

When God Looks for Greatness in His Church and in His People

The 2nd Half of the Gospel of Mark #3

Mark 9:30-37

Then Jesus said to them: “let the little children come to me – and do not hinder them – for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these. For the last shall be first and the first shall be last and the greatest among you shall be your servant.

The greatest Naval ship to ever set sail in ocean waters was the USS Enterprise. This United States Navy aircraft carrier sailed around the world for 55 years until it was decommissioned in 2017. But what made the USS Enterprise great wasn't its size or endurance. What made it great was the simple metals of iron, aluminum, steel her creator used to craft it. The greatest substance known to mankind is water. The God of the Bible created it when He spoke the world into existence. The last time I checked, water has yet to be decommissioned. But what makes water great has nothing to do with Crystal Springs, Aquafina, or Fiji. What makes it great is the simple elements of hydrogen and oxygen that our Creator used to craft it.

Search the Scriptures and you'll find that when God set out to craft greatness, he used the most basic of elements. To craft his most prized possession, he used dust from the earth and breathed life into his nostrils. To craft great leaders, he searched the shepherd's fields. To craft great churches, he left the buildings made of brick and mortar to search for fisherman and tax collectors. Our world looks for greatness in the form of importance, power, fame, and achievement. But I want to tell you today that our Lord goes about the process much differently. When He looks for greatness, he looks for servants. When he looks winners of the race, he looks for those who are willing to come in last. And when he looks for churches to use to do great things for him, he looks for people who make it up to see Him through the eyes of a child. For in today's passage of Scripture, when the disciples had just finished arguing about who was the greatest, Jesus pointed to the children who happened to be among them and said: “whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me.”

I really believe that we've only scratched the surface of the great things God wants to do in the life of our church. But for Jesus to do those great things, He requires one thing from each of us. It is this: He requires that we measure greatness not in the way that the world does. He requires that we measure it through the eyes and faith of a child. For the Divine Colonel's famous recipe for making great churches and great Christians who contribute to the building of the Kingdom of God has not changed for 2000 years. He always starts with simplest ingredient: the faith of a child. According to the Bible, the eyes of the Lord roam the earth looking for people who desire to be great on His terms, not the worlds. So today I want to tell you what God looks for when He sets out to craft great churches and great Christians. We see what he looks for in Mark 9:30-37. When His eyes cast their glare in our direction, what will Jesus see in you, in me, and in we, collectively?

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

1. Willingness to be last in a “me first” world. (31; 34)

- **Putting Your Best Foot Forward:** (1) Have you ever heard the phrase “put your best foot forward?” I sure have. I've used the phrase many times in my life. (2) The phrase was first used in Colonial America when formal greetings were common. (3) When a lady curtsied, the men bowed in return. (4) For a young man, the best bow was thought to be the best sign of being a gentleman. (5) As a result, young men practiced bowing by putting their best foot forward so that they could be deemed worthy of being the most distinguished gentleman. (6) Greatness with Jesus is exactly the opposite. It's not putting your best foot forward. It's putting your best foot backward so someone else can become the most distinguished gentleman.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Greatness in God's eyes never happens by trying to be first. It found in the willingness to be last.
- **Textual Emphasis: Mark's Idea of Greatness vs the Disciples Idea of Greatness:** (1) Biblical writers had an uncanny way of phrasing their materials in a clever way to make an important point. (2) Mark was one of the best at doing it. And he does it in this passage. (3) Notice how it begins: (a) the son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and then he will be killed, and then he will rise again. On the other hand, the disciples didn't answer Jesus' question and kept quiet because they had “argued about who was the greatest.” (4) The greatest had just predicted His death, while the lesser were arguing about their glory. What an important comparison.
- **App:** “When we in our foolishness thought we were wise. He played the fool, and He opened our eyes. When we in our weakness believed we were strong. He became helpless to show we were wrong. So, we follow God's own fool. For only the foolish can tell. Believe the unbelievable. And come be a fool as well.” -- Michael Card, *God's Own Fool*.

2. Willingness to be a servant in a “serve me” world. (35)

- **That’s the First Time I’ve Ever Seen a Walking Sermon:** (1) There once lived a man who arrived at the Chicago Railroad Station to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. (2) As soon as he arrived, the cameras flashed, the city officials had their hands outstretched to meet him, and the media bombarded him with questions. (3) Before he fielded any or shook any hands, Albert Schweitzer politely walked through the crowd to the side of an elderly woman struggling with two large suitcases. He picked them up, smiled, and escorted her to the bus. (4) When he finished, no reporter asked him any questions. But one did manage to say to the crowd: “that’s the first time I ever saw a sermon walking.”
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Great Christian people and great Christian exist not to be served. They exist to serve. And that’s rare in a “serve me” world.
- **Textual Emphasis: Bondservant:** (1) In verse 35, Mark mentions that Jesus set down just before he started speaking to the Twelve. That’s what rabbis did in Jewish culture with their students before they taught them the most important lessons: lessons that they needed to learn and learn right that very minute. (2) And the lesson was this: “anyone who wants to be first must be last and a servant of all.” The word “servant” here comes from the Greek word *doulos*. It was a word used in Greek culture to denote the servant’s relationship to royalty. For to be a *doulos*, meant to be an individual in the king’s court who is not at his own disposal. Instead, the *doulos* was at the king’s disposal to serve his master’s needs. (3) But the greatest aspect of a *doulos* is what they often said when serving others of the royal household when they were not in the king’s immediate presence. They said: “as unto the king.”
- **App:** Thousands of years later, how God looks for greatness in people and in churches hasn’t changed. He looks for those not at their own disposal, but at the king’s disposal. He looks those willing to serve others while not in the king’s immediate presence “as unto the Lord.”

3. Willingness to be childlike in a “childish” world (36-37).

- **7-Up:** (1) A group of fathers were in a waiting room while their wives were in the process of giving birth. A nurse came in and announced to one man that his wife had just given birth to twins. To which he responded: “that’s amazing. I play for the Minnesota Twins. (2) A minute later, another nurse came in and said to another man, “sir your wife has given birth to triplets.” To which he responded, “that’s amazing. I work for the 3M company.” (3) All of the sudden, the third man slipped out of his chair and started feeling ill. The men looked at him and said: “are you sick?” To which he responded, “yes, I am. I work for the 7-Up Company.”
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Childishness is common. Childlikeness is rare. And there’s a vast difference between the two.
- **Textual Emphasis: Jesus’ Sermon Illustration:** (1) While sitting down, Jesus made one of those exceedingly rare at Genesis Church one-point sermons: “anyone who wants to be first must be last and a servant of all.” (2) Now to illustrate what he means; he uses children within their midst as in illustration: “whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me.” (3) His illustration implies two things: (1) Literally: these children here are just as important in the life of the Kingdom Community as you are, disciples. (2) Figuratively: Childlikeness is the key to the kingdom. That begs a question: what’s the difference between a childish faith and a childlike faith?
- **Childish Faith vs Childlike:** (1) A childish faith is one that is immature. It is one that is demanding of God and demanding of God’s people. It’s one that always clamors for attention and acts out when things don’t go his/her way. It’s one that says: “God exists to make me happy and the church exists for that reason as well.” The Scriptures warn us about such a faith: “when I became a man, I put away childish things. One with a childish faith says things like: “Well, God always wants me to be happy.” (2) But a childlike faith is one that is mature. It’s one that is dependent on God and one that attaches to God’s people. It’s one that is trusting. It’s one that is loving. One with a childlike faith says: “the anchor holds in spite of the storm.” It’s one that says: God’s number one priority in my life is not my happiness. It’s to love me, protect me, discipline me, and mature me enough to ensure that I become a responsible adult. That’s the one Jesus commends.
- **App:** We all should have already graduated from a childish faith if we know Jesus as our Savior. But we never graduate from a childlike faith. It’s the key to understanding the Kingdom of Heaven every day.

4. Willingness to be welcoming in an “unwelcoming” world. (37)

- **Entertaining Angels:** (1) I love Hebrews 13:2. It says, “do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” (2) When God sends his angels, I pray we will be the type of Christians and the type of church that will make them feel welcome.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** “As often as you have done it to the least of these,” Jesus said, “you have done it unto to me” without even knowing it.
- **Textual Emphasis: Welcome:** (1) In verse 37, the word “welcome” occurs four times: 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. (2) The best way to understand what Jesus means by this is to insert the phrase “without knowing it” after the 2nd and 4th welcome. (3) In Scriptures, there is a reason children, sojourners, orphans, and widows are often linked together: they have nothing to offer you. And how you treat them says everything about who you are as Christian and who we are as a church.
- **App:** Let us always be welcoming of the “least of these” because by doing so we may even entertain an angel without knowing it. When he looks for churches to use to do great things for him, he looks for people who look at Him through the eyes of a child and who entertain angels without knowing it. May we be that kind of people. Praise to God.

