

The Path to Greatness

On His way to Jerusalem, Jesus has some vital lessons to convey to His disciples.

Mark 9:30-37

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.

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.”

Let's make three observations:

I. Jesus is extraordinarily humble (9:30-32)

Jesus is a remarkably patient teacher, but, even more so, He is a very patient and humble Savior. He teaches them that He will “be delivered into the hands of men...” to die a martyr's death on behalf of His disciples. What love Jesus has for us!

They don't understand Him because they are expecting a very different sort of messianic reign—one in which they, with Him, would rule over their enemies in great power. They didn't ask Him questions apparently because they didn't want their ignorance exposed, as was Peter's in Mark 8:33, and they probably didn't even want to know more about the dark road ahead of them. Ignorance was bliss.

II. We are extraordinarily proud (9:33,34)

Jesus asked a question that caused them to go completely silent. What could they say? While Jesus had been explaining the death He would die for their sakes, they were engaged in a debate about which of them would be the greatest! How selfish, how arrogant, how insensitive were these disciples; and yet, we are just like them.

III. Jesus calls us to extraordinary humility (9:35-37)

In order to truly be the greatest, Jesus teaches us that we must be last of all. Not second place, not near the rear, but last! Wow.

He then takes up a child and explains that to be a great person we must receive the ones in this life who are most like this child: the lowliest, most vulnerable people of all. That is what Jesus did when He received us, and it is what He calls us to do as well.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Philippians 2:1-11. How did Jesus' humility lead to His greatness? How does our humility lead to our greatness?

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- 2. What are some ways in which we, like the first disciples, can't seem to understand what Jesus is saying to us? Why can't we understand Him?

 - 3. Where does our pride come from? Why are we proud? In what ways is pride destructive in our lives?

 - 4. How can we subdue our natural pride and self-centeredness?

 - 5. What are some practical ways in which we can love, receive, and serve the vulnerable people in our world?

Going Deeper

List the ways in which your pride most often obstructs your walk with God.

Write out your plan for the next month to serve the vulnerable people in your world.