

Mark 9:33-41 “Jesus’ prediction no one accepts”

(Mark 9:33-37 NIV)

“They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.’

“He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘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.’”

Theme – Those who serve others achieve the greatest honor in God’s kingdom.

The 19th century poet James Russell Lowell said: “What men prize most is a privilege, even if it be that of a chief mourner at a funeral.”

Conversations often center on greatness.

Who is the greatest?

Kermit Roosevelt, son of President Teddy Roosevelt, once said of his father, "The trouble with Dad is that he's got to be



either the bride at the wedding or the corpse at the funeral."

Politician’s like to compare themselves with those considered past greats, e.g. Jefferson, Lincoln, F.D.R., JFK, Reagan, or Gandhi.

Many preachers suffer from the want-to-be-great syndrome.

At various stages of my life, I had visions of grandeur as preacher and an author.

Those visions now exist as musty delusions, but they were once lively.

Did your ever dream of prominence in some field? Football? Actor? Musician? Race car driver? Space scientist? Medicine? Professor?

Most of us like to be considered good at something.



This much is sure:

Most husbands long to hear their wives call them great.

Conversely, wives would like for their husbands to call them great wives.

Sadly, many spouses fear that praising their mate will make them proud and arrogant.

And yet, many would quit seeking attention outside their marriages if their mates would respect them and often praise them.

Actually, one compliment from Norma means more to me than a hundred compliments from others.

But, we’re talking about achieving greatness.

How do we find greatness in God’s kingdom?

In our text, Jesus addressed greatness two ways.

Mark chapter 9 opens with Jesus taking Peter, James, and John on a hike.



They climbed to the top of a high mountain, perhaps, to the top of 9,232 ft. Mt. Hermon.

Jesus lived on earth in an ordinary human body.

He grew through all of the stages we do.

From infancy, he experienced the stages of childhood, preteen, teen-ager, and adult.

When hungering as a baby, Jesus likely cried; at puberty, his voice probably cracked.

His body differed not a whit from ours.

As Hebrews tells us: “Since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same,” (2:14 NASB).

But on the mountain that day with the three apostles, something extraordinary happened.

When Jesus and the trio got to the mountaintop, Jesus’ body changed.

English translations say that Jesus was “transfigured.”

We get our English word metamorphosis from the term in the original.

We use metamorphosis to describe the change that sometimes occurs in rocks due to extreme heat, pressure, and water.

We also use metamorphosis to depict the transformation of a larva to a butterfly.

Metamorphosis means to *change form*.

On the mountain for a time, Jesus wasn’t in the human form of his childhood and adulthood.

He took on an entirely different nature.

His clothes became dazzling white.

Jesus took on the form we’ll receive in the resurrection.

As Philippians 3:14 states: Jesus, “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

We know little about the characteristics of those bodies except that they won’t need healthcare, medical help, or medicine.

Nothing bad will happen to them.

They won’t get sick, suffer covid19, paralysis, cancer, heart disease, or any malady or accident.

Believers’ bodies will completely change; they’ll be eternal.

Jesus’ body briefly took on that new dazzling appearance.

Something else happened on the mountain.

Two historic men became visible with Jesus.

Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the prophet arrived.

The sight of two famous men accompanying Jesus excited Peter.

He thought it a bright idea to build some shrines for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

Speaking from a cloud, a heavenly voice set Peter straight.

“This is my beloved son. Listen to him.”

Moses and Elijah quickly disappeared and they saw only Jesus, whom no one equals.

Peter, James and John descended the mountain with Jesus.

When they got below to the other apostles, a serious commotion started.

The apostles Jesus left on assignment were having difficulties, mostly because they

maintained a lousy prayer life.

After Jesus resolved the matter, he and all the apostles started back home to Capernaum.

The twelve talked as they went.

What subject dominated their conversation?

They talked the topic that often arises when groups get together.

Having attended a few high school reunions, I’ve noted that conversations often focus on alums who achieved greatness.

The apostles argued all the way about which of them was the best disciple.

Maybe it started when Peter, James and John reminded the others of their unique mountain experience with Jesus.

Whenever two or more gather, there’s a good chance the subject will arise at some level.



Milwaukie (Oregon) Union High School class of 1954 50th reunion. Bob is in row four, second from left.

**Who brings superior knowledge or experience?
Essentially, who is important?**

When they arrived in Capernaum, Jesus went into the house, sat down, and asked them what they’d been discussing and arguing on the way. The original seems to indicate that Jesus kept asking what they were arguing about on the way.

The apostles kept refusing to answer.

Imagine an attorney in court who keeps asking questions of a witness.

The witness continues avoiding the answer.

When you were young, did your parents and you ever have a conversation like the following?

They asked, “What were you doing last night?”

You answered: “Nothing.”

They asked again: “You were up to something. What was it?”

“I wasn’t doing anything,” you insist.

You knew any other answer might incriminate you.

Jesus didn’t try to pin the Apostles down or throw big knives at them.

He taught two important principles about greatness.

1. First.

If you want to be great in God’s eyes, put yourself last and serve everyone.

When heaven’s gates open and folks go in, do you think there might be many surprises?

Those who think they’re great now and expect others to serve them, may be absent up there.

On the other hand, Jesus said, the first to enter heaven will be those who stooped to serve in this life; who put others first.

2. Here’s Jesus’ second principle. He took a little child in his arms and said, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me . . .”

Emphasis Magazine printed this story:

The father's tone was harsh toward his five-year-old son. "Not now, Tyler," he said as he was looking for something in the electronics aisle of a large store. The father was intent on finding whatever he was looking for. However, Tyler kept asking questions that a five-year-old would ask, "What are you looking for?" And "Can I help?" His father kept dismissing him. It was obvious that the father was irritated and lacked patience. Back and forth the



SERVING GOD
BY SERVING OTHERS

conversation went.

Surprisingly, Tyler did not seem discouraged with his father's curt responses.

After the father paid and was about to leave the store, Tyler could be heard asking another question. Tyler wanted to do something with his father. To those observing this interchange it was not a revelation that the father once again dismissed his son, telling him that he did not have time to play a game. Tyler looked sad. Those standing in line at the cash register felt badly for the young boy.

That little boy could have been one of our sons hoping to get my attention.

I’m not proud of the way I often dismissed their needs when they were young.

Let me relate another story about how powerfully adults can affect the lives of kids.

When our daughters were young and their parents were poor, an Army sergeant at the Hollywood church took an interest in the girls.

He set up a small savings account for each of them and made regular contributions to it.

Sergeant Fred Hall, Jr. did the same thing for numerous little girls, especially orphans.

As a bachelor, he wanted to help young people.



He felt that girls got little encouragement to attend college in those times.

These two instances speak to me because I’ve often considered kids a bother.

Many of them just need a listener—someone to show interest in them.

One caring adult can make a profound difference in a child’s life.

When we welcome little children, it’s like welcoming God himself, said Jesus.



Whom do you welcome and serve?

Jesus put us all on his welcoming-serving committee yet few people observe Jesus’ warning about being first in God’s Kingdom.

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