

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 23RD–24TH, 2025 // GOSPEL OF MARK

A PREDICTION (MARK 9:30–32)

The Jewish understanding of the Messiah involved conquest and dominion.

- Many of Jesus' disciples probably followed Him with the expectation that they'd soon arrive in Jerusalem and there would be thrones awaiting them as Jesus overthrew the Romans.
- But God's version of "power" within His Kingdom looks a lot different than that of the kingdoms of this world.

BETRAYED AND KILLED (V. 31A)

As they quietly make their way through Galilee, Jesus once again teaches His disciples about the work of redemption He had come to do.

- Yes, He is the Messiah, and His Kingdom will reign forever and ever, BUT...
- ...what awaits them in Jerusalem is not thrones but crosses. Not only that, but Jesus will be betrayed, not exalted.

As horrendous as His betrayal, suffering, and death would be, God would intervene and raise Him to life three days later.

- Jesus' exaltation and vindication would not happen immediately through force; they would come through the path of suffering and sacrifice.
- This was an entirely different paradigm that they did not understand and, unfortunately, were too afraid to ask Jesus about (v. 32).

We can still find ourselves longing for a version of God's Kingdom that does not involve suffering and sacrifice and mirrors the power structures of the world around us.

- We imagine that if God's people just "win" in the arenas of politics, culture, or public opinion, then His Kingdom automatically advances.
- But Jesus points us to something far more subversive, enduring, and powerful.

Jesus' Kingdom is built not on coercion, conquest, and dominion through force, but on self-giving, sacrificial love through the cross.

- Whenever we confuse worldly power with Kingdom power, we risk missing Jesus entirely, just as His disciples did on the way to Jerusalem.
- Someday His Kingdom will fill the earth and every knee will bow, but until then, we follow Jesus in the path of humility, sacrifice, and the cross.

THE GREATEST? (MARK 9:33–37)

Although Jesus had just revealed to the disciples His plan would involve suffering, rejection, and sacrifice, old mindsets die hard!

- On the way back to their home base in Capernaum, these young men spent their time arguing with each other about which one of them was the "greatest" (v. 34).
- They were still obsessing over measuring greatness by the world's standards.

COMPARISON, COMPETITION, AND RANK

The power structures of the world's kingdoms measure greatness by whoever is on top and in control.

- To be "great" and to be "first," you have to climb ladders, promote yourself, take things by force, and make things happen by any means necessary to get power, control, and influence.
- But God's Kingdom looks different.

"IF ANYONE WANTS TO BE FIRST, HE MUST BE LAST AND SERVANT OF ALL" (V. 35).

Greatness in the Kingdom is not about climbing ladders and securing thrones but stooping down low and washing feet.

- It is not about grabbing power and influence for ourselves but giving ourselves away in service to others. This, according to Jesus, is what makes someone truly great.

Children in the 1st Century had absolutely no worldly status to speak of and no rights. They were considered weak, dependent, and insignificant.

- They had no power, no worldly skills, nor could contribute anything of value in terms of making money, building empires, or conquering nations.
- Yet, Jesus set a little child in the middle of His disciples to say something quite profound.

To welcome a "little child" is to welcome, receive, value, and embrace those who are seen as nobodies, nothing, and insignificant by our world.

- When we show dignity, love, mercy, respect, and goodness to "the least of these" in Jesus' name, we welcome Jesus Himself and God the Father who sent Him (v. 37).

- This is true greatness in God's Kingdom!

ON THE SAME TEAM (MARK 9:38–41)

Amidst all this teaching about humility, service, status, and greatness, John tells Jesus about a man who was driving out demons in Jesus' name, but who was not a part of the 12 (v. 38).

- John told this man to stop driving out demons, even though the 12 had not exactly been all that successful in doing so themselves!
- What's going on here? It was the self-righteous pride of sectarianism and spiritual elitism.

John seemed to have this mindset that only those belonging to their little group ("following us") could legitimately serve Jesus.

- The leaven of spiritual elitism and exclusivism is unfortunately alive and well in the Church today: we restrict the totality of Christ's work to our own circle, ministry, denomination, or method. We all want to feel special and elite.

Jesus commands His disciples not to stop the man. Anyone who performed a miracle in Jesus' name could not turn around and speak evil of Him (v. 39).

- Legitimate ministry is determined by allegiance to Christ, not by affiliation with a certain tribe.
- The person casting out demons is acting in Jesus' name, which shows faith and dependence on Christ's authority (not a certain group's).

The Kingdom of God is a whole lot bigger than our little bubble of personal, ethnic, national, or tribal/denominational networks.

- In His teachings, Jesus draws a distinction between false teachers (those truly opposed to Him) and other servants who may differ from a certain group in association or practice but are genuinely working for His Kingdom in His name (vs. 40–41).

Jesus is not advocating for unity that ignores truth or moral compromise.

- What He is saying is this: genuine followers of Jesus are on the same team!
- There may be some who are wrong or misled in some aspect of their presentation or teaching, but if they set forth the biblical Jesus in some manner, let God deal with them. If they are not against us, they are for us (Phil. 1:18).

WARNINGS (MARK 9:42–50) "LITTLE ONES"

Jesus has been talking about humility, unity, sacrifice, and true greatness for His disciples and now He returns to speaking about the "little ones who believe in me."

- Who is that? Those still young in the faith and "little" in their trust and understanding of Christ—immature, vulnerable, or weaker Christians, or those seeking the Kingdom of God.

DO NOT CAUSE OTHERS TO FALL AWAY (V. 42)

To cause one of these "little ones" to stumble and fall away from Christ because of our lack of unity, humility, holiness, and love, is a terrible, awful thing in the eyes of Jesus.

- As terrible a death as drowning is, that is better than the punishment that awaits those who cause the little ones to stumble. Some of us think nothing of how our actions affect the little ones.
- Some Christians think absolutely nothing about how squabbles, arguments, and divisions amongst and against other Christians confuse and hurt the "little ones."
- Some moms and dads think nothing about how their sins and bad habits, their marital/domestic strife, and their own spiritual hypocrisy are impacting the "little ones" in their own homes.

REMOVE WHAT CAUSES STUMBLING (VS. 43–48)

Jesus' language about cutting off hands and plucking out eyes is intentionally hyperbolic and over the top.

- Living for the Kingdom involves the painful sacrifice of cutting things out of our lives to keep ourselves from sin and falling away from Christ.
- Is it painful, inconvenient, and embarrassing to take certain precautions against sin? Yes.
- What's more painful? Accountability, correction, and repentance, or a divorce, a DUI, an overdose, and losing absolutely everything?
- What's worse? The often painful life of sacrifice involved as a disciple of Jesus, or the unquenchable fire of eternal Hell?
- To belong to Jesus is to expect the fire of sacrifice and suffering—not the easy life (v. 49).

SALTED WITH FIRE (V. 49)

In Leviticus 2:13, every grain offering was to be seasoned with salt as a sign of purity and devotion to God.

- Fire is also consistently used as a picture of testing, refining, and purification (Mal. 3:2).
- Every true disciple of Jesus will be "salted with fire": we will be purified by God through trial, sacrifice, and suffering.

LIVE A PURIFIED, PRESERVING LIFE THAT PROMOTES UNITY AND PEACE (V. 50)

In the ancient world, salt was necessary for preservation and purification.

- For "salt [to] lose its flavor" is for a follower of Jesus to stop looking, thinking, and acting like Jesus and be just like the world.
- When we follow the world's pursuit of self-interest, power, and status, we stop being "salty."
- "Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with one another"—do not get twisted back into the worldly patterns of rivalry, self-promotion, and pride.
- True greatness is found in a life of costly discipleship that embraces sacrifice, humility, service, and peace with other Believers.

POWER THROUGH HUMILITY AND SERVICE

- The gospel's power to save came about because Jesus humbled Himself in sacrificial service and went to the cross on our behalf.
- We are saved when we trust in Christ's sacrificial death for us. Following Him means embracing His life as a model for our own.
- We must let go of status and pride and follow Jesus' version of true greatness and power!

LITTLE ONES TO HIM BELONG

- To even enter the Kingdom, we have to come to God as children, not as those convinced of our own importance or status (Mt. 18:3).
- To live out the values of the Kingdom, we have to welcome, love, and view others as infinitely valuable in the sight of God.
- When we are convinced we are better than other people, it is hard to welcome and love them.

CUTTING OFF HANDS AND EYES

- Jesus dealt decisively with sin because He paid for it on the cross with His own blood.
- The cross frees us to live differently, with power over sin and its curse of death.
- Removing sinful habits, practices, and attitudes can be quite painful, but it is better than surrendering over to the hellacious and destructive consequences of sin!

STAYING SALTY

- An exceptionally religious Christian with "perfect" theology can lose their saltiness and be just like the world if they fall into the worldly patterns of pride, self-promotion, disunity, and self-interest.
- Jesus' work on our behalf saves our souls, and His Spirit in us empowers us to live as He lived—embracing sacrifice, holiness, humility, service, and peace with others.
- "In what areas of my life am I still chasing after status, recognition, or control instead of serving like Jesus, trusting God, and being humble?"*
- "How can I receive God's grace today with childlike trust rather than relying on my own strength? How can I extend His grace?"*
- "What sins or habits do I need to cut off?"*