

#1794  
Cf. #558 #1434

Mark 9:30-37<sup>[1]</sup>  
Who is the greatest?  
The One who serves.  
Jesus predicts his death.  
18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Supplementary Lectionary  
Series "B," Gospels

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Door Offering: KFC  
Noon: KFC

<sup>30</sup> They left that place [the region of Caesarea Philippi in the north] and passed through Galilee [to the south]. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, <sup>31</sup> because 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."

<sup>32</sup> But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

<sup>33</sup> They came to Capernaum [on northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee]. When Jesus was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" <sup>34</sup> But they were silent because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

<sup>35</sup> Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

<sup>36</sup> Jesus took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> "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."

#### WHO'S THE GREATEST?

- I. THE ONE WHO IS SERVED? Or,
- II. THE ONE WHO SERVES?

In the Name of Jesus, who humbled himself to serve us as our Savior, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

Jesus and his disciples were traveling from Caesarea Philippi, way north of Galilee. They were heading south into Galilee, through which they were passing. Jesus was no longer emphasizing his teaching and preaching to the crowds; rather, he was taking the time to teach his disciples privately. Jesus was teaching them especially about his upcoming passion and resurrection. By his passion – Jesus' suffering and death on the cross – Jesus would serve his disciples and all mankind by taking away their sins. Along the way, Jesus' disciples were arguing about who of them was the greatest. We too look at this question: WHO'S THE

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<sup>[1]</sup> *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

GREATEST? Is it I. THE ONE WHO IS SERVED? Or, is it II. THE ONE WHO SERVES?

WHO'S THE GREATEST?  
I. THE ONE WHO IS SERVED?

Jesus' disciples were arguing as they were traveling through Galilee to the town of Capernaum on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had made Capernaum his headquarters during his Galilean ministry. Jesus had been teaching his disciples about what was going to take place concerning him. He said, "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" (9:31b).

Jesus knew what was going to happen. Jesus knew what he would accomplish by his suffering, death and resurrection. Mark adds the note, however, "But [his disciples] did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it" (9:32). One of the reasons that Jesus' disciples had been arguing was the fact that they did not understand what Jesus was about to endure and accomplish by his suffering, death and resurrection. In addition, Jesus' disciples were also arguing about which of them would be first in the kingdom Jesus was going to set up.

Jesus' disciples wanted to have a significant place in the kingdom Jesus was going to establish. Mark records,

**<sup>33</sup> They came to Capernaum. When [Jesus] was in the house, he asked [his disciples], "What were you arguing about on the road?"**

**<sup>34</sup> But they were silent because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest (9:33&34).**

Who was the greatest? Jesus' disciples had the worldly view that the one with prestige and honor, the one who was served and waited on by others – that one was the greatest. In another record of this incident, Matthew records Jesus' answer to his disciples: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them" (Matthew 20:25b). That lording it over others, was the way of the world. That is what Jesus' disciples wanted at this point. Each of Jesus' disciples wanted to be first in his kingdom – for they thought that Jesus' kingdom would be a kingdom of this world.

APPROPRIATION

So, who is the greatest? Is the one who is served by others the greatest? Are those who are above others in status or position in this world the greatest? Cheerleaders lead cheering sections with the mantra: "We're number one! We're number one! We're number one!" If a person is a senator, governor,

president or king, that person expects others to honor him or her. Such a person expects others to treat him or her with dignity, deference, honor and respect. That, dear friends, is the kind of thing that we desire for ourselves in this world.

We want others to show us honor and respect. We want others to show us deference and dignity. We want to have prestige, power over, and recognition from others. We want to be served by others. Think about how you feel when that does not happen.

If we are not shown honor and respect by others, if others listen to us with half their attention diverted somewhere else – we take offense. If we are speaking to someone, and we see that kind of “glaze” come over their eyes, we know that they are not taking seriously our words; that makes us feel bad, perhaps even angry. If we are speaking and someone interrupts us, we are tempted to become hurt or angry. All of these things take place, because we want to be “number one” – we want to be respected and treated with deference and dignity – we want to be first. And, is this not the case also in the fantasies in which we indulge?

In our fantasies, are we not the main character? Are we not the hero or heroine? Are we not the one to whom others listen and the one others follow? Our natural sinful inclination is to be the greatest and to be served by others. But Jesus teaches us both by Word and example about true greatness.

## WHO'S THE GREATEST? II. THE ONE WHO SERVES?

As Jesus was traveling with his disciples from Caesarea Philippi in the north through Galilee to Capernaum, he was teaching his disciples what was going to take place.

***<sup>31</sup> ... [Jesus] 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.” <sup>32</sup> But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it (9:31&32).***

Jesus refers to himself as “the Son of Man.” The “Son of Man” was a messianic title – a title mentioned in the Bible as being “the Christ,” “the Anointed One,” – the One Anointed and Appointed by God to be the Savior of the world. In the Old Testament, the Prophet Daniel was given a vision of this Messiah, Anointed One – the Son of Man.

Daniel wrote,

<sup>13</sup> ***“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like the Son of Man [Hebrew, vn:aÔ rb'K],<sup>[2]</sup> a reference to Jesus], coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days [God himself] and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup> He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his Kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13&14).***

This Son of Man, Jesus, would receive great honor, glory and power; but, that honor, glory and power would come only after Jesus, the Son of Man, the Anointed One, had completed his mission – his mission to be the Savior of mankind.

So, Jesus told his disciples, “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” (9:31b). Jesus knew all of the details of what was going to happen.

Jesus knew that Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve disciples, one of the Apostles, would arrange to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (cf. Matthew 25:14-16; Mark 14:10&11; Luke 22:3-6). Jesus knew that the Leaders of the Jews would send a contingent of soldiers to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus would be located with his disciples on the night of the Last Passover. Led by Judas, Jesus would be betrayed with a kiss (Matthew 26:47-50; Luke 22:47&48; John 18:2&3). Jesus knew that he would be placed under arrest and would be led to the residence of the High Priest; Jesus knew that his disciples would all run away (Matthew 26:50b&56b). Jesus knew that his disciple Peter would deny knowing Jesus three times (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66ff; Luke 22:54ff; John 18:15-18, 25-27).

Jesus knew that he would be brutally interrogated by the Chief Priests (cf. Matthew 26:67&68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:62-65; John 18:22&23). Jesus knew that the entire Jewish supreme court, the Sanhedrin, composed of the Elders (lay leaders), Sadducees (Chief Priests), Pharisees and Teachers of the Law – the Scribes – would find Jesus guilty of blasphemy for confessing under oath who he was: The Son of God (cf. Matthew 26:63b-68; Mark 14:60-65; Luke 22:70,71). The penalty for blasphemy was death (cf. Matthew 26:65&66; 27:1), but since the Jews under Roman domination, did not have authority to execute anyone (cf. John 18:31b), Jesus knew that he would be brought to the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate (cf. Matthew 27:14; Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1-4; John 18:28ff). Jesus knew that all this was going to take place – every humiliating, bloody and gory detail.

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<sup>[2]</sup> Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1990.

Jesus knew that Pilate would learn that Jesus was innocent of all the charges the Jews were bringing against him (Luke 23:13&14, 23:20ff). Jesus knew, however, that to curry favor with the Jews and prevent a riot, Pontius Pilate would have Jesus cruelly treated, tortured and mocked (cf. Matthew 27:19ff; Mark 15:16-20; John 19:1-6). Jesus knew that Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, would give in to the Jews and order that Jesus be crucified (cf. John 19:6bff).

Jesus knew that he would be taken to the Place of the Skull – Golgotha, Calvary – and there be nailed to the cross (cf. Matthew 27:33ff; Luke 23:33ff; Mark 15:22ff; John 19:16bff). Jesus knew that he would hang on the cross from nine in the morning till three in the afternoon, during which time, Jesus knew that he would suffer from God the punishment for the sins of the world (cf. Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12; Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34; John 19:30). Jesus knew that he would be buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (cf. Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38ff). Jesus also knew that the Leaders of the Jews, afraid that someone would come and steal his body from the tomb and claim that Jesus had risen – that the Jews would petition Pilate to have a guard posted at the tomb (cf. Matthew 27:62-66). Then, Jesus also knew, and he told his disciples, that he would rise again on the third day.

Jesus said, “After three days he [the Son of Man] will rise” (9:31c). Indeed, Jesus did rise again from the dead (cf. Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20), and his resurrection would prove that he was the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One; that he was the Son of Man and the Son of God; that he was the Redeemer and Savior of the world; and that through him, the sins of the entire world were forgiven (cf. John 1:29b,36b; 2 Corinthians 5:19; 1 John 2:2). It was in this way, that Jesus would serve not only his disciples but also the entire world.

Who then was the greatest? It was Jesus, the servant of all. Moreover, to illustrate this more dramatically to his disciples, Jesus called a little child into their midst.

**<sup>36</sup> [Jesus] took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> “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” (9:36&37).**

What was so significant about a little child? Nothing! That was the point! A little child is certainly not “number one” by the measurement of this world. But Jesus lovingly took this little child into his protecting arms. Jesus was the shield for this little child. Jesus’ Name was on this little child, for he says, “whoever welcomes one of these little children in my Name welcomes me” – to be “in Jesus’ Name” means to bear Jesus’ Name – to carry the name: Believer, Christian. The simple faith and trust of the little child was to be imitated by his disciples and by all believers. In other words, Jesus’ disciples were to be servants of all – that would be greatness in Jesus’ Kingdom.

## APPLICATION

So, now, Jesus says to you and to me, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (9:35b). Jesus illustrated this point in our Gospel Lesson this morning, when he washed the feet of his disciples (cf. John 13:1-17). Jesus made the point at that time,

**<sup>12</sup> .... “Do you understand what I have done for you?” .... <sup>13</sup> “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘LORD,’ and rightly so, for that is what I Am. <sup>14</sup> Now that I, your LORD and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. <sup>15</sup> I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup> I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (John 13:12b-17).**

Jesus illustrated his servant-attitude by doing the most menial of tasks for his disciples – washing their feet. Jesus illustrated even more emphatically his servant-attitude by going the way of the cross for his disciples, for you and for me, and for the world. Jesus served you and me by taking away our sin. Jesus served you and me by giving us forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. Jesus is, indeed, the greatest! And, we are to follow in his footsteps.

The Apostle Paul summarized the servant-attitude that we are to have when he wrote to the Galatians, “Serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13b). Serve one another in love – the love that has as its objective that which is in the best interests – the best spiritual interests – of those being loved. And that best interest is revealed by God’s Word.

Proclaim to others God’s Word – the Law. That Law accuses, frightens, condemns, convicts, and damns. Proclaim that condemning Law to others, so that they will know that they cannot stand before God on the basis of their own merit.

Proclaim to others God’s Word – the Gospel. That Gospel of Jesus focuses on his suffering, death and resurrection; the Gospel of Jesus forgives; frees from sin, death and hell; and gives peace in the forgiveness of sins and salvation Jesus won for all.

Serve others with God’s Word – including the little children. Peter wrote in his First Epistle, “ ... in your hearts set apart Christ as LORD. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). Always be prepared to give an answer about Jesus.

## CONCLUSION

So, who is the greatest? It is not the one who is served but the one who serves. Jesus is the one who has served you and me with the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. You and I are to follow Jesus with that servant-attitude, as we bring the Good News of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to others. Amen.