**ANYONE WHO WANTS TO BE FIRST**

Mark 9:30-41 (Key Verse 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.””*

In today’s passage we are going to learn from Jesus how to truly be the greatest. Jesus began this teaching after observing his disciples who argued among themselves on who would be the greatest. The disciples had this argument because they had an earthly view on who would be greatest. In this world being the greatest means competing and comparing one with another which creates rivalry, petty and ugly relationship among people. Jesus called the disciples to live in harmony with one another to grow as servants of God and be used mightily to save the people of the world from the power of sin and death. The mission that God has given them has no room for petty relationships. And so, Jesus began teaching them that whoever wants to be first must be last, and the servant of all. Therefore, through today’s passage we are going to unpack in detail what this really means and how is it true greatness, and how it is useful for one to grown as a servant of God.

The passage today begins with Jesus who repeatedly began teaching- his disciples about his death and resurrection saying: *“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.”* When Jesus had said this, the disciples did not understand and were afraid to ask him about it. What Jesus was teaching was the most important lesson that the disciples needed to grasp, it was a lesson that he has been teaching them throughout his ministry. Jesus’ death and resurrection is at the core of his gospel ministry, is the core of who he is, our salvation revolves around this. However, the disciples who have been following Jesus from village to village, listening to Jesus preach did not understand when Jesus repeatedly taught them that he will be delivered into the hands of men, they will kill and after three days he will rise.

How could the disciples not understand this repeated teaching from Jesus? How is it that they struggled to understand this? They did not understand because they had a earthly view in their minds, they had their own earthly agenda. Though they followed Jesus daily, they had their own idea of who Jesus is and what he has come to do. They had their own idea that Jesus has come to liberate them from the Roman empire. They had ideas of an earthly messiah in mind, and so they could not understand Jesus when he repeatedly taught them who the Messiah truly is. Because of their earthly view of things, they could not deny themselves and follow Christ diligently. They other interesting thing is that it seems they knew that they were lacking, for when they did not understand Jesus it says they were afraid.

What is happening to the disciples, is not uncommon to many people today, because of earthly views many people struggle to understand the way of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus, they struggle to receive and accept Jesus’ second coming. They struggle because it does not make logical sense, it is simple, they struggle because they refuse to deny themselves and follow Jesus. When Jesus saw the disciples who were struggling, he did not give up on them but repeatedly taught them that he must die and on the third day rise again. Today as well, Jesus is not giving up on you and me, he will continue to repeatedly share the gospel message with you and me. May God have mercy on you and me to turn away from earthly view of things, surrender all to Jesus, receive him as the Messiah and accept his way by taking our cross and following him.

After Jesus had taught his disciples about his death a resurrection, they came to Capernaum and when he was in the house he asked them what they were arguing about on the road. The disciples again remained silent for they had argued about who was the greatest among them. They kept quiet when Jesus asked them for deep down they knew that their motives and ideas were earthly, their idea of being the greatest was about their selfish reasons, power over others. Realizing the danger of this Jesus began to teach them about what being truly great is. Let us look at the **key verse 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.”* To be first means one must be last, what a paradox, similarly, to be first one must be a servant of all. Jesus said this because being first is about leadership of God’s people and in Jesus’ eyes leadership is about being a servant for God’s people it’s about taking care of them first. Jesus himself is a perfect example we can learn from, he came into to this world born in a manger, the lowest form of birth, he was the last for the sake of serving us, for the sake of allowing all humankind to come to him.

Furthermore, Jesus became a servant of all, he gave even his own life for the sake of us, for the sake of all mankind. Jesus became the last, a servant of all and now he is seated at the right hand of God. True greatness is about being the very last and servant of all. Furthermore, Jeus continued in **verse 36-37**: “*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.”* Here Jesus further emphasized that true greatness is about welcoming others rather judging them, he further highlighting that welcoming others is like welcome him. Here Jesus also emphasized that those who welcome the little children welcome him, he mentioned little children because in ancient times children were very insignificant and no one paid attention to them for they had nothing to offer, they were just annoying and difficult to manage. So it was hard to welcome them and many people ignored them.

But Jesus today, emphasized that true greatness is about welcoming everyone even those like the little children, it is easy to welcome our friends, people we like, some of our family member, but those people who are like the little children are very difficult to welcome, but Jesus said, we must welcome them for welcoming them is like welcoming Jesus himself. When Jesus was punished and crucified, all the crowds shouted crucify him crucify him, all his disciples ran and were nowhere to be found, but when he breath his last he said Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. Jesus knew that Judas Iscariot will betray him, but he did not stop serving him and welcoming him. Jesus did so because true greatness is about welcoming others and not judging them.

Furthermore, in **verse 38** it says: *“Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”*” John did not want the other fellow to drive out demons in the name of Jesus because he was not with Jesus like them, perhaps he looked different, and he did not fit the profile according to John and so he stopped him from using the name of Jesus. But Jesus said, do not stop him because Jesus wanted to welcome everyone, Jesus was not influence by earthly forces of exclusivity and greatness like John and so he welcomed him. Jesus said *“For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.”*  True greatness also means we need to know and accept that the body of Christ is huge and spreads all over the world in various forms, so we must welcome other believers and not look down on them and think we are the only ones truly serving God. Of course as you know there are many false teachers that emerged over the years and that does not mean we need to let them be too, we still need to rebuke them and pray for their agenda to not prosper, so that the one true Jesus can be preached so that people can be brought to salvation. This is the kind of greatness that Jesus wanted the disciples to pursue, this is the kind of greatness that Jesus wants us to pursue for it is the only form of true greatness. It is true greatness for it guarantees true fulfillment, happiness and purpose and meaning in life. As opposed to earthly greatness which is filled with unhealthy competition and comparison, pettiness, politics and a whole lot of messy business.

As we have learnt today, the disciples were struggling first to understand and accept Jesus’ death and resurrection, we have also learnt that the struggles of the disciples are not unique to them only, today as well we struggle with the same. Now on top of this how can we pursue the kind of greatness that Jesus taught about? How can we be the last, how can we be the servant of all. Firstly, we can do so because that is the only form of true greatness, earthly greatness is not real it is fake for it leaves us empty, fills us with anxiety, leads us to depression and takes away our happiness due to unhealthy comparison and competition and petty politics. Secondly, we can be the last and servant of all because our Lord Jesus Christ has done it, we can follow in his footsteps, deny ourselves and be a servant of all, welcome others and serve them with love. And lastly we can be last and a servant of all by depending on Jesus, on our own we cannot be last, we cannot be a servant of all, we cannot welcome others because we are earthly beings. To be truly great we need to clothe ourselves with Jesus, with his blood daily, and then we can be raised into greatness and be used mightily as a leader, a servant of God’s sheep who welcomes all kinds of people. Like Jesus we will be able to welcome even public sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors, murderers and transform their lives by bringing them to Jesus.

**Conclusion:**

From today’s passage we have learnt that true greatness is not determined by social position or ability, but a character, a character of being last, a servant of all and welcoming others regardless of their social position. We have learnt that it is not easy to have a character of true greatness on our own, to overcome we need to clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ who has power and authority to enable us to be last, to be a servant of all and welcome others. To be used mightily by God we need to be last; we need to be a servant of all and welcome others. I pray that God may have mercy on us all today, to repent from desires of earthly greatness and come to Jesus to help us to pursue true greatness so that we can be transformed to be filled with joy, and a life of meaning and purpose as servants of God.

Amen, Key Verse