



**Kingdom Theology**  
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**San Antonio, Texas**  
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**Mark 9:30-37**

Such an interesting passage of scripture! You know in the whole Gospel of Mark the disciples get a bum rap. Mark is not kind to these disciples. They're slow, dimwitted and they don't get it. They just don't get it. Jesus spends three years with them and every time you turn around they don't get it. They get a bum rap, a really bad press.

But the interesting thing about it is even though they don't quite always get what Jesus is trying to say or do, he never gives up on them. Jesus never gives up on these guys. As a matter of fact, he takes this trip, this journey away from the crowds just to spend some time with these folks so that he can begin to really teach them about life under the reign of God and so it is important for us to know that even though they may be dimwitted, even though they may be a couple pounds shy of a full load, God doesn't give up on them. Jesus certainly doesn't and neither should we. He wants to teach them about the kingdom and you have to know that what's been going on in this is a series of events of Jesus seeking moments aside with these disciples to begin to teach them.

Now I'll be honest with you that it's pretty clear that Jesus' teachings, they aren't for everyone. They're not for the whole mass. They're not for the whole world. Jesus' teachings are very specifically for those people who have been called and commissioned and who live in community. It's not like Jesus is a popular author, he's not one of those Kahlil Gibran, you know, he's not out there writing books for any body and every body. He's not out here to make a killing in the market. He really is trying to reach just a certain group of people and for him at this moment in Mark's Gospel his entire attention is toward these twelve disciples. If no one else gets it he wants them to get it. And like I said, he doesn't give up on them even after the death and burial and resurrection he still reclaims them and calls them back and sends them out. Jesus isn't done with these who have been called.

You can compare this whole story of the disciples, as a matter of fact most folks do, they compare the story of the disciples with the church today. We still struggle with it. There are things that we just don't get that Jesus says. They baffle us. They blow our minds. The words that Jesus talks about when he starts talking about well I've got to go to Jerusalem, I'm going to die, they're going to kill me, but it's okay. Wait a minute, Jesus, you just said they're going to kill you. How is that okay? And it is so profound when Jesus tells them that and these disciples are so distraught that they don't even know what to ask, let alone have the gumption enough to ask him. What are you talking about, Jesus? We don't understand. They can't even ask that question. Jesus, we're a little slow, would you go over that one more time? They're embarrassed about it.

It's clear the disciples are a lot like us or maybe we are a lot like them. As the church even in the twenty-first century there are parts of it we just don't get. You know we'd like to believe that this Gospel is for every single person out there, that everybody can hear it and absolutely respond to it positively and everything will be just hunky-dory and the kingdom will be here. No, no. Yes, it's a Gospel that's offered to everyone but not everyone will receive it. Not everyone is going to and so when Jesus tries to withdraw away from the masses his intentions are not to turn his back upon the world, that's not what he's about to do especially in Jerusalem, but he really wants to spend some quality time with these disciples in the few moments that he has left with them and his intentions are drawn towards specifically making sure that they understand that what he's teaching isn't like what the rest of the world is seeking or teaching. No, he's not a Guru, he's not a spirituality Guru whose

books appeal to the masses, whose speeches are a \$1,000.00 a plate at a dinner. They're not about that. He's not seeking that kind of fame. He's not seeking that kind of attention. What he really wants is some time with these disciples, one on one, or one on twelve so that they can fully grasp that the kingdom he's talking about, what it means to live in the reign of God, is radically different than anything else they've ever heard.

Well they don't get it. They don't understand it always. They struggle with some of the sayings. They struggle with some of the teachings, the things that are going on. They don't understand why Jesus who is so incredibly popular with the masses is not trying to win the masses over. It happens, but it's not his intention. No, Jesus is not just another Dr. Phil, he is the Lord and there is a big difference. The disciples don't get Jesus' message and they are so intimidated by the way he's teaching, the things that he's saying, they've had a setback.

The passage just before this in the very first part of the Gospel of John in the first part of chapter 9 in this Gospel the disciples were out and they were trying to heal this father's son and they failed miserably and when Jesus hears about it they come back to him and say "Jesus, we don't understand it, we said the magic words and it didn't work. We said the same things you said and it didn't work, Jesus. Tell us, did we say it wrong, was it the wrong inflection maybe or did we leave a word out or did we get it out of order? What did we do wrong, Jesus, because we wanted to do the magic that you've been doing but it didn't work." And Jesus who is now frustrated with these twelve because they don't get it and PR is coming down hard on him. He's now got the Sadducees who are looking at him saying his own disciples don't even know what's going on. And Jesus in frustration says, "How much longer must I bear you? Okay, look, I'm going to Jerusalem and I'm going to be handed over to some people and they're going to kill me and it really is okay." And the disciples are dumbstruck. They don't know what to say to Jesus because these words... but what about the guy and his son, what are you talking about Jerusalem? They don't get it and they can't ask. They're so intimidated by the teachings and the awesomeness of who Jesus is, they don't know what to say. And Jesus tells them very simply. "Look, the kingdom isn't about that stuff. It's not about the healings. That's a part of it, but it's not about that. The kingdom is being in relationship" and they still don't get it.

They get to Capernaum and Jesus says, "Alright, wait a minute, I heard you all talking on the road, what were you arguing about?" Now they're really embarrassed. It's not that they are intimidated, now they are embarrassed. The disciples had been arguing about who is the greatest, who's the best, who's first, well I am because you know I knew Jesus first. He called me first. I've been with him the longest. How is it in that video in the Walk to Emmaus, nobody else walked on water with Jesus? Do you hear Peter saying that? Nobody else got to walk on water even though he sunk, it doesn't matter, but nobody else did. And they are arguing about who is the greatest, which is really stupid and you know how those arguments start. You've all had kids, most of you have. You know how those arguments start, little bitty nit-picking things... and they start and before long it is a stupid argument that gets so far out of control and when they're called on it, they're embarrassed.

It's no longer about we don't understand, it's now you were talking about death and stuff and we're talking about greatest. Gee, how stupid do we feel. Don't we still do that? Don't we? My church is bigger than yours. Oh yeah, but mine's older than yours. Oh yeah. We do that. Preachers do that. We get caught up into it. Who's the greatest? We get caught up into who's going to move this year. Who's going to what church this year? Did you hear so and so is going to that big church? I don't think they are worth it. I can think of five other preachers that would probably be better than that. I'm one of those five, probably number one on that list, but I didn't get asked to go there. We get sucked into it, too. We get into those silly little arguments about power and authority and who's first, who's the greatest and what's the best. We're not immune to it.

And so when Jesus says, “What were you all arguing about on the road?” I really want to believe that Jesus had an eyebrow raised when he started asking that question because he knew because they didn’t even say anything and he answered their question about what is great and greatness. Who’s the greatest? He says the greatest of all of you is the one who is last of all, least of all and who is servant of all. I don’t like that. I don’t know about you all, but I don’t like that. Taking what we’ve known in our whole lives as greatness and the definition of it, the whole world has said what greatness is, it’s the Warren Buffets and the Bill Gates and all of those, the Donald Trumps, it’s wealth and power and authority. It’s all they have to do is snap fingers and it’s done. That’s what greatness is. Greatness is the one who controls the political parties. You see it in Congress all the time, don’t we, in the minority leaders, the majority leaders? They’re all arguing, it doesn’t matter what party they are from, they do the same thing, it’s just the other side. Don’t we all do that? We see it in our businesses. We see it in our schools. We see it in our workplace. We see it in our homes. Yeah, don’t we? I want you to know I am the boss of our house. My wife told me I could say that. She said, “no, I’m not.” That’s what I thought. Braedon’s the boss of the house, right?

The truth of the matter is, Jesus takes our whole definition, the world’s definition of greatness and turns it completely right side up. Did you notice that, right side up, because what greatness is in the kingdom of God is not what greatness is in the world. As a matter of fact what Jesus is basically telling the disciples is that if you really, really want to be great then you’ve got to think about being last. You’ve got to think about being the least, putting every single other person ahead of your own wants and needs and desires. Boy does that ever fly in the face of our world, in our culture. I mean Madison Avenue has us convinced that that’s not right, just do it, the me generation, you deserve a break today and on and on and on.

We’re so ingrained with trying to become the greatest that we’ve forgotten that the way to become the greatest, according to Jesus’ teachings, is not the avenue that we’ve been taught. It’s so different. Become the least. And then to drive the point home, to make this point so crystal clear, psst come here, where’s that kid at, where’s that kid, come here, come here, come on over here and he sets a kid in front of these disciples. Now we read this in the twenty-first century and we think oh well he set a child there and the child is so naïve and perfect, they’re such without sin and... no that’s not why he did that. We got to go back into the first century, not the twenty-first century, the first century and we need to recognize that that child had no rights, that child wasn’t a human being yet, the child was not worth anything, the child was property, the child was worse than a slave. You at least bought a slave. You don’t buy a child. If you had a child, the child was yours, had no voice, had no way of making a decision, had no place in society, always belonged to someone else and in truth when you’ve got thirteen men in a room a child in the midst of them is an absolute unwelcome issue. The child is supposed to be hanging around its mom’s knees. It’s not supposed to be in amongst the men folk. But Jesus calls the child into him and he says, “Do you see this? This child, the one that has no rights, no value, no voice, no place in modern society of first century, that child is the one to whom you should serve. Whenever you welcome this child, because when you welcome someone you give them dignity, you give them integrity, you give them purpose and you give them worth, and when you welcome this child I want to tell you about greatness, when you welcome the child you welcome me and when you welcome me you welcome the one who sent me.

The values of the world are turned all the way over, because now it’s not an issue of well I knew Jesus longer than you did and I walked on water and you didn’t. Now it’s an issue of who treats the other, because the teaching is simple, Jesus wants us to recognize that in serving and searching for the least first we in fact become the least because we put those who are beneath us above us and that, according to the kingdom of God and the reign of God is what welcoming is all

about and that's what greatness is all about, putting the other first even the one that pierced their tongue and have a stud in it so when they talk they can't talk because it sounds like they got marbles in their mouth because they have this big thing on their tongue, even those or the ones that have the tattoos from there to there and everywhere else and places you don't want to know about, or the ones whose breeches are hanging down so low that you wonder how in the world they could even walk, or the ones whose clothes probably weren't theirs, they didn't buy them at least and they haven't been washed in months, maybe years, the ones that don't live next door but the ones that live under the bridge just around the corner. Those are the least in our society, aren't they? They are the children. They're the ones for whom Christ himself would not disdain to die. That's the greatest. Welcome them and you welcome Christ. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!