

092224 Sermon "**Called to Serve Humbly**" Mark 9:30-37

In Mark 9:30-37, we find Jesus teaching his disciples about two significant truths: His coming death and resurrection, and what it means to be truly great in the kingdom of God. The disciples were confused and too afraid to ask questions, but when they argued about who was the greatest, Jesus turned their world upside down with His response: "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

The situation in which this happened was that when Jesus was performing many miracles, many people were following Him, and His popularity was skyrocketing, His disciples were arguing about which of them was the greatest.

The desire for greatness is not something new. It's part of human nature. Even the disciples, who walked with Jesus for three years, struggled with this. But Jesus redefined greatness, not as a position of power or prestige, but as a posture of humility and service. His words in Mark 9 challenge us to reflect on what it means to follow Him. It's not about elevating ourselves, but about drawing closer to Him, walking the path He walked—a path marked by sacrifice and selflessness.

This brings us to Fanny Crosby's hymn, "Close to Thee" which we're going to sing as a closing hymn. The lyrics beautifully echo the heart of Christ's message in this story. In this hymn, the believer longs to be close to Jesus, not just in moments of glory but on the road of toil and suffering. Just as Jesus walked this path to the cross, we too are called to follow Him, even when it means humbling ourselves to serve others.

In our world—whether in American culture, the history of the church, or our personal lives—greatness is often associated with power, money, achievement,

influence, and recognition. Heroes are those who rise above adversity, achieve success, or hold positions of authority. However, Jesus offers a radical redefinition of greatness: it is not found in worldly power, but in humble service.

Throughout the history of the church, we see this lesson play out repeatedly. During times of persecution, the early church remained focused on the gospel, with believers willing to risk their lives for Christ. Yet when the church gained power, it often became complacent and corrupt. The pursuit of power led the church away from its calling to serve others and follow Jesus' example of humility.

Jesus' disciples argued about who would be the greatest among them, much like how the church has historically struggled with the allure of power. Just as the church lost its way when it became entangled with political influence, we too can lose sight of our purpose when we seek worldly greatness.

Jesus' words remind us that true greatness comes not through power or recognition but through humility and service. In American culture, where heroes are often defined by individual success, this message challenges us to consider how we can be heroes of faith—by humbling ourselves and serving others just as Jesus did.

The history of the church demonstrates how easily power can lead to corruption. When Christianity became the state religion of Rome, the urgency and purity of faith began to fade, replaced by complacency. Similarly, during the Middle Ages, the church became more concerned with maintaining power than serving others, leading to some of its darkest moments.

Jesus' rebuke in Mark 9 is not just for His disciples. It is a warning to the church throughout history and to us today. He calls us to return to the simplicity of the gospel, to avoid the temptation of seeking power and to focus instead on the mission of humble service.

Of course, serving and ministering to others is important. However, we must be careful not to serve without humility. It is much more important to serve with a humble attitude than whether someone volunteers or not. It may seem like we are helping others and doing many things on their behalf, but we must resist the temptation to become someone who rules over others or commands them. Jesus clearly said to serve humbly: serve God humbly and serve others humbly. Christians should live that way, and the church should also do so, so that it does not become corrupt over time.

Even in Jesus' time, there were people who knew about the temple system really well. They were the Pharisees. According to Jesus' expression, they were people who did not enter the gates of heaven themselves, and they were people who blocked others from entering by putting heavy burdens on others. Rather than humbly guiding and helping others enter the kingdom of God, they were people who stood above others and tried to give orders and be their boss.

To further illustrate His point, Jesus takes a child and places him before the disciples. In that society, children had little status or power. Yet, Jesus says, "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."

In serving those who are often overlooked—the least, the vulnerable—we are serving Christ Himself. Walking closely with Jesus means opening our hearts to those the world often neglects. Just as Fanny Crosby wrote, we ask not for ease or fame, but for the privilege to walk closely with Christ, which means

walking in the footsteps of a servant. True greatness in God's kingdom is not about elevating ourselves but about lowering ourselves to lift others up.

Jesus' teaching in Mark 9:30-37 challenges us to reject the world's definition of greatness and embrace the values of humility and service of the kingdom of God. Whether we look at American culture or the history of the church, the message is the same: power and recognition can easily lead to corruption, but true greatness is found in following Jesus' example of servanthood. As we reflect on this story today, let us be reminded that the church is called to serve, not to seek power. Our mission is to reflect the heart of Christ, caring for the least and the lost, walking humbly, and serving others humbly in His name.

Let us close with the words of Fanny Crosby's hymn "Close to Thee," as a prayer and a reminder of the path we are called to walk:

"Not for ease or worldly pleasure,  
Nor for fame my prayer shall be;  
Gladly will I toil and suffer,  
Only let me walk with Thee."

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, may we, like Christ, choose humility over power, and servanthood over self-exaltation. Jesus did not get angry with these disciples, but showed them by his own life. He walked humbly and silently on the path to the cross. And he calls you and me to that path today. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. To Christ be thanks and praise. Amen.