president or Tolstoy as a great author. We may think of Mozart as a great composer or Monet as a great painter. Apple became the first Trillion dollar company. And since I was in the Air Force for 4 months I'll throw in that the F-22 fighter jet at my base is called an "Air Dominance Fighter" [it's the best].

And then don't we think of greatness when it comes to sports?

People pay to see the best golfers & tennis players, the best baseball, soccer & football players.. and we have debates about who is the GOAT [the Greatest of all time]. Like Michael Jordan in basketball.... Or Walter Payton in football.

So we can appreciate greatness in others and even strive for it in our own pursuits. And short of this being an idol, I think that God is ok with such pursuits, because He is the one who endows us w/ talents and the potential for excellence [being created in His image].

But that said, in today's passage Jesus deals specifically with the question of **greatness in the kingdom of God**. Greatness in the eyes of God, not just greatness in skill or vocation or rank. Greatness in following Jesus as Lord & King.

So let's begin this morning by thinking about the greatness of Christ for a few moments – there's an hinge in the Gospel of Mark that is triggered by Peter's confession of Jesus in ch. 8. *Prior to that Peter had seen Jesus cast out demons. He had seen Him heal the sick, raise the dead, calm the storm, walk on water,*

*multiply food to feed the multitudes, and teach with authority all along the way.*

**Jesus was surely great in power & authority & character!**

So when Jesus asks his disciples, “**who do you say I am?**” in **Mk. 8**, Peter responds, “*you are the Christ*” – I believe you are the anointed one, the king, the messiah come to save your people.

But as you’ll recall, Jesus then teaches them in **[8:31]** **the Son of Man is going to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after 3 days rise again.**

Well, Peter doesn’t have a category in his mind for a suffering Christ, a dying Son of Man [who projected rule & power].... and so he pulls Jesus aside and rebukes him (and then Jesus in turn rebukes him).

And so begins a series of passages where Mark proclaims Jesus’ future suffering, what that means for discipleship, but also some brutal honesty about the disciples’ dullness/....and that brings us right into today’s passage that starts in **Mark 9, v. 30** [read vv. 30-31]

**v. 31**

This is the second formulaic statement of Jesus’ future suffering [and His resurrection on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day]... we find one in ch. 8, ch. 9 and ch. 10. I’ve already referenced the first one in ch. 8 right after Peter’s confession.

This one in ch. 9 has many of the same elements....

Son of Man, Suffering, being killed, and rising after 3 days.

There’s another passage in between that supports these great themes as well. It’s when Jesus comes off *the Mount of Transfiguration* with Peter, James and John – **look at vv. 9-13** [read]

Elijah here refers to John the Baptist coming before Jesus and himself suffering, but once again we see that Jesus [the Son of God & Son of Man] is going to suffer, die and then be raised.

So all of these passages have a lot in common. However, the 2<sup>nd</sup> announcement to his disciples in 9:31 reveals a new truth...

The first announcement in ch. 8 focused on Jesus' rejection, this 2<sup>nd</sup> announcement focuses on Him being delivered into the hands of men to be killed.

The first person who comes to mind is probably Judas Iscariot. He is going to betray Jesus and deliver Him over to the Jewish authorities. They in turn deliver Him over to Pontius Pilate. Surely that is part of this statement.

But it's not as though this delivering of Christ was surprising to God or beyond His knowledge. It's not as though God said to Himself, "*Wow, I never saw that one coming*" We know from the OT He saw it and even planned for it to come true.

Let me read from the introduction to John Piper's little book entitled, **50 Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die**

**The most important question of the twenty-first century is: Why did Jesus Christ come and die? To see this importance we must look beyond human causes. The ultimate answer to the question, **Who killed Jesus?** is: God did. It is a staggering thought. Jesus was his Son! But the whole message of the Bible leads to this conclusion.**

**The Hebrew prophet Isaiah, centuries before Christ, said, "It was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief" (Isaiah 53:10). The Christian New Testament says, "[God] did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32).**

And so the crushing & giving up & delivering of the great Son of God was something that God ordained/orchestrated!

**Why?** Is. 53:6 Because we all like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all

**Why?** To pay for our sins **Why?** to deliver us from judgment/hell

**Why?** to bring us good news **Why?** Because He loves us

*Do you believe that? And have you received the loving sacrifice of Jesus Christ into your life for the forgiveness of your sins?*

I hope you have because it required the One who stilled the waters & healed the sick & raised the dead & was gloriously transfigured on the mountain to suffer & die & rise on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. **The most important 3 days in the history of mankind...** Are those days written on your heart? Have you been captured & cleansed & transformed by the love of God thru Jesus Christ?

But with blunt honesty, **Mark 9:32** says that the disciples **did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask...** And here we see **the Dullness of the Disciples** in those days before the cross & resurrection.

In spite of what Jesus said, they were thinking.....

How could someone of Jesus' rank and power be reduced to suffering and death? With all the miracles he has done – how can He not come into Jerusalem and ascend the throne as the mighty messianic king? Surely he is going to sweep in and save the Jews from their Roman oppressors.

But they did not understand God's plan – God's plan was not a political coup in Jerusalem. God's plan was to save people's souls from every nation thru the sacrificial death & resurrection  
of His Son

But they did not understand at this point....

And it's so ironic that following Jesus' troubling prediction and humble acceptance of suffering & death - **what are they arguing about? Who is the greatest? [look at vv. 33 & 34] Read**

Talk about dull disciples! I wrote in my notes – ‘the not so great disciples’ They didn't realize who they were, who Jesus really was.... and what He had come to do.

I remember being at the New England Patriot's training camp in my 20's. My dad was coaching and so I got onto the field for practice. Well, after practice I walked off the field and a kid came up to me and asked me for my autograph. I said, “*I'm not a player my dad is a coach.*” He said, “*but you're wearing the practice shorts.*” And I was, but I said, “they have #23 on them, I'm not Rod McSwain” [And I'm thinking to myself – this kid was not the sharpest knife in the drawer]. But he wouldn't let it go, so out there somewhere in this world is a guy with my autograph. He thought he was getting the autograph of a professional football player, but he got mine instead. A case of mistaken identity.

In the case of the disciples, they were dull when it came to recognizing who Jesus was and what He had come to do.

They didn't realize that Jesus was the mighty Son of God **and** the Suffering Servant prophesied in Is. 53.

They were dull. So glad we're not like them **Aren't you?....** 😊

But the truth of the matter is that we can glean much from the disciples' dullness. One commentator writes, “If we have difficulty imagining the hardheadedness of the Twelve, let us ask how many of us truly understand, believe and follow Jesus?”

**How well do you understand Jesus when it comes to His words?**

Do you know them? Do you obey them?

**How well do you understand the mission of Christ?**

Some of us barely give it a thought. Go and make disciples!  
No, I'd rather be comfortable and focus on me. That's dull discipleship  
How well do you grasp the Lordship of Christ when He calls  
you to be holy & distinctive in this world? But if you walk &  
talk & think & drink & socialize & spend & pursue entertain-  
ment w/out a Lord Jesus filter....Is that distinctive or dull discipleship?  
I have areas of dullness. How about you? That's one of the ways  
today's passage challenges us...don't be dull disciples of Christ.

Wake up!

And specifically when it comes to God's definition of greatness.  
The disciples struggled with pride & rank & status, which were  
part of the fabric of Judaism in those days. Who got to sit where  
in the temple? or in the synagogue? or at the table? or in Paradise?

But Jesus blows that out of the water in v. 35 [Slide]

Sounds similar to Jesus' words back in ch. 8, v. 34 [read]

Dying to self//Following Christ in sacrificial service. That's the  
heart of discipleship. Plato said this, "How can a man be happy  
when he has to serve someone?"

That was the Greek attitude, but not Jesus' attitude. Humbly  
serving others is a premium in God's Kingdom. Want to be great  
in God's sight? Be a great servant! Be last of all and servant of  
all, regardless of rank.

■ During my tour of duty I got to work with an Army Chaplain  
who was a colonel. And I noticed that whenever we had a meal  
he always sat down and ate last. Everyone in the room was a  
lower rank, but he would make sure everyone else was taken  
care of first – that's servant leadership.

**I think of the movie White Christmas when Bing Crosby & Danny Kaye were talking about General Waverly – we ate and then he ate, we slept and then he slept. He was a servant to all. And that’s what Jesus teaches...**

I also love the example of service is **John the Baptist** – he came to prepare the way for Christ and this is what he said about Jesus, “*He must increase, I must decrease.*”

Jesus said that up to that point in time there was no one greater than John the Baptist. **Why?** because he was a humble servant

Greatness in the kingdom of God is being last, serving all – it’s wonderfully upside down from the world’s standard.

And Jesus drives this home with an illustration **–look at vv. 36 & 37**

So Jesus takes a child, who was without rank or status in ancient culture, and he says “whoever cares for or serves or welcomes a child [not necessarily your own] welcomes me.... receives me.”

-I think of a woman named Pearle on the Southside of Chicago who cares for the kids of single moms so that they can work and go to school

-I think of the Dewings who work on the Indian reservation in WI.

-I think of Michelle Lathrop who has worked with girls caught up in human trafficking.

Those who serve marginalized people are great in God’s kingdom And we are too when we serve all [as in all kinds of people in all kinds of ways]. I’m encouraged when I see that at our church...

**Empty nesters who come and help us w/ the kids in AWANA.**

**Those who care for babies in the nursery & teach SS.**

**Those who use their musical talents in the church. Those who do fix-it jobs.**

**Those who write cards and care for the elderly. Garage sale**

**Those who serve their spouse in the midst of illness.**

**Dads who disciple their kids. Kids who serve w/out being asked.**

Notice these people and be inspired by their example.

But most of all be inspired by Jesus who washed His disciples' feet. And follow Him as you think about Him being your suffering servant, who died for you and rose again. The Son, The King who stooped low and suffered a humble death for you. Beloved, no service is too menial; no person too insignificant.

I leave you with this amazing **chain reaction** in **v. 37** – **read** When you serve someone, you serve Christ and also God the Father. So let's cause some chain reactions this week. **Why?** Because we're following Jesus Christ as disciples, as servants!

**Benediction:** W+2..... Mark 10:45