

Redefining Greatness

Mark Series

Message 41

11.25.18

Mark 9:30–41 (CSB)

THE SECOND PREDICTION OF HIS DEATH

³⁰Then they left that place and made their way through Galilee, but he did not want anyone to know it. ³¹For he was teaching his disciples and telling them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after he is killed, he will rise three days later.” ³²But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask him.

WHO IS THE GREATEST?

³³They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” ³⁴But they were silent, because on the way they had been arguing with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵Sitting down, he called the Twelve and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be last and servant of all.” ³⁶He took a child, had him stand among them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷“Whoever welcomes one little child such as this in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me does not welcome me, but him who sent me.”

IN HIS NAME

³⁸John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he wasn’t following us.”

³⁹“Don’t stop him,” said Jesus, “because there is no one who will perform a miracle in my name who can soon afterward speak evil of me. ⁴⁰For whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹And whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name, because you belong to Christ—truly I tell you, he will never lose his reward.

1. Growing up, I didn't listen to "secular music".

A. My dad definitely didn't.

1. But my mom did.
2. And there were 4 favorite singers my mom loved.
 - a. Karen Carpenter
 - b. Reba Macintyre
 - c. Dolly Parton
 - d. Kenny Rogers

B. Kenny Rogers had a hit song called, "The Greatest".

1. And it is about a little boy dreaming of being the greatest baseball player ever.
2. And he was out on the ball field, by himself, doing what many of us have done a many time: Throwing the ball up in the air and trying to hit it.
3. 3 times he throws the ball up in the air, with the game on the line, and 3 times he swings and misses.
4. He says I am the greatest that is understood
But even I didn't know I could pitch that good.
5. The boy found a way to redefine his greatness.
 - a. He started out thinking he was the greatest hitter.
 - b. But instead he ended up being the greatest pitcher.

C. Part of life is the pursuit of greatness.

1. But the definition of greatness changes as we grow older.
2. When we are kids, greatness is being a firefighter, saving the world, or being filthy rich.
3. Then, greatness becomes defined as having a new truck and boat, big house, and a beautiful family.

4. Then, greatness is defined by being able to retire or seeing your kids raise your grandkids (and not mess them up).

5. And when a person prepares themselves to die, greatness is defined by love and being loved.

D. This changing definition of greatness is an important part of our spiritual journey.

1. We see this played out with Jesus' disciples.

2. The disciples had a grand vision of greatness:

a. Jesus was going to establish his kingdom.

b. In that kingdom, the disciples were going to be given positions of power and authority.

c. In the new kingdom, the rulers would no longer be named Caesar, Herod, or Pilate.

1. The names would be Jesus, Peter, and John.

2. This was what they were working for.

3. And then Jesus changes the definition of greatness.

a. Things had been going well for almost 3 years.

b. Miracles were happening and Jesus was making a mockery of religious powers and demonic powers.

c. Jesus was on the fast-track.

4. Then He starts talking about dying and resurrection.

5. Jesus is no longer marching his way to the Emperor's throne but to the Emperor's cross.

6. Jesus was challenging the disciple's views on greatness.

a. The closer we get to Jesus, the more our views of greatness will be challenged.

b. What seemed important at one point of our lives will become unimportant.

c. We all need our definition of greatness to be transformed by Jesus.

E. Jesus challenged the Disciples' view of greatness in 4 arenas of life:

1. Suffering.
2. Service.
3. Love.
4. Jesus.

Today, I want to talk about the first two: Suffering and Service.

2. Greatness includes suffering. (30-32)

A. Today's view of greatness does not often include suffering.

1. There are exceptions:
 - a. Nelson Mandela surely was a great man who experienced suffering in his life.
 - b. Martin Luther King Jr. is considered a great man because of both his actions and for what he endured.
2. When our culture thinks of great people, we think of those who have it all.
 - a. People like Kim Kardashian, Justin Bieber, and many sports stars are considered great not because of what they have suffered but because of what they possess.
 - b. Most people picture greatness and see mansions, money, and ease of life.
 - c. If someone has it all, they must be a great person.
3. Think about our lives for a moment.
 - a. We say we had a good day if everything went our way,
 - b. And we had a bad day if we suffered even a little.
4. For most of us, greatness and suffering are polar opposites.

B. Jesus saw this same idea in the eyes of the disciples.

1. They had big dreams for Jesus.
2. They saw greatness in him.
3. And they were right, no one is greater than Jesus.
4. But Jesus said that his life involved greatness of a different sort: A greatness expressed in death and resurrection.
5. "Jesus speaks of surrendering his life; the disciples speak of fulfilling theirs. He counts the cost of discipleship; they count its assets. The disciples have yet to learn that the rewards of discipleship come only as a consequence of following Christ on the costly way to Jerusalem." (Edwards 2002, 285).

C. **Jesus' definition of greatness includes suffering.**

1. Jesus was preparing his followers for the betrayal, death, and resurrection that was coming.
 - a. Not only was Jesus preparing the disciples for his own betrayal, death, and resurrection.
 - b. Jesus was also preparing the disciples for their own betrayal, death, and resurrection.
2. This not only confused the disciples but it scared them, according to verse 32.
 - a. At some level, everyone of us fears suffering.
 - b. How much will it hurt and how much will it cost are questions that add to our fear and anxiety.
3. Yet Jesus didn't address these fears for the disciples.
4. Why?

D. **The result of suffering for believers is resurrection.**

1. The hope of resurrection is reserved only for those who love Jesus.

Romans 8:28 (CSB)

²⁸ We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

2. Many Christians love this verse.

a. But notice a couple of things:

b. First, this promise is only for believers.

1. Can we honestly and biblically tell someone who is far from Jesus that their suffering has a purpose and will end in a good result?

2. According to Scripture, we cannot.

3. It is God who redeems and turns our suffering around to produce something beautiful in His eyes

4. But **when we are apart from God, we have no part in the promises.**

c. Second, this promise does not exclude believers from experiencing suffering.

1. Suffering is normal for all of humanity.

a. Suffering is part of the fall and the curse.

b. Jesus and His followers all experienced great suffering.

c. Today, countless numbers of believers are worshipping and praying in secret because of the real threat of suffering and persecution.

d. Even this week, John Allen Chau was martyred on a remote island off the coast of India as he was taking the Gospel to a people who have never heard of Jesus.

2. To suffer does not mean you are outside the will of God.

a. The disciples could not believe that Jesus was openly talking about his suffering.

b. Great people don't suffer, so they thought.

c. Yet Jesus was preparing them for a great demonstration of suffering.

d. But the suffering of believers is different than the suffering experienced by others.

3. The difference between the suffering of believers versus unbelievers is that Jesus redeems our suffering.

4. When a believer suffers, God is at work making that suffering into something good.

3. Christians cannot claim the promise of a life without suffering.

a. But we can claim God's redemption of our suffering, leading to a resurrection.

b. Some of you today are experiencing pain and hurt.

c. It would be wrong of me to stand before you and deny what you are feeling.

d. What I want to tell you, though, is that I believe there is a resurrection in your future.

1. People you thought were lost will be found.

2. Relationships that were dead will find new life.

3. Hopes and dreams that you had long buried will be resurrected.

4. Your pain, hurt, and suffering are not wasted with God.

E. In Jesus' Kingdom even the greatest suffer.

1. Don't despise your suffering.
2. Instead, give it to Jesus.
3. And pray for the resurrection that comes from believing in him.

3. Greatness includes service (33-35)

A. On the road, the disciples begin to argue.

1. Not for a moment or to, but for a long while they argued.
2. Jesus calls them on it, knowing full well what the subject of their argument was.
3. They were arguing about who would be the greatest in the new kingdom.
 - a. When Jesus was king, and Caesar dethroned, who would be 2nd in command?
 - b. Who would hold the most prestigious commands?
 - c. Who would be able to give an order and have every wish taken care of?
 - d. This is what they argued about.
4. The disciples had bought the world's view of greatness.
5. They needed this corrected.

B. Many agree that Mother Theresa was a great example of a life well lived.

1. But most of us aren't volunteering to live our lives in servitude to the weakest or the poorest among us.
2. Yet, Jesus modeled this kind of life for his disciples.

C. Jesus said that If any of you want to be the greatest, then you must be the servant.

1. Jesus is serious.

- a. It says he sat down to teach them.
- b. This is an authoritative position.
- c. He isn't having a conversation or a discussion.
- d. He is setting forth the hard-truth of the Kingdom.
- e. When Jesus sat to teach, the disciples leaned in close.

2. What Jesus teaches them is that their ideas of greatness were wrong.

- a. It wasn't about how many cars you had in garage.
- b. Greatness is not about the titles, the letters before your name, or any of those things.
- c. Greatness is defined by how many you serve, not by how many serve you.

3. The word servant is the Greek word *Diakonos*.

- a. It's the same word used for deacons.
- b. (I want to take a moment and applaud our deacons. They are truly amazing servants who love their church and their pastor. You definitely don't see all the ministry and acts of service behind the scenes, but they are true blessings).
- c. The word *Diakonos* described someone who waited tables.

1. A few weeks ago I said that the best waiters and waitresses are those who blend into the background while making sure that all the needs are met.

2. That's what Jesus is saying:

3. If you want to be great, blend into the backdrop.

4. Don't vie for attention, don't fight to be noticed, don't cut in line.

5. Serve others, be at the back, this is greatness in the kingdom.

D. Notice, that Jesus didn't say that serving is the way to greatness but it IS greatness.

1. To serve each other is not a way to become great.
2. It is greatness in the Kingdom.
 - a. We don't serve and then reach a place where we no longer have to serve anymore.
 - b. There is no retirement from serving others.
 - c. Service to others is not the path to greatness, it is greatness.
3. Jesus expressed this again in Matthew 20:25-28

Matthew 20:25–28 (CSB)

²⁵ Jesus called them over and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. ²⁶ It must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

4. The Apostle Paul understood that greatness expressed itself in servant form when he wrote in Philippians 2:1-11,

(Philippians 2:1–11, CSB)

"If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone

should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross. For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow— in heaven and on earth and under the earth— and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:1–11, CSB)

E. Jesus wanted his disciples to be great in what matters.

1. The other day I heard a commercial celebrating a “historical” moment involving... a video game.
2. How in the world have we changed the definition of greatness to include actions played in a video game?
 - a. Jesus wanted Peter, James, and John to be great and to succeed in things that matter the most.
 - b. The challenge is to be great in things that matter to God. Nothing is greater in God’s eyes than giving, and no vocation affords the opportunity to give more than that of a servant (10:43).¹

Conclusion: Are you pursuing greatness in the things that matter?

A. We are a lot like the disciples in that our priorities often are not in line with what God wants.

1. We are pursuing greatness in areas that won’t matter a year from now, a decade from now, or an eternity from now.
2. We are buying into these beliefs that says the avoidance of pain is the path to greatness.
3. And the more people who serve us the better.

4. Yet Jesus demonstrated that greatness is found in sacrifice and service.

B. For those of who here today who are experiencing suffering, I want you to pray that you will also experience resurrection.

1. That dreams, relationships, and health that has long been dead will find new life in Jesus working through you.

2. Today is a day to pray for lost children and broken marriages.

3. Today is a day to pray emotions and thoughts to be brought into order.

4. Today is a day for hurting bodies to be healed and restored.

5. Here in just a moment, we are going to ask you to come to the front so we can pray with you.

C. Today is also a day for many of us to get our hearts right about service.

1. You have been approaching every relationship, opportunity, and church service with one thing in mind: what can I get out of it.

2. When you should be asking, "how can I serve those God has put into my life."

3. "You have developed the heart of a ruler when God has desired you to have a heart of a servant."

D. Let us take time today to come before the Lord and allow Him to help us to pursue the greatness he has for us.

ⁱ James R. Edwards, 287.