

Text: Mark 9:30-37

³⁰They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” ³²But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. ³³They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” ³⁴But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. ³⁵Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.” ³⁶He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷“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.”

Theme: The Great Are those who Welcome the Lord.

In much of life there is a rank in which we stand in the group. In the military, you have enlisted men and officers. In the office there is management and labor. Some churches have ranks such as bishops and archbishops. Some cultures have rank.

Sometimes we might wonder where we rank among the Lord’s people. The disciples wondered that in our text. They began to argue among themselves about who was the greatest. We are tempted to desire to become great in God’s kingdom with selfish ambition and to show others just how important we are. But that is the sure way of how we can make ourselves least in the kingdom of God. Today Jesus shows that those who are great are those who welcome the Lord in a surprising way.

I. Think of how Jesus welcomed us.

He didn’t welcome us because He thought there was something great about us. We are tempted to think that Jesus welcomed me because He really needed me. He needed my gifts and talents. He needed my praise. He looked at me and thought, “There is someone that I can use.”

It is actually the opposite. When He chose us, it was a statement that if God could use me, then He can use anyone. Think of the kind of people that God called in the Bible. He called Moses, a man who stuttered. He chose Jeremiah, who was very young, as a prophet. As apostles He chose men who were very slow to understand. This is the third time that Jesus predicted His passion to the disciples. They still didn’t know what He was talking about, and they were too afraid to ask Him what He meant. When He was betrayed, they all ran away, and Peter denied Him three times. Later Jesus called Paul. In 1 Timothy 1:13 he describes himself as a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man. He confesses that He was the chief of sinners. In 1 Corinthians 1:26 Paul describes the kind of people that God called at Corinth where he writes, “*Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him.*”

Those are some humbling words. God chose people like the little child that Jesus speaks of. A little child has no influence. They have no connections. They are completely dependent on the parents. When children are very young, you can't ask them to run to the store, do chores around the house or earn some money. They are still too young for all those things.

That is how we were before God. We could do nothing for Him. Yet, in His mercy and grace, He set His heart on us.

But His love was even greater than that. He loved us even though it meant that He would have to die for our sins. The disciples didn't understand what Jesus meant because they didn't realize that they were sinners who needed redemption. They were arguing about who was the greatest when they should have been thanking God that He called sinners and fools like them to follow Jesus.

Sometimes we fall into that trap of thinking that God really needs me. When people are asked why they believe they will be saved, most people respond with things that they have done for God, as if God really needs them, but He doesn't. He would do just fine if you were not following Him. He would simply find someone else to do what you are doing. An example is In the book of Esther, when Mordecai told her, *"If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come from another place..."* (4:14) God had planned to use Esther, but had she not cooperated, God would have simply found another way.

Without Christ, we are nothing but sinners who need redemption. In His great love for us, Christ paid for our sins. He suffered and died in our place. He took people who were of no value and gave us value by clothing us with His righteousness.

So as Christians we confess that we are poor, miserable sinners. We know that without Christ there is nothing good in us or about us. There is nothing that we could do for God. God really doesn't need us. Yet, in His mercy God has washed away our sins and made us righteous and holy through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. That is how great His love for us is. He has welcomed sinners like us. Our value is in the new life we have in Christ.

II. How do we welcome Him?

It is tempting to think that I need to please God with great deeds. We think that we have to do something important as Christians so God will value us more than other Christians. We want to do things that other people will notice and that will bring recognition. We want to be given important titles and honored with awards. It is tempting to be like the disciples and want others to look up to us and all that we do for God We want to be important and do important things.

However, when we want to be important, we usually do more harm than good. An example of that was Paul when he thought he was doing great deeds for God by persecuting the church. Jesus called down from heaven, *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"*

Christ shows that we welcome Him when we welcome the humble and the lowly. He says that when we welcome a little child in His name, we welcome Him. In Matthew 25 Jesus says that when we feed the hungry, clothe the poor, look after the sick or visit those in prison, it is as if we are doing those things to Him. Our service to those people is much like Jesus' service to us. They can't benefit us in any way. Yet, we serve them out of love and mercy. It is not done to receive rewards. In Matthew 25 the righteous are amazed that Jesus tells them they did all these things. They were not keeping track. They were simply sharing God's mercy as God had been merciful to them.

In our lives this plays out when parents raise their children in the fear and training of the Lord. It is shown in things like changing diapers or getting up in the middle of the night to feed them. It is when husbands and wives give up things that they love for the good of the other. It is when workers work hard and show their boss respect, even if the boss is harsh. It is when we care for an elderly relative or visit a shut-in from church. None of these things receive any recognition. We are not keeping track. As Christians we learn to be merciful to those in need as Christ has been merciful to us.

Do you want to be great in the kingdom of God? If that question crosses your mind, you probably cannot become great. Such selfish ambition is the way of our world rather than of our Lord. As Christians we simply care for those who need our help, even if they cannot do anything for us. That is how God welcomed us. It was simply out of grace and mercy without any merit or worthiness on our part. He has welcomed sinners like us, and He calls us to welcome those who need us. When we do, we are welcoming Him by sharing the mercy He has given to us.

Amen

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