

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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It's Great To Be A Kid Again
Mark 9:30-41

If you take any ten chickens, put them in a pen together, and spread a little chicken feed on the ground, in no time at all, you will witness an amazing phenomenon. The chickens, who may have never been together before, will form a hierarchy based on dominance. That hierarchy is known as the pecking order. Through a series of skirmishes, the chickens will determine who the Number One Chicken is, then the Number Two Chicken, the Number Three Chicken, all the way down to the unlucky Number Ten Chicken.

And there's a lot at stake for the chickens in this because the chickens will peck at the others who are below them in the order. That means the number one chicken is never harassed. It also means the last chicken has a terrible life, always being harassed without anyone to peck.

And the pecking order phenomenon is not unique to chickens. It happens everywhere, all the time, at work, at school, at class reunions, at family dinners, even at church. Just like chickens, humans have a tendency to scratch around and ruffle our feathers and establish our place.

We're constantly organizing ourselves into pecking orders based on how big our house is, how nice our clothes are, how many important people we know, how influential our job is, how long we've been a church member.

But as you study the Bible, it doesn't take long to realize that Jesus spent His entire ministry ripping apart the foundations of the pecking order. He is God in the flesh and yet He was born in a lowly stable. He sat on the throne of heaven for eternity past but had no place to call His own on this earth. Jesus entered this broken world with its messed-up pecking orders and redefined what it means to be great and live a great life on this earth.

And that's what this morning's passage is all about. As we continue our study of the Gospel of Mark, we find Jesus, alone with His disciples, teaching them about what it means to be great in the Kingdom of God.

Mark 9:30-41

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. 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." 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.

Our text begins with Jesus traveling alone with His disciples. Verse 31 says the reason He wanted to be alone with them was to teach them. But the first thing Jesus teaches them is something He has already taught them, that He is going to die and rise again from the dead. Verse 32 says the disciples still didn't understand and were afraid to ask Jesus about it. Mark doesn't tell us why they were afraid. Perhaps their pride made them afraid to show their ignorance. Whatever the reason, they don't want to talk about it, so they basically drop the subject entirely.

But there is something they are eager to talk about. It becomes the catalyst for everything else that Jesus talks about in this section. Look again at verse 33.

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.

I love the picture Mark paints here. On the way to Capernaum, the disciples had been arguing in the back seat like a bunch of kids who don't think Dad can hear them all the way up in the front seat. And, when they're confronted about it, they all just sit there frozen, like a bunch of little boys who just got caught red-handed. It's like they instantly knew what they had done was foolish and there wasn't any excuse for it.

Mark says they'd been arguing about who was the greatest among them. They knew that Jesus had come to establish the Kingdom of God and that they had been chosen to be part of that Kingdom. The only thing they didn't know was which one of them would be seated next to the King. What would be the pecking order? Who would have the most power and influence and notoriety? Who would be the Secretary of State next to Jesus? Who would be the greatest?

And Jesus had overheard the whole thing. And, since He had set this time aside to teach them, that's exactly what He does. He teaches them what it actually looks like to be great as part of God's Kingdom.

Look at verse 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."***

Do you see what Jesus is doing? He's revealing that true greatness is basically the exact opposite of what our world says. He literally says that the person who is last in importance in the eyes of our world is first in terms of the kingdom. And, He isn't encouraging a new pecking order, as if the disciples should take His definition and start arguing all over again about who is the greatest. **He's** essentially saying that the only way to truly be great is to stop trying to be great the way our world defines greatness. The only way to be truly great is to stop living for yourself and become the servant of all.

And that's the big idea for us this morning: **Greatness comes through service.**

Greatness in God's Kingdom isn't defined or determined by your bank account or your career or where this world would rank you in terms of value or importance. You may never be rich or famous. You may never sit at a table with influential people or have your name written down in history. But your life can instantaneously become the life of a truly great person. Jesus says greatness comes through service.

Every one of us has the capacity for greatness because every one of us has the opportunity to put the needs of others before ourselves. Greatness comes through service. That's the lesson Jesus is teaching His disciples in this section.

And, in the time we have left, I want to go back through our text and show you three defining characteristics that mark a great servant in God's Kingdom.

1. A Great Servant SACRIFICES

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."

Don't miss what is going on here. It was just a few verses ago that Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration. His glory was miraculously unveiled in a way that made His face shine like the sun. The voice of God thundered from heaven, "This is my beloved Son." Peter, James, and John were with Him and were so blown away by His utter greatness that they fell down on their faces before Him. It was unmistakably clear that no one is greater than Jesus, not Moses or Elijah or any of the great saints throughout time.

And, as Jesus leads His disciples away from that mountain, He wants to teach them something about how the greatest person in the history of this world would live His life. He would walk from a mountain of glory to the place of the cross where He would sacrifice His life for the sins of mankind.

The phrase Jesus uses is that the Son of Man was going to "be delivered into the hands of men." The word "delivered" doesn't mean rescued or saved. It means to be handed over or given away.

Jesus was given away. Who gave Him away? Some people think this is a reference to Judas betraying Him. But I don't think that's what Jesus is referring to here. I believe He is referring to the choice He is making to give Himself away.

In John 10:18, Jesus says, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again."

Jesus laid His life down. He handed His life over. The greatest person who has ever lived demonstrated His greatness through sacrifice. That's exactly what Jesus will say in the next chapter of Mark.

Mark 10:45 - For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

A great servant sacrifices.

And make no mistake about it, if you are going to serve like Jesus, you are going to have to sacrifice. You are going to have to give up things that are rightfully yours in order to meet the needs of others. Your time. Your hobbies. Your leisure. Your way of doing things. Service requires sacrifice.

And I just want to celebrate the fact that this room is filled with people who model this on a daily basis. Moms who sacrifice their time and energy to meet the needs of their children. Dads who sacrifice their careers and their hobbies to put their families before themselves. Grandparents who sacrifice their retirement and leisure to see that their grandchildren have opportunities that they could never have had for themselves.

Every week on this campus, hundreds of volunteers give up countless hours they could spend doing other things so that they can meet the needs of others.

- Hundreds of people give their lives away to feed the neediest people in our community through House of Hope.
- Our deacons give their lives away to care for our widows through the widow ministry of our church.
- Nearly a hundred employees of Merritt Island Christian School have chosen to forego a better paycheck so that they can teach children about Jesus.
- An army of servants showed up this morning to pick people up on golf carts and prepare classrooms and rock babies in our nursery and teach teenagers the Bible.
- Yesterday, a team of servants poured over my sermon notes so they could be prepared to translate this sermon into Spanish while I preach so that our Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters can hear the Word of God in their native language.
- Right now, a team of people are up in a room (some of them teenagers), working hard behind computers to broadcast our service over the internet so that hundreds of people who can't be here in person can join us in spirit.

And Jesus sees it all. No one else may notice, but Jesus sees it all. And Jesus says it's great. He says greatness comes by being a servant who sacrifices by giving yourself for the good of others.

And some of you are being stirred to serve, but you've been hesitant. You know it will cost you. You know you will have to give something up. Friends, hear and answer the call of Jesus. Stop living the good life so you can live a great one.

A great servant sacrifices.

2. A Great Servant Is SELFLESS

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."

In the Greco-Roman world, children were seen as insignificant members of society. It wasn't that children were unloved, but they were viewed as non-contributors because they needed everything done for them and they couldn't do anything for you in return. That put them on the bottom of the pecking order.

And, as Jesus held that child in His arms, He was giving us a picture of the kind of servant He is calling us to be someone who serves without expecting anything in return. And this is a powerful insight into the kind of service Jesus considers great. It's not the service that gives to get.

There's a kind of service that looks good on the outside but is selfish at its core. It's willing to sacrifice, but only because it believes what is being given up will result in something beneficial to itself. That kind of sacrifice isn't great service, it's self-service.

It's what happens when an employee volunteers for the job no one wants hoping she can score a few points with the boss and get a promotion down the road.

It's what happens when a teenager cleans his room out of the blue hoping he can score a few points with his parents and get the latest video game.

It's what happens when a husband suspiciously makes the bed and does the dishes hoping he can score a few points with his wife, so she'll be okay if he says he's going golfing the next day. That's called giving to get. That's not great service. That's manipulation. That's what the world does.

Great service is selfless. It serves to meet the needs of others out of love, not greed. It cares for single moms and widows and orphans. It gives to the homeless and the helpless. It reaches out to those who have nothing to offer in return.

And Jesus says that when we serve those who have nothing to offer in return, it's as though we are receiving and caring for Jesus Himself. It's as though we are embracing God the Father.

I wonder how long the list of volunteers for our children's ministry would be if we really believed that caring for kids was like loving on Jesus Himself.

So, what would change about the way you live in your home or do your work at your job or do life in this church family if you really believed that every act of selfless service was an expression of love for Jesus Himself?

Great servants are selfless.

3. A Great Servant SEES JESUS AS SUPREME

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.

One of the cool things about the disciples is that they are as messed up as us. Jesus has just talked about being a servant and receiving others without putting yourself at the center, and John speaks up. "Hey Jesus, speaking of receiving other people, there was this time when you weren't around, and we saw a guy casting out demons in your name and we tried to shut him down. Was that good service?"

These guys are amazing. What's going on here? Well, the key to understanding this exchange is to notice what John and Jesus emphasize. Why did they try to shut the guy down? Verse 38 tells us. John says it was because "he was not following us." They are telling Jesus about it because He wasn't there. So, the "us" in that verse is the disciples without Jesus.

And Jesus redirects His attention. In verse 39, He points out that the guy was working in Jesus' name. And He says that's a good thing. In verse 40, He says that the one who is not against us is for us. Here, Jesus uses the word "us" in a way that has to include Him. He's now part of the "us." In other words, the "us" should always center around Jesus.

Here's what I believe Jesus is doing here. He's highlighting that the disciples had made the work about themselves. They didn't like the guy because he wasn't following them, even though he was following Jesus.

Jesus is supreme. He's the One we want people to follow. He's the One we want to promote. He's the One we want to be glorified.

That's why He says what He says in verse 41.

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.

What's the motive for giving the water? It's Jesus. He's at the center of this service. That's the kind of service that Jesus will reward, the kind of service that's all about Him.

The goal of great service is that Jesus would be supreme. And just think how that would change the way you serve.

- Husband and wives, what would it look like if you served your spouse with the goal that they would love Jesus even more than they love you?
- Parents, what would it look like if you served your children with the goal that they would love Jesus even more than they love you?
- What would it look like if you served in this church or this community – at your school or your job - with the goal that people would love Jesus above anything else in this world?

Great servants see Jesus as Supreme. He's the One who matters most. When we serve people with the desire to love them as though we are loving Jesus and with the hope that they would know and love Jesus above all, Jesus says that's true greatness.

Your life can be great today. You can be great today. Greatness comes through service. So, lay aside what this world says is great by laying down your life in service to others for the glory of Jesus. That's the point.

And that's why we need Jesus. Only Jesus can free us from the sin that keeps us from serving others the way we should. Only Jesus can free us from pride and self-centeredness. Only Jesus can give us new hearts and empower us to live like the greatest Servant of them all. Only the Greatest Servant ever can make us great servants like Him. We need Jesus to be Jesus in us.

And we don't just need Jesus, we have Him. He came to give His life for us on the cross so He could live His life through us in resurrection power.