



THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Study Guide Full
Mark 9:30-37, 10:13-16
February 9, 2020

In the transfiguration, which we examined two weeks ago in our sermon and in this guide, we considered the superiority of Jesus to the appearing Moses and Elijah. And yet, Mark makes clear in that passage that this superiority, this greatness of the transfiguration, is inextricably linked to suffering and death.



A similar measure of greatness in the kingdom of God appears in this week's passage of the disciples' discussion over who is the greatest. It is a passage that, as we locate ourselves in the text, demands we evaluate our own metric of status and success to consider Christ's metric of serving those most overlooked.

"Christ Blessing the Children"
Nicolas Maes, Dutch painter
1652-53

9:30 *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.*



Mark 9:30-37 10:13-16

Notes:

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."

10:13 And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. 14 But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. 15 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." 16 And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Commentary Notes:

vv. 30-31. Jesus and the disciples have returned to Galilee from the beneath the mount of Transfiguration, likely Mt. Hermon, located about 70 km north of Galilee. There Jesus again teaches his disciples about his upcoming passion ("Passion" from the Latin *pator*, "suffering," refers to Jesus'

Discussion Questions:

Confess: In the last few weeks, have you too quickly forgotten that the Christian walk is one of death before resurrection? If so, in what

arrest, trial, suffering, and crucifixion)—the lesson not sticking in the disciples' heads and hearts.

v. 32. Of this verse, 18th century John Wesley writes in his notes, "They did not understand how to reconcile the death of our Saviour (nor consequently his resurrection, which supposed his death) with their notions of his temporal kingdom."

vv. 33-34. Jesus returns to Capernaum, the site of the beginning of his Galilean ministry, back in Mark 1. Note the contrast between the publicity of Jesus' teaching and healing in the Sabbath there, and the privacy of his conversation with the disciples here (as we also saw last week in 9:28). Perhaps in this privacy should be inferred a tone of grace and compassion in Jesus' teaching, in light of the inappropriateness of the disciple's greatest conversation.

v. 35. The discussion about who is the greatest certainly seems out of place for the Markan reader: keep in mind what we have seen in recent weeks with Jesus' discussion with Peter about his passion (8:31), and with the experience of the transfiguration through the lens of suffering (9:12).

way? Ask for God's forgiveness for your lack of understanding and perspective, and rest assured in his resurrection power.

Pray: Pray that many in Vancouver who are not yet disciples of Christ would come to understand "the word" of Jesus being handed over, killed, and resurrected. Pray that the uniqueness of Christianity—premiered as it is upon death, specifically upon an historical death—would be understood by the many who erroneously think all religions are essentially alike.

Discuss: What are some of the many ways that contemporary Vancouver culture points us, whether explicitly or implicitly, to desire to be the greatest? In walking the Christian pathway of Christ's suffering and passion, why is it so difficult to fight against these societal tendencies?

Reflect: How do we, as FBC family, do well in our church life to hear and respond to the gospel truth that the last will be first? How do we fail to live out this paradoxical truth? What changes would you imagine for our church to improve in this regard? Ask for the Spirit's illumination over these questions.

Discern: How is God calling you to serve as the lowest within the life of FBC? What is one particular step that you can take in this direction?

Discern: How is God calling you to serve as the lowest beyond the walls of FBC? What is one particular step that you can take in this direction?

Yet, we should keep in mind that in the ancient Near East matters of honour and status were supremely important. Within Judaism, rabbis would argue whether greatness was a matter of Torah knowledge or good deeds. So it is that Jesus' teaching here is radically countercultural.

Of this verse, 4th century bishop Gregory of Nyssa writes in *On the Christian Mode of Life*, "Let vanity be unknown among you. Let simplicity and harmony and a guileless attitude weld the community together. Let each remind himself that he is not only subordinate to the brother at his side, but to all. If he knows this, he will truly be a disciple of Christ."

vv. 36-37. Strauss' *Expositor's Commentary* makes clear the cultural context here: "Children in Jesus' day lacked social status or rights of their own. They were wholly dependent on their parents. They were at the bottom of the social ladder. Jesus' point is that true greatness means caring about even the most insignificant people, like children."

10:13-16. The disciples view children in line with what we've just seen—with little status, unworthy of Jesus' attention. Jesus' response to this expression of exclusion is indignation, and his personal touch to welcome those excluded who come in reliance on him.

Listen: Listen meditatively, and/or sing along (using YouTube) with Graham Kendrick's "The Servant King," which we sang in worship; or sing with the hymn "The Servant Song."

Study: There are so many pages of Christian history that we could read to understand the blessings that God pours into our lives as we seek to be servants of all. Yet to start, consider reading *Living Gently in a Violent World: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness*, by theologian Stanley Hauerwas and Catholic founder of L'Arche Jean Vanier. The lessons of the L'Arche community, in the embrace of disabled brothers and sisters, are a wonderful example of living to serve in radically countercultural ways.

Discern: Who are "the children"—those lowest on the social ladder—in your neighbourhood? Who are those both young and old whom we can welcome with the welcome of God into our church and Connection Group life?

Confess: Have you recently been guilty of looking to welcome primarily those on the top of the social ladder? If so, confess your sin.

Discuss: How do we do well to incorporate the life of our children into the of our church at FBC? What are some ways that we might grow here?

Pray: Pray that your Connection Group would have opportunities to welcome those who might be excluded and overlooked.