THE SERVANT OF ALL

Mark 9:30-41

Key verse: 9:35

*Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”*

God created human beings to be great. He made each person wonderfully and fearfully in the image of God and with a glorious mission from God. But how can we be great while living in a world that is under the power of sin and death? In today’s passage, Jesus taught his disciples the way to be great. May God help us to accept the way that Jesus teaches here.

Let’s pray ...

Today’s passage has two parts:

Part I: *“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men …”* (30-34)

Part II: *“Anyone who wants to be first …”* (35-41)

So Part I. *“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men …”* (30-34)

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus predicted his death three times; in Mark 8:31, 9:30 and 10:32. These verses are important, because they express the simple truth of the gospel. However, the fact that Jesus predicted his death three times, also shows that Jesus was committed to helping his disciples to understand the meaning of his death. The truth of Jesus’ death was not easy for the disciples to accept. In fact, the first time Jesus predicted his death, “Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him” (8:32). But Jesus did give up on his disciples. He kept teaching the same message again and again in that hope that they would eventually understand.

Let’s look at verses 30-32. *30 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” 32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.*

As the time of his death was fast approaching, Jesus made teaching his disciples his top priority. In order to do so, Jesus put his public ministry on hold and led his disciples to an undisclosed location. *He said to them,* “*The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.”*

Here we can see that Jesus had a sense of problem about his disciples. He wanted to help them to understand the meaning of his death in order to be prepared for it in advance. But how did the disciples respond to his teaching? It says that the disciples *did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.*

Here, the disciples' problem was that they did not understand Jesus’ death. In other words, they did not understand the meaning of his death. Why not? Most likely they did not understand the meaning of Jesus’ death because of their fixed idea about suffering. To them, suffering was always bad. It was always a result of the negative consequences of sin. With this viewpoint, they could not imagine that anything good could come out of suffering. However, spiritual suffering is not the same as suffering for our sins. Spiritual suffering produces a good result. When Jesus was delivered into the hands of evil men, he was without sin. And, when he was killed it was not for his sins, but for the sins of others. Most of all, Jesus’ suffering was for the glory of God. God had a good purpose for Jesus’ suffering, and his suffering produced a good result. Through Jesus’ suffering God forgave and atoned for the sins of the world. Also, Jesus suffering resulted in him being raised from the dead to win the absolute victory over the power of death. Jesus suffering was not bad or negative at all. It was the road to redemption and glory. Through the good news of the gospel, we can adopt a totally new understanding of suffering. To suffer for our sins is meaningless, but to suffer for Jesus is not meaningless, but glorious. May God help us to overcome our fixed idea and accept suffering for God’s glory.

Look at verses 33-34. 33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

Jesus had just predicted his death, but his disciples only thought of themselves. They only wanted to clarify what position they would get in Jesus’ earthly messianic kingdom, by arguing about who was the greatest. The disciples' argument showed their immaturity. But Jesus didn’t scold them. He simply asked what they had argued about in order to help them to think about their problem. And, when they kept quiet, Jesus also kept quiet. Instead of discouraging his disciples' desire to be great, Jesus saw the opportunity for a teachable moment.

Part II: “Anyone who wants to be first …” (35-41)

Look at verses 35. This is our key verse.

*35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”*

Jesus did not discourage his disciples’ desire to be great, but taught them the way to be great. His teaching contains some paradoxical truths; such as the last can be first, and the servant of all can be the greatest. These truths are contrary to--and even in opposition to what the world teaches us about how to be great. The world teaches that to be great means that we need to rise above others is some way, either politically, financially, or intellectually, or in terms of achievement, fame or power. It means that we have earned the means to exercise judgment and superiority over others or to rule over others.

However, Jesus taught that to be great means something quite different than that. Jesus taught that to be great means to serve others, and to be the greatest means to be the servant of all. But what does it mean to be the servant of all. As we know all means all. There is a way that we can serve others and still leave room for ourselves. But, to be the servant of all is not like this. To be the servant of all means to give up our own life completely. It means that we must be willing to suffer and willing to die for the sake of serving others.

In my own case, whenever I was serving as a messenger, I expected my family to serve me. Then, I ended up giving them all a hard time. So last week, since the passage talked about being the servant of all, I considered serving the message and serving my family members at the same time. I was successful to a point, or at least showed some improvement, but I wasn’t able to do it to the end. Though this, I realized how hard it was for me to accept the truth about suffering and to completely lose my life for Jesus. The fear was that if I really became the servant of all, there would be no room left for me, no room left for my own life or my own things at all.

In this way to be the servant of all is not about performance, but about giving our heart and whole life. Jesus set the best example of the servant of all. In the passage, Jesus served his disciples leaving no room for his own life. Jesus served them the words of God, and even the same message again and again regardless of their response. In this way he bore their spiritual blindness and all of their sins and weaknesses to the end. Ultimately, Jesus even served his disciples and all people to the point of death, suffering and dying on the cross for the sins of the world. To be truly great means to be the servant of all like Jesus.

Look at verses 36-37. 36 He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 37 “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

Here Jesus gave his disciples a practical example of serving. Serving is to welcome a little child in Jesus’ name. Jesus’ example makes us think about the needs of a little child. Little children are very dependent on their parents for just about everything. Their parents need to feed them, bathe them and clothe them. When they poop poo, they need to change their diaper. When they cry, they need to pick them up and soothe them. In many cases, they can even fall asleep without their parents' help. They are very noisy and very messy and as they grow they make a lot of mistakes--a lot of mistakes. Growing children especially need a lot of encouragement. They inevitably want to try new things, but inevitably mess them up. They need encouragement, because if you scold them, they may not want to try again.

And, little children could mean those that are spiritually young as well. The disciples were like little children; when they didn’t understand or accept Jesus’ teaching, when they argued or made a lot of mistakes. Figuratively speaking, the disciples needed their diapers changed a lot.

The point here is that little children require a lot of work, and by work I mean suffering; like no time left for yourself suffering. But Jesus encourages us to welcome little children and promises to reward us when we welcome little children. But it is not alway easy to welcome little children. So we need to welcome them in Jesus’ name. Instead of trying to welcome them by our own strength and getting burned out, we need to welcome them in Jesus name. When we welcome little children in Jesus’ name, we welcome Jesus himself and more than that, we welcome God the Father who sent Jesus.

When we welcome one person to Bible study in Jesus name, it is not only that person that is blessed, but we ourselves are blessed the most. We feel that we are not only serving that person, but that in serving them, we are really serving Jesus.

Jesus taught his disciples how to be great through his words and example, but still the disciples were not necessarily changed--not yet anyway. Look at verses 38-41. Let’s read these verses by taking turns.

38 “Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”

39 “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, 40 for whoever is not against us is for us. 41 Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

Here, John shows that he still didn’t accept Jesus’ teaching. If he had, he could have welcomed this man in Jesus’ name, and looked for a way to serve them. Although this man was not one of the disciples, and perhaps had somewhat limited in his personal knowledge of Jesus, Jesus still welcomed them as a precious servant of God.

In conclusion, let’s read verse 35 again. 35 *Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”*

Jesus encouraged his disciples to be great by teaching them the way to be great. To be great we need to grow as the servant of all after Jesus’ example, by welcoming little children in Jesus’ name. This includes serving children at home and on the campus. May God help us to serve all to the point of having no room left for ourselves, so that we might each grow to be truly great servants of God. One word: The servant of all