

Mark 9:33-50 | Greatness Redefined

Tyler Velin | March 12th, 2015

In our world today there are three types of celebrities. There are celebrities who are known for absolutely no reason. Like the Kardashians and everyone from Jersey Shore. Then there are the celebrities who are known because of what they have produced, your movie stars and athletes. But then there is this final bracket of celebrities and those are the innovators. These people are seen as visionaries and icons in their craft and whatever they do is seen as the model to copy.

In the music industry these are people like Elvis, The Beatles, Michael Jackson. In movies we have the Spielberg, Wes Anderson, Peter Jackson. People who not only have fame, but have influence. I don't know a single person in the fashion industry, but I can probably bet that there is some fashion mogul out there and if she was to wear a garbage bag in public, it would become cool to wear a garbage bag in public. Why? Because certain individuals have the capacity to define the standards through which we view life.

As much as I love Spielberg and The Beatles, no one on earth had the ability to redefine entire categories of existence like Jesus Christ. He was not only an innovative celebrity, he was the creator of the whole world. He brought a perspective that was not only unique, but it was objectively real and true.

Tonight we are going to see Jesus redefining what it means to be great in this world. This should be pertinent to all of us as college students: we all want to be great at something. But how does the gospel of Jesus change the way in which we think about that?

The theme we are going to see tonight, quickly, is **“Following Christ is a life of servanthood defined by humble cooperation and hostility towards sin.”** Pray.

So in the past three chapters Jesus has been explicit in explaining to his disciples that he is the Messiah, he is the Son of God come to die for the sins of humanity. And today we are going to see Jesus beginning to define for them even more what it means to follow him.

Mark 9:33-37.

One thing I love about this text is that Jesus asked them what they were talking about and no one answered because they were ashamed. Here they were in the presence of Jesus Christ, the God man himself, and they were arguing over who was the greatest.

And yet, even though no one answered, Jesus still pushed into the issue. Why? Because Jesus is kind. Jesus doesn't wait for us to vocalize our tendencies and heart issues which birth sin, but Jesus comes into our hearts and exposes it on his own because he is gracious.

Jesus isn't going to discuss this issue because he wants to shame his disciples, he wants to address it because he wants to love them and he wants them to think rightly about himself and each other.

And here the disciples are thinking in terms that we all think, who is better, who is the greatest. Whenever we meet with anyone we have a subtle tendency to do that. Whether it's comparing majors, year in school, how old they are, what job they have. We want to have the upper hand when it comes to recognition.

And Jesus sees this view brewing in his disciples and he says this: **Mark 9:35-37.**

To be the greatest is to be a follower of Jesus and a servant of all.

This isn't another opinion from the self-help section, this is the mind of God himself speaking truth and reality into the lives of those who follow him. Jesus defines greatness because Jesus is the greatest, and here he gives a countercultural definition of what it means to be first: you must be last, and you must be a servant to all.

Then he pulls up a child and says he who receives a child receives me, but more importantly he goes on to say he who receives a child in my name also receives the one who sent me.

Now most people in here don't have children. But when you do one of the most common questions you will be asked is, "How has parenting changed you?" My answers, always, is, "I am more aware of how selfish I am than ever before."

Because to accept a child is to lay down your life for them. It is in one sense to lay aside your aspirations for glory and selflessly serve, love and care for this one. Following Jesus is a life of humility and service towards others.

If you are a believer in here tonight, where does that show up in your life? By observing your interactions and aspirations would people see you as a servant, or would they see you as someone concerned only about your own "glory" as well intentioned as it may seem.

But let's allow Jesus to clarify this thought a little more. What does he mean when he defines following him, and greatness in terms of humility and servanthood. **Following Christ is a life of servanthood.**

The narrative continues: **Mark 9:38-41**

So let me summarize what just happened. John, who is one of Jesus's inner three, is upset because there were some other people who were doing Jesus follower things and yet they are not part of the disciples. Now there are other places in the Bible where we see people casting out demons with insincere faith trying to do magic more than trying to follow Jesus. But the tone of this text isn't that, the tone of this text is that these are genuine Christ followers, but John is upset because they are not part of their group.

The bite of pride is often subtle in the Christian mind, but the slightest bite still bears a lethal sting. So often we can discredit the work of other Christians because they are not us. We can become nitpicky in their sin, we can criticize their devotion, we can discount their efforts because they are different than our own, but look at what Jesus says in relation to this: **Mark 9:39-41.**

The road of gospel ministry is broad. And we need different people from different backgrounds in different groups in order to do this better. The world doesn't need, nor does it want a million Tyler's. The world needs people who are united in Christ, but unique in belonging and emphasis.

Following Christ is a life of servanthood defined by humble cooperation. And again, even at the end of this text Jesus frames this in light of servanthood. **Mark 9:41.**

We need the help of others to do the mission of the church. We need to pray that Jesus kills our pride which can so often draw our attention back to our own glory and away from the glory of Christ. Look at how Paul prays for the church in Philippi: **Phil 1:3-7.**

We should be a people who pray for the gospel growth of other Christians, not who slander and gossip about ones who are different from us. Even here on this campus we should pray that Cru, InterVarsity, Chi

Alpha and other groups become captivated by the gospel and produce gospel fruit. That is how we can serve these ministries as Christ served us.

Finally we see this: **Following Christ is a life of servanthood defined by humble cooperation and hostility towards sin.**

Mark 9:42-50.

This is a huge text, a great text when it comes to fighting sin. But often times I think we can look at this text in isolation of its context. In verses 33-37 Jesus talks about servanthood, in 38-41 Jesus talks about humility and cooperation, and in this very text we looked at look at the first verse, **9:42** and the last one **9:50**.

We as Christians need to be vigilant against sin in our lives. Now obviously Jesus isn't telling us to cut off our body parts. But Jesus, the author of creation, is framing this in terms of importance. Once again Jesus is taking everything we see as real and so important and framing it in light of spiritual things. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. Why because it is better to enter the kingdom of God with one hand than to go to hell with two.

The weight we have in fighting sin is huge. To clarify we do not avoid hell by being sinless, we avoid hell by faith in Christ, but those who believe in Christ have power over sin. Sin is not your Lord, Jesus is. For those who have been redeemed by Christ we fight sin because we have been freed from it.

But in light of the context of this text, we don't just fight sin because it is good for us, we fight sin because it is better for everyone else. One of the best ways to serve those around you is to be vigilant in your own fight against sin. Sin is contagious and works well with others. But to be hostile towards your own sin is to be hostile with corporate sin.

And look back at the end of this text: **9:50**.

Now look back in the Old Testament at **Lev. 2:13**. Did you see that? God says that we should not let the salt of the covenant to be missing. Now in Bible times salt was something which preserved food before they had refrigeration.

And God says that they need to season their offerings with salt because their offerings need to be timeless. But Jesus refrains this passage here in Mark 9. Because Jesus is the permanent sacrifice we no longer need to offer salted offerings to God, we are now the salted offering.

We as believers are the preservation of God's covenant of grace and through our service, through our humble cooperation, through our fight against sin we are benefitting the world because we are presenting Christ to those who are lost.

Do you see the weight of your servanthood? Does this change how you view yourself? Does this redefine your idea of greatness?

Because in light of an eternal savior who came to die for our sins we have been redefined. To make a lasting legacy in this earth isn't to carve out a name for ourselves, it's to preserve a name for Christ.

In light of that call we seek to serve hand in hand as faceless laborers before a faithful Jesus, and we seek to put sin to death in our members for the good of ourselves, and for the benefit of those around us.

Are you salty? Are you a preserving follower of Christ? Is your life a life of servanthood defined by humble cooperation and hostility towards sin? I pray that this is true in you, and in this group.

