

THE POWER TO RULE Mark 9:30-37

INTRODUCTION

Our text, Mark 9:30-37, has no crowds in it. It is just Jesus and His close followers. Now, as we set the scene, do not think that only the 12 apostles traveled with Jesus. His band of followers was a good-sized group, number in the dozens. The scripture tells us that Jesus chose the 12 Apostles from among a larger group. For example, many people overlook what is revealed in Acts 1:21-22, when Peter is choosing a replacement for evil Judas, he says the new apostles must meet certain qualifications:

“So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” –Acts 1:21-22

The gathering that Peter talked to at the time was 120. No doubt many of the men qualified. But not only were men traveling with Jesus, so were many women, several of means. The wealthy Mary Magdalene, for example, who financially supported much of the needs of the group. Unless the Bible specifies that only the 12 or a smaller group are with Jesus, we should assume that their band of pilgrims could include dozens of people at any point.

Outside of this close circle where the crowds of people.

The section of the Bible we see today has no crowds. This is the 12 plus, most likely, men and women who are often present, followers of Jesus.

Mark gives us insight into their conversations. There are two subjects we deal with. Let’s begin.

TEXT: Mark 9:30–37

30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.”

32 But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.

If you have not noticed by now in our walk through the gospel, **we have a very familiar theme: The Christ must suffer, and no one sees it coming.**

Jesus tells those closest to Him, over and over, that He must die and raise. They don’t see it. Why not? We can only guess. The students of the Bible did not realize the Messiah must suffer. The critics, friends, and disciples, all missed this. When Jesus stated in plainly, they could not hear. Remember what the angel said to the women when they arrived at the empty tomb?

“He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” –Luke 24:6-7

They had heard Him say it, but they did not understand. They were troubled when He said these sorts of things. The last time someone had confronted Jesus on His declaration of

death, it was Peter –and what happened to him? Jesus called him, “Satan!” Now, they are troubled by what He says, but they are afraid to ask Him about it.

33 And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?”

34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.

Life’s embarrassing moments, right? The 12 apostles knew that they were chosen for more important duties than the rest of the crowd traveling with them. On top of that, Peter, James, and John seemed to get unique attention from Jesus. The desire to be great in the kingdom of God naturally grew. Jesus, after all, would soon be running the whole world. Being second to the messiah, or third, who would not want that job? And so they argued.

Then, they get caught by the Boss. “Um, what are you guys talking about?”

They don’t answer, naturally! But the Boss already knows.

This becomes a teachable moment for Jesus:

35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”

36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them,

37 “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

In the first century they valued children more than modern man does, but children had a lot less status.

Our society devalues children. We seek to control their existence in every way possible. In the worst case, we abort them in the womb. But that is not the only child-devaluing practice of the modern age. Today, we put off marriage as long as possible, shortening the years of life given to child rearing. Then, when marrying, we decide to limit the number of children that arrive to 1 or 2, or 3 at most. And when they get here, we increase the numbers of ways the parents can be absent in the child’s upbringing. We see children as accessories to a self-indulgent life. Well, I have a career, I do what I want, and I’ve added a child or two.

In Israel, like in most societies before the 1900’s, children were valued as improving the status of the family. The larger the family, the better. Children were a legacy. They were the guarantee that one made an impact on the earth. The strength and unity of the family system that reared the children was paramount. All societies agreed that the family, therefore was the most important institution, and must be protected. Children were valued because they were the building blocks of that which was most important in society. In that, we have lost much in modern times. The industrial revolution in the West, and communism in the East has killed the value of the child and the family.

On the other hand, the first Century societies can learn from the status we put on children. We may not value them highly, but when they arrive, we do assign them status as equals. Each one gets a name and a place in society. Each one is provided for with a room, and many individual possessions. Each one is taught to focus on his or her strengths and aptitudes. Large

quantities of wealth are expended to educate and nurture each one. Laws are written to protect the rights of children so that they are treated in with the same status as adults –safe in their cars, safe in their health care, safe in their labor habits, etc. Even our orphans have a complex and expensive system to see to it that each child has a place, and is not forced to begging on the streets. Pre-Christian societies have much to learn from us today on this front. Kids are people too.

In Jesus' day, though children were valued, their status was marginal. They were not adults. They were incomplete beings. They could be sold or given away as workers. They may have been important to their moms, but they were not important in society until they reached the age of adulthood.

If anyone wanted to be great, he did not do so by paying attention to children. If children wanted to be important, they needed to hurry and grow up.

So, each culture has something to learn. But in both cases, children, really, are not the seen as the most influential people in society. Powerful People don't aim to spend time with children. Regular Americans have one or two kids and feel guilty because they have built lives where they don't spend enough time with them.

So, as these men fight over who is the most talented and most worthy of leading the nation and the world, Jesus stops them and says and does something that is as radical today as it was then:

36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

Receive children as valuable, in the name of Jesus —that is greatness. There are 12 apostles following the Messiah, expecting to be great in the kingdom (remember the request of James and John?). Jesus implies, "start a children's ministry and you will be great." If you welcome children in Jesus' name and you are welcoming God into your own heart. The most direct line to power? Welcoming children in the name of Jesus. (And not just children, any who is seen as powerless is the doorway to God.)

Here is a socially powerless individual. You will not rule nations by focusing on the well-being of children. You will not get invited to the city council to govern the town. Alexander the great did not take over the world by paying attention to the marginal. Start an orphanage, care of the poor, help the crippled and lame, sure, it's nice, but it is not the path to greatness.

Trump did not become an influential man by running a soup kitchen or a rescue mission. He did it by real estate, and government, and influencing the rich and powerful.

So, what is Jesus saying? Is He saying that only the weak and the marginal are to be cared for? No. Jesus Himself, famous for His love of children, and sinners, and broken people, also called the wealthy like Matthew and Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. He also reached out to the powerful like Roman centurions. He ministered to the wealthy like Mary Magdalene and Lazarus and his sisters.

Welcoming every single person in the name of Jesus is the goal. Do not think that greatness comes from competing with one another to be the most holy, or most powerful

among men. Rather, greatness comes by purposely, voluntarily, and intentionally serving other people. If greatness in heaven comes from serving the least, then the greatest is the one who is servant of all.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Everybody matters

Christianity changed the world with this simple idea. It is the Christians who pioneered hospitals as places of mercy and care for all people, all over the world. It is the Christians who brought the rise of the orphanages to care for the children on the streets. It is the Christians who brought an end to world-wide slavery (without going into much detail, slavery was a world-wide institution from the beginning of human society, until the 19th Century when protestant western Christians brought it to an end). It is the idea that everyone matters that ended legal child labor.

It is Christianity that spits in the face of social Darwinism, by saying the people with Downs syndrome are equal to the rest of society. Christians changed the world with this idea. Every human being is made in the image of God. Every human being has inherent dignity. Even the vilest and weakest among us is still human, and of great value.

Why? Because to receive the smallest it to receive Jesus. To recognize the humanity and the value of each person, and treat each person as worthy of love and honor, this is to understand God's values.

2. We seek a different kind of Kingdom

If you want a system that rewards the ambitious and the competitive that have a drive to rise to the top and be in charge of everyone and everything, then you have a world of opportunities at your disposal. Gathering followers to become famous, or gathering money to become powerful, or gathering voters or subjects to rule cities or nations, all these are there for you. Becoming great in sport, or business, or entertainment, or a nation, the rules are always the same: Become influential among the important people in the system, and you have arrived.

If you want that system, stay away from Jesus. Jesus' kingdom was founded by a man who never held an office in the local government. He never held an office in the Sanhedron of the Jews. He never even held an office in His synagogue. He never started a campaign. He never commanded the Romans or the Jews. He did not raise an army and conquer as Alexander the Great. He never won over people by finances or intrigue. He was not a great business man; He gave away all HE had and didn't pay a mortgage nor build a mansion in the best neighborhood.

As for the marginal and powerless of society? They called Him friend. He was not welcome at city hall, or at the best cocktail parties, but the guys in nasty section of town welcomed Him into their homes.

His strategy for ruling Israel seems inefficient, doesn't it? How are you going to take over and become the King of these people? His answer was the oddest of all. He went to the cross, the lowest point of all, and subjected His own self to death on behalf of every person, great or small.

If you wanted to become the mayor of your town, I do not suggest you do it like this. It won't work. You are going to have to influence the influential. If you want to take over a nation, this is not how it is done. America was won by bloodshed, organization, and revolution. Wars win nations. Leaders must get many to follow and then they must be in control, and manage and govern them all. They must have power.

That is not the Kingdom you join when you come to Jesus.

Jesus' Kingdom is so silent, so unassuming, so stealthy, that it seems weak, and ineffective. Little bands of believers here and there, travelling from society to society, unified on the idea of a king who died, and rose; unified by caring for the least. These people are sprinkled throughout the world and throughout the generations. But they have no seat at the United Nations or the halls of government. Yes, there are Christians in these places sometimes, but there is no powerful Kingdom of God, ruling in the halls of men.

In one sense, the Kingdom of God is no threat to any nation. There are no armies or force. But in another sense, the quiet Kingdom of God is the master of all nations. Because we do not need human power to rule and reign, we cannot be stopped. What will you do to stop God's Kingdom? Take away its power to rule? It doesn't have any. Take away its property? It does need it. Take away its freedom? The people are liberated within. They will survive. Kill them? That only sends them to glory. And the King will one day return not with human power, but the power of God, and all the kings of the earth will be judged on how they honored God and His people.

And the Kingdom of God is winning the fight. We are not losing, we are winning. Though we are persecuted and jailed and slain, still we grow. Unlike the Muslims, we do not need to take over power to invade a nation. Unlike the secularists, we do not need to control the laws or the commerce to grow. We are millions of Asians. We are millions of Africans. We are millions of Westerners. We are in all nations. We are the subversive force of the Kingdom of God. And we win by the sneakiest of means: We serve the poor and the marginalized. We love our enemies. We endure persecution.

3. This world is upside down

I would like to end this message with a reading from a letter of Paul to the Corinthians, and an invitation:

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. –1 Corinthians 1

This world is upside down. We have it all wrong. The God who made this world will soon return to set things right. Christian, embrace the status of servant of all. Jesus, your King, set the example for you.

Now here is the invitation: If you don't have a kingdom to call home, come and join us. If you are tired of the wars and the fighting and the strife of mankind's system, come and join us.