

Sunday, August 28, 2016

Pastor Don Denyes

## Introduction to Mark 9:31-41

Most of us like to think of ourselves as the main character in the story. We want to be the most famous, most successful, most respected person in our circle. By its very nature, this way of thinking causes us to compare ourselves to others and see how we can ensure that we match up favorably against them. Therefore, we end up thinking of ourselves as better than others.

Jesus' disciples were no different. They, too, struggled with the desire to be greater—or at least *perceived* to be greater—than the other disciples. Jesus is not fooled by this form of pride. He confronts it head-on and brings it into the light where it can be displayed in all its sinfulness and shamefulness. Jesus doesn't think like we think. His categories of greatness are far beyond ours, and we ought to sit at His feet until we learn this lesson from Him...

## Context

The context for this passage really begins with the confession of Peter in 8:29. It was clear at that moment that the disciples did not have a firm grasp of how the kingdom of God was to work. Jesus, as the Lord's anointed king, would not assume power by force, but through suffering, death, and ultimately resurrection. Jesus' disciples must assume the same role as Jesus, who took the form of a servant and became obedient unto death. But as of now, they still do not understand what must happen to Jesus and how they ought to follow (Mark 9:32).

## Structure

- I. Jesus confronts the disciples (33-34)
- II. Jesus instructs them about true greatness (35-37)
- III. Jesus corrects the disciples' prideful thinking (38-41)

**Read and Reflect** (Use this section to write down any thoughts you had on the sermon. Make sure to note any questions you had about something in the passage or in the sermon.)

Read Mark 9:31-41

Beware of *selfishness* in ministry

- 33: Arguing—who is the greatest
- 35: Serving is the greatest
- 36: Illustration—be like a child

Beware of *exclusiveness* in ministry

- 38: Not one of us
- 40: Not against me is for me

## Discuss

1. Do you ever compare yourself to the people around you? In what areas is that most common in your life? Can any good come from that attitude or is it all bad?
2. Read Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33-34. What was it that the disciples did not understand about Jesus? How do you know they didn't understand Him?
3. The disciples were trying to "one up" each other, which displayed their selfishness in ministry (9:34). How does Jesus' death and resurrection free us from bondage to the sin of selfishness not only in ministry, but in every area of life?
4. Jesus said that for His disciples to be truly great they must "be last of all and servant of all." What would it look like for you to be "servant of all" in the context of your family? Our church? Your neighbors?
5. Read Philippians 2:1-16. In this passage Paul echoes Jesus' teaching in Mark 9:35-41. How does this teaching challenge you to think of yourself in relation to others? How does it challenge the way you think about practical ways you can serve in the local church?

**Go Deeper** *(This section is especially for leaders to consider as they prepare for the Growth Group meeting)*

Gospel Connections: At the heart of the gospel message is the humbling reality that none of us is capable of “measuring up” to the standard which God has for us. In fact, you and I are far more wicked than we could possibly imagine. Even for those of us who have grown up in the church and tried to live fairly moral lives are as filthy and guilty as the vilest sinner the world has ever known. Our only hope is that we have been saved by the grace of God in Jesus. This truth ought to humble us and give us a perspective of other people, not as subordinates or inferiors, but as fellow dead people in need of the new life which only the gospel can bring.

Whole Bible Connections: Mark 9:38-41 finds an interesting parallel in Number 11:26-29. When a young man informs Moses that supposedly “unauthorized” people are prophesying, Joshua pleads with him to have them stopped. Moses’ response is as open-minded as Jesus’ when he responds, “would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit on them!” As one scholar put it, “the kingdom of God is much bigger than our experience of it.” Yet just as Joshua and the apostle John sought to be exclusive in the ministry of the gospel, so we too often struggle with acknowledging God’s gifts to other people for His glory. Would that we would be people who would accept one another, not on the basis of any clique or social status, but simply according to the grace of God in Christ.

Theological Connections: When we “do theology,” or come to a theological conclusion, based on what we see in our own experience and wisdom, we become what Martin Luther called, “theologians of glory.” This is the most common failure of modern culture in terms of understanding the goodness of humanity. Instead, Luther says, we should be “theologians of the cross.” When we become theologians of the cross, we no longer attribute value to things or ourselves based on our natural senses or societal understandings. Instead we attribute value based on the word of God alone. So servanthood and suffering become theologically prestigious positions, while those who boast of themselves and seek glory for themselves do so in vain.