

Lesson Eight

(Mark 9:30 - 10:31)

Who is the Greatest?

(Mark 9:30-37)

30 They left that place and went on through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where he was, 31 because he was teaching his disciples, "The son of Man will be handed over to men who will kill him; three days later, however, he will rise to life."

32 They did not understand what this teaching meant, but they were afraid to ask him.

33 They came to Capernaum, and after going indoors Jesus asked his disciples, "What were you arguing about on the road?"

34 But they would not answer him, because on the road they had been arguing among themselves about who was the greatest.

35 Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all." 36 He took a child and made him stand in front of them. Then he put his arms around him and said to them, 37 "Whoever in my name welcomes one of these children, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not only me but also the one who sent me."

Jesus is the Logos who became a human being. But how can we comprehend the nature and limitations which His humanity imposed on His divinity??? Compare Phil. 2:6-11; Heb. Ch. 2; etc. He certainly was aware of the death which was prepared for Him, even before the transfiguration. Even though He was nailed to the cross by the hands of wicked men, He permitted this to be done out of His own free will (compare John 10:17-18; Matt. 26:53-54). Try to visualize the feeling of the disciples at this time. They did not have the advantage which we have, of knowing beforehand how it all came out. For them it would be as Zechariah prophesied: *"God will kill the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered"* (Matt. 26:31; Zech. 13:7). They had to be prepared for the crisis which was to come upon them, so that when Jesus rose to life in triumph, they could fulfill the mission for which they had been chosen.

A perpetual problem created by their faulty understanding of the coming kingdom, was the question of who would be the most important in what they saw as the political government of the new age. Jewish thinking expected the Messiah to bring back the golden age of David and Solomon (in political terms). Contrast this with how James uses the prophecy of David's kingdom being rebuilt (Acts 15:13-18). Jesus was well aware why they were arguing among themselves, and the disciples were embarrassed by his question, because they don't want him to know what they have been doing. But Jesus has something important to tell them, and it is in the context of their argument. No doubt Jesus has said this many times. *"Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all."* In God's kingdom, greatness is not measured by normal human standards. See how Jesus said it in Matt. 20:26-28. Paul also said, "For it is not ourselves that we preach; we preach Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5).

In order to emphasize this, Jesus takes a child and has him stand in front of the disciples -- as a parable. In the first century world, children were thought of as the property of the father. This shows the importance of the way in which Jesus treated both children and women as *real people*. The disciples (and we ourselves) are being given a command *which they must do for themselves*. Little children are humble, teachable, without selfish ambition, without sinful pride, do not hold grudges, etc. If the disciples want to enter the kingdom of heaven, they should not waste time arguing about who is the greatest, but rather think about whether they would even be allowed in!

In the Kingdom of God, there are no second class citizens. The Jewish leaders believed themselves to be the elite and thought the common people not worth saving. Therefore they were shocked when Jesus mixed freely with the common people (Matt. 9:10-13; 11:19). God's act in Christ makes salvation available to *everyone* who will listen and come!!!

Jesus makes it even stronger in verse 37. Welcoming the Father depends upon already having welcomed the Son, and welcoming the Son depends on already having welcomed a child (that is, one who is insignificant). One learns Christ and even God the Father through what he learns in serving his fellowman. See how Jesus pictures the day of Judgment in Matt. 25:31-46.

Hard Teaching (Mark 9:38-50)

38 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw a man who was driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he doesn't belong to our group."

39 "Do not try to stop him," Jesus told them, "because no one who performs a miracle in my name will be able soon after to say bad things about me. 40 For whoever is not against us is for us. 41 Remember this! Anyone who gives you a drink of water because you belong to Christ will certainly receive his reward."

42 "If anyone should cause one of these little ones to turn away from his faith in me, it would be better for that man to have a large millstone tied around his neck and be thrown into the sea. 43 So if your hand makes you turn away, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a hand than to keep both hands and go off to hell, to the fire that never goes out. [44 There 'their worms never die, and the fire is never put out.'] 45 And if your foot makes you turn away, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a foot than to keep both feet and be thrown into hell. [46 There 'their worms never die, and the fire is never put out.'] 47 And if your eye makes you turn away, take it out! It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye, than to keep both eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 There 'their worms never die, and the fire is never put out.'

49 "For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good; but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Human nature runs to extremes, and is often more strict than necessary. Jesus was much more tolerant than his disciples. The incident of the exorcist which Mark records here, teaches a valuable lesson in tolerance. Jesus had taught them that welcoming anyone, even a little child, *in His name*, is welcoming Him. This makes John

remember something that had happened, and he asks Jesus, “Were we doing right when we told this man to stop driving out demons? He was using your name, but doesn’t belong to our group.” Note that this man was actually doing what the Apostles had been given a special commission to do. This means that he was a true believer in Christ, because otherwise he could not have made use of the *name* of Jesus (compare the sons of Sceva, Acts 19:13-17). Jesus tells them not to stop this man, and he neither praises or condemns the man for going his own way. Jesus explains: “*because no one who performs a miracle in my name will be able soon afterward to say evil things about me.*” Alford says: “See 1 Cor. 12:3. ‘The very success of the miracle will awe him, and prevent him from soon or lightly speaking evil of Me.’ We must beware of supposing that the application of this saying is to be confined to the *working of a miracle* -- verse 40 shows that it is general -- a weighty maxim of Christian toleration and charity, and a caution to men how they presume to limit the work of the Spirit of God to any sect, or succession, or outward form of church: compare Phil. 1:16-18. . . This saying is not inconsistent with that in Matt. 12:30. They do not refer to the same thing. This is said of *outward conformity* -- that, of *inward unity of purpose* -- two widely different things.”

Verse 40 is illustrated in verse 41. Nothing done for God by a true believer is without value. Even such a small thing as a drink of water *in the spirit of Christ* is worthy of reward. One may honor Christ in even the smallest of ways, and genuine Christianity will express itself in action. The spirit of service brings both the giver and receiver to a greater awareness of Christ himself. Compare James 2:14-26.

In dealing with the subject of temptation, Jesus emphasizes that it would be the best of the bargain to sacrifice a hand, or foot or eye (if that would help), to escape from God’s wrath. *Fire* symbolizes pain, suffering, punishment, persecution, etc. *Salt* symbolizes permanence, prevention of spoilage, etc. Everyone, good or bad, must and does suffer. Fire will test and show the quality of each person’s works (1 Cor 3:13). The apostles, especially, would be *salted with fire* (1 Cor. 4:9-13). Verse 49 is more correctly translated: “*Everyone will be purified by fire as a sacrifice is purified by salt*” (4th ed. Text). Compare Lev. 2:13; Ezek. 43:24. “*Have the salt of friendship among yourselves.*” “Salting with fire” (compare Heb. 12:5-11) helps produce the spirit of self-sacrifice and humility. This allows peace with each other, and removes any need for a power struggle to determine *who is the greatest*.

Marriage

(Mark 10:1-12)

10 Then Jesus left that place, went to the region of Judea, and crossed the Jordan River. Crowds came flocking to him again and he taught them, as he always did.

2 Some Pharisees came to him and tried to trap him. “Tell us,” they asked, “does our Law allow a man to divorce his wife?”

3 Jesus answered with a question, “What commandment did Moses give you?”

4 Their answer was, “Moses gave permission for a man to write a divorce notice and send his wife away.”

5 Jesus said to them, "Moses wrote this commandment for you because you are so hard to teach. 6 But in the beginning, at the time of creation, it was said, 'God made them male and female. 7 And for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, 8 and the two will become one.' So they are no longer two, but one. 9 Man must not separate, then, what God has joined together."

10 When they went back into the house, the disciples asked Jesus about this matter. 11 He said to them, "The man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against his wife; 12 in the same way, the woman who divorces her husband and marries another man commits adultery."

The purpose of Jesus here is not to tell how to dissolve a marriage, but rather to show God's whole intent in the relationship of a husband and wife. The Pharisees had no interest in learning new truth (they thought they already knew it all). They wanted to put pressure on him and get him to incriminate himself by what he said. Would his answer offend King Herod as John the Baptizer had done??? Would he contradict the law of Moses??? Jesus answers by throwing the whole question back to the authority of the Old Testament portion of the Bible. God's divorce law in Deut. 24:1-4 was not the ideal for mankind, but was intended to prevent worse situations. It was their *imperfection* which made such things necessary, and divorce was to be thought of as an extreme measure (such as radical surgery to treat cancer). Human sin and weakness does exist, however, and God's divorce law was intended to regulate it and keep it in check. Notice that a divorced person who had been married to another, could not remarry the original spouse, even if the second spouse had died. Mark does not mention the "exception clause" which Matt. 5:32; 19:9 gives. However, the "exception" is strongly implied in the answer to the disciples' question in verses 11-12.

God's original marriage law is found in Gen. 2:18: "It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him" Or as Zamenhof expresses it: "*I will create him a companion-counterpart to him.*" In the beginning, one man and one woman were joined in marriage for life. The marriage bond is stronger than the bond between parents and children (as Gen. 2:24 says). The husband and wife become "one flesh" in the *sex act* (compare 1 Cor. 6:16). It is God's plan that the man and the woman form a unity which would continue unbroken until the death of one. (God's plan provides for unity of male and female into a *oneness*. This would be impossible for two males or two females.) God has not specified forms and rituals for a wedding ceremony, but he does back up the marriage bond with his own authority.

Mark shows the disciples asking further questions about what he had said. "Except for fornication" applies to the entire statements in verses 11-12. Fornication is a broader term than adultery, and includes any sex act with someone *other than* the spouse. DeWalt says: "The sexual element in marriage makes of the two one flesh -- i.e., it was meant that sexual union should be inseparable from permanent personal unity -- and only by sexual unfaithfulness can the unity, once established, be broken." (For an apparent exception to this, see the Pauline privilege, 1 Cor. 7:15. But desertion can be understood as a breaking of the sexual bond.) As Alford shows us in his Greek Testament, a man who divorces his wife in spite of the fact that she has not been unfaithful to him, and marries another, commits adultery because he is still married to his former wife; also, if anyone marries this divorced woman, *who was not unfaithful*, he marries another man's

wife (with the exception of 1 Cor. 7:15). An example of this is Herod and Herodias in Mark 6:18. Also, Jewish thinking had a double standard for men and women, with men's misdeeds not being really thought of as sins. But Jesus placed men and women on exactly the same level and required the same standard of conduct from both.

To Receive Eternal Life?

(Mark 10:13-22)

13 Some people brought children to Jesus for him to touch them, but the disciples scolded those people. 14 When Jesus noticed it, he was angry and said to his disciples, "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

15 Remember this! Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."

16 Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them.

17 As Jesus was starting again on his way, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?"

18 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not lie; do not cheat; honor your father and mother.'"

20 "Teacher," the man said, "ever since I was young I have obeyed all these commandments."

21 Jesus looked straight at him with love and said, "You need only one thing. Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me." 22 When the man heard this, gloom spread over his face and he went away sad, because he was very rich.

Jesus blessing the little children serves as an introduction to the incident with the rich man. The disciples think the children are wasting his time, and this makes Jesus angry! "*Let the children come to me*" gets to the heart of the matter. What Jesus says here shows: 1) children (and infants) are not "totally depraved" (as the term is popularly used); 2) children can come to Christ (as soon as they have faith and are accountable); 3) no one should forbid them from coming; 4) parents should bring them to Jesus. The love, humility and trust of a child should be the qualities of the one who claims to follow Christ. This is illustrated by the case of the rich young man.

This young man is evidently honest and righteous (at least consistent with what he knows). Mark tells us: "*Jesus looked straight at him with love.*" He had kept the commandments. He was not a hypocrite. Yet this young man is to some degree a religious fanatic who is self-righteous. He feels some *need* within himself, and so he comes to Jesus seeking answers. "Good Teacher" is not the usual way to address a rabbi, and shows some intention to *flatter*. "*Why do you call me good?*" is Jesus' way of pointing out to the young man that his words are only conventional flattery. What Jesus says does not deny His divinity. Jesus, in the flesh, shared our weak human nature (Phil. 2:7) yet without ever sinning (1 Pet. 2:22). Jesus had not died yet and the law was still in effect. Obeying the law would bring eternal life -- yet no one could obey the law (James

2:10), so that in fact, no one could be “good” but God Himself. Jesus did fulfill the law, but this was not completed until the triumph of the resurrection (see Acts 13:29-39). The Christian’s “goodness” comes through Christ (see Rom. 8:1-4). (God does take his own Law seriously. There is only one way in which a fully personal and truly just God can realize his purpose in such a world as this. That is, by himself bearing the suffering of the world and the consequences of our transgression. How can he be the just God unless he suffers more than any man in total innocence? Compare Heb. 4:15-16.)

Jesus then points out the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth commandments, and adds, “*do not cheat.*” The young man says that he has done this. The man is sincere in wanting to obey God. Yet there is ignorance in what he says, and Jesus strikes at the heart of the problem. What Jesus now tells him brings out the fact that this young man has made an “idol” out of his riches (it is the *love* of money which is a sin, 1 Tim. 6:10). “*Go and sell all you have. . .*” Jesus did not give this command to the rich who had not made money their “god” (such as Zacchaeus, Luke 19:8). But for this man, his riches stood between himself and God. Gloom spreads over his face and he goes away sad. He really did want to follow Jesus, but he thinks the price is too high to pay. Later Paul was to tell us to *give ourselves* as a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1-2). When you capture a person’s mind, you can capture his heart, and when you capture his heart, you can capture his financial resources, and when you have captured his financial resources, you have captured the whole person! You cannot *buy* that kind of loyalty!!! Giving ourselves as a *living sacrifice* includes all our worldly possessions. It is no longer “mine,” but rather “God’s,” which he gives to me to use for His glory!!! (Jesus does not ask us to take a vow of poverty, but he does ask us to put *him* first in our lives. In order to do this, we will take an interest in the well-being of others. Compare Matt. 25:31-46. Some of the spiritual giants of the Bible have been wealthy people, yet they put God first in everything. Think of Job, Abraham, David, etc.)

Who, Then, Can be Saved?

(Mark 10:23-31)

23 Jesus looked around at his disciples and said to them, “How hard it will be for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God!”

24 The disciples were shocked at these words, but Jesus went on to say, “My children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! 25 It is much harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.”

26 At this the disciples were completely amazed, and asked one another, “Who, then, can be saved?”

27 Jesus looked straight at them and answered, “This is impossible for men, but not for God; everything is possible for God.”

28 Then Peter spoke up, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”

29 “Yes,” Jesus said to them, “and I tell you this: anyone who leaves home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me, and for the gospel, 30 will receive much more in this present age. He will receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields -- and persecutions as well; and in the age to come he will receive eternal life. 31 But many who now are first will be last, and many who now are last will be first.”

There is no merit in being poor, and Jesus does not require everyone to give up their wealth in order to be his disciples. Yet there is more opportunity for a rich man to be “possessed by his possessions.” Jesus says it will be very difficult (but not impossible) for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. The problem is that we all tend to trust in material things. Only Mark includes the information in verse 24. The disciples were shocked by what he said, because Jewish people believed a person’s material wealth was some indication of his spiritual condition (even though they were aware that this was not always true). Jesus answers by showing that it is *hard* for *anybody* to enter the kingdom of God! (“For them that trust in riches” does not appear in the corrected text of verse 24.) For emphasis he again states how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom, and uses a proverbial saying about a camel and a needle. We believe in “free grace,” yet this is not a clever way to get around God’s law. DeWalt says: “It is so hard for sinful men, rich or poor, to enter the kingdom, that for a rich man -- one who is especially involved in the unchildlike habits of the world -- to enter is harder than for a camel to go through a needle’s eye.” We must “pay a price” to follow Jesus. Compare Luke 13:24; 14:26-33.

With such high standards, how could anyone get into the kingdom??? They ask, “*Who, then, can be saved?*” Jesus makes it even stronger: “*This is impossible for man. . .*” On the basis of human merit and human abilities, no salvation would be possible! Mankind does not have the ability to save themselves! Only when this fact is understood does a person become willing to accept God’s way of putting people right with himself (compare Rom. 10:1-4). God, however, is not limited in what He does. Before we even knew it, He acted in Christ Jesus to allow us a way to escape the sentence of death which sin brought on the whole human race!!! Compare Rom. 8:1-4; 5:1-21. W.N. Clarke says: “He can make new creatures of men; he can impart the spirit of the kingdom. He has command, too, of all means, earthly and heavenly. So he can bring into his kingdom men who are spiritually incompatible with it. See 1 Tim. 1:12-17; 1 Cor. 15:9-10.” God does *call* everyone as evidence of His desire that all should be saved. “*Everyone will be taught by God*” (John 6:45). It is a paradox that when we choose Him, we find that He has already chosen us!!!

Peter speaks up and says: “*Look, we have left everything and followed you.*” Perhaps there is a note of despair in this. The disciples still expect a political kingdom at this time, and what Jesus has just said has shocked them all deeply. Peter is saying: “We have done what this young man would not do. We have accepted the kingdom on the right terms and at great personal sacrifice. Are we all right??? We have given up our personal possessions to follow you.” Not “salvation,” but “reward.” Jesus promises that all who take this step will begin receiving their reward right now “*in this present age*” as Mark records (Compare John 10:10). Matthew gives part of the promise which speaks about the “New Age” (“regeneration”) which is the “messianic community,” the “kingdom\church” which was still future at this time. It could not begin until he died and raised from death. The Twelve were to do a special work in this kingdom\church. We all gain new brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers through our new relationship in Christ! God will bless in this present world, as well as in eternity! Only Mark preserves the phrase: “*and persecutions as well.*” This will come from those outside the group (compare Acts 8:1-3; 1 Thess. 2:14-16). Jesus also gives the warning not to make the

reward the goal. Those who try to make themselves *first*, will finish *last*! Christ's church is just the opposite from the world. Compare Luke 22:24-27.

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 9:30 - 10:31)

1. Why was it so difficult for them to reconcile what Jesus said about his death with what they knew of his life?
2. Why were they afraid to ask him to explain?
3. Had anything happened in the experience of the Twelve which would suggest the topic of "greatness" in the kingdom?
4. What confession was made by the silence of the Twelve?
5. Show how the very nature of the wish to be important would place such a person last in the kingdom of Christ.
6. What motive is at work in the one who wants to serve others that makes him important in the kingdom of Christ?
7. Name two qualities of a child that should be seen in one who follows Christ.
8. How does welcoming a child relate to welcoming Christ?
9. Was it wrong for the man to be driving out demons? Why did John think it was wrong? (v.38)
10. What principle is being taught in verses 39-41? How does this apply to us today?

11. In verses 42-47 Jesus seems to advise drastic action to avoid sinning. In what sense does he mean this? How do you apply this to us today?

12. Discuss the ways Jesus uses the word “salt” in verses 49-50. How does this relate to what He has just said?

13. How did the practice of marriage originate?

14. Both Jesus and the Pharisees referred to Moses but with very different results. Why is this?

15. Was Moses compromising God’s law when he wrote the provision for dissolving a marriage?

16. Just how do the husband and wife become *one*? In what sense do they become one flesh? How does this new relationship relate to father and mother?

17. Is Jesus forbidding all divorce? Read the parallel account in Matthew.

18. Can marriage ever become adultery? When? Would either person in this be innocent?

19. Is it true that Jesus saw in children his own image, and because of this used them as a “parable” to teach his disciples?

20. Note three unusual things about the man who came running to Jesus.
21. In what sense is God the only one who is “good”? How does this relate to Christ-before-the-cross?
22. Show how both ignorance and sincerity were in the answer of the young man.
23. What wonderful opportunity did Jesus offer this young man?
24. Why couldn’t this young man keep his money and still follow Jesus?
25. Why is it that Christian men often become rich, but rich men rarely become Christians?
26. Did the disciples think -- “if a rich man cannot be saved no one can be saved”? Why would they think this?
27. What was impossible and possible in the salvation of a rich man?
28. Did Peter feel he and the other apostles had done what Jesus asked the young ruler to do?
29. How is it possible to receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, etc., with persecutions? How does this apply to you personally?
30. Why the warning of verse 31? What does this mean? How does Matt. 20:1-16 relate to this?