



MARK 9:30-50

GREATNESS REDEFINED
JANUARY 24, 2021 | PASTOR KYLE BELDEN



GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER (USE JUST ONE OR ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS TO CONNECT AS YOU START YOUR CONVERSATION)

- 1 **When you were growing up, what issues did you most frequently argue about with your siblings?**
- 2 **Who do you argue with today in ways that sometimes remind you of the arguments of your childhood?**

Money, fame, power—these are the things the world considers essential for greatness. Even some of Jesus’ disciples argued over who should be first in God’s Kingdom. Jesus continued to reveal Himself and the extent of His love to the disciples, but they still didn’t understand what Jesus was teaching and argued about who would be greatest in Jesus’ coming Kingdom. Jesus set the record straight by telling them that those who want to understand what greatness is must learn to be like a child. Let’s dig into that idea together.

QUICK REVIEW (OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE TO SHARE WHAT MOST STOOD OUT FROM SUNDAY’S MESSAGE)

Looking back at your notes from this week’s message, was there anything you heard that caught your attention, encouraged, challenged, or confused you?

DIG DEEPER (OBSERVATIONS FROM THE SCRIPTURE OR COMPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURES FROM SUNDAY’S MESSAGE)

- 1 Someone read **Mark 9:30-37** in their Bible.

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And He did not want anyone to know, ³¹ for He was teaching His disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And when He is killed, after three days He will rise.” ³² But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask Him. Who Is the Greatest? ³³ And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵ And He sat down and called the twelve. And He said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” ³⁶ And He took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him Who sent Me.”

Is there a person with whom you feel you must always compare and compete? What does our tendency to compare ourselves and compete with others reveal about our hearts?

Why do you think the disciples are arguing over who will be first? What brings about such a competitive spirit between people?

What is the lesson that Jesus wants to convey to the disciples about power, control, and leadership?

What point was Jesus making by having a child be an example of greatness in this context?

Vs. 30-37 reveal that the faith of the disciples still had a long way to go. Though He was clear in His teaching about the cross and His resurrection, the disciples were clueless and even fearful. And as vs. 30-37 reveal, they were also quite prideful, arguing with one another about who would be the greatest among them in the earthly kingdom they (wrongly) expected Jesus to establish. Even at this point they lacked faith in Who Jesus really was and what He was really about. Had the power of God been more

and more evident in their life, they would have more dependent upon God and possessed a more humble posture towards others. Our faith and our prayers are a conduit for the power of God in our lives, and God's power is evident in us as we obey Him and humble ourselves before Him.

2 Someone read **Mark 9:38-50** in their Bible.

³⁸ John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." ³⁹ But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in My name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. ⁴⁰ For the one who is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward. ⁴² "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into Hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Hell, ⁴⁸ 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' ⁴⁹ For everyone will be salted with fire. ^[i] ⁵⁰ Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

The unnamed exorcist is an example of one of His followers who is to be welcomed. The attempt by the disciples to stop the unauthorized exorcism is an abuse of their authority, made all the more ironic by their own failure to cast out the demon from the epileptic boy (9:17–18). In effect, they made Jesus' point for Him. Anyone who serves people in the name of Jesus is to be seen as an ally, even if he is not part of our community.

What was the point that Jesus was making about misleading children? How does this teaching relate to the issue of power and control in the previous paragraph?

Which part of this passage brings the greatest challenge for you at this point in your life: resenting someone just because he or she doesn't do things the way you think they should (v. 38), condemning those who mislead the young and innocent (v. 42), a willingness to remove habits that draw you into sin (vs. 43–48), or being at peace with one another (v. 50)? Explain.

When Jesus used the salt analogy (v. 50), what warning was He giving the disciples? What is the practical truth in this passage for anyone who has influence over others?

Salt does not normally lose its taste, but salt from the Dead Sea was mixed with impurities and over time could acquire a stale taste. If Jesus' followers lose their salt (probably meaning their sense of servanthood - v. 35), it was not easily restored. However, when His followers have such a sense of service, peace is the outcome. Had the disciples grasped this concept of servanthood instead of opting for power and greatness, they would not have been arguing on the road (9:33).

LIVE IT OUT (DISCUSS HOW YOU CAN LIVE OUT THE TRUTHS YOU JUST OBSERVED IN SCRIPTURE)

1 *Think about your kids when they were little or maybe a nephew/niece or other kids you are close to. How do you see greatness, as defined by Jesus, in them? What can we learn from kids about how Jesus wants us to live in relationship to Him and others?*

2 **What are some practical ways to deal with the temptation to compare and/or compete?**

3 *Jesus draws our attention to a child who has no power, no authority, who is kind of a mess as children are, but says that this is what greatness looks like in His kingdom. He says we must resist the urge to view it through our own lens. How have you viewed what greatness looks like in a way that is inconsistent with what Jesus says in this passage? How could viewing greatness differently (as redefined by Jesus in this passage) change your words, decisions and actions toward others moving forward?*

CLOSING PRAYER

Close your time in prayer with your group.

NEXT WEEK:

Read **MARK 10:1-31** before Sunday and your next home group gathering. Remember to take good notes so you are ready to add to the discussion your home group will have!

PRAISE/PRAYER REQUESTS (TRY TO HAVE ONE OR A FEW PEOPLE PRAY FOR ONE TOPIC AT A TIME)

Use this space or the back of this paper to write the requests and find a way to share those with the group so you can be praying for each other during the week.

TIPS ON GROUP PRAYER

Prayer is an important part of being in a Home Group. Here are some tips to help make group prayer be a life-giving aspect of your group.

PRAY FOR ONE TOPIC AT A TIME: Anyone in the group is free to introduce a prayer request or praise during the prayer time. Once a topic is introduced, the group focuses on that request alone. Once it's covered, the group moves on to the next request or praise.

PRAY MORE THAN ONCE: If your group is focusing on one topic at a time, each person is encouraged to pray several times during the prayer time for those topics they feel most led to pray about. No one should be required to pray.

KEEP PRAYERS SHORT AND SIMPLE: Group prayer goes better when members keep their prayers short and to the point. When someone prays for a long time, it's hard for the other members to stay focused and long prayers tend to intimidate those who are just learning to pray out loud in a group. No one should be required to pray out loud.

How to Use this Discussion Guide

This guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create a healthy environment for Gospel community, growing in friendship, and becoming like Jesus together. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, please review the guide before your group meets to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel the need to read all the content during your group discussion or ask all the questions. The guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help your group grow in Gospel community. In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead. We are praying for you too!

Visit cpmodesto.org/groupleaders to download the sermon discussion guide every week. Not in a Home Group, but want to be in one? Visit cpmodesto.org/homegroups and use the Home Group Finder!

COMMENTARY

MARK 9:30-50

9:30–32. In Hebrew literature, an inclusio is a literary device in which two teachings or refrains serve as brackets or bookends to a central teaching or story. We saw in vs. 9–10 that Jesus talked about His death and resurrection and that the disciples did not understand His teaching. Then there was this miracle, a reminder of God's power over demonic powers, a reminder of previous miracles, evidence that God can raise someone from the dead, that there is life after death. The inclusio is finished in verse 31, where Jesus again predicted His death and the disciples did not understand. This device catches the reader. It says, "pay attention." It is the literary equivalent of "he who has ears to hear, let him hear."

9:33–35. These verses show how little the disciples understood Jesus and His mission. He has just predicted His violent death at the hands of the authorities, but the disciples argued over who would be the greatest in His Kingdom. They were still thinking in terms of their conquering Messiah and the kingdom He would usher in. Some interpreters believe vs. 33–50 are various teachings of Jesus, not necessarily in chronological order. Most of the teachings are repeated in Matthew and Luke in different orders. This may be a case of the Gospel writer arranging material to make his point. In this case, the point is, "Where is humanity to find greatness"? Three disciples had seen Christ's greatness revealed. Then His glory had been further manifested by a miracle that nine of the disciples could not perform. The circumstances would lead naturally to concern about who would be the greatest. When Jesus asked the disciples what they had been arguing about among themselves, they remained silent, and the tense indicates that they remained silent for some time. Jesus' probing questions have a way of putting things in proper perspective. Jesus did not focus on their arguing about who was the greatest.

He spoke frankly, telling them if they wanted to be first, they must be last. The theme of servanthood echoes throughout Mark's Gospel and reaches its greatest expression in chapter 10. Jesus stated again that human values are not necessarily Kingdom values. In human institutions, we may fight for status. We may be concerned about being in the right crowd or being seen by powerful people. The old adage, "It's not what you know; it's who you know," has no place in the Kingdom of God in the way the world means it. In another sense, it is only who you know that can gain you entrance into God's Kingdom. But the image of a humble man or woman falling on his or her knees before God in repentance and asking for pardon and grace is a much different image than that of the businessperson cuddling up next to the person on a higher rung of the ladder.

9:36–37. To illustrate His principle, Jesus placed a child in the midst of them. "Taking him in His arms (Gr. enagkalisamenos) means "to hold in the crook of the arm." It is a picture of reliance, affection, repose. Was it shocking to the disciples to have this child in the midst of them, sitting on the Lord's lap while He taught? It may have been. Children were not viewed favorably in ancient Israel. They were considered among the lowest element in society. Children, even today, have no power. Instead they are needy. The disciples had been talking about which one was the greatest. After all, they had seen miraculous things, they had been with the Lord, they had performed great deeds. What would this association, this notoriety, give them? We have seen how Jesus treated the sick and outcast; we have seen how He treated women. Now we see His treatment of children. The Lord's brother James would later write in his epistle that we should not show favoritism in our treatment of people (Jas. 2). Jesus' words here established the principle. Jesus said that the greatest in the Kingdom will be the person who serves. With the child, Jesus pointed out that the ones who serve will serve even the least in the Kingdom.

9:38–40. John still wanted to draw lines—to determine clearly who's in and who's out. The child may be in, but this man must surely be out because he was not one of them. In many ancient societies, if exorcists wanted to cast a demon out of someone, they would cast it out in the name of someone stronger. Jesus was making the point that because this man was using His name, he might be a friend and should be treated as such.

Jesus referred again to service and suggested that an alliance, a bond, is forged when someone serves the Christian because of Christ. We see precious little of that today. Christians are openly persecuted in many parts of the world and subtly persecuted in others. And yet Christians themselves do not practice this form of tolerance. So often we do not treat other people and other denominations as though they belong to Christ.

9:41. In the dry climate of the Middle East, "a cup of water" was a great act of hospitality and kindness. Jesus pointed to service again as He told His disciples that humble acts of service when done because of Christ will be rewarded.

9:42. This verse is a corollary of the one preceding, stated in the negative. If someone does even a small act of kindness, it is noted and rewarded. Likewise, if anyone puts even a tiny stone in the path of a disciple, thereby causing her or him to sin, it will bring judgment. It is unclear to whom "one of these little ones" refers. It could refer to the children Jesus had mentioned earlier, or it could refer to humble believers. Jesus was probably referring to the humble, the weak, the outcast.

Our actions and our words carry significant weight. How many of us have caused someone weaker in faith to doubt or to trust in works rather than in Christ? Some organized religions today insist on law as the means of attaining Heaven. And yet, Jesus called this a heavy yoke. Jesus turned the tables and insisted that it would be better for these people to be drowned in the sea by a large stone used to grind grain than to cause even one person to doubt or to sin.

9:43–48. Some early church fathers took verses such as these literally and maimed themselves in order to attain Heaven. But this verse is a literary device known as hyperbole, which uses exaggeration to make a point. Jesus was saying that the judgment He had just spoken of was so serious that it would be better to sacrifice yourself than to sin. Do not cause others to sin and do what you have to do to keep from sinning yourself. Sin is so serious that it calls for drastic measures to remove it from our lives. Is it the hand, foot, or eye that causes one to sin? If you were to cut off your hand, would this remove sin from your life? No. Sin is in our very nature. Only Christ's atoning blood can remove it and change our nature. We must never forget the high price His sacrifice demanded. The word life in vs. 43 and 45 are parallel with the "Kingdom of God" in v. 47. It is not merely human life that Jesus was speaking about here. He was referring instead to eternal life, the life we are granted because of our trust in him.

9:49–50. These verses are difficult because they do not seem to link with the previous verses, except by the word 'fire.' Because salt is a preservative, verse 49 could refer to the eternity of punishment as does v. 48. This seems an unlikely link, however. It is possible that these were separate sayings unconnected to verse 48. In this case, vs. 49–50 would have been placed here in order to help people remember them more easily because of the repetitive words. But my position is that these verses do connect with what has just transpired. The link is found in the last part of v. 50: "be at peace with each other." The disciples had been arguing about who was the greatest. Then they argued about whether this other man was a part of them or not. Jesus had just taught about divisiveness and remembering that anyone who does the work of Christ is a brother or sister. His reminder here acted as an injunction to help the disciples put away divisiveness.